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# Farewell to the Eleven:

## Letter to the Editor of the *New York Call*, March 24, 1917

by Algernon Lee

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Editor of *The Call*:

It is significant that on the very day when 11 members of the Socialist Party come out in favor of war and announce their intention of supporting the government in any sacrifice it requires, basing their action on the statement that the proposed war is one of national defense, on this very same day the *New York Times*, the most authoritative spokesman of the war party and Washington an in Wall Street, gleefully announces that this is not going to be a mere defensive war, and confidently predicts that once this nation is fairly involved in the struggle, our government will enter into alliance with one or more of the European governments, and that the terms and purposes of this alliance will be dictated, not by the present desires of the American people, but by conditions developed or created in the course of the war. *The Times* now feels that it can begin to be honest with its readers. It is a pity that the 11 should not begin by being honest with themselves.

The 11 are ready to support the government in any sacrifice it may require. Of them it will require but one, and that one they have already made — the sacrifice of their class loyalty and their political independence. For the rest, they will support the government in forcing thousands of boys to sacrifice their lives; in forcing our unions to sacrifice their right to strike; in forcing our party to sacrifice freedom of speech and press; in forc-

ing the whole working class to sacrifice its hopes of social reform and of emancipation from class rule.

The 11 do not consciously mean just this. But this is what they have done, and will go on doing. That is why I say they ought to have begun by being honest with themselves.

There are some roads that cannot easily be retraveled. The road that leads to war is one of them. Whoever deliberately assents to the war now impending, thereby disables himself from combating any of its normal and predictable consequences.

The 11 have formally approved of conscription, knowing that it will touch only young men; knowing that it is intended to be permanent, not temporary as in 1863; knowing that the general staff, which has planned it and will administer it, means to follow the Prussian model, not the Swiss.

The 11 have not a word to say against the censorship which is demanded by the general staff, a censorship which is not only to control the publication of military news, but also to prevent the expression of opinions disapproved by the government, and which is to be administered by appointed officials responsible to the commander-in-chief, not to Congress.

They have not a word to say against the proposed Espionage Law, modeled on the infamous act of 1798, a law which ought to be entitled "An Act to promote espionage and blackmail within

the United States.”

They have not a word to say against the perversion of public schools to the purposes of militarism, nor against the campaign for the suppression of academic freedom, which our patriotic college presidents and trustees have already inaugurated.

They have not a word to say against the systemic coercion which is now being used in factories and other places of employment to compel wage-workers to abandon their opposition to war and pledge themselves to absolute and unthinking obedience to the executive powers.

And why should we expect them to oppose any of these things? They have allied themselves with the government. They are not vain enough to suppose that they can influence the government's policy in matters of detail, once they have cast in their lot with it. All of them are sensible enough to know that in such an alliance the weaker partner must be the silent partner, whenever he is not the docile spokesman. Approving the war which the government desires, and which the government will direct, they cannot oppose the militarism which is the necessary concomitant of that war — and which, by the way, is the main objective of the government's war policy.

They have declared *burgfrieden*, and *burgfrieden* is in its very nature a bargain by which one party gives up all its freedom of action and the other party frees itself from all responsibility from its actions.

The 11 have had nothing to say against the

invasion of our neighbor republic of Santo Domingo by armed forces of the United States — an incident to which has been the establishment there of a censorship more drastic than any in Europe, administered by an officer of the United States Navy.

They will have and can have nothing to say in opposition to their government when, formally as an incident and substantially as an integral and conceived part of the war that they now advocate, the armed forces of the United States are used to invade Mexico and, if not to annex a part of its territory, at least to impose upon it a virtual protectorate in the interest of American great capital.

Just as Hyndman, Thomas, and Scheidemann have forfeited the influence they once had with their respective governments and become the tools of those governments whenever there is some measure of reaction to be executed at home, so have our 11 (who collectively, if not individually, may be counted as equal to any of the 3 named) thrown upon the scrap heap whatever power they might have had to defend working class interests in the time of trial and enlisted themselves for noncombatant service in the domestic war for the supremacy of capital. Scheidemann had some excuse; Hyndman had more excuse; Thomas had vastly more excuse; they have none.

*Algernon Lee.*

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*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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