
The American Legion and Civil Service “Preference” for Soliders

by Victor D. Berger

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There seems to be a concerted effort on the part of the so-called American Legion to harass and punish Alderman Hannifin of the 1st Ward for casting an honest vote in the Board of Aldermen on the question of giving preference to former soldiers for employment in the civil service by this municipality.

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The practice of giving preference to former soldiers is old and was inherited from militaristic and autocratic governments. It was supposed to be a law in Russia and in Prussia.

Former soldiers have an advantage of 5 points now under the rules in Milwaukee. But the American Legion seeks what is practically a monopoly for them.

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Now let us consider this proposition.

To begin with, this late war can in no way compare with the great wars fought by our country in the pas. Our wars before this were entirely fought out with volunteers.

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The United States enlisted about 4 million men in this war, of which less than 80,000 volunteered.

In other words, less than 2% volunteered; 98% were drafted.

In the Civil War, the proportion was just the opposite. Less than 2% were drafted, and 98% volunteered.

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Moreover, this may be said of the 80,000 who volunteered: a large number of them volunteered only — because the threat of the draft was hanging over the country, and some of these boys did not want to be drafted.

I know whereof I speak, because in my own family 6 boys volunteered. And one of them paid the supreme price.

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Moreover, we also have to consider this: young men of certain nationality groups in our country volunteered in this war for nationalistic reasons that have nothing to do with America.

I don’t want to go into details.

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In short: 4 million men were enlisted in the army, 98% of whom were drafted. They went because they were commanded and compelled to go.

If they had refused they would have been imprisoned. They would have been disgraced, besides.

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These army men deserve a great deal of sympathy and even praise, because they did what they considered their duty — but they deserve no special honors or distinction or monopolistic privileges.

The workmen at home — especially the miners,

railroad men, and machinists — did just as much to win the war — since the war had to be won.

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And just who is the American Legion?

It is the Praetorian Guard of capitalism in America. It can in no way be compared with the Grand Army of the Republic.

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Before any of our soldier boys ever returned from France, the big financial interests of New York subscribed \$250,000 for the American Legion. There were no \$250,000 ready to start a “society” for them when the “boys in blue” returned in 1865.

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Our big financiers had a very bad conscience, of course.

First, because they got this country into the war.

And second, because our big financiers and big business men in general had profited so much by this war. Therefore, our rulers naturally were afraid of “radicalism” getting a hold of the labor movement.

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Capitalists, especially, were afraid that the boys — having been in Europe — might have imbibed Socialistic ideas by contact with European soldiers. Although our boys were in France only a short time — and most of them could speak only one language — yet our ruling class was afraid.

For this reason the American Legion was founded, financed, and is being supported by the capitalist class and its press.

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At first the American Legion was also used to a large extent to break down strikes and to scab on union men. This was done often in the East.

That great and good friend of the capitalist class, Sammie Gompers, however, called the attention of his trust friends to the fact that such activity would undoubtedly mean the speedy end of the American Legion — which naturally would have to be made up of common workingmen, who had formed the overwhelming majority of the army.

After some discussion, the word was passed from headquarters to please quit scabbing as an official business of the army.

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The American Legion declared itself “neutral” in the struggle between capital and labor.

Nevertheless, the fact alone that the workingmen who join the American Legion — for a good time or getting a special advantage — bind themselves to become “neutrals” in the struggle of labor for better conditions, which is really their own struggle. This marks an immense advantage for the American capitalist class.

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Such is the American Legion. This is the outfit that wants to dictate how this country is to be run for the benefit of the profiteers and their Praetorian Guard, the “American” Legion.

The voters of the city of Milwaukee should never submit to the dictates of the American Legion any more than to the dictation of any other private detective agency.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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