

Week 10 Documents – Prohibition and World War I

JOHN HAYNES HOLMES CALL FOR CHRISTIAN PACIFISM

WHEN the Great War burst upon the world in August 1914, it was natural that affrighted and outraged men should regard this disaster as a final demonstration of the failure of Judaism, Christianity, the organised peace propaganda, and international socialism. The tradition of Israel reaches back to a period antedating the advent of Christianity by more than seven centuries; the gospel of love, associated with the name of Jesus, has been known to humanity for nearly two thousand years; the peace movement, led by able and distinguished men, backed by abundant resources, well-organised and persistently aggressive, has had three generations to impress its doctrines upon the modern mind; and during the last half-century or so, we have seen a massing of the forces of labour, in all countries, under the banner of socialism, which seemed to constitute a sure protection against war. And yet, when the crisis came, no one of these great forces proved of any avail. The tide of conflict swept across Europe, Asia, Africa, and the seven seas as swiftly and terribly as though no bulwarks had ever been raised against it. What wonder that men in their disappointment and fear, declared religion a failure, the peace movement a farce, and socialism an arrant sham!

That this indictment is rightly to be levelled against Jews and Christians, pacifists and socialists, is to my mind undeniable. Never has humanity been called upon to witness a more tragic spectacle than that of the millions of Germans, Austrians, French, Russians, English — all of them pledged in one way or another to the cause of peace — marching away to the battlefield, at the first sound of alarm, not only without protest, but with enthusiasm. There were some Jews and Christians, we may well believe, who revolted inwardly, if not outwardly, against the call to arms; there were some peace advocates, we know, who were distraught and ashamed; the attempt of the socialists, before the declarations of war were made, to stay the flood of madness then threatening the race, stands out as one of the few glorious episodes of the dreadful days of July and August, 1914. But that, when the actual moment of dread decision came, these millions of religionists, pacifists, internationalists, abandoned their spiritual professions and clung to patriotism as the one sure passion of their souls, is a sober fact. Everywhere they gave way at the very moment when, if ever, they should have stood fast, and thus failed!

. . . Monarchical governments, founded upon superstitions of divine right, secret diplomacies which make falsehood a virtue and identify statesmanship with deceit, balances of power determined by immoral rivalries for world empire and dominion, an economic system based upon exploitation of labour at home and consumers abroad, vast armaments of war reared on the specious pretence of maintaining peace, the barbaric idea of force as the safeguard of security — . . . these have failed! But not those great movements of brotherhood, goodwill, co-operation, which have preached their message to ears that would not hear, and knocked for admittance at portals that would not open. This hour marks perhaps the hour of darkest failure in all of human history. But it is the failure not of Christianity but of civilised barbarism, not of Christ but of Caesar, not of love but of blood and iron!

And yet it is in this hour of universal ruin, that the gospel of force is being preached with a vigour which has never been known before! On every side we are being told that, in the world of men as in the world of beasts, there is no security save "in tooth and claw." Books and pamphlets are pouring from the presses in an endless flood, to warn us of the perils of "defenselessness," by which is meant a reliance upon international goodwill which scorns the mailed fist and the clashing sword, and the need of "preparation," by which is meant arming ourselves to the teeth

against our neighbours. We have even been called upon to witness, during the last few months, the spectacle of a group of men, gathered self-consciously in Independence Hall, in the brave attempt to organise a movement for the establishment of *peace by force!*

Edward Leigh Pell on Christian Warfare

THE kingdom of Christ is a kingdom of peace, but you cannot establish a kingdom without war. And the army of Christ is still on the fighting line. The moment we enlist in his service we find ourselves face to face with forces of evil which call for all the fighting spirit we have and more. And what we lack he will supply. There are teachings of Jesus which cannot get into the blood without turning the veriest "slacker" into a hero. If a man is a Christian he is bound to fight. It is in his blood. He cannot retreat. He cannot surrender. He cannot hide his head in the sand. He must fight.

Christianity means war. It doesn't necessarily mean this or that kind of a war, but it means war. We cannot follow

Christ and not fight. We must fight individually and we must fight as a people. We must fight with our spirits—heaven only knows how we have to fight with our spirits! We must fight with our intellects. And so long as savagery remains in the world—so long as there are human beings who are not susceptible to moral appeal—it may be necessary once in a long while to fight with our bodies. We may cut war out of our hymns and our rituals and our school histories and our ethical culture societies, but we cannot cut it out of the Christian life. A Christian is no "slacker." A Christian is every inch a fighter.