

Parliament and the Army: The Curragh “Mutiny”

Arising out of the article “What is the Use of Parliament,” in our January issue, a correspondent writes pointing out that the refusal in 1914 of British Army officers to obey the Asquith Government if ordered to attack the Ulster “rebels” shows that the army can successfully defy Government and Parliament.

Before dealing with the incident in question, it may be as well to restate the claim made by the Socialist Party with regard to control of Parliament. Our view is that control of Parliament, secured by the return of a majority of Socialists in an election fought simply on the issue of Socialism versus Capitalism, implying as of course it does that the big majority of the working class understand and want Socialism, would give effective control of the political machinery, including the armed forces.

Let us see, then, in what way the Curragh “mutiny” bears on our contention. In the first place, our correspondent has his facts all wrong. There was no “mutiny,” no evidence of an intention to mutiny, no defiance of the Government and no defiance of Parliament or the majority of the electors.

Asquith’s Government was not elected on the issue of Home Rule for Ireland and the coercion of Ulster, but predominately on the issue of the House of Lords’ veto. Further, its majority at the December (1910) election was greatly reduced from its majority at the January (1910) election, and it was confidently believed by the Conservatives that the next election would give a majority to them. Asquith’s Government had therefore no direct evidence that the majority of the electorate were behind them on the Ulster question. On the other hand, it was the view of the influential Army officers also that elections at no distant date would put the Liberals out of office. (See “Biography of Sir Henry Wilson” by Sir Charles Callwell, *Sunday Times*, May 22nd, 1927.)

Even, therefore, if the Curragh officers had decided to disobey orders, they would have done so with good reason to believe that their attitude would be endorsed by the electorate and the new Government. That situation, quite the reverse of the situation which would exist after the return of a Socialist majority at an election fought on the issue of Socialism, invalidates the comparison between the “mutiny” in 1914 and a hypothetical mutiny by anti-Socialist Army officers against the orders of a Government backed by a Socialist Parliamentary majority and a Socialist electorate.

Secondly, and doubtless wholly or partly because of their doubt as to the views of the electorate, Asquith’s Government never showed that it seriously intended to force the issue.

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