



DEMobilISATION ...

Remobilisation?

An article by TOM HARRISSON from *The New Statesman and Nation*, June 10, 1944

“AFTER THE LAST WAR.” Is any phrase more often used in serious Service discussion? Among civvies, too, the phrase is increasingly to be heard these days. Listen to a typical housewife, age thirty, giving her views on the war's end:—

I can't see it ending in under two years. And when it does end, I don't think it will be really over. Every one says the men will be kept out there after the war, and won't come home for years and years. And there will be terrible unemployment at home. Look at the promises they made in the last war about jobs for all, and look what happened.

The peace of 1918 caught the country unprepared; as a result there was much confusion and distress. It was not simply the fault of the Government, who did try, belatedly, to tackle the problem. The High Command didn't help. But basically it was the fault of ordinary people everywhere, in khaki and out. They failed to prepare or inform their minds for that sudden miracle, Peace. When it popped out of agony, they panicked. All war lessons were discarded. To-day we face the same issues.

Many older folk remember this post-war period only too well, high hopes and vanished visions, bitter unemployment and “heroes” singing in the streets. Over and over again, people still talk of the “muddle” and “chaos.” Many now feel *anything* would be better than a recurrence. In particular, they feel we must start straight with planned demobilization, key to all that can follow.

In 1917 Lloyd George prepared a demobilization plan designed to restart peace industry quickly. Haig opposed it as “most objectionable and prejudicial to discipline.” So it was shelved. Armistice brought a rush to get out. String-pullers wangled out first. Indig-

nation, fanned by the press, mounted rapidly. There were several small mutinies, a big Whitehall march by armed soldiers, and the setting-up of Soviets on the Russian model in one or two units. As Winston Churchill, then War Minister, puts it in his book *The World Crisis*:—

The ordinary soldier without these advantages (of strings to pull) saw his lately joined comrade hurrying home to take his job or somebody's job, in England, while he, after years of perils and privations on a soldier's pay, wounded and sent back to the carnage three and some four times, was to be left until the plums at home had been picked up and every vacancy filled.

In the face of feared violence a hasty plan was made by the War Minister; demobilization on the basis of wounds, service, and age; Army pay more than doubled; new young men for the Army of occupation. Put forward early in 1919, these measures helped, though too late to be fully effective. Demobilization went very rapidly, 3,300,000 in the first five months and on at 100,000 a week. At the same time, some million civilians lost their war jobs. There was no question of an assured job, moderate security, or any broad plan at all. The result is familiar enough. Another war-time Minister, Reginald MacKenna, says it excellently in his *While I Remember*:—

The countries which had been devastated by the war and those which were threatened by ruinous indemnities set to work at once to repair the damage and build up their resources; England, which had endured as long a strain as any without having iron driven into her soul at the sight of her land, laid waste or her industry ruined, settled down to drowsy recuperation until the next crisis should arouse her with the threat of financial disaster, revolution, or another war.

Journey Home covers the same people for three years, on the difference between their peace hopes, wishes, ideals, and their peace expectations, what they consider really *will* happen. In nearly every category, expectation fell well below hope. In two cases this is especially