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Taking the Profit Out of War

By BERNARD M. BARUCH

Reprinted from The Atlantic Monthly.

*[The February issue of the Atlantic for 1925 carried a paper by Mr. Sisley Huddleston dealing with the general subject of "taking the profit out of war," which Mr. Huddleston called "An American Plan for Peace." The first-quoted phrase was put into the language by the War Industries Board toward the close of the World War through its efforts to eliminate all war profits. Mr. Huddleston's article came to the attention of Mr. Bernard M. Baruch, chairman of the War Industries Board and administrator of the non-profit plan, and (as he writes us), since it seemed to indicate a growing interest in the idea, induced him to invoke practical means to bring about a full comprehension of taking the profit out of war in the various great countries of the world. To this end he responded to a suggestion of Mr. Owen D. Young, of the Page School of International Relations at Johns Hopkins University, that he establish a course of lectures there to expound the War Industries Board plan in detail. Later he will proceed to make similar arrangements at leading universities in Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and Japan. Agreeing with Mr. Baruch that the subject calls for public knowledge and discussion, it was natural for the Atlantic to turn to him for the following paper.—*THE EDITORS OF THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY.*]*

I

War was once described as Prussia's most profitable industry.

It needs only a scant examination of history to learn that other countries were open to the same indictment. The methods of the Robber Barons did not pass with the end of feudalism. Annexation by conquest did not cease. But when America entered the World War President Wilson fathered a doctrine that shall always govern us—that never a foot of territory would be added to our boundaries by force.

So, as America has taken the lead toward making impossible national profit through war, it too may be America's privilege to point the way toward making impossible individual profit through war. To take the profit out of war is to take a long step toward creating an economic detestation of war. The experience of the United States in the World War affords a basis for the belief that the plan herein discussed is practical. In fact, it is more than a belief—it is a certainty, although not widely known.

The world is such a busy place, and the radius of human activity has been so greatly enlarged because of modern inventions, that it is not strange that there are but few people who are conversant with what was quietly but effectively taking place in this country in the mobilization and use of its material resources in the World War—a process that would have eventually eliminated all improper profits.

Strength is given to the public advocacy of industrial mobilization made by both President Harding and President Coolidge—Mr. Coolidge as recently as last October in his Omaha speech to the American Legion—by the fact that the plan they advocated as a part of the regular national war agencies had once been set up and successfully operated under the War Industries Board.

Preceding the President's recent clear exposition of this subject, some degree of public interest had been engendered by an exchange of letters between Owen D. Young (of Dawes plan fame), in behalf of the Walter Hines Page School of International Relations, and the writer. The correspondence resulted in the establishment of lectures at the Page School (of Johns Hopkins University) on this theme. Previously the *Atlantic Monthly* printed an article by Sisley Huddleston, who pointed out that Europe saw great strides toward peace in the American idea of "taking the profit out of war" in a systematic way. His basic reference was to the plan of the War Industries Board.

The resources of a country might be referred to as the five M's: (1) man power; (2) money; (3) maintenance or food; (4) material resources (including raw materials, manufacturing facilities, transportation, fuel and power); and (5) morale. The intelligence with which the first four are directed and co-ordinated as a whole will determine the fifth, the morale of the community.

In the war emergency it early became evident to those who were charged with the responsibility of mobilizing the resources that there was a just sentiment among the people against profiteering. Profiteering might be willful and profit making might be involuntary; but, whatever its form, there was a just determination it should cease. So it became necessary to fix prices where the supply was limited.

Wherever the government created a shortage by its demands, prices were fixed, not only for the Army, Navy and the Allies, but for the civilian population as well. And in addition to price fixing on war essentials (such as steel, wool, copper, and so forth), the balance, after the war program had been filled, was rationed or distributed according to the priority needs of the various civilian demands. In other words, where the price of the product of an industry was fixed that industry had to deliver the part which the government did not need to the civilian population, not in the way the industry chose, but as the government directed.

It must be remembered that when the war came there was no adequate preparation. Indeed, it is doubted by the best authorities whether any effective form of preparation then known would have been of much avail in view of the widespread and engulfing results of the war and the lack of knowledge of the various instruments of destruction which were being devised and which it became necessary to combat.

Our own Army had several divisions competing one with another for materials, transportation, housing, and so forth. On top of that there prevailed the demands of the Shipping Board, with the slogan that ships would win the war, and of the Food Administration, with the slogan that food would win the war. Further, there was the Railroad Administration with its need for material and labor, and finally there was the feverish quest for labor and supplies on the part of the munition makers—all competing for labor, money, materials, transportation, fuel, power, and each insisting on the greater importance of its activity. All this while the labor supply was being lessened by the flow of men into the Army.

While an endeavor was being made to bring order out of chaos, the great undertaking had to go on. Men, ships, munitions, food, material, had to be provided. Old organizations, bureaus and traditions had to be met and changed, but not destroyed until the new was set up. The wonder of it all is, not that there were so many mistakes, but that so much was accomplished.

At the time we entered the war prices were at their peak, and tending higher because of the war's insatiable demands. The problem was not alone to secure the materials and labor and to stop the confusion, but to do it in such a way that the morale of the people would be maintained. The prices of some things, like steel and copper, were fixed far below prevailing rates, and the wages of labor in those industries were standardized. The more highly organized an industry, the easier it was to arrange. Order did not commence to appear until the Army funneled its needs through one man sitting with a section of the War Industries Board and until the Navy, Shipping Board, Allies and Railroad Administration did likewise. Each department satisfied its requirements through a central authoritative body. This was called the War Industries Board, controlling and directing all materials and co-ordinating through its chairman the whole system of governmental and civilian supply and demand. It was created by executive order in March of the year 1918.

Briefly, this board endeavored to mobilize the industries of America so that the fighting forces of the Allied and associated nations could draw from the United States—the last reservoir of men, materials and money—the things needed for the winning of the war at the time the things were needed and with the least dislocation of industry and the least disturbance of the civilian population.

II

The War Industries Board was organized like any other supervisory committee, with a chairman, vice chairman, members in charge of various activities, bureau chiefs and subordinate workers. It surveyed and sought to arrange the whole industrial war field under the plenary powers conferred by the President and the Congress. How well it did this is a story for others to tell. What it did is the basis of the plan I am here drawing.

It was comparatively easy to fix prices and to distribute materials, and indeed to stabilize the wages of labor in those industries in which prices were fixed. The labor situation, however, became increasingly difficult, particularly when General Crowder found it necessary to withdraw men for the proposed campaign of 1919 after 4,000,000 soldiers had already been taken.

Much has been said about the profiteering of labor. It is an unjust accusation. It is only fair to say that this condition was primarily brought about through the inexperience of the organization within our own governmental departments and by the furious bidding of munitions makers and ship builders for services. That situation, together with the increased prices of the things that labor had to buy with the results of its work, made it inevitable that labor must get higher wages.

So it became evident that the price fixing program had to go even further, and the War Industries Board, when the Armistice came, was proceeding with a campaign to fix the prices of all the basic things that labor had to buy. Some had previously been fixed. I speak of labor in a much broader sense than manual labor, for the unorganized so-called "white collar" part of our community—clerks, teachers, government employees, professional men—were less able to meet the situation than labor in the narrower sense. For the protection and relief of such groups certain plans were devised. To illustrate—

One of them provided that manufacturers, jobbers and retailers of shoes could make and sell shoes only of a specified quality at a fixed price, effective July, 1919. No one who did not have a card of the War Industries Board in his window could sell shoes, and only the standardized shoes could be sold. No jobber or manufacturer would sell shoes to anybody who did not have this card. The shoes were to be stamped Class A, B or C and had to be of the quality prescribed and sold at the price fixed. The country was so organized in every district that there could be immediately reported to Washington the name of any shoe retailer who did not carry out the regulations of the War Industries Board as to price and quality. Through restrictions on his labor, money, raw materials and transportation no manufacturer would have been permitted to sell to any dealer violating the regulations. The Armistice stopped the execution of this plan.

Another plan of this nature: The manufacturers of men's and women's wearing apparel had in 1918 been called to Washington, together with the retailers of various goods, and notified that regulations would have to be made in regard to retail prices and standardization of clothing.

The rulings by the board were made known through the issuance of official bulletins at irregular intervals and were widely distributed by the press, which co-operated in this most necessary work with a whole-hearted purpose that gave to the orders of the War Industries Board the instant and broad circulation they required.

Mr. Hoover already was doing much to perfect his control of food products and prices. There was also talk of fixing rents, and in some cities this was done.

If we were to start, in the event of another war, at the place where we were industrially when the World War ended, the President, acting through an agency similar to the War Industries Board, would have the right to fix prices of all things as of a date previous to the declaration of war when there was a fair peace time relationship among the various activities of the nation. It would be illegal to buy, sell, serve or rent at any other than these prices. Brakes would be applied to every agency of inflation before the hurtful process started. An intelligent control of the flow of men, money and materials would be imposed, instead of having the blind panic heretofore ensuing on the first appearance of the frantic demands of war. The Draft Board would have before it the rulings of the priority committee, together with the estimated needs of every business and profession in its relationship to the conduct of the war, and men would be selected accordingly. The Draft Board could more intelligently decide, with the advice of the priority committee, many of the problems with which it would be faced. There would be no sending of men to the trenches who were needed for expert industrial war work and then bringing them back again. Businesses not necessary to the winning of the war would be curtailed. The Draft Board would have that information before it.

The prices of all things being fixed, the price fixing committee would make any necessary adjustments, as was done during the war. Under the system used in 1918 these prices were made public and adjusted every three months, so that any consumer or producer had his day in court when he considered prices unfair. Those who complained that during the war prices were too high had this ready recourse to hand.

In the meantime all the industries of the country would have been mobilized by the formation of committees representative of each industry as was done in the World War. Over them would be placed a government director or commodity chief. The various government departments would appoint committees representing their requirements, so that on one committee the resources of the nation would be represented and on the other the demands of the government. The government director would stand between to decide, in conjunction with the priority committee, to what department supplies should go.

Money would be controlled and directed like any other resource. "Taking the profit out of war" is not synonymous with "conscription of wealth," as it is sometimes regarded. The latter is a theoretical project, prohibited by our Constitution, contrary to the spirit of our social and political institutions, and impossible in practice. Taking the profit out of war is an orderly and scientific development of the economics and conduct of modern war, necessary to the effective mobilization of national resources and indispensable to equalizing the burdens of war among the armed and civilian population. Born of experience and proved by practice, it removes some of the most destructive concomitants of modern war—the confusion and waste incident to war time inflation.

This term "conscription of wealth," used by so many, has created a hope among those of socialistic tendencies, and a fear among those who, like me, believe in our system based upon personal initiative and reward, of a taking of money without payment, for the use of State. Neither the hope nor the fear is justified by the recommendation herein contained or by our experience in the war. The use of money should be controlled and directed in national emergency. A man should no more be permitted to use his money as he wishes than he should be permitted to use the production of his mine, mill or factory except through the general supervising agency. This was being done to-

(Continued on page six.)

Three Rows From the Front

By H. LOUIS RAYBOLD

(Copyright.)

THE great singer, bowing graciously to the applause inspired by his opening selection, noticed that the girl was there again, three rows from the front and in the center.

He had first seen her in Oakland, then in Denver, and had continued to find her at each recital in the various cities he visited on his coast-to-coast tour. Always she sat, as now, rapt, adoring, and, at the close of each song, clapping with her little hands.

He seized his accompanist, young Pierre Diderot, and led him forward, at which the little hands clapped harder than ever at the great singer's generosity in sharing the plaudits of the audience.

Unfortunately for his peace of mind, the girl was getting to be a necessity to the man. He had grown to look for her first of all, and if by any chance she was late his heart sank. And then when she did come in, her mauve evening cape over her slender arm, he revived again like a drooping plant after a shower, and was willing even to sing the "Volga Boat Song" as an encore.

To his audience Orloff Siechiensky was the great master, superb and supreme. To his manager, he was a refractory child who, if properly controlled and kept clear of entangling alliances with women who made fools of themselves over him, would continue to bring in with his golden voice vast sums of money at each performance.

Therefore, when, during the brief intermission, Orloff remarked that he was sending a note by an usher asking a certain charming lady to be shown into his presence, the manager frowned. But he very well knew that it was poor business to cross Orloff in the middle of a recital. He was quite capable of refusing to appear at all again that evening.

Yet something must be done. "Very well," he said to Orloff resignedly. "Give me your note and I give you my word I will deliver it at once. There, they are still clapping you. You must go on again."

It was after his rendering of an old Polish folk song that Orloff saw an usher approach the occupant of the center seat three rows from the front and after that the girl sat for a long time with her head bowed. When she finally raised it he could see that her eyes were shining.

After the last encore Orloff hurried from the stage to clasp the slender hand of a dark-haired girl and gaze into a pair of steady eyes.

"I am flattered by your regular attendance at my recitals," he said, speaking slowly, for his English was never at its best during emotional moments. "You are my inspiration."

The girl raised fathomless eyes to his. "Thank you," she said quietly. "You are to me the greatest of masters. But it is your pianist that I pursue, Pierre. We are to be married soon, but I follow to keep my eyes on him. These young artists are like wax in the hands of the flattering women. I have the time and the money, so I spend them both to keep him safe for me. Oh, I see him hardly at all. Once in a while a little dinner or a few words on the train"—she shrugged her shoulders.

Orloff's manager, carefully within earshot, grinned. "Bravo—bravo!" he said to himself. "The girl is a clever little actress. My suggestion and check, sent along with his note, were an inspiration. If only Pierre does not spoil it by bursting in and swearing he never saw the girl! How devilishly disagreeable Orloff looks with that frown on his forehead!"

Yes, Orloff looked for all the world like a very large little boy who sees a stick of candy about to be taken away from him. He had dropped the slender hand and was already sick of the interview.

"Pierre—Pierre!" she shouted suddenly, to the consternation of his manager.

"No—no, Siechiensky. Pierre has gone ahead to attend to your luggage."

"What's that, monsieur?" Pierre rushed in hurriedly. "Did you wish—Nom de ciel, is it you whom I see—petite Eugenie? Pourquoi—"

"Ah, Pierre," the girl rushed into his arms. "The master sent for me and the other one—he wrote me this note and"—she held out a check and waved it in the direction of the manager, whom the rapid turns of his wheel of fortune had made speechless—"and I can't keep it because all I have said was the truth!"

"Oh," said the manager grandly. "Consider, my children, that it is my wedding present to you both."

Then: "Come, Siechiensky," he pleaded soothingly, "or you will miss your train and break the hearts of the two thousand people that await you."

Outside in the darkness he mopped his brow. It had the earmarks of a narrow escape.

Changed His Mind

The manager of a large warehouse in Glasgow who was much disliked, received an offer from an English firm and had all but decided to give up his Glasgow job. His fellow employees thereupon collected a purse of money and presented it to him as a thank offering on the occasion of his departure. "Weel, weel," said Scottie as he took the purse. "I never thocht ye liket me sae weel, but noo that I see ye're sae vexed at me gaun' awa', I think I'll no gang, but jist bide whaur I am."—Montreal Witness.

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