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WOMEN, INTO THE RANKS!

By

ROSE

SMITH

IP.



Women, Into The Ranks!

1914—YOUR KING AND COUNTRY NEED YOU!

"The girls and women carried on their risky work in the pluckiest fashion, and if one of them was blown to horrible destruction the others would keep up their spirits by singing at their work."

"They had to work under conditions of very real danger to life and limb; and what some of them probably dreaded still more, of grotesque disfigurement, for one of the points which was associated with the shell-filling factories was toxic jaundice resulting from T.N.T. poisoning. This ailment turned their faces a bright and repulsive yellow. The poor girls for this reason were nick-named by their associates outside as 'canaries.' They were quite proud of this designation, for they had earned it in the path of duty."—LLOYD GEORGE in his Memoirs, "Daily Telegraph," June 7, 1933.

The facts are that in 1914-18 thousands of wives of soldiers were forced to enter industry, for the first time, in order to maintain their families. Numerous other women were persuaded by the propaganda of the press, pulpit and society ladies, that their duty to King and Country necessitated that they should enter war service. The reward was to be a "land fit for heroes to live in."

In the drive for more and more shells, all negotiations in regard to hours, wages and working conditions were broken down. The following letter from a woman munition worker gives some idea of the working conditions:—

"I'd four years at Dick Kerr's in Preston. Seven days a week, eight hours a day, for 21s., standing over gas fires soldering heads on 60 lb. shells. We'd 36 a day to do for



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the standing wage, and if we could manage to do more than 36 we got 13¼d. a shell extra. We worked three different shifts.

"He was at the war, and so I was compelled to work because at first the separation allowance was only 21s. a week for me and the two children. Even when they raised it, it was only 24s. 6d. I'd to send him food parcels out of that. I used to go to work crying, especially when I was on nights. I wouldn't do it again, not if I had to live on one meal a day.

"The floor was made of old railway sleepers, and the heat of the stoves drew out all the tar until you were nearly mad with your feet. We couldn't take our food to work because of the poisonous acid and gas fumes. I've stood for hours after work in the food queues waiting for margarine for the kiddies and then had to run straight to my work. Terrible it was. I wouldn't do it again, no I won't, and we ought to try and get other women not to do it. Why should we?"

If explosions occurred the dead and the dying were placed on one side and the living continued to manufacture the munitions of war. So for four long weary years it continued.

THE FRUITS OF VICTORY.

In 1918 the women of the war period looked for the realisation of their dreams, "homes for heroes"—a nicely furnished home, with no worry about money. 1918 to 1933 have been years of bitter disillusionment—the homes we were promised have not been built. Rents are 56 per cent. higher than in 1914 and housing conditions are growing rapidly worse. In Glasgow there are 148,000 living in two-room dwellings, whilst in London "there are 30,000 people in families from five to eleven each herded in one room," writes Allen Hutt in his "Condition of the Working Class in Britain."

North, South, East or West, the position is the same—terrible housing conditions, veritable death traps, at exorbitant rents. Hear what the medical officer of Blaenavon, S. Wales,

reports: "it is not uncommon to find in the case of a mother giving birth, that the child has to be delivered by the nurse or doctor in an only bedroom, which is of necessity the sleeping place of sometimes three, four and often more children of varying ages." Lancashire and Yorkshire have still thousands of back-to-back houses, whilst the sanitary conditions not only constitute a "nuisance," but a serious menace to health.

Meanwhile, a quarter of a million building workers are on the streets with no work to do and the death rate of mothers is 3,000 per year, due in the main to poverty and bad housing conditions. Children in enormous numbers die each year as the result of the same vile circumstances.

Referring to the increase in infant mortality in Tilbury during the past year, Dr. W. T. G. Boul, the Medical Officer, says in his annual report that he believes the death-rate for the district will be one of the highest in the whole country.

"This rate," he writes, "has risen now for the last four years. The number of infants' deaths during the year 1932, out of a total number of 413 births, is 49. The question we have to answer is: Why did these children die? Thirty-six per cent. died under the age of one month. These deaths were presumably due in great measure to ante-natal conditions due to general hardships and poverty in the district."

Through the congested, insanitary working-class quarters epidemics circulate quicker than the notorious Black Plague, 20,000 people being carried off from January to April, 1933, by influenza. The National Government says, that at the present time, too much money is being expended on fever cases. They now propose to cut the allowance to local health authorities by £200,000. The prospect is one of increasing sickness and loss of life.

A GREAT COUNTRY'S REWARD.

Truly the war years' dream of a comfortable home and a steady wage have been ruthlessly shattered. Many Londoners think themselves lucky if they can rent a room in a converted

stable. Three million of our men have no jobs at all. The remainder work for wages averaging less than £2 a week.

Every seventh industrial woman worker is out of a job; 206,000 women have been robbed of all unemployment benefits, under the Anomalies Act, whilst in May of this year alone 6,600 women were denied benefit under the Means Test.

The wages of women workers average less than 30s. per week. Wives of unemployed men are to be denied Maternity benefit. Women fall sick in increasing numbers and a "grateful country" rewards them by reducing their sickness benefits. Our children are to have less facilities for Education and a healthy upbringing. The "path of duty" has led the women workers of the war years to a sorry pass.

REMEMBER 1914!

It is well that we recall the posters of 1914-18—"Do you realise that the safety of your home and children depends on our getting more men now?" "Do you realise that one word 'Go' from you may send another man to fight for his King and Country?" "Women of England do your duty! Send your men to-day to join our glorious army."

We helped capitalism to win its "bloody war" in 1914-18 and we have still to pay for it. Every day of our lives since 1918, we have slaved and starved and suffered that a "grateful country" could give £1,000,000 per day to the big bondholders. But *our* wages have been steadily reduced, we have been forced to work harder and harder, millions have been thrown out of jobs, and the social services have been cut down.

WOMEN THE BREADWINNER.

In spite of homes to see to and families to bring up, thousands of working women have had to "turn out again," to bring in a little more to keep the "door open." We work side by side with the men, and the bosses give us about half the rate of wages, trying everywhere to squeeze out a man and replace him by a woman. They use us to try to bring

down the general rates of wages and to introduce the "speed-up" methods.

They have terrorised the women of Lancashire, by threat of unemployment and loss of unemployment benefit, to work the six-loom system. In Coventry, Leicester, Birmingham and London they have made women the first victims of the Bedaux System. They would set the hands of the women of the working class against the men and vice versa.

Yet the Ryhope, Lanarkshire, Venestas (London) and North British Rubber Mills (Edinburgh) strikes have shown that there is recognition in the minds of the workers that there men and women stand or fall together. This report in the "Daily Worker" is typical:—

"The management have posted notices closing down all departments. In a statement they have issued to the press, they say that the strikers thronged the streets and forced their way into the mills and 'intimidated' workers into ceasing work. They also blame the girls who struck work in sympathy with the men originally affected, of getting the men to reject the settlement carried out by the Union officials. We can authoritatively state that at Wednesday's meeting, the girls asked the men originally affected, who were on the platform, if they were satisfied with the settlement. The men replied, in one volley, 'No! we are not satisfied.'"

WOMEN ORGANISE FOR STRUGGLE.

The women and girls whose courage in 1914-18 "has never been sufficiently recognised," according to the Right Honourable David Lloyd George, show a newer courage. A courage which leads them into demonstrations against Hunger. A courage which leads them into organised strike actions against worsened working conditions. A courage which leads them into battle against the war-makers.

The gathering forces of the working-class movement have paid homage to their high courage in the Birkenhead bread

riots, the Burnley strike, the fights against "speed-up," the Coventry strike against Bedaux and the London fights against evictions.

CAPITALISM SEEKS TO RECREATE THE WAR MIND.

Capitalism may have failed to "recognise" the courage of the British working woman in 1914-18, but it certainly recognises her growing class-consciousness in 1933. It understands that working women have said "Never Again" shall they be used to recruit men into capitalist wars.

The capitalists have noted the conference resolutions and demonstrations of working women. They appreciate that there has been a tremendous change in women's opinions since 1914. They are disturbed, because they prepare for new wars—spending £109,000,000 on war material in 1933, increasing their drive for the recruitment of men to the forces.

New methods are adopted in an attempt to bring women back to the 1914 state of mind. The Government has already assessed the possible industrial output of war materials by women. They have elaborated schemes for war production and service.

The "Sunday Express" on April 30, 1933, published an article giving details of a scheme to mobilise all men and women for war service. It stated: "It has taken six years to prepare" . . . "There will be no conscientious objectors and no factory agitation causing battles to be lost for want of shells. The most rigid rationing, far more perfect than that achieved in the last war, will be put in force from the start. People who do not want to go to war and do not want to do National work will not receive a ration card."

The governing class of this country have prepared their organisation and now attempt to recreate the "war mind" of 1914, in many instances using the exact methods and words of that period.

PHYSICAL TRAINING FOR WOMEN.

Training centres for unemployed women are to be extended. Social Service centres receive Government grants to carry on their "keep fit" classes among the women. Larger masses of women are thus to be brought under semi-military discipline. Fifty thousand school children are specially invited to see the Aldershot Tattoo. The Hendon Air Display cost the rate-payers £54,000 for a one-day spectacle.

Numerous women of the middle class receive special training in aviation, at the country's expense, Red Cross and First Aid Societies spread their tentacles amongst the working women. They receive every assistance, from patronage by Royalty to inclusion in military demonstrations.

THE GLORY OF THE MILITARY.

The military authorities repeat their policy of 1914—painting military life in brilliant colours. "R," the writer of a report in the "Manchester Guardian" of June 21, 1933, states, "at a recruiting meeting I attended, a General urged us to get away from 'this absorbing idea of everlasting peace and try to realise that the paradise you hope to live in in the future is a very foolish and idealistic one.'"

She goes on to say: "He was also certain that the women of this country could do a great deal to stimulate the young men to join the Territorial Army instead of discouraging them. He thought they ought to be told what might have happened to them in 1914. A Lieutenant-General said that the women of England were distinguished for their unselfishness, and when it was put to them how unprepared the country was they would be the first to inspire men to give their services to the Territorial Army."

This is in 1933, fifteen years after the "war to end war."

THE PRESS TAKES A HAND.

The Capitalist Press pursues the same policy, mindful of the developing class-consciousness of the workers understand

ing their advancement towards conscious political action, seeking to turn women's thoughts aside to "safe" matters.

The "Woman's Own" Magazine (June 24, 1933) runs a special illustrated middle-page article, "Bring Back Merrie England"—"Prosperity will return all the quicker if we are in the mood to greet it." The "Passing Show" (June 17, 1933) runs a feature article by Shaw Desmond, "What Politics do to Women," trying to prove how women's interest in politics corresponds with their lack of beauty.

The Capitalist Press, from "Home Notes" to the "Daily Herald," caters particularly for women, running special Mothercraft and "Homecraft" features. Through the cult of "Beauty" they push into the background the vital needs of women.

Other papers like the "Evening News" come out bolder—a full-page article of June 27, 1933, on "Women Under Nazi Rule" states of German women, "The girls themselves say that marriage should come before everything, that men must be cared for as the bread-winner, and, finally, that in their opinion English women are spoiled." Mary Borden, writing in the same paper on June 22, stated of England, that "The lord and master idea still persists. . . . We still cling in our hearts to the old idea that Hitler is trying to re-establish by compulsion as a working basis of society."

THE NEXT STEP—FASCISM.

What is this "working basis" of which there is so much talk? Just as British workers were promised "homes for heroes" so were the German workers in 1914-18. Ever since the war they have struggled against increasing unemployment and misery. They have built up strong working-class organisations to resist the attempts of the German governing class to maintain their profits at the expense of the workers.

The German ruling class, fearing the growing strength of the workers, like the British National Government promised

the workers "work and wages." They have swept into power, on the fine promises which they have given to the workers—promises of comfortable homes and regular jobs.

As with the British National Government, these promises were intended to bluff the workers. The German National (Fascist) Government says, there is to be an end to the "senseless business of women's rights." And the women must go back into the kitchen.

Herr Hitler, as the spokesman of the German ruling class, says that he can bring prosperity back by reducing the amount of goods coming into the country, that he will increase production in the factories, provide jobs for men, and increase the home comfort by forcing the women to stay at home.

But how can the Fascist regime enlarge the home market when the country has nine million unemployed, when wages have fallen by half during the years of the crisis, when, in spite of tariffs and subsidies, the income from agriculture has fallen by over 30 per cent. during the last three years, when millions of small depositors are being robbed of their money by means of mass bankruptcies, and finally, when two-thirds of the apparatus of production is standing idle?

In such a situation Hitler can only repeat what is being done by every capitalist Government and that is to still further lower the standard of life of the workers, to take away insurance benefits, and attempt to break the workers' organisations. At the same time on the foreign front the German Government intensifies its preparations for the war for markets.

They have pursued the most brutal tyranny against the workers, imprisoning, torturing and killing thousands of the flower of the German working class. The Trade Union, Co-operative and Socialist Movements have been ruthlessly suppressed. They try to recreate the old German Military State, where the function of women shall be to produce ever more soldiers, and the glory of men shall be to engage in war.

In order to win the support of the workers for this policy

the Nazis issue a very clever appeal to the men, promises of steady jobs and a comfortable home. Women are to be got out of the factories and offices and their places to be filled by men. Instead of producing goods for market, women shall once more become the "home-makers" and "comforters of men."

HOW IT WORKS OUT.

German women, formerly in a measure self-supporting, are to become entirely dependent upon their menfolk, or forced into domestic service. (They are to lose their insurance benefits.) Men may be promised women's work, but the bosses will see to it that wages are brought down to that formerly paid to the semi-skilled woman worker, whilst their responsibilities will be tremendously increased by having to maintain their womenfolk. Increased responsibilities, lower wages and higher prices will result. The misery of the German working class will increase a hundredfold.

The Nazi Government has stated that it stood for a policy of international peace, but feverishly prepares for war. It has developed a military force of a million men, forced women into training corps and armed its police. Germany at war will mean the world at war.

Mary Borden, speaking for the British owning class, states, that this is the "old idea to which we still cling!"

IN ENGLAND TOO!

It would be well to point out how the governing class of Britain has much in common with the Nazis. It has always maintained that women were of less economic value than men and has legislated so that they receive about half the general rate of wages in the sweated trades. Social Insurance benefits are less. The percentage of disallowances of benefits is far higher amongst women than amongst men. Unemployed married women are robbed of all benefits and classed as dependents of their husbands. The Social Services which

deal more particularly with the welfare of women have been the subject of the deepest "economy" cuts. In the course of the bosses' attacks on wages and conditions women are handicapped, in the main from "independent" action by the operation of the Conciliation and Arbitration Boards of the Board of Trade.

Like the Nazi Government, the British governing class employs the most brutal tyranny against the workers' organisations. Leaders of the unemployed are imprisoned, under 300-year-old Acts. The Trade Disputes Act has been used to baton and imprison numerous working women, in Lancashire, London and Bedwas.

The unemployed are compelled to accept task work at low remuneration. Unemployed women are forced into uninsurable domestic service. Some have even been compelled to work in Army canteens. The Co-operative funds are to be robbed of £1¼ millions this year. And all the time they drive to develop a more highly militaristic police force to use against the workers in the coming struggles, and to increase recruitment into Forces for imperialist war purposes.

"HAIL HITLER!"

Hitler has contended that his main concern is to fight Communism. Leading British statesmen have indicated that in such a fight he is their ally.

The facts are that ever since 1918 the Communist Party of Germany has been growing in strength. Whilst smaller than the Social-Democratic Party (the German Labour Party), it was nevertheless the most active and militant force against the German ruling class. It had its organised groups in streets and factories and had built up a strong movement of Red Front Fighters to protect its demonstrators and meetings. It refused to compromise with the Social Democrats, who claimed that they would build a "State standing above classes."

The Communists believe that the needs of the working class must come first, that a working-class State must replace that of the governing class. The German Labour Party, on the other hand, believed that it was possible to arrest the crisis by assisting the masters to reduce wage costs, social insurance benefits, and increasing taxation. Thus they strengthened the position of the governing class at the expense of the workers. They gave new power to a class which had been severely shaken by the incidents of 1918.

Whilst in office they continued to build battle cruisers, strengthened the military police and batoned and imprisoned the workers. They disbanded the Red Front Fighters. The workers were bitterly disillusioned. They saw no way out, for the German Labour Party had carried on a most persistent slander against the workers' dictatorship of the U.S.S.R.

The Nazis were able to sweep into power under promises of work and wages. Hitler, once in power, employed the Fascist Dictatorship against the Communists, Labour Party and Trade Unionists alike. All are victims of the terror.

As in Germany so in every other capitalist country. When the capitalist class fight for power they carry the war into every section of the workers' ranks, employing their most brutal tactics against the most militant sections. Their attack can only be broken by the unity of the workers' ranks.

It is not the Bolshevism of Germany alone which Hitler seeks to destroy. He looks for sources of profit abroad. In the Soviet Union, under the leadership of the Communist Party, the building of a new economic system goes on. Industry and agriculture are developing far in excess of any capitalist country. It is a land teeming with wealth—as such it is the envy of every capitalist Government. It is a prize to be fought for—even thieves have been known to combine to rob. Germany is the ally of Britain in their mutual drive to prevent the organisation of the workers for the overthrow of capitalism, in their war plans against the Soviet Union.

The truth is that the governing class of all capitalist countries seeks to prevent class action of the workers, to break the workers' fighting front. They are concerned to keep alive "National Patriotism" which places "Duty to King and Country" before duty to class.

"Duty to King and Country" in 1914-18 has led British working women to the Means Test, to the Anomalies Act, to hunger and misery, as the following two examples quoted from the "Daily Worker" will show:

"A woman who pleaded that she had stolen because she had no food at home for her young children was led sobbing to the cell, after being sentenced at Bristol to a month's hard labour for shoplifting. The woman, Mary Burrige, of Hill Street, St. Paul's, was alleged to have been seen taking articles of food worth 3s." (April 20, 1933.)

"An old discharged soldier now dependent on his children for his maintenance committed suicide; his pension was 5s. 3d. per week. Here are the facts as given by his daughter to a press reporter:—

"My money is about £1 a week, but often it is less, because it is piece work. This week it came to 13s., but of this there was the rent of 7s. 10d. to pay. One week I had 25s., and after that when Dad applied for relief they told him 'you have Violet's money.' That's what he got for fighting for his King and Country." (January 10, 1933.)

WORKERS CLOSE THE RANKS.

In England under the guise of "Equality of Sacrifice" they reduce still lower the workers' standard of life.

It has already been declared that further "Economies" are to be enforced against the unemployed. Miners, textile workers, railway workers and others are threatened with further reductions and "speed-up."

The swift action of the workers, the strike of the Smethwick workers against Bedaux, the camping of the Hunger Marchers in Princes Street, Edinburgh, the threat of the Welsh miners

of a one-day strike, the move towards preparations to end the miners' agreement, indicate to the governing class the mood of the masses. It is a mood to resist any worsening of their conditions, to force recognition of their organisations.

The Co-operatives, the Trade Union branches, and the other working-class organisations pass resolutions against the breaking of trade relations with the Soviet Union. They pour in their support to the victims of the German Fascist Terror. They build a mighty movement against war and organise National Demonstrations of protest. The ranks of the British working class close in, to resist the capitalist attacks on standards of living, to resist the Fascist Terror and to prevent Imperialist War.

UNITY IN ACTION.

No barriers of sex or sectional organisation must be allowed to break the ranks. Leadership marred with the preservation of narrow organisational interests must be overruled. The Hunger Marchers, the Means Test, Demonstrations in Hyde Park, the London busmen's strike, the strike of the textile workers in 1932 have shown the closing of the ranks.

"Unity in Action" has become the fighting slogan of the great masses of workers. Women, concerned with their freedom, concerned for the abolition of misery and war, must allow of no split in the ranks. The lessons of Germany must be taken deeply to heart. There can be no going backward for working women.

The way out of our present misery is only by struggle against the Means Test, against Speed-up, for equal pay for equal work. In the process of this struggle we will knit closer together the ranks of the workers and gain strength to go forward to the building of a new system of society—a system of society where we shall not give up the profits of our labour to a small governing class, but where the profits will be used

to build crèches and schools for our children, hospitals for the sick, and labour-saving homes for the workers.

Under workers' control, as in the Soviet Union, we will free women from the drudgery of the kitchen and give her every facility for a free, full and happy life, free from the everlasting spectre of misery, hunger and war.

Refuse to be misled by the officials, rally to the call of your fellow-workers! We women in particular must exert our influence, display the utmost courage, and fearlessly combat all the forces of reaction so that 1914-18 shall not be repeated, so that there shall be no bloody Fascist terror in Britain, that women shall not be used for the governing class to delay the onward march of the toiling masses.

WORKING WOMEN! FORWARD IN THE UNITED STRUGGLE
OF THE WORKING CLASS.

FORWARD IN THE FIGHT AGAINST FASCISM AND WAR!

FORWARD TO EMANCIPATION, TO FULL EQUALITY WITH MEN!

FORWARD TO THE OVERTHROW OF CAPITALISM!

FORWARD TO THE BUILDING OF SOCIALISM!

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