

THE CLASS STRUGGLE IN BRITAIN.

A Record of the Past Six Years. By A. Fineberg.

Continued from last week's Supplement.

The National Register.

Immediately after the passage of the Munitions' Act, a further step towards military and industrial conscription was made in the form of the National Registration Act. The proper psychological atmosphere was also being prepared by the cry of restriction of output. The worker was coming to be

The information was to be collected and collated by local registration committees set up by the local authorities, controlled by a central registration committee in conjunction with the Board of Trade.

Ministerial assurances were given in the House of Commons and in public meetings that no compulsion of any kind was contemplated; nevertheless, in the Parliamentary debate, it was made clear that to

headed by the Northcliffe Press. The Cabinet appeared to be divided on the issue. An influential majority, including Mr. Asquith, Mr. Balfour and Lord Kitchener apparently still adhered to the voluntary system. But Mr. Lloyd George, supported by Lord Northcliffe, was conducting a conscriptionist intrigue, in which he was finally to triumph.

The question came before the Trade Union Congress held at Bristol in September, 1916, and a declaration against conscription was unanimously adopted. A week or two later a conference of the Labour leaders was addressed by Mr. Asquith and Lord Kitchener. At this meeting the Labour leaders were told frankly that unless a sufficient number of men were raised by voluntary means, compulsion would have to be resorted to. The leaders then undertook to conduct a recruiting campaign of their own. In this way they played into the hands of the conscriptionists, for they admitted that the failure of their campaign would justify the introduction of conscription.

The Derby Scheme.

On October 6th, 1915, Lord Derby was appointed Minister of Recruiting, and the next stage in the campaign was developed. The maxim adopted was: "Divide and conquer." The Derby Scheme of recruitment began and was to last ten weeks, during which period 35,000 recruits were to be raised. All men between the ages of 19 and 41 were divided into 46 age groups, single men comprising the first 23 groups, and married men the remainder. Men in these groups who had hitherto resisted social and economic pressure to enlist were called upon to "attest" their willingness to serve if called upon. The attested men were to be left in their occupations until their own age group should be called up, as the need of further men for the Army should arise.

The First Tribunals.

Tribunals were set up to consider applications from attested men for exemption from service on the ground of business or domestic hardship, or on the grounds of being employed in munitions or other essential work. An employer could appeal on behalf of an employee. These men were starred in the records and furnished with a badge. Men now found themselves faced with the choice either of attesting or being dismissed from their employment, and under this pressure and hoping that they would never be called on to serve, masses of men flocked to attest.

It was now plain that this was the last step towards military conscription. With practically the whole manhood of the country now liable to service, the resistance to compulsion would be small. During the progress of the scheme abundant hints were let fall by the Prime Minister and Lord Derby, that, if at the end of the period "a substantial number of young men" had failed to attest, compulsion would have to be resorted to. No definition was given of what would be considered "a substantial number."

First Military Service Act, 1916.

Meanwhile, the opposition to conscription was growing. The No-Conscription Fellowship was formed, and was organising energetically. Labour organisations all over the country were pledging themselves to resist the hateful thing.

At the beginning of the new year a Cabinet Committee, appointed to report on the success of the Derby Scheme, professed itself dissatisfied with the results, and on January 5th, 1916, the Military Service Bill was introduced.

An emergency joint Labour and Trade Union Conference was held on January 6th, which declared against conscription by an overwhelming majority, and advised the Labour Party to resist. But the impotence of Labour was once more demonstrated, for, in spite of its declared opposition, the Military Service Act was passed on January 27th, 1916. Under its provisions, all unattested single men within the Derby groups were "deemed to be enlisted." Exemptions, absolute, conditional and temporary were allowed, and an exemption clause for conscientious objectors was inserted.

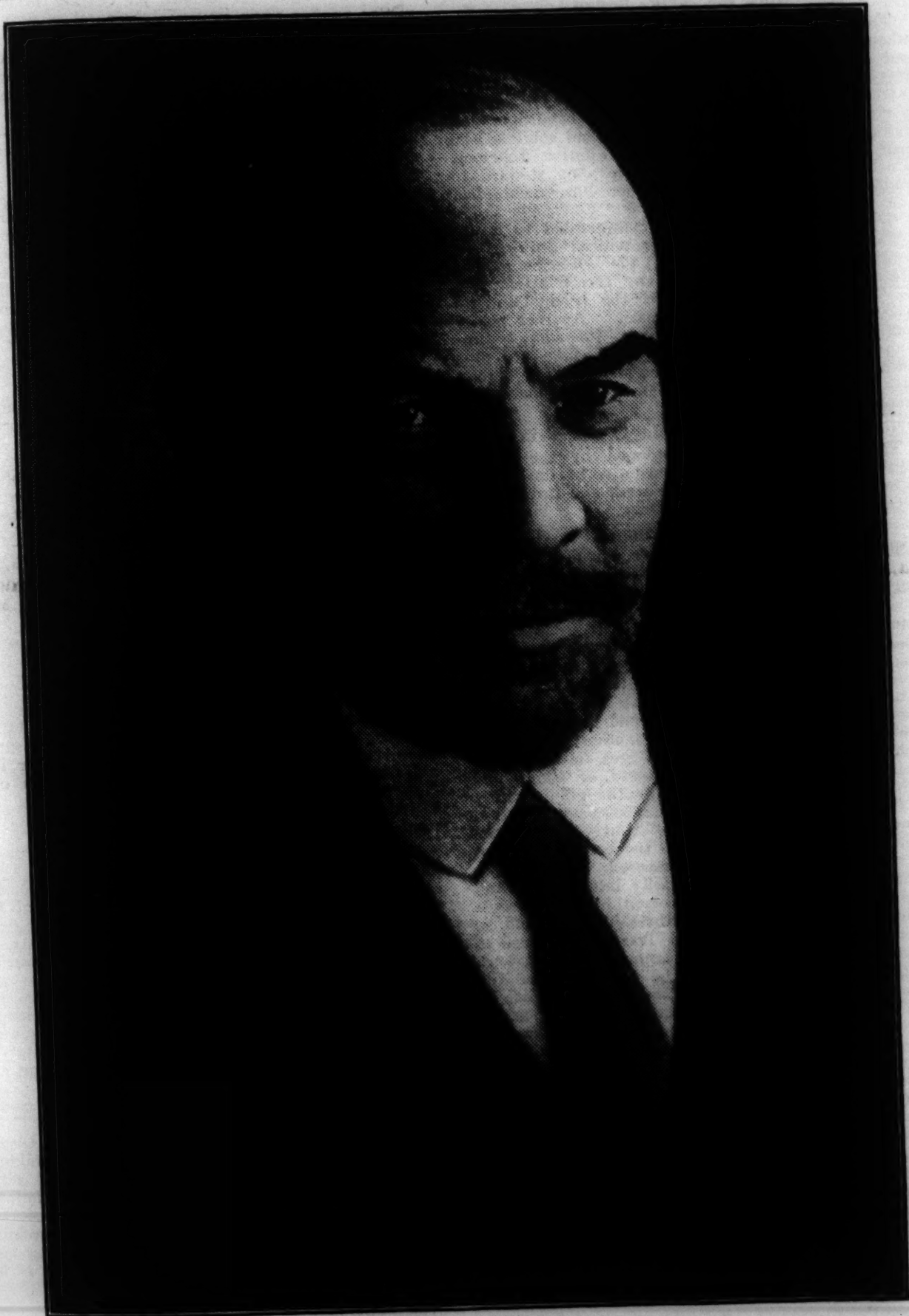
Industrial Safeguards.

During the passage of the Bill various pledges, ostensibly safeguarding the workers against industrial conscription were given by members of the Government, and the following ostensible safeguards were introduced into the Bill itself:—

Clause 2 (3): "No certificate of exemption shall be conditional upon the person to whom it is granted continuing, or entering into employment under any specified employer, or in any specified place or establishment."

Clause 2 (4): "Where a conditional certificate is granted, the conditions upon which it is granted shall be stated on the certificate."

On the other hand, under Clause 3: "A certificate of exemption . . . in the case of an application on



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considered no longer as a human being with rights and privileges, but as so much "man-power" necessary for filling the trenches and for providing munitions for the prosecution of the War. The National Register proposed to furnish the information necessary for estimating and controlling the man-power of the country.

Clause 4 set out questions to be answered by every male and female person in Great Britain between the ages of 15 and 65. The age, state, the nature of employment, and whether it was "serving war purposes," were to be given, and each person was to declare whether he or she was skilled in, and able and willing to perform any other form of work than he or she was engaged upon, and if so, which kind?

many of its supporters the chief merit of the National Registration Act lay in the possibility of using it as an instrument of compulsion. Nevertheless, few people, even amongst Socialists, were willing to admit that the National Register was a definite and calculated step towards conscription, and few indeed were they who refused to register—about half-a-dozen people were fined or imprisoned for such refusal. Some who refused were allowed to go unpunished. The *Workers' Dreadnought*, as a matter of fact, was the only paper which issued a warning that this meant conscription.

Conscription Campaign.

But no sooner was registration completed than a campaign in favour of conscription was launched,

conscientious grounds . . . may be conditional on the applicant being engaged in some work which, in the opinion of the Tribunal dealing with the case, is of national importance."

And Section 3 of Clause 3 provides: "If a man holding a certificate of exemption ceases to qualify for the certificate, he shall be liable, after the expiration of two months, to the operation of the Act, unless he, in the meantime, has obtained a renewal of the certificate."

Second Military Service Act, 1916.

This Act applied only to single men, but the fate of the married men was not long in being decided. On May 25th, 1916, the Military Service Act (No. 2) was passed, and under it all married men up to the age of 41 were also "deemed to have enlisted."

The safeguards in the first Act against industrial conscription were, in the second, dangerously tampered with.

Section 5: "The provision in sub-section (3) of section 2 of the principal Act, that no certificate of exemption shall be conditional upon a person to whom it is granted continuing, or entering into employment under any specified employer, or in any specified place or establishment, shall not apply to a certificate of exemption granted on the ground of conscientious objection."

Under the first Act, two months' grace, to obtain a renewal of his certificate, was allowed to a man who ceased to be employed on work of "national importance. Under the second Act this period was limited to two weeks; the words "unless in the meantime the man has made an application for the renewal of his certificate" were substituted for "unless in the meantime the man has obtained a renewal of his certificate."

The Act had not long been working before protests against it began to arise all over the country, and especially on the Clyde and the Tyne. The workers at once began to learn by vivid experience how infamous were its provisions; fines and imprisonments were imposed for trivial causes such as lateness at work. Workers, even young girls and lads were punished for leaving employment in poison-processes which were seriously undermining their health. From district after district many cases of grossly unjust decisions by the Munitions Tribunal were reported, and all sorts of trouble arose in regard to the wages of women and semi-skilled and unskilled men who had been newly brought into the industry and were put to do the work of skilled men at lower rates.

The compact which preceded the Act had been made between the Minister of Munitions and the Trade Union officials, and the rank and file now began to feel a bitter resentment at the way in which their officials had thus light-heartedly signed away the safeguards which the workers had built up for their protection after seventy years of struggle.

The employers made abundant use of the coercive powers of the Munitions' Act, which reduced the workers to indentured slavery, whilst the Government "control" over employers in "controlled" establishments was a mere matter of form without real existence.

A Commission of Inquiry was appointed to allay the rising discontent. This Commission admitted that the workers' complaints were fully born out, particularly in the matter of leaving certificates.

On November 30th, 1916, Lloyd George addressed a conference of representatives from 55 Unions connected with munition making. He promised to redress the grievances, but when the Bill that was to make good his promise came to be introduced it was found that it failed to correspond with his pledges.

After a further conference with the A.S.E., this Bill was amended, but even in its new form, it did not comply with the A.S.E. demands. However, it modified the leaving certificates, and compelled the employer to grant them immediately a man was suspended. A Munitions Appeal Tribunal was set up and powers were given to the Minister of Munitions to regulate the wages of women and of semi-skilled and unskilled men. Provisions were made for the avoidance of the delays in arbitration which had become a scandal, and imprisonment was abolished in default of paying the fines imposed on the workers for lateness, absence, and so on, by the Munitions' Tribunals. In principle, however, the amending Bill left matters where they were; the Act remained a "slavery Act," and even the power given to the Minister to regulate wages was found to have given the Ministry the opportunity to prevent, until it chose to permit them, increases of wages to all sections of workers in munition industries. The Ministry of Munitions proved, on many occasions, more difficult to deal with than the employers.

Lloyd George Visits the Clyde.

"Forward" Suppressed.

The amended Act was passed on January 27th, 1916, but, meanwhile, Mr. Lloyd George made a tour of the munition works of the Tyne and Clyde, with the purpose of popularising the dilution of labour scheme, to which the rank and file workers there were displaying great hostility and obstructing at every opportunity. At Glasgow, Lloyd George met with a very unfavourable reception, and he thought it necessary that the Government Press Bureau should issue to the press an official (and garbled) version of the meeting. The Glasgow *Forward* printed a true account of the affair, and, in consequence, was suppressed for four weeks.

Following on this visit three Commissioners for the Dilution of Munition Industries were appointed to draw up schemes of dilutions for separate areas and

individual workshops. The Clyde Workers' Committee and the Shop Stewards demanded the right to be consulted in the formation of these schemes. The Clyde Workers' Committee was the direct descendant of the "Central Labour Withholding Committee," which conducted the strike of 1915, when the Trade Union officials had repudiated it. The Government Commissioners refused to negotiate with the Shop Stewards, although they were the real representatives of the men, and not the official Trade Union officials, whom alone the Commissioners would recognise. Discontent grew when it became known that in certain shops the women introduced under the dilution scheme were being grossly underpaid, in some instances receiving wages as low as 12s. and 14s. per week.

On January 12th, 1916, the Clyde Engineers and Kindred Trades Joint Committee demanded 2d. an hour increase of wages to meet the rise in prices. The demand was a modest one, for in the period in which prices had risen by 48 per cent., wages had only been increased by 10 per cent. The claim was referred for arbitration to the Committee on Production, which, after long delay, finally refused the increase altogether for skilled men, but made small concessions to unskilled men.

How the Strike Began.

The unrest was brought to a head on March 17th, when the workers at Parkhead Forge, Glasgow, came out on strike. The strike was provoked by the arbitrary act of the management in forbidding David Kirkwood, a shop steward, from visiting other departments in order to investigate the conditions and rates of the unskilled men, women and soldiers who had been introduced under the dilution schemes. Until that time the right of the shop steward to confer with the stewards of other departments had not been interfered with.

The Commission immediately attempted to intimidate the strikers by posting notices drawing attention to Regulation 42 of the Defence of the Realm Act, directed against any person attempting to "impede, delay, or restrict the production, repair, or transport of war material." Another poster guaranteed protection to all who immediately resumed work. The posters, however, failed to produce the effect intended, for the strike rapidly spread to other shops until about 1,500 to 2,000 men were involved.

A.S.E. Executive Repudiates the Strike.

The men were again abandoned by the official Trade Union leaders. The Executive of the A.S.E. called upon the men to resume work and forbade the payment of strike pay.

The Deportations.

Six days after the commencement of the strike the Government resorted to drastic and unprecedented measures. On the morning of March 24th it became known that six of the strike leaders had been kidnapped and deported out of the strike area. The deportees were Kirkwood, Messer, McManus, Shields, Haggarty and Wainwright. The deportations were carried out under the doubtful authority of Section 14 of D.O.R.A., which, when it was originally framed was supposed to apply to spies and enemy agents. The regulation gave the military authority power to prohibit residence in a forbidden area to any person "suspected of acting, or having acted, or being about to act in a manner prejudicial to the public safety or defence of the realm." The deportations occasioned some stir throughout the country. It was indicative of the extent to which the boasted liberties of the country had been tampered with, that a military authority could arbitrarily intervene in and break a strike, but so accustomed had the people become to such outrages on their liberties, and so securely were the Labour and Trade Union leaders bound to the policy of the Government, that nowhere outside the strike area was the seriousness of the measure appreciated. As a matter of fact, the official Trade Union leaders had no sympathy for the strike and were content to see it smashed by any means. The deportations were accompanied by the arrest of 30 other leaders.

The arrests and deportations continued. On March 30th, MacDougall and Maxton were arrested. By this time nine shop stewards had been deported and 60 had been arrested. The men held doggedly on for another week, insisting on the release of their leaders before resuming work. But the unexpected move on the part of the Government had demoralised them, and at length the strikers decided by ballot to resume work, and the Clyde Workers' Committee left the conduct of negotiations in the hands of the A.S.E. Executive.

The Substitution Scheme.

After the passage of the Military Service Acts, the situation resolved itself into a struggle between the War Office and the Ministry of Munitions for the dilution of man-power. The pledges given by Government representatives during the passage of the Act were conveniently forgotten, and industrial conscription (never so named, but under the guise of "combing out," "substitution," and "dilution") gradually became general.

The Man Power Board.

The Man-Power Board, set up in September, 1916, to adjust the claims of the War Office and the Munitions Department, issued its report recommending combing out and further dilution. But the most decided step towards industrial compulsion was the Substitution Scheme. Under this scheme, Local Substitution Committees were set up. Their business was to facilitate the release of men physically fit for military service and to replace them by substi-

tutes not of military age, or if of military age, not fit for general service. Men of a low physical category were not to be sent into the Army, and unfit men already in the Army were to be released. The position of such a man was as follows: A job as substitute would be found for him, and he would be offered the choice of accepting it or being sent into the Army. If he accepted he had to sign a form which bound him to undertake work for war purposes in the employment of any firm named by the Ministry of Munitions, and to remain in such employment as long as the War lasted. He received 7d. an hour or the current rate upon the job, whichever was the highest. He also received children's allowances and subsisting allowance if working away from home. This applied only to unskilled men.

The Trade Card Scheme.

The threat to comb out skilled men aroused the opposition of the engineers, and in November, 1916, they secured a concession, later conceded to most other skilled Unions, by which all skilled men on war work and munition volunteers were given a card of exemption. The system was known as the Trade Card Scheme and was accompanied by the undertaking that all men not previously enrolled as War Munition Volunteers should, on ceasing to be employed on war work, immediately enrol as such. The War Munitions Volunteers Scheme was established in 1915, and legalised under the Munitions Act of 1915. The volunteers had to sign an agreement undertaking to accept employment in making munitions in any controlled establishment named by the Minister of Munitions, and to remain in such employment during the war for so long as is required."

Restricted Occupations Order.

In February, 1917, the Restricted Occupation Order was issued under D.O.R.A. This order forbade employers in specified trades not necessary for the prosecution of war from engaging any workman between the ages 18 and 41. Thus every worker in these trades were put wholly at the mercy of the employer, for whilst the employer could dismiss the workman, the workman could not leave his employment, for he was forbidden to seek employment elsewhere.

Munitions Act, 1917.

All these encroachments upon industrial liberty were received with extreme suspicion by the workers. Unrest was growing all over the country. The operation of the Military Service Acts, the combing out, and dilution, the rise in prices, all aroused profound dissatisfaction. In the spring of 1917, two new measures intensified the unrest, which culminated in the strikes of engineers all over the country in May, 1917.

In April, 1917, a new Munitions Bill was introduced, the main object of which was to extend dilution to commercial work, and to give the Minister of Munitions power to extend the operations of the Munitions Act to any work which he declared, by order, to be work of national importance.

Protected Occupations Schedule.

At the same time the Government threatened a complete reversal of its policy with reference to the combing out of skilled men, and proposed to supersede the Trade Card Scheme, substituting for it a Schedule of Protected Occupations, in which only men in certain specified industries were to be protected from conscription. The Schedule was provisional and subject to modification.

The May Strike, 1917.

This repudiation by the Government of a definite pledge brought matters to a head. Strikes of engineers broke out in the Midlands and spread from centre to centre all over the country. The strikes were repudiated by the leaders, but were carried on by the "unofficial" shop committees, and it was only when the A.S.E. Executive and the Minister of Munitions agreed to negotiate with these committees that work was resumed. Eight ringleaders were arrested, but were released on giving an undertaking that they would abide by the result of the negotiations.

The negotiations dragged on wearily. The men's protest against the withdrawal of the Trade Card Scheme was not upheld, and the Protected Occupations Schedule came into force; but an undertaking was given, as a result of a special conference with the A.S.E., that dilutees would be called on before skilled men. No agreement could be reached on the extended dilution proposal, and finally Mr. Churchill, the new Minister of Munitions, decided to drop the clause, and rushed the Bill through on August 16th.

Leaving Certificates Abolished.

The only decided gain for the men was the promise to abolish the leaving certificates, which finally were abolished by an order on October 5th.

Commission on Industrial Unrest.

Arising out of the engineers' strike, a Commission was appointed to enquire into the causes of industrial unrest, under the direction of G. N. Barnes, once secretary of the A.S.E., and an ex-I.L.P. member. Eight sub-commissions were appointed, which reported in July, attributing industrial unrest to the following causes:—

- High prices.
- Dissatisfaction with the Protected Occupations Scheme.
- Disparity of wages between skilled and semi-skilled and unskilled.
- Delay in arbitrations.
- Industrial fatigue.
- Leaving certificates.

Dilution.
Conflicting Government orders.
Unequal food distribution.
Bad housing.
Breaking of Government pledges.
Fear that the restoration of Trade Union practices would be carried out.
Lack of local and shop organisation for the settlement of grievances.

The Coventry Strike.

In December, 1917, a serious dispute broke out in Coventry. The employers in a certain firm refused to recognise the shop stewards appointed by the men. 50,000 munition workers at Coventry were out for a week, and the strike threatened to assume national proportions. Finally, on an agreement between the Employers' Federation and the Unions to call a joint conference to negotiate the matter on a national basis, work was resumed. Recognition of shop stewards was conceded locally. At this conference an agreement was reached which recognised the individual shop stewards, but did not recognise the Works Committees or provide for joint action between the stewards belonging to the various Unions. It was perhaps for the latter reason that the A.S.E. refused to be a party to the agreement.

Military Service Acts (1 & 2), 1918.

Towards the end of 1917, a new demand was made for man-power, and Lloyd George stated in the House of Commons that the Government wished to withdraw the pledges given to the Trade Unions at the time of the May strike—not to comb out skilled men. Preliminary conferences were held with the Unions, in which the A.S.E. refused to partake, demanding a separate conference, since the pledge was originally given to the engineers. The Government refused and the Military Service Act (November, 1918), was passed. The dissatisfaction of the engineers was increased, and a ballot of members decided overwhelmingly to resist the new measure. The other Unions concerned requested a joint conference with the A.S.E., and it was clear that unrest was becoming daily more acute. In March, 1918, the big German offensive on the Western front began. Of course, it was tremendously boomed by the Government and the Press, and official leaders of the Unions refused to call a strike, and the unofficial movement did not feel strong enough to do so.

A comb-out of 50,000 miners was also consented to by the men. The new measure, therefore, allowed to pass unopposed, to the accompaniment of Ministerial and Press scare stories about the desperate character of the military situation, there was a second call for fresh man-power, and a second Military Service Act was passed with hardly a challenge.

These two Military Service Acts of 1918 comprised the last links in the chain of industrial conscription. The first Act permitted the Director-General of National Service (appointed March, 1917) to issue an order at any time to withdrawing at 14 days' notice any certificate of exemption, whether granted by Tribunal, Government Department, or on occupational grounds. The second Act empowered the King to proclaim that a national emergency had arisen, and to cancel forthwith any and all certificates of exemption, except those granted on the grounds of conscientious objection or ill-health. Other provisions of the Act included the power to extend the Act, by order, to Ireland, and the extension of the obligation to military service to all men up to the age of 57.

Industrial Conscription Virtually Complete.

With the passing of these two Acts the Minister of National Service had now received powers to direct all men between the ages of 18 and 57 to take up any work to which he cared to assign them, with certain exceptions, as, for instance, men already serving with the Forces, disabled men, and men in holy orders.

In practice, however, these powers could not be easily applied to:—

- Men exempted on grounds of health, although they could be subjected to a fresh medical examination, and thereupon come under the direct power of the Director of National Service.
- Skilled men exempted under the Protected Occupations Schedule, and not young enough to be combed-out on the excuse of "national emergency."

Since the abolition of the leaving certificates such men had, at least, nominally, free choice of employers.

The "Embargo" Strike, 1918.

This was the full extent to which industrial conscription was introduced. Two further attempts to make it absolute met with such determined opposition that the Government was obliged to drop them.

In June, 1918, the Minister of Munitions published an advance draft for the extension of the Munitions Volunteer Scheme. Under this new scheme it was proposed to make practically compulsory enrolment in the War Munitions Volunteers for skilled workers, and in the War Workers Volunteers for unskilled workers, compulsion was applied by threatening to withdraw their protection from military service from men who refused to enrol.

The purpose of this move was to make labour "mobile," by placing it within the power of the Minister of National Service to direct any worker to, or to transfer him from, any firm or establishment in the country. This was industrial conscription, complete and absolute. The opposition offered by the workers to this proposal was, however, so determined, that it was quietly abandoned.

Baffled in this direction, the Government, nevertheless, adhered to its purpose. It now had recourse

to D.O.R.A., under Regulation 8a, of which the Minister of Munitions had power to regulate the engagement or the employment of workmen in munition works. In July, under this regulation, an order was sent to a hundred firms, forbidding them to engage any fresh skilled men.

No previous consultation with the men's Unions had taken place, although the scheme had been communicated to the Trade Union Advisory Board of the Ministry of Munitions.

The men, fearing that the embargo would be extended to make it impossible for any skilled man to change his employment, began to hand in strike notices. The situation assumed so ominous an aspect that Winston Churchill, the Minister of Munitions, at last consented to consult with the Trade Union leaders, and, in the meantime, the strike notices were suspended. The Trade Union officials said that they did not disagree with the principle of the new regulations, but that the embargo should be executed and controlled by local committees representing employers, employed and the Ministry of Munitions.

But the rank and file were entirely opposed to such a scheme, which they knew was certain to work out to their disadvantage, and, whilst the official leaders were negotiating, engineers and toolmakers began to come out in large numbers in Coventry, Birmingham and Manchester, and the movement very soon spread to other branches of the industry and other parts of the country.

Work or Fight.

The Government threatened to cancel the protection certificates of the strikers and to call them to the Colours. The ultimatum, "Work or Fight" was proclaimed as a challenge to the strikers. G. H. Roberts, the Labour Party representative of Norwich and now Minister of Labour, declared:—

"If young men refused to work without substantial or justifiable reasons, then, by the ordinary operations of affairs, they become liable to be impressed into military service."

At the same time, the Government now saw that it was best to make an appearance of being conciliatory to workers willing to be reasonable. It therefore arranged with the Trade Union Advisory Committee to appoint a Commission of Inquiry. On this promise being given, the men were got back.

The Commission of Inquiry reported in September, exonerating the men from blame and suggesting the appointment of an Advisory Committee, with adequate labour representation, to be consulted for all future measures affecting munition workers.

The principle of the embargo was, however, upheld, though never since extended. In theory, therefore, though not fully in practice, industrial conscription was now absolute. The only safeguard now was the explosive condition of labour feeling, and its impatient resistance to all further encroachments.

A few months later the War came to an end; had it continued, there is no doubt, that the logic of events would have produced the inevitable implications of modern warfare, the complete mobilisation of labour for military and industrial purposes.

Throughout the history of the introduction of conscription, the Parliamentary representatives of the Labour Party played no creditable part. The special joint Labour Party and Trade Union Conference, held prior to the introduction of the first Military Service Act, declared against conscription and instructed its representatives to oppose it. In spite of this the Labour Ministers remained in the Government; and the Labour Members of Parliament (with the exception of five I.L.P. members) supported the Bill. This was the case with every succeeding Military Service Act.

The position towards the end of the War was roughly as follows: the industrial truce had been turned into a defeat for the workers; enormous profits were being made in shipping, munitions, food and fuel; prices had risen steadily; the worker was overworked and overdriven. He was tied to his industry, and in many cases to his employer, and the threat of military service was held over his head. By the Munitions Act he was deprived of his Trade Union rules and regulations. He was forbidden the right to strike; and for every demand for increased wages, and every protest against his evil condition had to be made in the face of D.O.R.A., the Munitions Acts, and the Military Service Acts.

Labour Shows Signs of Awakening.

In the last period of the war a curious reversal in the status and prospects of labour began to be apparent. Even while the last links of industrial slavery were being rivetted, labour was gathering its forces, both for defence and aggression, in a manner that betrayed an ever-widening breach between it and its Parliamentary and Ministerial representatives. And Labour was becoming popular.

The reasons for this are various. Partly it was due to the disgust caused by the war, and the reaction against it, which even an absolute victory could only momentarily conceal. People were beginning more or less consciously to loath the continued exploitation of their narrowest and most primitive instincts. The delusion of a world made safe for democracy had faded; in its place the workers saw a plutocratic dictatorship wedded to the old order. They began to regard with dismay a Government which countenanced plundering and profiteering, and took advantage of a war abroad to rivet the chains of slavery and militarism at home.

The old political parties had become merged into one arid and unscrupulous coalition, representing commerce and industry. The one force that seemed to stand out in opposition, with the promise of a constructive programme, was Labour, and towards

it progressive elements began to turn. The example of the Russian Revolution also furnished a powerful stimulus. Something of the change that had come over Labour was indicated by the strike of the electricians as a counterstroke to the refusal to let the Albert Hall for a labour meeting.

No sooner was the Armistice signed, than the railwaymen gave notice to the Government and to the railway companies that they had withdrawn from the industrial truce. A similar step was taken by the Labour Party at its November conference, when it decided by an overwhelming majority to break the Political Truce, and withdraw the Labour Members from the Coalition Government. Most of the Labour Ministers submitted to this decision with reluctance. Barnes and Roberts presented with the Party ultimatum, decided upon by the delegate conference, elected to sever their connection with the Labour Party, and to cast in their lot with the Coalition for good and all.

Restoration of Trade Union Practice.

Part I. of the Munitions Act, abrogating the right to strike (not always observed during the war) was repealed immediately after the Armistice. It was not until June, 1919, that a Restoration of Pre-war Practices Act was passed, making it obligatory on the owner of every establishment two months after the passing of the Act to restore trade union customs, which had been suspended during the war.

Proceedings under this Act must be instituted by the workers affected, or by Trade Unions. The Government does not make itself responsible for initiating prosecutions. The restoration of pre-war conditions was only made obligatory for one year.

The Shorter Hours' Movement.

The beginning of 1919 witnessed an intensifying of the class struggle. The industrial world seemed to be seething with unrest, and there was a general spontaneous demand for a better condition of life by the workers. Meanwhile there seemed no hope of a substantial reduction in the cost of living. Demobilisation and the slowing down of war work were causing much unemployment, and from every part of the country arose a demand for reduced hours of work without reduction of wages. The main argument for the demand was that the unemployed might, by its means, be absorbed into the industry, but the movement was also partly impelled by a reaction against the excessive over-working of the war period, and the Revolutionary Socialists in the industries were endeavouring to use the situation to take the masses a stage further in the class struggle. The official Trade Union movement was forced also by the general tendency to make demands for reduced hours. Programmes for reduced hours and improved conditions were put forward by miners, railwaymen, transport workers, engineers, shipbuilders, cotton operatives, bakers, general labourers, and others.

The Belfast General Strike.

At the close of 1918 and the beginning of 1919 the officials of the unions concerned in the engineering and shipbuilding industries were negotiating for a 47-hour week. The rank and file considered the 47-hour week too long, and in January the Belfast engineering and shipbuilding workers came out on a strike for a 44-hour week. The strike soon became general, and the strike committee virtually controlled the town, issuing or withholding its permits for the supply of gas, electricity, and so on.

The Clyde Strike.

A few days later a similar strike, but for a 40-hour week, began on the Clyde. In Glasgow three days before the strike began there were 29,465 persons unemployed. The engineers and shipbuilders were here also the initiators; but, though less general than in Belfast, the strike spread to many classes of workers, including municipal employees, bakers, carpenters and joiners, builders, railway shop workers, miners, paper workers, gas workers, and many others. Not only were Glasgow and the Clyde involved, but strikes for the 40-hour week sprang out in Edinburgh, Leith, Rosyth, Greenock, Perth, and other places in Scotland, and in Barrow-in-Furness, and other English centres. In the Port of London the shipbuilders struck for a 15/- a week increase; partly to secure the increase, but mainly because they wished to join the strike movement and not to run the risk of being used for work diverted from the ports on strike.

On January 31st, the Clyde strikers held a great demonstration in George's Square, Glasgow; suddenly the Riot Act was read, and the police commenced a baton charge, in which 53 persons were injured. A deputation from the strikers was at the time interviewing the Lord Provost in the City Hall. David Kirkwood, one of the deputation, rushed out on hearing the conflict, and was knocked down and injured by the police. Afterwards, troops were brought into the city, and occupied the City Chambers, with machine guns and fixed bayonets. Tanks and barbed wire were also prepared. Councillor Shinwell, David Kirkwood, William Gallacher and Harry Hopkins were arrested, and imprisoned for their part in the strike.

The National Executives of most of the Unions concerned were hostile to the strikers—therefore, the majority of the workers were without strike pay. The local officials, whilst in many cases opposed to the beginning of the strike, afterwards either supported it, or, at least, refrained from denouncing it. The A.S.E. Executive vindictively dismissed the London, Glasgow, and Clyde District Committees, and Secretaries, and served a notice on Harry Hopkins to vacate, at the end of the month, the Union premises, which he occupied with his family, though it was practically impossible for him to find other accommodation in Glasgow.

From the time of the George's Square baton charge and the arrest of the strike leaders, the strike movement in the North began to flag. It was hoped that the engineering and allied trades in the London area would join the strike, and that there would be a national strike of electricians. The London engineers and the E.T.U. decided, though half-heartedly, to join the strike. The Government replied by issuing a D.O.R.A. order to make it illegal for electricians or any others engaged in important public services. The Transport Workers were appealed to join the strike, but though they were negotiating for reduced hours, they hung back. The miners were also appealed to, but they were negotiating the adoption by their national conference of a Miners' Charter, and declared that they could not act until the charter had been adopted. There was great unrest at this time in the Army and the Navy, but though the more forward of the men in these services desired to act with the industrial workers, combined action was not secured. The railway men obtained an eight-hour day by negotiation. The London tube companies attempted to interpret the excluding the customary half-hour luncheon interval. The tube workers struck, and gained a concession from the tube companies.

Though the London strike had largely failed, the Government arrested and imprisoned David Ramsey and W. F. Watson for inciting speeches.

The acuteness of industrial strike movements had now subsided, but unrest in the Army and Navy continued for many months, and was at one time general and overwhelming. It even spread to the men in the occupied territories of Germany, and other places abroad. The Government was obliged to make numerous concessions to the men, and what was most striking, the military authorities were many times obliged to submit to demonstrations of turbulence without visiting punishment on those concerned.

The wave of turbulence which brought with it the first general strike attempts seen in this country, was in part due to the influence of the Russian Revolution, in part to a reaction against war conditions, in part it was due to economic pressure, and in part also to the awakening consciousness of the British workers, and the growth of Socialist thought amongst them.

The Miners' Charter.

The miners, through whom the general thrill of unrest was also running, in February, 1918, demanded:—

- (1) A 30 per cent. wage increase.
- (2) A six-hour working day.
- (3) Full maintenance at Trade Union rates of mine workers unemployed through demobilisation.
- (4) Nationalisation of the mines, with joint control by the State, and the mine workers.

The miners declared their intention to strike to obtain these concessions in full. Nevertheless, having obtained a wages increase they consented to drop the demand made on behalf of the unemployed mineworkers, and accepted a Commission to inquire into the questions of hours and nationalisation.

The power of the Miners' Federation was evidenced by the fact that the Government did not then think a point-blank refusal advisable, and that it pretended, instead, to treat the miners' demands with respect, and gave half the seats on the Commission to men who were called miners' representatives, though some of them were appointed by the Government.

The first Commission reported in favour of a seven-hour working day immediately, and a six-hour working day later, on certain conditions. The Government accepted this Report. The second Commission presented three reports, the Majority report being for a bureaucratic scheme of nationalisation with compensation to the mine-owners. The Government refused to accept this Sankey Report, but the miners failed to carry out their threat to strike, although the threat was many times repeated, and its operations postponed from conference to conference.

In promising to accept the finding of the Commission on Nationalisation, and by making Justice Sankey its chairman, and allowing half the representatives to be those who were, at least, called Labour representatives, the Government had seemed to favour nationalisation of the mines. On December 4th, 1918, during the General Election, Winston Churchill announced that the Government had decided to nationalise the railways and a Government Ways and Communications Bill would have given the Minister of Transport power to take over the railways. The Government was thus prepared, at least, to promise the nationalisation of important public services and key industries to placate labour; but as the unrestfulness of the workers died down, and the general strike threat receded, the mood of the Government changed. It has now taken a determined stand against nationalisation.

The special Trade Union Conference of March having decided not to take action to enforce the claim for mines' nationalisation, the miners have fallen back on a demand for increased wages.

The Railway Strike.

On 26th September, the railway system was brought to a complete standstill by the general strike of railwaymen. The trouble arose in the discussions with the Government concerning the abolition of the special war wage and the fixing of the future wages standards. The locomotive men, by the threat of a strike, had obtained a favourable settlement. The skilled men thus satisfied, Sir Auckland

Geddes assumed they would display no concern as to the terms secured by the unskilled men, and made the latter an offer which for some grades would amount to a virtual reduction of 14/- per week. The offer was announced as "definitive," and in face of this the Union declared a general strike, to which the skilled, as well as the unskilled, men unanimously responded. The Government appeared to enter the contest with alacrity, and then revealed that it had been making preparations for strike-breaking so far back as February. These preparations were so elaborately planned as to give rise to the conviction that it was the Government that had declared a lock-out, rather than the Unions a strike. The Transport Workers' Federation called a conference of Trade Unions, which appointed a commission to mediate between the Government and the railwaymen, and declared that in the event of mediation proving unsuccessful owing to the attitude of the Government, they would extend the strike to other services and industries. Meanwhile the active rank and file were impatiently demanding a general strike, and the mediating committee came in for much criticism. The negotiators patched up a temporary peace, which provided for the maintenance of the existing wages scales for another twelve months, a minimum railway wage of 51/- until September 30th, 1920, and in the meantime negotiations were to proceed as to subsequent standardisation. The result of these negotiations were announced in January, 1920. The salient features were an addition of 5/- to the existing war bonus, making a total of 33/-, which was to vary with the percentage increase or decrease of the cost of living—and the fixing of a shop wage of 40/- below which wages are not to fall however much the cost of living decreases. These terms fall far short of the men's expectations, and the unrest on the railways is by no means allayed. The 40/- minimum is the one proposed by the Government last November, and which the men rejected. The January terms were accepted by the negotiations committee by a very narrow majority.

The Moulders' Strike.

The strike of the three ironmoulders' unions comprising 50,000 men, which began in September, 1919, and dragged on for eighteen weeks, was remarkable for the tenacity of the men on strike, and for the callous indifference of the closely allied unions, which, if they had declared a sympathetic strike, would have procured for the moulders the 15/- increase they were demanding within a few days. The strike finally ended with the acceptance by the men of a 5/- increase they had from the first rejected, and the promise of a Government inquiry into foundry conditions.

The Dockers' Enquiry.

The Coal Commission had begun a fashion in such inquiries, and an inquiry into the conditions of the dock workers followed, during which Ernest Bevin, the dockers' representative, declared against a sliding scale of wages to rise and fall with the cost of living, on "a fodder basis."

In the days of our fathers, the fact that such Commissions always ended in nothing had become a byword, so notorious that it was familiar to every man and woman in the street. In these later days of Fabian Labour experts the old fact has been forgotten, and the workers have been told that these inquiries are opening the door to their salvation.

Experience is, however, teaching the workers of to-day that after the Commission has reported the position remains precisely as before; the workers are still faced with the fact that they must either allow their demands to be ignored, or make a fight to secure them.

SOUTHAMPTON BOILERMAKERS' STRIKE.

By Harry Pollitt.

In July, 1915, immediately after the introduction of the Munitions of War Act, the firm of J. I. Thorneycroft, torpedo destroyer builders, of Southampton, introduced six men to perform certain operations connected with boiler-makers' work, without these men possessing the necessary qualifications. It was the earliest attempt at dilution in the South, and was as promptly challenged by the boiler-makers, who held a mass meeting and gave the firm notice that unless the dilutees were removed within four hours, all work would cease.

The firm agreed to do this, and no attempt was made to re-introduce dilution amongst the boiler-makers until September, 1915, when the firm again brought in the same six dilutees. Immediately this was known, all the boiler-makers, who numbered about 1,700, left their work at 11 a.m., and refused to commence again until this dilution was stopped.

All attempts to get the men back to work proved a failure, the firm, acting on the instructions of the Ministry of Munitions, refused to remove the dilutees. The Executive Committee of the Boiler-makers' Union begged, prayed and threatened the Strike Committee. The Admiralty, through Dr. MacNamara and the Ministry of Munitions, joined in. Veiled threats came from London as to what would happen to the leaders should the men fail to return to work; but the men refused to budge.

Questions were raised in Parliament about the strike, the press was loud in its condemnation of our action.

The firm was interviewed, but refused to remove the dilutees, and the boiler-makers would not work with them. A deadlock was reached, and something to appear before Justice Atkins at Winchester, to be tried under the Munitions of War Act.

The usual appeals to patriotism were made. We were told that if we returned to work, the case had to happen, so 45 of the leaders were summoned to appear before Mr. Justice Atkins, at Winchester, to be tried under the Munitions of War Act.

The usual appeals to patriotism were made and we were told that if we returned to work, the case would be dropped.

We refused the offer, and the case was adjourned for two days.

By this time public feeling had been roused against us, especially amongst the soldiers camped around Southampton at the time. When the trial took place in the Bargate, Southampton was in a state of great excitement. Again we were told that if we would only return to work the case would be dropped. Again we refused, and so the trial commenced.

Ernest Bevin, of the dockers, was assessor on the Tribunal for the men's side, and it was largely due to his efforts that the ringleaders got off with a fine of £5 each, coupled with a threat that unless the men returned to work, dire consequences would follow. A midnight meeting of the strikers was held, and it was decided to take a ballot vote as to whether the men should return to work, and the case go to arbitration as soon as a return to work was secured.

The ballot was taken and the result announced at a never-to-be-forgotten meeting in the Woolston Picture Palace. It was decided by a two to one majority to go to work, and so, after a fortnight's fight, the men went back; but what a fight they gave the Government. Mr. J. T. Brownlie and Mr. Moses, the two staunch Labour leaders, were sent down to talk nicely to us. The writer was not allowed to speak, for fear these gentlemen might hear some unpleasant truths, but was asked to move a vote of thanks to Mr. Brownlie, which he did, and which Mr. Brownlie probably remembers as a unique one. However, the strike was responsible for certain modifications in the Dilution Scheme, and it was only in May, 1917, that certain practices were put into operation that would have been carried out in 1915, had it not been for the boiler-makers' strike in Southampton. It is interesting to recall that the six dilutees were gradually removed, and the question of dilutees was never raised again so far as the boiler-makers were concerned in that particular firm. The fines, amounting to £225, were subscribed by a 10/- levy amongst the men, and outside donations, and thus ended the first big dilution strike in England.



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