

## THE COMMON SENSE OF WARFARE

Sec. 1

### CONSCRIPTION

I want to say as compactly as possible why I do not believe that conscription would increase the military efficiency of this country, and why I think it might be a disastrous step for this country to take.

By conscription I mean the compulsory enlistment for a term of service in the Army of the whole manhood of the country. And I am writing now from the point of view merely of military effectiveness. The educational value of a universal national service, the idea which as a Socialist I support very heartily, of making every citizen give a year or so of his life to our public needs, are matters quite outside my present discussion. What I am writing about now is this idea that the country can be strengthened for war by making every man in it a bit of a soldier.

And I want the reader to be perfectly clear about the position I assume with regard to war preparations generally. I am not pleading for peace

when there is no peace; this country has been constantly threatened during the past decade, and is threatened now by gigantic hostile preparations; it is our common interest to be and to keep at the maximum of military efficiency possible to us. My case is not merely that conscription will not contribute to that, but that it would be a monstrous diversion of our energy and emotion and material resources from the things that need urgently to be done. It would be like a boxer filling his arms with empty boxing-gloves and then rushing--his face protruding over the armful--into the fray.

Let me make my attack on this prevalent and increasing superstition of the British need for conscription in two lines, one following the other. For, firstly, it is true that Britain at the present time is no more capable of creating such a conscript army as France or Germany possesses in the next ten years than she is of covering her soil with a tropical forest, and, secondly, it is equally true that if she had such an army it would not be of the slightest use to her. For the conscript armies in which Europe still so largely believes are only of use against conscript armies and adversaries who will consent to play the rules of the German war game; they are, if we chose to determine they shall be, if we chose to deal with them as they should be dealt with, as out of date as a Roman legion or a Zulu impi.

Now, first, as to the impossibility of getting our great army into existence. All those people who write and talk so glibly in favour of conscription seem to forget that to take a common man, and more

particularly a townsman, clap him into a uniform and put a rifle in his hand does not make a soldier. He has to be taught not only the use of his weapons, but the methods of a strange and unfamiliar life out of doors; he has to be not simply drilled, but accustomed to the difficult modern necessities of open order fighting, of taking cover, of entrenchment, and he has to have created within him, so that it will stand the shock of seeing men killed round about him, confidence in himself, in his officers, and the methods and weapons of his side. Body, mind, and imagination have all to be trained--and they need trainers. The conversion of a thousand citizens into anything better than a sheep-like militia demands the enthusiastic services of scores of able and experienced instructors who know what war is; the creation of a universal army demands the services of many scores of thousands of not simply "old soldiers," but keen, expert, modern-minded officers.

Without these officers our citizen army would be a hydra without heads. And we haven't these officers. We haven't a tithe of them.

We haven't these officers, and we can't make them in a hurry. It takes at least five years to make an officer who knows his trade. It needs a special gift, in addition to that knowledge, to make a man able to impart it. And our Empire is at a peculiar disadvantage in the matter, because India and our other vast areas of service and opportunity overseas drain away a large proportion of just those able and educated men who would in other countries gravitate towards the army. Such small wealth of officers as we have--and I am quite prepared to believe that

the officers we have are among the very best in the world--are scarcely enough to go round our present supply of private soldiers. And the best and most brilliant among this scanty supply are being drawn upon more and more for aerial work, and for all that increasing quantity of highly specialised services which are manifestly destined to be the real fighting forces of the future. We cannot spare the best of our officers for training conscripts; we shall get the dimmallest results from the worst of them; and so even if it were a vital necessity for our country to have an army of all its manhood now, we could not have it, and it would be a mere last convulsion to attempt to make it with the means at our disposal.

But that brings me to my second contention, which is that we do not want such an army. I believe that the vast masses of men in uniform maintained by the Continental Powers at the present time are enormously overrated as fighting machines. I see Germany in the likeness of a boxer with a mailed fist as big as and rather heavier than its body, and I am convinced that when the moment comes for that mailed fist to be lifted, the whole disproportionate system will topple over. The military ascendancy of the future lies with the country that dares to experiment most, that experiments best, and meanwhile keeps its actual fighting force fit and admirable and small and flexible. The experience of war during the last fifteen years has been to show repeatedly the enormous defensive power of small, scientifically handled bodies of men. These huge conscript armies are made up not of masses of military muscle, but of a huge proportion of military fat. Their one way of fighting will be

to fall upon an antagonist with all their available weight, and if he is mobile and dexterous enough to decline that issue of adiposity they will become a mere embarrassment to their own people. Modern weapons and modern contrivance are continually decreasing the number of men who can be employed efficiently upon a length of front. I doubt if there is any use for more than 400,000 men upon the whole Franco-Belgian frontier at the present time. Such an army, properly supplied, could--so far as terrestrial forces are concerned--hold that frontier against any number of assailants. The bigger the forces brought against it the sooner the exhaustion of the attacking power. Now, it is for employment upon that frontier, and for no other conceivable purpose in the world, that Great Britain is asked to create a gigantic conscript army.

And if too big an army is likely to be a mere encumbrance in war, it is perhaps even a still graver blunder to maintain one during that conflict of preparation which is at present the European substitute for actual hostilities. It consumes. It produces nothing. It not only eats and drinks and wears out its clothes and withdraws men from industry, but under the stress of invention it needs constantly to be re-armed and freshly equipped at an expenditure proportionate to its size. So long as the conflict of preparation goes on, then the bigger the army your adversary maintains under arms the bigger is his expenditure and the less his earning power. The less the force you employ to keep your adversary over-armed, and the longer you remain at peace with him while he is over-armed, the greater is your advantage. There is only one profitable use for any army, and that is victorious conflict. Every army

that is not engaged in victorious conflict is an organ of national expenditure, an exhausting growth in the national body. And for Great Britain an attempt to create a conscript army would involve the very maximum of moral and material exhaustion with the minimum of military efficiency. It would be a disastrous waste of resources that we need most urgently for other things.

## Sec. 2

In the popular imagination the Dreadnought is still the one instrument of naval war. We count our strength in Dreadnoughts and Super-Dreadnoughts, and so long as we are spending our national resources upon them faster than any other country, if we sink at least £160 for every £100 sunk in these obsolescent monsters by Germany, we have a reassuring sense of keeping ahead and being thoroughly safe. This confidence in big, very expensive battleships is, I believe and hope, shared by the German Government and by Europe generally, but it is, nevertheless, a very unreasonable confidence, and it may easily lead us into the most tragic of national disillusionments.

We of the general public are led to suppose that the next naval war--if ever we engage in another naval war--will begin with a decisive fleet action. The plan of action is presented with an alluring simplicity. Our adversary will come out to us, in a ratio of 10 to 16, or in some ratio still more advantageous to us, according as our adversary happens to be

this Power or that Power, there will be some tremendous business with guns and torpedoes, and our admirals will return victorious to discuss the discipline and details of the battle and each other's little weaknesses in the monthly magazines. This is a desirable but improbable anticipation. No hostile Power is in the least likely to send out any battleships at all against our invincible Dreadnoughts. They will promenade the seas, always in the ratio of 16 or more to 10, looking for fleets securely tucked away out of reach. They will not, of course, go too near the enemy's coast, on account of mines, and, meanwhile, our cruisers will hunt the enemy's commerce into port.

Then other things will happen.

The enemy we shall discover using unsportsmanlike devices against our capital ships. Unless he is a lunatic, he will prove to be much stronger in reality than he is on paper in the matter of submarines, torpedo-boats, waterplanes and aeroplanes. These are things cheap to make and easy to conceal. He will be richly stocked with ingenious devices for getting explosives up to these two million pound triumphs of our naval engineering. On the cloudy and foggy nights so frequent about these islands he will have extraordinary chances, and sooner or later, unless we beat him thoroughly in the air above and in the waters beneath, for neither of which proceedings we are prepared, some of these chances will come off, and we shall lose a Dreadnought.

It will be a poor consolation if an ill-advised and stranded Zeppelin or

so enlivens the quiet of the English countryside by coming down and capitulating. It will be a trifling countershock to wing an aeroplane or so, or blow a torpedo-boat out of the water. Our Dreadnoughts will cease to be a source of unmitigated confidence. A second battleship disaster will excite the Press extremely. A third will probably lead to a retirement of the battle fleet to some east coast harbour, a refuge liable to aeroplanes, or to the west coast of Ireland--and the real naval war, which, as I have argued in an earlier chapter, will be a war of destroyers, submarines and hydroplanes, will begin. Incidentally a commerce destroyer may take advantage of the retirement of our fleet to raid our trade routes.

We shall then realise that the actual naval weapons are these smaller weapons, and especially the destroyer, the submarine, and the waterplane--the waterplane most of all, because of its possibilities of a comparative bigness--in the hands of competent and daring men. And I find myself, as a patriotic Englishman, more and more troubled by doubts whether we are as certainly superior to any possible adversary in these essential things as we are in the matter of Dreadnoughts. I find myself awake at nights, after a day much agitated by a belligerent Press, wondering whether the real Empire of the Sea may not even now have slipped out of our hands while our attention has been fixed on our stately procession of giant warships, while our country has been in a dream, hypnotised by the Dreadnought idea.

For some years there seems to have been a complete arrest of the British



imagination in naval and military matters. That declining faculty, never a very active or well-exercised one, staggered up to the conception of a Dreadnought, and seems now to have sat down for good. Its reply to every demand upon it has been "more Dreadnoughts." The future, as we British seem to see it, is an avenue of Dreadnoughts and Super-Dreadnoughts and Super-Super-Dreadnoughts, getting bigger and bigger in a kind of inverted perspective. But the ascendancy of fleets of great battleships in naval warfare, like the phase of huge conscript armies upon land, draws to its close. The progress of invention makes both the big ship and the army crowd more and more vulnerable and less and less effective. A new phase of warfare opens beyond the vista of our current programmes. Smaller, more numerous and various and mobile weapons and craft and contrivances, manned by daring and highly skilled men, must ultimately take the place of those massivenesses. We are entering upon a period in which the invention of methods and material for war is likely to be more rapid and diversified than it has ever been before, and the question of what we have been doing behind the splendid line of our Dreadnoughts to meet the demands of this new phase is one of supreme importance. Knowing, as I do, the imaginative indolence of my countrymen, it is a question I face with something very near to dismay.

But it is one that has to be faced. The question that should occupy our directing minds now is no longer "How can we get more Dreadnoughts?" but "What have we to follow the Dreadnought?"

To the Power that has most nearly guessed the answer to that riddle

belongs the future Empire of the Seas. It is interesting to guess for oneself and to speculate upon the possibility of a kind of armoured mother-ship for waterplanes and submarines and torpedo craft, but necessarily that would be a mere journalistic and amateurish guessing. I am not guessing, but asking urgent questions. What force, what council, how many imaginative and inventive men has the country got at the present time employed not casually but professionally in anticipating the new strategy, the new tactics, the new material, the new training that invention is so rapidly rendering necessary? I have the gravest doubts whether we are doing anything systematic at all in this way.

Now, it is the tremendous seriousness of this deficiency to which I want to call attention. Great Britain has in her armour a gap more dangerous and vital than any mere numerical insufficiency of men or ships. She is short of minds. Behind its strength of current armaments to-day, a strength that begins to evaporate and grow obsolete from the very moment it comes into being, a country needs more and more this profounder strength of intellectual and creative activity.

This country most of all, which was left so far behind in the production of submarines, airships and aeroplanes, must be made to realise the folly of its trust in established things. Each new thing we take up more belatedly and reluctantly than its predecessor. The time is not far distant when we shall be "caught" lagging unless we change all this.

We need a new arm to our service; we need it urgently, and we shall need

it more and more, and that arm is Research. We need to place inquiry and experiment upon a new footing altogether, to enlist for them and organise them, to secure the pick of our young chemists and physicists and engineers, and to get them to work systematically upon the anticipation and preparation of our future war equipment. We need a service of invention to recover our lost lead in these matters.

And it is because I feel so keenly the want of such a service, and the want of great sums of money for it, that I deplore the disposition to waste millions upon the hasty creation of a universal service army and upon excessive Dreadnoughting. I am convinced that we are spending upon the things of yesterday the money that is sorely needed for the things of to-morrow.

With our eyes averted obstinately from the future we are backing towards disaster.

Sec. 3

In the present armament competition there are certain considerations that appear to be almost universally overlooked, and which tend to modify our views profoundly of what should be done. Ultimately they will affect our entire expenditure upon war preparation.

Expenditure upon preparation for war falls, roughly, into two classes:

there is expenditure upon things that have a diminishing value, things that grow old-fashioned and wear out, such as fortifications, ships, guns, and ammunition, and expenditure upon things that have a permanent and even growing value, such as organised technical research, military and naval experiment, and the education and increase of a highly trained class of war experts.

I want to suggest that we are spending too much money in the former and not enough in the latter direction. We are buying enormous quantities of stuff that will be old iron in twenty years' time, and we are starving ourselves of that which cannot be bought or made in a hurry, and upon which the strength of nations ultimately rests altogether; we are failing to get and maintain a sufficiency of highly educated and developed men inspired by a tradition of service and efficiency.

No doubt we must be armed to-day, but every penny we divert from men-making and knowledge-making to armament beyond the margin of bare safety is a sacrifice of the future to the present. Every penny we divert from national wealth-making to national weapons means so much less in resources, so much more strain in the years ahead. But a great system of laboratories and experimental stations, a systematic, industrious increase of men of the officer-aviator type, of the research student type, of the engineer type, of the naval-officer type, of the skilled sergeant-instructor type, a methodical development of a common sentiment and a common zeal among such a body of men, is an added strength that grows greater from the moment you call it into being. In

our schools and military and naval colleges lies the proper field for expenditure upon preparation for our ultimate triumph in war. All other war preparation is temporary but that.

This would be obvious in any case, but what makes insistence upon it peculiarly urgent is the manifestly temporary nature of the present European situation and the fact that within quite a small number of years our war front will be turned in a direction quite other than that to which it faces now.

For a decade and more all Western Europe has been threatened by German truculence; the German, inflamed by the victories of 1870 and 1871, has poured out his energy in preparation for war by sea and land, and it has been the difficult task of France and England to keep the peace with him. The German has been the provocator and leader of all modern armaments. But that is not going on. It is already more than half over. If we can avert war with Germany for twenty years, we shall never have to fight Germany. In twenty years' time we shall be talking no more of sending troops to fight side by side on the frontier of France; we shall be talking of sending troops to fight side by side with French and Germans on the frontiers of Poland.

And the justification of that prophecy is a perfectly plain one. The German has filled up his country, his birth-rate falls, and the very vigour of his military and naval preparations, by raising the cost of living, hurries it down. His birth-rate falls as ours and the

Frenchman's falls, because he is nearing his maximum of population It is an inevitable consequence of his geographical conditions. But eastward of him, from his eastern boundaries to the Pacific, is a country already too populous to conquer, but with possibilities of further expansion that are gigantic. The Slav will be free to increase and multiply for another hundred years. Eastward and southward bristle the Slavs, and behind the Slavs are the colossal possibilities of Asia.

Even German vanity, even the preposterous ambitions that spring from that brief triumph of Sedan, must awaken at last to these manifest facts, and on the day when Germany is fully awake we may count the Western European Armageddon as "off" and turn our eyes to the greater needs that will arise beyond Germany. The old game will be over and a quite different new game will begin in international relations.

During these last few years of worry and bluster across the North Sea we have a little forgotten India in our calculations. As Germany faces round eastward again, as she must do before very long, we shall find India resuming its former central position in our ideas of international politics. With India we may pursue one of two policies: we may keep her divided and inefficient for war, as she is at present, and hold her and own her and defend her as a prize, or we may arm her and assist her development into a group of quasi-independent English-speaking States--in which case she will become our partner and possibly at last even our senior partner. But that is by the way. What I am pointing out now is that whether we fight Germany or not, a time is drawing near

when Germany will cease to be our war objective and we shall cease to be Germany's war objective, and when there will have to be a complete revision of our military and naval equipment in relation to those remoter, vaster Asiatic possibilities.

Now that possible campaign away there, whatever its particular nature may be, which will be shaping our military and naval policy in the year 1933 or thereabouts, will certainly be quite different in its conditions from the possible campaign in Europe and the narrow seas which determines all our preparations now. We cannot contemplate throwing an army of a million British conscripts on to the North-West Frontier of India, and a fleet of Super-Dreadnoughts will be ineffective either in Thibet or the Baltic shallows. All our present stuff, indeed, will be on the scrap-heap then. What will not be on the scrap-heap will be such enterprise and special science and inventive power as we have got together. That is versatile. That is good to have now and that will be good to have then.

Everyone nowadays seems demanding increased expenditure upon war preparation. I will follow the fashion. I will suggest that we have the courage to restrain and even to curtail our monstrous outlay upon war material and that we begin to spend lavishly upon military and naval education and training, upon laboratories and experimental stations, upon chemical and physical research and all that makes knowledge and leading, and that we increase our expenditure upon these things as fast as we can up to ten or twelve millions a year. At present we spend about

eighteen and a half millions a year upon education out of our national funds, but fourteen and a half of this, supplemented by about as much again from local sources, is consumed in merely elementary teaching. So that we spend only about four millions a year of public money on every sort of research and education above the simple democratic level. Nearly thirty millions for the foundations and only a seventh for the edifice of will and science! Is it any marvel that we are a badly organised nation, a nation of very widely diffused intelligence and very second-rate guidance and achievement? Is it any marvel that directly we are tested by such a new development as that of aeroplanes or airships we show ourselves in comparison with the more braced-up nations of the Continent backward, unorganised unimaginative, unenterprising?

Our supreme want to-day, if we are to continue a belligerent people, is a greater supply of able educated men, versatile men capable of engines, of aviation, of invention, of leading and initiative. We need more laboratories, more scholarships out of the general mass of elementary scholars, a quasi-military discipline in our colleges and a great array of new colleges, a much readier access to instruction in aviation and military and naval practice. And if we are to have national service let us begin with it where it is needed most and where it is least likely to disorganise our social and economic life; let us begin at the top. Let us begin with the educated and propertied classes and exact a couple of years' service in a destroyer or a waterplane, or an airship, or a research laboratory, or a training camp, from the sons of everybody who, let us say, pays income tax without deductions. Let us mix with these a



big proportion--a proportion we may increase steadily--of keen scholarship men from the elementary schools. Such a braced-up class as we should create in this way would give us the realities of military power, which are enterprise, knowledge, and invention; and at the same time it would add to and not subtract from the economic wealth of the community. Make men; that is the only sane, permanent preparation for war. So we should develop a strength and create a tradition that would not rust nor grow old-fashioned in all the years to come.

#### THE CONTEMPORARY NOVEL

Circumstances have made me think a good deal at different times about the business of writing novels, and what it means, and is, and may be; and I was a professional critic of novels long before I wrote them. I have been writing novels, or writing about novels, for the last twenty years. It seems only yesterday that I wrote a review--the first long and appreciative review he had--of Mr. Joseph Conrad's "Almayer's Folly" in the Saturday Review. When a man has focussed so much of his life upon the novel, it is not reasonable to expect him to take too modest or apologetic a view of it. I consider the novel an important and necessary thing indeed in that complicated system of uneasy adjustments and readjustments which is modern civilisation. I make very high and wide