

# TOLERATION or PERSECUTION

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WE have always believed England to be the "land of liberty." It is true that we have amongst us the downtrodden, the hungry, the sweated worker, yet a great majority undoubtedly have enjoyed a large measure of liberty of thought, speech and action.

With the coming of war we have seen one by one cherished rights and privileges disappear, amongst them that of the individual to choose his own vocation in life. By the passing of the Military Service Acts many thousands of men have been compelled to leave their former occupations and become soldiers. It was thought that these Acts contained sufficient protection for those who could not conscientiously take part in war to release them not merely from actual fighting, but from that subordination to the demands of the military which was equally repugnant to their consciences, that they would in fact, be left free to continue in those civil employments in which they were faithfully and usefully serving their country. Unhappily this has proved not to be so, and at the present time there are at least 1,000 men in prison, whose only crime is that they have conscientious scruples against militarism in all its forms.

They have been arrested, taken to the police courts, sent to barracks—where they have often been roughly handled—Court-martialled, and then sent to military detention barracks or civil prisons. In the detention barracks many have been severely punished for continued refusal to obey military orders, and have on a second Court-martial been sent to civil prisons.

Nothing but a very strong sense of duty could make these men continue to undergo these privations. If they obeyed orders nearly all of them would be sent to non-combatant corps in which the men are employed in industrial work out of reach of the guns. Had it been physical safety they were seeking this would have met their case. Can any further evidence be needed to show that they are genuine conscientious objectors? They are a standing witness to the failure of the Tribunals to understand and adjudicate on conscience.

Among these are a number of Bristol men, whose names and sentences are as follows:

Stanley Oxley, Ashley Road. Sentenced to 21 months' hard labour.

Daniel Huxstep (market gardener), City Road; Basil Robert, York Gardens. 22 months' hard labour.

Ernest Roe, North Street, Bedminster. 112 days' military detention. Sentence expired; awaiting decision of Central Tribunal.

Ernest Batten (farmer), Old Sodbury. 112 days' hard labour.

Geoffrey Lees, Hallen, Henbury. 6 months' hard labour.

Ormond Pink, Dunkeny Road, Bedminster. 18 months' hard labour.

Stanley Ashman, Chester Park Road, Fishponds. 18 months' hard labour.

Frederick Beard, Perry Road, Stapleton Road. 8 months' hard labour.

William Gould, Winsford Street, Stapleton Road. 6 months' hard labour.

Arthur Miller, Lynton Place, Redfield. 6 months' hard labour.

Harold Jarritt, Cranbrook Road. 112 days' hard labour.

Ernest Gilpin, Lower Ashley Road. 6 months' hard labour.

Alfred Adams, Newfoundland Road. 6 months' hard labour.

Claude Brewer, Church Road, Redfield. 6 months' hard labour.

W. H. Jones, Stephen Street, Whitehall. 112 days' hard labour.

Henry Coker, St. George's Road, Hotwells. 3 months (military detention).

Herbert Coker, St. George's Road, Hotwells. 112 days' hard labour.

Thomas Merrick, Clouds Hill Avenue. 84 days' hard labour.

T. C. Underwood, Treefield Place, St. Werburgh's. 112 days' hard labour.

Alfred Chidgey, North View, Westbury Park. 112 days' hard labour.

Philip Radley, Radnor Road, Westbury Park. 6 months.

Reginald Rawle, Saxon Road, St. Werburgh's. 6 months' hard labour.

Concerned at the fact that some thousand men of good character are in prison, and that there are at least as many more to follow, the Government has devised a fresh scheme for dealing with them. This is to give civil employment under the Home Office. On Thursday, June 29th, the Prime Minister said in the House:

"The men who are held to be genuine conscientious objectors will be released from the civil prison on their undertaking to perform work of national importance under civil control. They will be transferred pro forma to Section W of the Army Reserve, and they will cease to be subject to military discipline or the Army Act so long as they continue to carry out satisfactorily the duties imposed upon them. Perhaps I may add to that statement two general propositions which I hope may receive universal assent. The first is that all men whose objections to active military service are founded on honest conviction ought to be, and will be, able to avail themselves of the exemption which Parliament has provided. And, in the second place, it is necessary that men who put forward objections of this kind as a pretext and a cloak to cover their indifference in responding to the national call, and are therefore guilty of the double offence of cowardice and hypocrisy, should be treated, as they ought to be treated, with the utmost rigour."

In saying that the men "ought to be, and will be, able to avail themselves of the exemption" the Prime Minister has assumed a relation to another man's conscience which he would find difficult to justify.

A committee for providing work and allotting the men to it is now sitting, and the imprisoned men are being interviewed. With the exception of those few whose sentences have expired and who are out on furlough, these men have little opportunity of consulting their friends or of gaining further information as to the character and conditions of the employment offered than that given by the Committee. Some will accept it; others will refuse. They are asked to sign the following document:

I, ....., promise for so long as I am allowed to be free from military control and military duties:

1. To serve the Committee for the Employment of Conscientious Objectors (hereinafter

called the Committee), their Agents or Representatives, with diligence and fidelity on such work of National Importance as the Committee may prescribe for me.

2. To reside at such place as the Committee, their Agents or Representatives, may from time to time determine.

3. To conform with such regulations as the Committee may lay down for the due execution of the work allotted to me.

4. To conform to such regulations with regard to conduct and to such as are framed to secure the well-being of men working under similar conditions to myself as may be made by the Committee or by the Agents or the Representatives of the Committee or as may be made by duly appointed Representatives of the men so working and approved by the Committee.

I understand that if and when I cease to carry out any of the foregoing conditions I shall be liable to complete the term of my sentence and subsequently to be recalled to military service.

(Signed) .....

They are then dispatched to the scene of work, and some are already making a road between Newhaven and Seaford; others have been sent to a quarry near Aberdeen. Whatever the conditions of labour they will be compelled to accept them or face the penalty of being returned to their unit. What then will be their fate if they refuse to become industrial conscripts?

Lord Sandhurst stated in the House of Lords that they would be discharged from the army after having served their sentences, but Mr. Morrell pointed out, in the House of Commons on August 3, that this conflicted with the Prime Minister's statement, and elicited the following reply from Mr. Lloyd George, the new War Minister:

"With that kind of men I personally have absolutely no sympathy whatsoever, and I do not think that they ought to be encouraged. . . . With regard to those who object to shedding blood it is the traditional policy of this country to respect that view, and we do not propose to depart from it; but in the other case I shall only consider the best means of making the path of that class a very hard one."

On August 16th Mr. Forster, Under-Secretary for War, stated, in answer to a question from Mr.

Snowden, that "men who refuse to accept work under the Home Office scheme will be kept in prison until the termination of their sentences, and will then be returned to their unit. If they again refuse to obey military orders they will be dealt with in accordance with the Army Act, and they will have no further opportunity of presenting their case to the Central Tribunal."

Mr. King: "Will they be sent to the front, although they still continue to protest?"

Mr. Forster: "I expect so."

Mr. Harvey: "Will steps be taken to see that such further penalties as are inflicted shall be inflicted in the civil prison?"

Mr. Forster: "No, sir. They have now got their chance; if they do not take it, it is their own fault."

This means that men, recognised as conscientious objectors by the Central Tribunal, are to be dealt with as soldiers who wilfully disobey a lawful command.

Apparently that clause in the first Act which granted power to Tribunals to grant absolute exemption to conscientious objectors, and which was emphasised in the second Act, is to become a dead letter.

From all sides of the House of Commons and the House of Lords we have statements showing that individual members do not desire to enter upon a fresh period of persecution. Lord Hugh Cecil, speaking on the 15th May, said:

"I do not think the State ought to extend indulgence to the conscientious objector because of sympathy with him. That is not the point. Even if he is perfectly sincere he may often be a very wrong-headed person. The reason why, it seems to me, indulgence ought to be shown to the sincere and genuine conscientious objector is because it is wrong to force a man to do what he thinks sincerely is immoral or irreligious."

To hand these men over to the military is to dismiss all further question as to their convictions. Major Newman, speaking in the House on May 15th, said:

"If there is one person who cannot deal with the conscientious objector it is a Court-martial or an officer in charge of troops. Hon. members opposite have sought to fortify their opinions by quotations from Dr. Clifford, but they have failed to quote one bit of common sense which appeared in Dr. Clifford's letter. It was this: 'Conscience ought not to be

handed over to the military. There is one law in the army, and only one—obey, or be shot. Military rule makes no provision for conscience.'"

What happened to men before Mr. Asquith talked about the "utmost rigour" was bad enough. Bullying of the worst sort, "crucifixion," irons, dark cells, diet of bread and water, the allowance of bread so small that the victim suffers perpetual pain from hunger—these punishments are already well known. If any doubt the truth of this let them read the statement in Hansard of Major Wedgewood, speaking in the House of Commons on August 1st. He was speaking of the treatment that had been meted out to a man known by him to be a follower of Tolstoi:

"If the democracy of this country begin to think that this war is bringing us down to the Prussian level, if they begin to think that every injustice is going to be tolerated now, and that when the yoke is firmly on their necks it may remain there after the war, if these sort of ideals are to spread among the democracy in this country, we shall be injuring our position in carrying on the war more than I think most of us realise at the present time. . . . Though it was notorious that this man was a passive resister, the Tribunal does not treat him as such. He is sent into the army. You would naturally think that if he refuses to obey orders he will be Court-martialled and given imprisonment. This is not what happened. He has written a letter, not to me but to a friend of mine: 'I don't know if I shall get a chance to post this on my way to-morrow. I think I am going to Wandsworth. To-day I have had three hours' standing with my face to the wall, punched round the square, horse flannels thrown at me and drawn across my face, knuckles rapped, walking stick pushed up my nose. Still, this is nothing compared with the rack and thumbscrew and the stake. All this does not affect me, but a kind action in the end fetched tears. As I was being taken back to the cells I asked for a drop of water. The man said, "You won't get no b——y water." Another fellow went and got it and brought it to me. There is still a lot of kindness in the world.' I understand that that sort of thing is not uncommon. I can only say that that sort of thing is intolerable in this country. It is not my business to see that the treatment of passive resisters is a little more decent. It is

the business of the Government and the War Office."

Mr. Scott Duckers, who has served 112 days in a military detention barracks, has been returned to his military unit, and the colonel has said to him, "Since we evidently cannot do anything with you in this country I have recommended that your Court-martial be dispensed with and that you be sent out to France at once."

Though the public know little of what is going on, the members of Parliament have not been ignorant, and some of them have used considerable influence to prevent further persecution. Now that the House has risen, this safeguard has been removed, and it depends on the public generally to see that things are not done in their name which they will think of with remorse in the days to come. It has been demonstrated that conscientious objectors will face torture and even death without wavering. If they should be called upon to do so again they will still be conquerors; they will still be able to say:

I am the master of my fate,  
I am the captain of my soul.

But the nation that has gone back to the methods of the Stuarts in her dealings with those who can not conform will have no such solace. There are those who have been loud in demanding liberty of conscience for themselves in the past who are now doing their best to deprive others of it. It is for us to see that the civil and religious liberties of our country are not further infringed, that her standards of right and wrong are not lowered, and that the God-implanted guide in man which men call conscience is not scorned and put to shame. If we are true patriots, if we desire that our country shall be "not a fair but the fairest of all," we shall stand by those who have surrendered their physical freedom to secure freedom of soul.

They are slaves who fear to speak  
For the fallen and the weak;  
They are slaves who dare not be  
In the right with two or three.

MABEL C. TOTHILL

(Hon. Sec., Joint Advisory Committee  
for Conscientious Objectors).

27, Rosemary Street, Bristol.

August 27th, 1916.

