

Working Women Must Fight Jingoism

By VERA BUCH.

The mobilization of American women in support of the last war which the American government conducted in 1917-1918 has a poignant lesson to the working class. It is a warning to us to realize the importance of the women, and to begin energetically the task of organizing and teaching the working class women, so that when war breaks out again, they will be mobilized, not for the support of the imperialists, but for the fight against capitalism and for the victory of the proletarian revolution.

Women Under Gov't Control.

Systematically, on a national scale, an apparatus was created, using the permanent bourgeois women's organizations, which reached to the last corner of the country and dragged in not only the middle class women, but the working women and workers' wives as well. Under the direct control and with the full support of the federal and state government apparatus, this organization of women penetrated not only the whole United States, but even the colonial possessions.

The imperialists fully understood the value of the women. They lost no time. Fifteen days after war was declared on Germany, on April 21, 1917, the mobilization was begun by the creation of a Women's Committee of the Council of National Defense. This council had been organized by act of congress in August, 1916, and consisted of the secretaries of six state departments, plus an advisory committee of seven. It was thus a direct appendage of the government, and its Women's Committee, meeting in Washington as a sub-division of the council, was in the closest connection with the government center. Nine women were put on the committee, most of them heads of big bourgeois women's organizations, such as the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the National Council of Women, the National Women's Suffrage Association, and others. Dr. Anna Howard Shaw was the chairman of the committee. Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt was also a member. Later two other women were added, one of them the president of the International Glove Workers' Union.

Within a few weeks, the Women's Committee had formulated a plan of action which was sent out to well-known patriotic women in 48 states. At once the organization work was begun. A temporary chairman was appointed in each state. Her first job was to call together a conference consisting of the heads of women's organizations having a statewide scope, and such individuals as she wished to represent unorganized women. Recognition was to be given to clubs, to religious denominations, to fraternal and philanthropic societies, to patriotic and protective associations. All the innumerable women's organizations under bourgeois influence, which have had an

Must Not Allow Mobilization for Imperialist War, but Fight for Proletarian Revolution

extraordinary development in America, were thus at once systematically mobilized and thrown into action under the leadership of the Women's Committee which got its orders and inspiration from the U. S. imperialist government.

Thorough Local Organization.

These state conferences were constituted as permanent groups. There were organized similar committees on a local scale in each county, city, town and village. In the cities, there were also ward organizations. When it came down to local groups, membership was no longer based upon organization, but any individual woman who could be brought in was eligible. Thus there was a possibility of getting those who had escaped membership in the permanent organizations, and of reaching each and every working woman and worker's and farmer's wife. The purpose uniting all these divisions was to see "that all necessary forms of patriotic service or of defense program as outlined by the Women's Committee were actually carried forward." In other words, the women were to be mobilized in the most thorough manner to sacrifice their all for the bloody duty of winning the war for Wall Street.

Departments were established in all divisions for the following fields of work: registration, food production and home economics, food administration, women in industry, child welfare, maintenance of existing social service agencies, health and recreation, education, liberty loan, home and foreign relief. The chairmen of the committees on food administration, women in industry and liberty loan were considered so important that they were appointed only in consultation with the Women's Committee in Washington and worked directly with it. Not satisfied with mobilizing the women of the U. S., proper, similar organizations were created also in the Panama Canal Zone, in Porto Rico, the Philippines, the Hawaiian Islands and in Alaska. The work was carried out so efficiently that by June 15 six states were already thoroughly organized.

Jingoism Send Hot Air Barrage.

Simultaneously with creating and perfecting the structural apparatus for the work, there was sent out a barrage of sentimental, jingoistic propaganda for enlisting the women's moral support, for working them up into a patriotic frenzy in which they would be prepared to make any sacrifice. The women suddenly become very important in the eyes of government officials, they acquire qualities of zeal, heroism and intelligence unsuspected before.

Said President Wilson:

"I think the whole country has admired the spirit and the capa-

city and devotion of the women of the United States. . . The country depends upon the women for a large part of the inspiration of its life."

And the secretary of war chimes in:

"I think there is a certain significance. . . when a secretary of war says to the women that the success of the United States in the making of this war is just as much in the hands of the women of America as it is in the hands of the soldiers of our army."

On August 2, 1917, the secretary of the navy declares:

"American women have always been ready to answer the call of service and have cheerfully undergone the untold sacrifices and burdens which war places upon them. They are already making sacrifices and enduring hardships with a spirit which commands our intense admiration."

And listen to the secretary of the interior in June, 1917:

"Unless our women feel the greatness of the moral issues involved in this contest, and unless they have raised their boys to fight, if necessary, for the things for which we stand, the war cannot be won."

And so on "ad nauseam." In pulpit and press, in movie and school, in parade and mass meeting the campaign went on to drive the last working woman, the last workers' and farmers' wife into doing "her bit" to support the noble cause of defending imperialist profits.

Women Enormous Support to Gov't

The actual concrete results of the campaign were of enormous help to the ruling class. After a few months campaign among the women for the saving of waste bread, the National Commercial Economy Board stated that enough bread had been saved each day to feed a million people. \$350,000,000 worth of crops were raised by women in backyard gardens during 1917. And in the same year, \$36,000,000 worth of garments made by women, says Mr. Davison, head of the American Red Cross, were sent to the troops abroad. This in addition to the many millions of dollars for relief purposes raised through the activities of the women.

The activities carried on by the various women's committees were manifold. One of the first jobs was the registration of the women for service. The women were prepared by special letters and a message from the government. Some states and cities instituted classes to train women registrars. Within six months the national committees on registration received over 9,000 calls for women workers from firms holding government contracts for war materials.

Then the food conservation drive. Every one remembers the garbage pail campaign. How a group of patriotic dames supposedly visited the home of Hoover, then Food Administrator, to inspect its garbage pail—and behold, it was empty!—the implication being, I suppose, that the Hoover family ate up its garbage. The empty garbage pail was held up as the emblem of perfection to the American working class housewife. She was supposed to cut out meat and wheat from her menu and scrimp on her already poor table so as to save the food for the army.

On May 5, 1917 Secretary Houston of the U. S. Dept. of Agriculture issued a special appeal to the women of the country for food conservation and economy in the home. He appealed also to the "loyalty" of the working women. He said:

"Employed women, especially those engaged in the manufacture of food or clothing, also directly serve their country and should put into their tasks the enthusiasm and energy the importance of their products warrants."

At one of the first national conferences called by the Women's Committee of the National Council of Defense, Hoover, the new Food Administrator, gave a plan for enlisting the women in the first nationwide campaign for food conservation.

In the Liberty Loan Drive, too, the women's organization was invaluable to the government in putting over its plan for filching from the American workers their hard-earned dollars for the manufacture of armaments and munitions which would kill both American and European workers by the millions. Of course, here, many other important agencies were at work. Large firms made the jobs of their factory and office workers dependent upon the purchase of so many Liberty Bonds. Poor workers, women included, pledged their earnings for months and years to pay for these. The Liberty Loan department of the Women's Committee was instrumental in distributing 700,000 Liberty Loan primers and hand books to teachers and 1,500,000 special letters to farmers' wives. It also assigned 1,600 women speakers to tour the country for the drive. It was no accident that in such working class centers as Pittsburgh and Allegheny Co. Pa., women subscribers to the loan were one-third of the total. Red Cross work also, that is, the making of surgical supplies and "comforts" for soldiers, was a principal activity of the women.

To Be Continued

No sooner is the exploitation of the laborer by the manufacturer, so far as an end, that he receives his wages in cash, then he is set upon by the other portions of the bourgeoisie, the landlord, the shopkeeper, the pawnbroker, etc.—Karl Marx (Communist Manifesto).

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.—Karl Marx (Communist Manifesto).