BOYD CABLE

DOING THEIR BIT

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Cable B.

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Содержание

Doing their Bit War work at home

PREFACE

BY THE

Rt. Hon. DAVID LLOYD GEORGE, M.P

I hope that Mr. Boyd Cable's book will have a wide circulation, both amongst our troops who will learn from it how their comrades at home are doing "their bit," and amongst the public who will learn from it how great is the industry and devotion of those who are supplying our armies with materials of war.

D. LLOYD GEORGE.

I
WORD TO THE FRONT

When I came here from the Front a couple of months ago I remember looking out from the train and thinking how quiet and normal and peaceful the country looked. Driving from the train through London, the street crowds, although flecked and tinged with khaki, appeared to be going busily or lazily about their ordinary business or laziness, the people were shopping, or walking, or driving in buses or taxis as if they personally had still no more than a newspaper interest in the war, as if fighting or munition-making were matters concerning a certain section of mankind altogether apart from the ordinary life of the country.

I know better now. My eyes have been opened, and I have seen fully and satisfyingly. There is no fighting here, thanks be, but the khaki that swarms and hives about the outer ways, and only trickles through the big towns, is evidence enough of the fighting material. And even less in evidence, because it does not wear a uniform and because its business is carried on behind closed and carefully guarded doors, the country is sweating at forge and furnace, is juggling with lathes and stamps and presses, has peeled off its coat and set to work in deadly earnest to give the Front the unlimited munitions the Front so long has wanted. It is not given to many to see what actually is being done, and to still fewer to say what they have seen, and first of all I may explain the why and wherefore of these chapters I am writing on munitions and munition-making. I am aware that very competent journalists have already covered the ground in a series of articles widely published in leading papers, and I am also aware that prominent politicians have made statements as to “increased output” and “controlled factories” and “organisation of industry,” and so on. But I am also fully aware that the Front has become exceedingly sceptical of all the facts and figures that have been paraded and of the promises that have been made for a year past. I remember how in the first winter we at the Front looked forward to the spring and listened hopefully to the tales of a flooding tide of munitions that was to help us in the Big Push. I remember how we hung on through the winter enduring the punishment that came to us because of the shortage of shells, of bombs, of trench-mortars and machine-guns; and I know how grimly the Front stuck out the punishment and hung on stubbornly with a tremendous faith that, come the spring, all would be well, that new armies would be coming along to help carry the weight, that munitions would be pouring out to help us level the long tally. And I know too well the bitter disappointment and the black rage that filled the Front when the spring came and brought us, not a plenty of munitions, but tales of a great shortage, stories of strikers and shirkers, woeful cries of a wasted winter. And when the spring dragged on into summer and the summer crawled past and brought us face to face with the certainty of another winter in the trenches – But these things are past, and, with the Front, I am glad to leave them and let bygones be bygones. But it is because of this past that I asked the Ministry of Munitions to give me an opportunity to see with my own eyes what is being done now, to give me a chance, as one of the Front themselves, to tell the Front as much as I might of what I might see, to let the Front know what I am sure the Front wants to know, what are the munition prospects for the future. The Ministry of Munitions has allowed me to look and to see, to ask questions, to talk with inspectors and managers and workers, to watch the work that is being done, and to figure out what is going to be done. And now I am going to tell the Front as fully as I may what it all amounts to. Some things that I know it would not be wise to tell, I shall not tell; but that still leaves a lot that I know the Front will be glad to hear. I hope the Front may read these chapters, and I hope the Front will tie a stone to this book and sling it over to any near-enough portion of the Hun lines, because what I have to write is so very cheerful telling for the Front to hear that it would surely be highly unpleasant for the Germans to digest.

And will the Front as it reads please remember this – that I am not writing to please or displease any person or party in politics, that I am not trying to support or injure the beliefs of any portion of the Press, that at the present time I have no interest in anything beyond the interests of the Front, that, like themselves, I only want to get on and get done with the job, and that my interest in munition-making and its prospects is the main and personal one that is so urgent at the Front – Are we going to get the stuff we want? Are we ever going to be short again?

And here, in a sentence, is the belief I have come to after a wide tour of the munition works: We ARE going to have all we ever hoped for; we are never, never, never going to be short again. I say this remembering how the size, and therefore the requirements, of the Army have increased, how much vaster in proportion to the increased Army the supplies will have to be to come up to our wants, how our fighting fronts have multiplied and grown, how also some of our Allies are still dependent upon us for some of their munitions. In spite of all these, I believe we are going to get all we want and need, if – it is the only if, although it is in a way a big enough one, and one that I'll come back to presently – if the workers at home play up and play the game and back us up to allow us to play out ours.

If they do that, we are going to have munitions to play about with, we're going to have a heaping plenty of shells and machine-guns and bombs and grenades and 'planes and trench-mortars.

There are enormous stacks of munitions ready and waiting now, and they are a mere handful to the munition mountains that are going to come along in ever increasing quantity month by month. You men who clung to your battered and water-logged trenches that winter while the German shells pounded them and you to pieces and our own guns were making a cruelly feeble reply, you gunners who heard the angry demands and the pitiful pleas of the suffering infantry for "retaliation" and a heavier fire and the silencing of this battery or that *minnenwerfer*, and had to smother your savage longing to "let 'em have it" because you were short of shells, you will understand the joy that has lately been mine to stand and look at massed rows and ranks of big fat howitzer shells awaiting shipment, to watch the wide sea of lathes whirling and buzzing, eating up length after length of steel and brass rods, turning out fuse-parts and one bit or another of weapons and projectiles, to hear store managers wonder how or where they are going to house the growing output, to be told, as I have been told time and again, that the factory is running night and day, week in week out, that the present output is to be doubled in the next month or two months, that the full volume will be reached in February or March, April or May, as the case may be. That last was perhaps the most cheery feature of a completely cheering tour – the constant assurance that larger premises were in contemplation or course of construction; that extra hands were being taken on, or sought, or trained; that further machinery was on order, or coming in, or being installed; that present output is only a beginning and is to be added to by half as much again, or to be doubled, or trebled. I didn't have to be satisfied with hearing these things, either; to be content with the mere telling; to be left at the end wondering if it was all a mere vague wish or hope or an empty boast, and doubting whether the spring, like last, would see the hopes squashed and the boasts fallen flat. I had plain enough proof meeting me at every turn that there was a solid and businesslike backing to all the boasts and promises. Here I could see a score of huge lathes with the packing being stripped from about them, there a wide cement floor being spread, new storeys sprouting in a tangle of scaffolding and steel girders on existing works, half-built forges and furnaces rising gaunt from a sea of bricks and mortar and cement. I drove headlong for hours in a fast motor or tramped interminably over wide areas where brick and wood huts and houses and workshops ran, row upon row, township after township, all empty of munition men or machinery, but all clattering and echoing to the saws and hammers of the workers who drove the job to the quickest possible completion. The promises I got, and that I gladly pass on to the Front, were not only by word of mouth; they were in solid brick and stone and wood, shining steel and brass and copper, regiments of working carpenters and masons, whole brigades of brawny navvies delving and draining and digging out foundations and laying and levelling engine-room beds and machine-shop floors. I was, in fact, more keen to discover and make sure of what is to be done rather than what

has been or is being done, and this because I know, and the Front knows, how we stand out there for munitions now, but not how much lay behind our daily needs, how we are to fare when, or if, all the scattered fronts get busy together, when one big battle is to tread so close on the heels of another that it will be hard to sort out one from the other and issue us the right clasps to our medals.

Well, I confess myself satisfied; and I've a strong fancy that by next summer the Front is going to be satisfied, and the Germans also are going to be satisfied after quite another fashion. Just now I'm writing about munitions, and I'm not going to wander off into war strategy, or compete with the prophet experts in guessing when the War is going to finish. But, after all I've seen and heard, it is impossible to get away from this happy thought – if last winter and spring and summer we could hold the enemy, could even on occasion beat back a long and desperate assault, break in and grip and stick to a mile or two of country, a few lines of trenches, if we could do what we have done with a small army and a desperate lack of munitions, what are we going to do this year with a fresh and big army, with lavish supplies of every arm and equipment we require, with a flood of munitions pouring in as fast as ever we can pelt them out? It looks pretty good, doesn't it? And now I'll go on to a general description of some of the proofs I have had of just how good it really looks.

II
THE MUNITION MACHINE

I have, I admit, been amazed to see the extent to which the war workshops of the country have grown, the enlargement of existing works, the springing up of entirely new factories, the huge armies busily employed in all these places. But I have been still more astonished – I have been out Front a year, remember, and have lost touch with the country's domestic doings – to find how munition-making has become part and parcel of the national existence; that it is quite a commonplace for Lady This of Tudor Hall or Countess That of Belgravia to be handling a lathe in a workshop alongside Miss So from Kensington and 'Liza Such from Houndsditch; that it is no more than a matter of course that a man cast for a commission and refused for the ranks a year ago on account of bad eyes has "gone munitioning" and, grime and oil to his weak eye-rims, is driving a donkey engine in a big factory; that any day you may see at the "canteens" of various factories scores of ladies, who have been used since the day they were born to being waited on hand and foot, now taking the other end of the job and carving mountains of bread into slices and carrying cups of tea and cheerfully waiting on the workers who serve their country in the "shops." I find that the passenger train services have been chopped to pieces, that mails take any old time to do their journey, that goods by rail get there this week, or next, or a month hence – because munition transport blocks the rails; that whole industries have been blotted from existence because their hands or their plant were wanted – for munitions; that Polytechnic classes are being busily taught – to make munitions; that, in fact, the whole country is one seething munition factory, and no man or lathe or tool that can be turned to munition-making is possibly doing anything else. It may surprise you at the Front, as it certainly did me, to learn that the Ministry of Munitions has taken a grip on the whole industry of this country; that it has an autocratic control over it, wide and strong beyond the wildest dreams of the craziest autocrat; that no man can buy or sell a barrow-load of old iron or a sovereign's worth of copper or brass without some official of the Ministry getting to hear of it and popping up to air an insatiable curiosity; that no lathe or machine for working metal may be imported without the Ministry being given copious explanations as to its destination and intended use, and, moreover, if that use be not for munition work that the machine or metal is much more likely than not to be commandeered forthwith and set to munitioning; that no machine may be exported; that you cannot buy or sell a new or second-hand machine without a permit from the Ministry; that no man or firm may use man or machine to make clocks or gramophones or motor-cars or anything between if the Ministry prefers the man or firm to turn his factory to making munitions in whole or in part. And all this power is no empty form. It is used to the full, and as a result thousands of machines and scores of thousands of hands have been turned from other work on to munitions. A mechanic may no longer work where and on what job he pleases. If he is running a machine for stamping out trouser-buttons and the Ministry wants him to turn over to stamping out cartridge discs, he has to do so. If a firm is busy making motor-cars, the Ministry inspector may step in and tell the firm to drop that work and start making shells. If another firm already making munitions is employing daily 100 skilled and 100 unskilled hands, the Ministry will almost certainly take away a number of the skilled hands and hand them over to another factory where skilled men are scarcer and more urgently required. All this simply means that the engineering resources of the country are mobilised and efficiently organised and turned full force on munition-making. The Munition Machine is running now with wonderful smoothness, but it is easy to see what a gigantic task it must have been to get it in running order. It could only have been done with the willing agreement and co-operation of the great engineering and business men and firms throughout the country. You have heard how the Ministry called on local business men to organise their districts, to form local committees, and to set themselves to getting the last ounce of munition work out of their

districts. Now I am telling you how those committees have done their work, how they and the local Ministry offices and officials have handled the job. But I doubt if ever the country will realise how well it has been done or how much it owes to these people. I have come in contact with many of them in my tour, and I found only one thing greater and more wonderful than their efficiency, and that is their keenness. Obviously and emphatically their whole hearts and souls are in the job. They have in many cases sacrificed their incomes, in every instance I met the whole of their leisure or pleasure or ease to their work. I met one works manager who has not seen his home in daylight for over six months, who has not seen his young children awake in that time, whose normal working hours have been 6 a.m. to 11 p.m., Saturday, Sunday, and Monday alike. These works owners and managers, and inspectors, and committee-men, and chairmen and secretaries, the brains of the munition business, are amazing and wonderful beyond words. They are the organisers and the driving power behind the whole vast machine, and what that machine is we are going to know more and more fully as the War goes on. I have often in the past heard expressions of wonder that the services of the great business men, the "captains of industry," were not properly employed in the service of their country. That, when one comes to realise the truth, is rather a good joke, because, while people are still grumbling about it not being done, it has been done – has been, quite after the fashion of real business men, very completely done with an entire absence of fuss and feathers and fluster and talk.

Some of the heads of the greatest engineering firms in Great Britain – no, that is very wrong, and I ought to say in the Empire – some of the greatest business brains the Empire owns are running this munition business. In many cases – I believe I might say most cases, but throughout these chapters I am only going to tell of what I have actually and personally seen and known – these men are spending unstinted time and energy on the work, freely and without fee, salary, profit, or reward. Men who have been handling contracts running into millions of pounds, men who have been earning many thousands a year, have dropped all their own affairs to come in on munition work. I can give you one instance out of many I met which will do for a sample. At one place, which I'll describe more fully later on, and which is going to be when complete the greatest munition works in the world, bar none, something like a score of our greatest contractors are hard at work. They are the sort of men who take on as an ordinary job the tunnelling of the Alps or the Andes, the building of a Forth Bridge, the erection of a street of skyscraper buildings, the building of a Nile barrage. Now they are building roads and huts and power stations and water- and drainage- and lighting-systems, and are driving the work at a furious excess speed to completion. And the Number One, the head-centre bull's-eye boss of the job, is a partner in what I believe is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, contracting firms in the Empire or the world, a firm whose name is a household word, whose activities have spread over all the inhabited and a biggish section of the uninhabited globe, who control capital running well up in the millions and have fingers in all sorts of business pies. About him are gathered a crowd of picked men from the four corners of the earth. In the block of offices run up to house the staff and staff work you could probably find a man to speak any civilised or semi-civilised language in the world, and a few who can speak some tongues it would puzzle a University professor to put a name to. They have been hooked in from Chile or Chicago, Sydney or Santiago, from railway surveys in Brazil or oil-fields at Baku, from bridge-building, lumbering, mining, canal-digging, well-boring, tunnelling, from any or all of the biggest jobs in the Empire or outside of it. And here they are dumped down in a corner of Great Britain, planning, estimating, figuring, tearing up the foundations of the earth and re-shaping it to their own ends and to that one great end, munition-making. The fruits of all their energy and experience and knowledge are sprouting about them and growing visibly under their hands and eyes day by day and, indeed, hour by hour. They are the power that is driving the machine, the huge machine which is just beginning to speed up, which has not yet properly got into its stride, but which when it does is going to justify to the hilt that verdict on the Old Country that is credited to a Yankee journalist: "Bad starters, but darn good finishers."

But it is not only in the large new or extended factories that the Ministry of Munitions is doing good work; in fact, I have heard it said that this is the easiest and simplest side of the colossal task. The difficult and intricate part has been the organising of the small business and plants, the converting of all sorts of weird manufacturings into munition-making. I had innumerable instances of this before me wherever I went, but the whole idea was in a fashion epitomised in a drive I was making from one large factory to another. One of the Ministry's engineers was with me showing me round. Like all his fellows that I met, he was desperately keen on the work, and because I was evidently anxious to hear and to learn he talked munitions without ceasing and poured enough facts and figures over me to stun a census collector. Our car moved on the wet roads at a pace that was just over or under the edge of the safety limit – I discovered afterwards that this is a habit with the drivers of the Ministry cars, and one driver to whom I dropped a casual remark about fast driving explained the habit. "These munition gents I drive never has but the one word for me," he said, "an' that's 'Hurry up!'" My engineer companion was in the midst of a staggering estimate of the rate at which his district's output was growing when the car swung dizzily round a sharp corner, braked hard, and slid guttering under the tail-board of a huge lorry that lumbered along in the middle of the road. There was a tarpaulin over the wagon, but at the tail of it I caught sight of something that reminded me of long lines of men staggering with heavy burdens into the back-door trenches at Loos.

The car jerked out from behind the wagon, dodged into a gap in the reverse traffic, swooped past, and fled squattering down the wet road. "That's the factory, over there," said the engineer, pointing, "and that chimney-stack beside it is the Blank Tobacco Factory. They're doing shells there now." I expressed some wonder that tobacco manufacture could by any wizardry be converted to shell-making. "Bless you," the engineer chuckled, "that's nothing. I can show you queerer changes than that. You see, our great trouble is to get machines enough and men enough to handle 'em. Shows like motor works and boilermakers were dead easy and obvious, and they were scooped in the first snap. Then later – quick, look down this lane – at the end!" The car swooped past, and I had one glimpse, as the lane-entrance opened and shut to our passing, of a dingy, grey vista gleaming with wet puddles and with a couple of lorries blocking the far end. "That," said the engineer, "is the X Y Z Gramophone works. They're shell-fuses now." And so as the car buzzed fiercely down straight stretches, or banked steeply and swung skidding and lurching round greasy corners, or checked sharply and crawled hooting hoarsely and impatiently at impeding carts, the engineer discoursed at length on the conversion of this manufactory or that to munitions, and pointed out a late magneto-maker's, or a piano factory, or a coach-builder's, describing their past operations and summing up their conversion with "Now they're pineapple bombs," or "They're rifle-stocks," or "They're aeroplane frames." I asked him if these firms volunteered for munition work. "Some of them," he said; "but others never dreamed there was any war work they could adapt themselves to." I thought of the tobacco factory and concluded it was small wonder some didn't dream of it. "But I will say," went on the engineer, "as a rule they only want showing, or a hint of a showing, and they get as keen as mustard on it. There was the Rollero Duplicator now. You know what a duplicator is? Thing for printing copies off a typed stencil sheet. Well, they turned over to – " and away he went on another magic-wand conversion tale.

And that is the sort of thing I have been meeting throughout the length and breadth of Great Britain. It isn't only the big firms and factories that are on War work. The little fellows are doing their bit just as energetically, and if each of their shares is small it must bulk considerably in the total; and many of them, by devoting all their energy to certain screws or cups or cones, are able to free the large makers of this small work, and leave them to handle other parts and use up the fitments turned in to them. Every scrap of work turned out by every firm or factory is done to gauge, and a screw made in a back room in Bermondsey and another turned at Clydebank will fill and fit a screw-hole bored in a Birmingham shop just as exactly as if the one man or machine had made the lot. But the gauging work is quite a pretty story in itself, though I must leave out its telling in the meantime.

III
SUBLIME TO THE – SUBLIME!

The car had run into the closer traffic of the town, and the engineer was still pointing out various works that had been converted from all trades under the sun to the one and only that counts to-day, when he dropped a remark that roused a fresh current of curiosity. “It isn’t only regular business firms that are in on this game, you know,” he said. “There’s a good story I must get the Eastern district man to tell you, about an old-clo’ Jew that wanted to switch his jet-bead machines or something and his horribly sweated bonnet-makers on to war work. He’d have taken on any contract he could grab too, from 15-inch shells downwards. But the day’s long past when a man can hook a contract on the gamble of sub-contracting it out, so our Jew misfired that lot. I rather fancy his bonnet hands are button-holing cartridge-belts or something now, though. But clothing and kit isn’t my line, and I don’t know the details, and I’ve plenty of queer conversion cases inside my own job. There’s one little place I have now would tickle you. The factory is a top back bedroom in a little side street, the machinery is one knock-kneed, rheumaticky lathe, and the factory staff is one old man, although, between ourselves, I believe his old missus takes a turn and keeps the lathe running while he’s asleep. The room isn’t big enough to hold the lathe and the length of brass rod that feeds into it and turns into a fuse-part, so they’ve knocked a hole in the wall and the brass rod sticks out through it and works in again through the lathe an inch at a time. Then there’s another little place something after the same style to begin with, but growing a lathe at a time. It’s just down the street here, and we pass it presently.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.