

" WHY THE RECRUITING CAMPAIGN HAS FAILED "

by

A Private of the Line.

The following paragraphs were written at the end of last year, shortly after I had left the Army. Consequently, some minor details are inaccurate, but apart from these, I consider the situation to be much the same, despite Mr. Duff Cooper's long awaited efforts at reform, which were farcical in the extreme and quite inefficacious.

It has been left to the new Minister of War to make a genuine effort to introduce reform into the Military Machine, and although I consider what effort he has made totally inadequate for solving the main problems of the recruiting shortage, nevertheless, it may alleviate the situation temporarily; and one hopes that Mr. Hore-Belisha's plan is but a forerunner of further measures to secure a more adequate and efficient Army.

As an ex-private I claim some knowledge of what is required to attract the army recruit, and believe I have set down in the following the main causes of discontent among serving and potential soldiers, and the remedies needed.

Summer 1937.

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The recent "drive" by the War Office for more recruits has been unsuccessful for the simple reason that the Government has not yet even suggested removing the principal deterrents to Army recruiting. These in my opinion, are the following.

First and foremost, insufficient pay, comparing unfavourably with present day standards in civil life; lack of improvement in general conditions, many of which are anachronistic in the extreme; and lastly, the ignominious status of the "ranker".

What encouragement to join the Army does the soldier's pay give the average young civilian? Why enlist at 14/- a week, even if this does include "all found" as military handbooks so glibly advertise, when one can "earn" 17/6 a week for doing nothing? Even after three years service the infantryman is only receiving 21/- and can never earn more as a private whatever length of service he does. In a corps, or as a tradesman or N.C.O. his pay is little better, and marriage allowances for wife and children are shockingly small. At the least, the government should return the "cuts" made in the soldier's pay some years ago. Moreover, an increment in pay would attract a superior type of individual, both physic-

ally and mentally, thus making it unnecessary to lower the standard of qualifications that the War Office is doing at present.

Social conditions in the Army are distasteful to the would be recruit because, whilst in civil life conditions have improved immeasurably during the last century, there has not been an equivalent improvement in the soldier's life. Crowded barrack rooms without any privacy whatsoever, absence of the smallest luxuries that make life amenable, an insufficient diet of cheap food that is badly cooked and served (the waste is consequently enormous) are the chief causes of dissuasion. According to military doctors army food is the ideal diet for hardworking young men. But where does one find wholemeal bread, fresh milk, butter and eggs on a mess room table? Some times eggs do appear, their age and quality only too apparent from the continental trade mark they bear! Somehow I don't think civilian dieticians will agree with their khaki associates. How unlike all this are conditions in the American Army (as all who have come into contact with it will testify) known among soldiers of other nations as "the Gentlemen's Army"! An apt description that we English should be proud of could we apply it to our own. And when the American soldier is sent overseas he travels in comparative comfort in two-berth cabins, not on one of the cramped, unhygienic troopships that it is the lot of his British cousin to sail on, packed like sardines on troopdecks some of which are below the waterline. An army medical officer once admitted to me that the British troopship is the worst in the world. An exaggeration no doubt, but not one so very gross, having, myself, intimate knowledge from personal experience of all the troopships that ply between England and the East.

Nor does the prospect of six years continuous soldiering in India appeal to young men, where diversions are few and far between. It might be mentioned in passing that the officer on foreign service receives home leave every three years.

Last, but not least; the status of the Soldier. In civil life he is still thought of but little better than his drink-sodden illiterate ancestor who ravaged Europe in the eighteenth century. Except in time of war, of course, when he is considered a very fine fellow fighting for his King and Country. As soon as the war fever has subsided, however, he reverts to his former position of inferiority. Even in his own sphere, his "superiors", the officer class regard him with a certain amount of disdain tempered with an outward demeanour of "esprit de corps", that stock phrase of army conversation. Is it any wonder that the "man in the street", who theoretically at any rate, is on equality with the "highest in the land", is ~~detracted~~ dissuaded from joining a community which is still in many ways a relic of the feudal system.

Neither Mr. Duff Cooper's rhetorical speeches throughout the length and breadth of the country nor the numerous new and

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often ludicrous would - be incentives adopted by the War Office during the last few months have been successful in bringing the required number of potential soldiers flocking to the recruiting offices. These and other similar methods, should they be adopted, will not be successful. A thorough re-organisation of Army conditions as outlined in this letter is necessary. No excuse on financial grounds can be taken. If the Government can afford to spend £300,000,000 on deadlier weapons, it can at least afford a smaller sum on brightening the lives of the men who make the defence of the British Empire possible.

Believe me, I write with sincerity and from experience,
for I am,

Yours very sincerely,

CLIVE JACOB

Ex Private of the Line.

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