

A War Legislature

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To the reader of the capitalist press the doings of the State Legislature at Albany have always seemed of small significance. While the bills and measures that come before the National Congress are spread over pages of print, the dangerous, often many times more insidious, activity of the parliament of the State of New York has received practically no publicity. It is this fact that has made possible the notorious ease with which measures contrary to every interest and wish of the public at large have been passed. It was this that made it possible last year to pass the "Bloody Five," the military laws, that even in peace times put the population of our state on a war basis, in the name of preparedness.

With the election of Shiplacoff and myself to the Assembly, this peaceful idyll of capitalist law-making was rudely disturbed. Not only did we refuse to vote for their measures—that would have troubled them but little—but our patent intention to drag the family skeleton of their body into the public, our inconvenient habit of rushing into print every attempt to "put over" something on the people of the State, may explain the unpopularity that we enjoyed among our colleagues in the Assembly.

If last year's legislature stood in the sign of military preparedness, this session just finished has striven nobly to present to the exploiters of the state a form of industrial preparedness that has given them in the name of patriotism an opportunity to trample down the scanty, hard-won social protection that the workers of New York have enjoyed.

The outbreak of war has brought to New York, as to every state and nation under the rule of capitalist interests, increased military burdens, a curtailment of personal rights and liberties as foreshadowed by the recent state registration, whose purpose it is, beyond a doubt, to pave the way for a system of general registration, similar to those that prevailed in Germany, Austria and other reactionary countries before the war.

In observing and judging the New York Assembly, it is not only profitable but proper to note the physical surroundings.

The Assembly Chamber is a tremendously large room, about two hundred feet long, two hundred feet wide, and almost one hundred feet high. The accoustics of the Chamber are so poor that at a public meeting held in Albany the latter part of January, at which meeting the speaker of the Assembly honored us with his presence—the first time in the history of the State that a speaker of the Assembly was part of the audience at a Socialist meeting—I charged that, had the architects who planned the building of the Assembly Chamber deliberately intended to build a room in which the people's voices could not be heard, they could not have succeeded more capitally than they did. That charge stands uncontradicted to this day.

The chairs for the legislators are arranged in semi-circular fashion, covering the entire width of the Chamber. In the center of the room and probably in the center of the height of it as well, there are strung up a cluster of wires. These wires make it possible for the centrally seated men to hear what is going on. Those seated on the right and on the left of the Chamber must do the best they can with "blind ears."

A resolution was introduced by me in the early stages of the session to remedy this defect, but this resolution joined the company of a great many other resolutions in the grave yard of the Assembly. The capitalist politicians do not propose to have the people's representatives know what is going on there.

Politically, the Republican party was in the overwhelming majority this year in both branches of the State Legislature. In the Senate they had thirty-six out of fifty-one. In the Assembly they had ninety-nine out of one hundred and fifty. The remaining fifty-one in the Assembly were forty-nine Democrats and the two Socialists.

Practically, however, on almost all of the important legislation that was considered this year, there were two Socialists on one side of the question and the remaining members of the body on the other side of the question.