

Don't Become a Murderer!

Alexander Berkman

1916

YOUNG MAN! You whom the government is trying to entice into the army and navy, beware! Bethink yourself before taking the step. Consider what you are about to do, and the purpose you are to serve. Ask yourself the meaning of military service and of war. Do you want to prepare for murder? Do you want to be trained for wholesale slaughter and, when ordered, to kill your fellow-men, men like yourself, whom you have never even seen and who never did you any harm? Think of it, and if there is a spark of manhood in your heart, you will be filled with horror and disgust at the very thought of military service.

You may be one of the unemployed, without money or friends. But better a hundred times to suffer need and hunger than to don the uniform that stands for cowardly obedience and the murder of your brothers. Consider that it is this military power which you are asked to join, that is upholding the conditions which are keeping you and thousands of others in starvation and misery. If you put on the uniform, you help to strengthen and perpetuate this power and you become the blind tool of the class that robs and kills under the guise of patriotism. It pays them well. They even instill the little school-children with the spirit of boastful jingoism and murderous hatred, because patriotism enlarges profits and increases dividends. Do you want to help them?

It is unworthy of a thinking man to be a blind, obedient tool. But still more unworthy it is to train oneself for the purpose and to subject oneself to humiliation and inhuman treatment in order to learn how to kill and murder.

Young Man! You are a poor man, a child of the poor. It is a terrible and shameful spectacle that in every land the sons of the workingmen constitute the army whose purpose it is to perpetuate the slavery of labor. Can you complain of oppression and exploitation if you lend yourself to uphold the system of economic robbery, if you take up arms to defend it? As long as there are enough young men who permit themselves to be driven to slaughter like a herd of sheep and who are willing to participate in expeditions of robbery and murder (for that's what war really is), just so long the possessing classes will continue to rob and to murder, to slaughter by the wholesale and exterminate whole countries. You, the sons of the people, you young workingmen of the land, you alone can put an end to these terrible things and their frightful consequences, by refusing to join the army and navy, by refusing to be used as hangmen, manhunters and watchdogs.

Already "great" generals and other well-paid patriots speak of conscription. They want to introduce forced military service in this country, as has been done by the tyrannies of Europe. It is

time to show them that the people see through their infamous schemes. Let the young generation remain away from the recruiting offices and refuse to be used as food for cannon.

The mission of the soldier is no different from that of the professional cutthroat who kills a man to order, except that the soldier receives less pay for his services, though he must be prepared not only for one murder but for wholesale killing. In bitter irony of his position, he is even commanded to sing the praises of the Lord who is supposed to be love and justice personified, and who is said to have commanded, "Thou shalt not kill."

The military uniform that seems so gay holds nothing but subjection and humiliation for the common soldier, and only a very meagre existence. He gets the mere crumbs when the glory and the profits of the bloody game of war are distributed. For the glory is all for the generals, the diplomats and statesmen, and the dollars are pocketed by the swindling suppliers of provisions, the cannon makers and manufacturers of arms, the ship builders and steel trust magnates. Young man, can you not understand why all these people with their hired slave drivers and paid newspaper writers are so patriotic? They are at all times ready to sacrifice the lives of poor devils for "the honor of the country." It means profit for them, and for that they cheerfully send to slaughter thousands who have been careless enough to fall into the net spread by the gaily decked agents of hell.

Beware of their traps! Too late will be regret when you are already caught. According to statistics about five per cent of the men desert from the United States Army. It is a striking proof that the fine promises of the merry and happy life of military service are nothing but a lie and a snare. Don't be duped, young man. Your true interest lies with the great body of the toilers, in solidaric effort with the producers to possess themselves of the land and tools of production for the use and benefit of all.

Down with the slaughter of mankind! Long live humanity!

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