

**WO 339/51440**

**Officers' 'Long Number Papers': Siegfried Sassoon**

**1914-1922**

These extracts are taken from the service record of Second Lieutenant Siegfried Sassoon who served in the British army during World War One.

Siegfried Sassoon was a published poet when he joined the army in 1914. A respected officer, he was awarded the Military Cross in 1916 and served in France and Palestine.

Sassoon was invalided out of the war on a number of occasions. During one of his recovery periods back at home, he made contact with a group of pacifists which fuelled his growing disillusionment with the war.

In July 1917, Sassoon wrote a letter expressing his anti-war sentiments which was published in The Times and read in the House of Commons, a copy of which is included in this selection.

This was a difficult event for military authorities - a respected, decorated, published Officer speaking out publicly against the war - a political nightmare. Sassoon was in danger of being court-martialed, but thanks to an appeal by his friend and fellow poet, Robert Graves, it was accepted that Sassoon's outburst could be blamed on 'war neurosis' and required treatment rather than punishment. He was transferred to Craiglockhart hospital in Edinburgh, where he met the poet Wilfred Owen and developed a close friendship.

Both Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon are widely considered to have had relationships with men, although there is no evidence to suggest they were romantically involved with each other. Both Owen and Sassoon produced some of their most famous works while at Craiglockhart together before Owen was killed in action on 4 November 1918 while Sassoon was in England, permanently invalided out of service.

One of Sassoon's poems included in his service record is also selected here.



Mr S. Sullivan, Birmingham, forwards a document which he says he found open on the luggage rack of a railway carriage compartment when travelling between Birmingham and Preston.

The document, dated July 1917, purports to be a "statement made by 2nd Lieutenant Siegfried Sassoon, 3rd Battalion Royal Welsh Fusiliers" regarding what he terms the deliberate prolongation of the War by those having power to end it.

On 26/11/17 a Medical Board found this Officer fit for General Service after service in France - neurasthenia and gun shot wound.

A. G. 3.  
18/1/18.

Acknowledged receipt -  
//

D.S.I.

I think you wd like to see this - Lt. Sassoon was undoubtedly the author but when it was written he was a lunatic vide Medical Board in 3 - It seems that it is possible that some pacifists are circulating Sassoon's insane effort -

19/1/18

W. H. D. S.  
for D.S.I.

D.S.I. I am sure you are informed with this statement is not now circulating to the same extent as for many years.

22/1/18

P.A. W. H. D. S.  
23/1/18 [P.T. O]



by

Sec. Lt. Siegfried Sassoon,  
3rd Batt: Royal Welsh Fusiliers,  
July, 1917.

I am making this statement as an act of wilful defiance of military authority because I believe that the war is being deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it. I am a soldier, convinced that I am acting on behalf of soldiers. I believe that the war upon which I entered as a war of defence and liberation has now become a war of aggression and conquest. I believe that the purposes for which I and my fellow soldiers entered upon this war should have been so clearly stated as to have made it impossible to change them and that had this been done the objects which actuated us would now be attainable by negotiation.

I have seen and endured the sufferings of the troops and I can no longer be a party to prolong these sufferings for ends which I believe to be evil and unjust. I am not protesting against the conduct of the war, but against the political errors and insincerities for which the fighting men are being sacrificed.

On behalf of those who are suffering now, I make this protest against the deception which is being practised upon them; also I believe it may help to destroy the callous complacency with which the majority of those at home regard the continuance of agonies which they do not share and which they have not enough imagination to realise.



122091/5 (M.I.7.)

Personal & Confidential

20th. July, 1918.

Dear Sir,

Attention has been drawn to some verses on p. 394 of your issue of the 13th. July, 1918, signed by Siegfried Sassoon. Presumably, therefore, the author is Captain S. L. Sassoon, M.C., of the 3rd. Bn. Royal Welsh Fusiliers.

This Officer in July 1917, was reported by a medical board to be suffering from a nervous breakdown and not responsible for his actions, but at the end of November, 1917, he was found to have recovered and to be fit for General Service. He is now serving in France.

Your Reviewer on p. 400 of the same issue recognises clearly what was the state of Mr. Sassoon's mind when he wrote "Counter-attack and other Poems", but if Capt. Sassoon were now writing verse such as that printed on p. 394, it would appear that his mind is still chaos, and that he is not fit to be trusted with mens' lives. I should therefore be grateful if you would let me know when you received his verses "I stood with the dead". It may be, of course, that they have been in your possession some months. The information, which is desired solely in the public interest, will of course be treated as confidential.

Yours faithfully,

(Sgd) George Cockrill

Brig-General

D.D.M.I.

A. W. Massingham Esq.  
The Editor,  
"The Nation".



knew that her father, side by side with David Lloyd George, had taken twenty years ago a far stronger line against the Boer War. But they were not sent to prison by the then Government, which was wise in its generation. Is the present Prime Minister likely to win this war by sending to prison an English girl because she presumes to challenge militarism without asking the leave of his Censor? Is he not rather in danger of destroying that long fought-for right of the English race to write and speak what they choose, or to be charged and tried by a jury of their fellow countrymen if their writing or speaking is alleged to be contrary to law? The only trial these three Friends have had is a trial by one worthy Alderman with an appeal to another worthy Alderman; not very satisfactory, when such a grave issue is at stake, even though the Aldermen had legal advisers.—Yours, &c.,

Ex-M.P.

#### THE FUNDS OF THE BRITISH WORKERS' LEAGUE.

SIR,—In this week's issue you are good enough to devote some little attention to the British Workers' League, and in the course of the article to which I refer, you ask certain questions and make certain assertions with regard to this organization. Perhaps you will permit me briefly to comment thereon.

You ask, "What is our financial basis?" To that question I beg to state that every farthing of money we have is received absolutely without any conditions whatever, on our published programme, and every receipt issued to subscribers is issued with that proviso.

Our funds are under the control of two trustees, quite unconnected with party politics, men of irreproachable standing, one of whom has served his country gloriously in the war, has been grievously wounded, and has been decorated by the King. This gentleman has long family associations with Liberalism. Our other trustee is an agricultural expert of national repute. These facts were published in our official organ, the "British Citizen" on March 16th.

From the beginning of our propaganda up to the present moment, we have not obtained a farthing from any political party, or other organization. May I, in my turn, inquire respectfully, why you should make these innuendoes alone against the British Workers' League? The writer of the article in question might perhaps, with some use, pursue his inquiries in other directions. For instance, he might get into touch with Mr. George Lansbury and inquire of that eminent rebel and Syndicalist, how he manages to continue the publication of the "Herald" and to support the propaganda of the "Herald" League from the pennies and halfpence of his wild supporters. The "Herald" is reputed to have a very large circulation, but practically has no revenue from advertisements; unlike almost any other paper in the kingdom, it continues to appear week-by-week at the pre-war price of 1d., with paper five times the price before the war, and printing charges increased three or four hundred per cent. How is it done?

Perhaps your tearful contributor will follow up my suggestion and pursue his inquiries in this direction. Our chief sin seems to be that we are prepared to learn the lessons of the war and decline to bend the knee to the blessed gospel of Cobdenism, *sans phrase*, for which heinous offence we are apparently a "counter-revolutionary body." If to seek to substitute a system of national and imperial economy for the pre-war system of cosmopolitan economy is to be reactionary, then indeed I must plead guilty. If to desire a reconciliation between the administrators of industrial capital and the manual workers on the basis of a guarantee of high wages, is, in the view of the Old Liberals, contrary to the spirit of Liberalism, then indeed we have departed far from the blessed teachings of the leaders of Victorian economics, whose names the writer of the article quotes with such unction.

I make no complaint whatever, that you stand pre-eminently for Individualism, Cobdenism, Free Trade, and Pacifism, as against our faith in the new Empire Democracy, based on national economics; but I hope I am not asking too much of you as an honorable opponent, with lofty ethical ideals of internationalism, to fight "clean," and to refrain from publishing totally baseless innuendoes against men and women, every bit as good democrats as yourself, but who visualize the coming democracy in very different terms from those expressed by the bourgeois Gradgrinds of Victorian capitalism.—Yours, &c.,

VICTOR FISHER, Hon. Sec.

[Mr. Fisher has not answered the question whether the funds of a body describing itself as a "Workers' League" are in any degree derived from sources which could be described as the bourgeois Gradgrinds of Georgian capitalism.—Ed., THE NATION.]

#### RUSSIAN AND BRITISH DEMOCRACY.

SIR,—May we bring to your notice that a number of Russians living in London have formed a Union, "Russian Commonwealth" ("Narodopravsto"), with the object of uniting Russians who—

1. Repudiate the so-called Bolshevik rule as tending to disintegrate the Russian state and as endangering the independence of the people of Russia.

2. Advocate the summoning of a democratically elected Constituent Assembly as the only expression of the free will of the whole people.

3. Consider the republican order to be the surest guarantee of the peaceful and free development of Russia, and

4. Believe that only in close union with the Allies can Russia regenerate her strength and avert the menace of German domination aggravated by the whole foreign policy and orientation of the present rulers of Russia, of which the Brest-Litovsk peace is the most disastrous expression.

One of the chief aims of the Union is to promote the closest possible *rapprochement* between the British and Russian democracies.—Yours, &c.,

Committee.

PROF. S. P. TURIN (Chairman).

J. V. SHKLOVSKY-DIONE (Vice-Chairman).

PROF. S. I. GAVRILOFF.

A. M. KROUGLIAKOFF.

D. V. FILITZ.

E. I. ZOONDELEVITCH (Hon. Treasurer).

A. R. BAGATURIANZ (Hon. Secretary).

Sardinia House, Kingsway, W.C. 2.

#### PROPAGANDA IN PICTURES.

SIR,—It occurred to me that among those whose sentiment your paper represents, some protest might be made against one of the latest small incitements to misery and madness flung to the hopeless public.

The Ladies' Emergency Committee of the Navy League has exhibited, broadcast in some parts of London, a paper appealing for funds to help British prisoners, and showing a German woman in nurse's uniform pouring water upon the ground, before the eyes of helpless wounded men. The grace and gesture of the woman depicted suggest truly enough the mental condition in which such a deed must be done. It is the grace of a moral maniac—a creature in whom the propaganda of hate, together perhaps with personal loss and suffering, has unseated reason and conscience, and let loose forces of inhuman malice such as sleep perhaps in all of us. The purpose of the committee, whose merciful work everyone must value, is no doubt to excite compassion for prisoners suffering among callous foes, but it is grievous that in stimulating compassion their poster should at the same time tend so strongly to arouse in the spectator the same passion of vindictive ferocity whose existence among the enemy has cruelly affected our own men.

There has been kindness as well as inhumanity shown by the enemy to our prisoners, and ferocious treatment of innocent aliens among ourselves has not been unknown; but the unreflectiveness of the average man leads him readily, on representation of some atrocity, to take it as typical of a whole nation, and to make his enemy alone the representative of those evil forces that universally beset the struggling spirit of man. He who gazes absorbed upon evil thus projected is transformed into its likeness, malice and hatred rising unprovoked within his own breast. It is for this reason that such pictures, influencing even children whom one would wish to shield from the worst contagion of war, are so greatly to be regretted.—Yours, &c.,

M. BODKIN.

50, Southwood Lane, Highgate.

#### THE LATE REV. DR. JOHN HUNTER.

SIR,—It is intended to produce a short biography of the late Rev. Dr. John Hunter. I should be grateful if any who possess letters from him or other relevant material would allow me to see them. They would be carefully handled and returned.

I should also be glad if any who knew him in his early days in Aberdeen or at college, or were acquainted with his work in York and Hull would write to me.—Yours, &c.,

L. S. HUNTER.

8, Prince Arthur Road, Hampstead, London, N.W. 3.

#### THE LEWIS SEYMOUR CASE.

SIR,—I beg to acknowledge your memorandum and cheque for £159 5s., which THE NATION has collected to defray part of the expenses in the trial, Moore and Heinemann v. Lewis Seymour. On Mr. Moore's behalf and my own, I offer you our grateful thanks.—Yours, &c.,

W. HEINEMANN.

20-21, Bedford Street, London, W.C. July 3rd, 1918.

#### Poetry.

##### I STOOD WITH THE DEAD.

I stood with the Dead, so forsaken and still:  
When dawn was grey I stood with the Dead.  
And my slow heart said, "You must kill; you must kill:  
Soldier, soldier, morning is red."

On the shapes of the slain in their crumpled disgrace  
I stared for a while through the thin cold rain. . . .  
"O, lad that I loved, there is rain on your face,  
And your eyes are blurred and sick like the plain."

I stood with the Dead. . . . They were dead; they were dead.

My heart and my head beat a march of dismay;  
And gusts of the wind came dulled by the guns—  
"Fall in!" I shouted; "Fall in for your pay!"

SIEGFRIED SASSOON.





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