

A PERSONAL STATEMENT.

BY BERTRAND RUSSELL.

On Friday, September 1st, two men from Scotland Yard, acting on behalf of the War Office, served a War Office Order on me, forbidding me to enter any prohibited area without permission in writing from the competent Military Authority. (Prohibited areas include practically all places near the sea, including many whole counties.) On September 11th, in reply to representations, an official letter was sent to me by order of the Army Council, containing the following paragraph:

"I am further to state that the Council would be prepared to issue instructions for the withdrawal of the order if you, on your part, would give an undertaking not to continue a propaganda which, if successful, would, in their opinion, militate to some extent against the effective prosecution of the war."

My profession hitherto has been that of a lecturer on mathematical logic. The Government have forbidden me to fulfil an agreement to practice this profession at Harvard, and the Council of Trinity College have forbidden me to practice it in Cambridge. Under these circumstances it became necessary to me to lecture on some more popular subject, and I prepared a course on the Philosophical Principles of Politics, to be delivered in various provincial towns. As three of these towns are in prohibited areas, I cannot go to them without permission in writing from the War Office. In reply to a request for this permission, I was informed that I must submit the lectures to the War Office censorship. I replied that this was impossible, as they were to be spoken, not read; but I sent the syllabus of the course.

In reply, I received a letter, dated September 13th, acknowledging receipt of the syllabus of lectures, and stating that "in the absence of further details," it was "impossible to advise the Army Council whether they might properly be given during the war." The letter further stated that "such topics as 'The Sphere of Compulsion in Good Government' and 'The Limits of Allegiance to the State' would, in particular, seem to require very careful handling if they are not to be mistaken for propaganda of the type which it is desired to postpone till after the conclusion of hostilities." It concluded by offering to give permission for the lectures if I would give "an honorable undertaking" not "to use them as a vehicle for propaganda."

My proposed course of lectures on "The World as it can be made" is not intended to deal with the immediate issues raised by the war; there will be nothing about the diplomacy preceding the war, about conscientious objectors, about the kind of peace to be desired, or even about the general ethics of war. On all these topics I have expressed myself often already. My intention is to take the minds of my hearers off the questions of the moment, and to suggest the kind of hopes and ideals that ought to inspire reconstruction after the war.

But when I am requested by the military authorities to give an "honorable undertaking," as regards my lectures, that I will not "use them as a vehicle for propaganda," I am quite unable to do so, for the following reasons:

First and foremost, because I cannot acknowledge the right of the War Office to prevent me from expressing my opinions on political subjects. If I say anything which they think prejudicial to the conduct of the war, they can imprison me under the Defense of the Realm Act, but that is a proceeding to which I am not a party, and for which I have no responsibility. If, however, I enter into a bargain by which I secure certain advantages in return for a promise, I am precluded from further protest against their tyranny. Now it is just as imperative a duty to me to fight against tyranny at home as it is to others to fight against Germans abroad. I will not on any consideration, surrender one particle of spiritual liberty. Physical liberty can be taken from a man, but spiritual liberty is his birthright, of which all the armies and governments of the world are powerless to deprive him without his cooperation.

Apart from this argument of principle, which is hardly of a kind to appeal to military, there are other more practical reasons for not giving such an undertaking as is required. It is impossible to be absolutely certain what one will say when one speaks extempore; and it would be obviously absurd, in reply to an awkward question, to say "I am under an honorable undertaking not to answer that question." Even if these difficulties could be overcome, it is utterly impossible to know what would be covered by such an undertaking, since there is no precise definition of the propaganda to be avoided, and no indication as to whether only certain conclusions are forbidden, or also the premises from which they can be deduced. May I say that I consider homicide usually regrettable? If so, since the majority of homicides occur in war, I have uttered a pacifist sentiment. May I say that I have respect for the ethical teaching of Christ? If I do, the War Office may tell me that I am praising conscientious objectors. May I say that I do not hold Latimer and Ridley guilty of grave moral turpitude because they broke the law? Or would such a statement be prejudicial to discipline in His Majesty's forces? To such questions there is no end.

If the authorities at the War Office were capable of philosophical reflection, they would see an interesting refutation of militarist beliefs in the terror with which a handful of pacifists appears to have inspired them. They have on their side the armed forces, the law, the press, and a vast majority of the public. The views which we advocate are held by few, and expressed by still fewer. To meet the material force on their side we have only the power of the spoken or written word, of the appeal from passion to reason, from fear to hope, from hate to love. Nevertheless, they fear us—such is the power of spiritual things even in the present welter of brute force.

THE MYTH.

Some time ago I received the printed copy of an almost fanatical pro-Ally speech in which the Belgians are represented as martyred saints while Germany is denounced in strong terms as inhuman and barbarous. The general attitude of the speaker is high handed and his utterances come in the name of a higher morality as if dictated by the spirit of humanity. The next morning mail brought me a sonnet from an Anglo-American friend which apparently refers to the same leaflet and sees in the orator's interpretation of current his-