

room tutelage. It becomes harder than ever to force school upon him. Some one must be held responsible. The employer is out of the question; the father cannot take time from his job; but the mother is at the service of the law. She has answered every summons from the school in the past and it seems logical that she should now extend this responsibility. The more recalcitrant the boy, the more severe must be her punishment. It has come about that working-class mothers of working-paper sons are being sent to the Tombs because of their sons' truancy. Theoretically, the father is also responsible, but the mother only has the time to be locked up. The assumption is that she has enough influence over the adolescent youth to make him go to school against his will. The assumption seems weak, unless the boy happens to be more chivalrous than we have any reason to expect considering the example of his father and the courts. There remains one possibility. The teacher might be held responsible for not making the boy want to come to school. Surely, if the boy's non-attendance is so serious as to justify the locking up of the mother, the school might reasonably be asked to show what it has done toward the prevention of his truancy.

## The Futility of the Subsidy

**T**HE opponents of the ship subsidy proposal now before Congress are gaining ground in their attempt to have the whole question postponed at least until the next session. Some of those who favor the subsidy are aiding them, alarmed at the amount of hostility the measure has created, and fearing the political effect if it should be passed before the all-important fall elections. To the opponents of the existing bill must be added the name of Secretary Denby who in a speech a few days ago in Japan observed that while the American merchant marine needs some sort of subsidy, it should not be in the form now proposed. His opposition is the more important because a leading argument in favor of the Lasker proposal has been the usefulness of our merchant ships to the navy in case of war.

It is unfortunate in every sense that the question of subsidization for the merchant marine should have been bound up with the disposal of the government's enormous fleet built during the war and as a war measure (though, for no good reason that can be discovered, the building was continued long after the armistice). The two questions ought to be considered separately; instead, the enormous cost of maintenance of the Shipping Board's boats is used as a feverish argument in favor of a policy

of subsidization which would have little chance of adoption if considered on its merits. Clearly, the friends of subsidy hope to establish a precedent which will enable them to secure continuing legislation even after the government tonnage is disposed of—if that happy day ever dawns.

Yet it would be hard to select a worse moment to embark upon a policy of government charity to shipowners than the present. As a result of a world-wide severe industrial depression, shipping is idle in every port. The leading maritime powers have hundreds of vessels laid up, and you can buy ships anywhere at less than the present reproduction cost, though that is lower than at any time since the war began to raise wages. American shipyards are operating at about five percent of capacity, and are building none but special types. Shipyards abroad are in a similar condition. With ships going begging for cargo, sailors are out of work and wages of all types of seamen have been violently "deflated"—those of Americans faster than any other nationality, according to Andrew Furuseth, president of the International Seamen's Union.

For this replete and jaded appetite, Mr. Lasker is hopefully preparing a fine new meal. He expects to sell 3,000,000 tons of his ships to Americans, that being the amount of good tonnage in his 10,000,000. Four million tons of wooden ships are absolutely worthless; the other 3,000,000 steel tons range from fair to very poor, and he hopes to sell them abroad at bargain prices to foreign operators who will agree to keep them out of competition with the American flag. But why should foreigners buy American ships at any price when there isn't cargo enough to keep occupied the ships they already have? And why should American owners buy at a good world market price of \$30 a ton—only ten or twenty dollars less than the cost abroad of new ships of modern improved design—and then tie their new-bought vessels to the wharf? Mr. Lasker can hardly contemplate giving a subsidy so heavy that it will pay the American owner to send his ship back and forth in ballast, as was the case with French sailing vessels a few decades ago. Even if he does, he is wrong; for the interest, insurance and depreciation cost on an average Shipping Board cargo boat will exceed the cash subsidy proposed in the bill. A 5,000 ton steamer costs \$150,000, on which these fixed charges will be not less than 15 percent, or \$22,500. If such a vessel travelled 40,000 miles a year at twelve knots or less her subsidy would be only \$10,000. Even if Mr. Lasker decided out of hand to double it, it would still be less than these charges. All the other forms of subsidiza-

tion (except the 2 percent loans for building) are ineffective unless cargo and passengers are being carried in the normal way.

The plain fact is that the daily expense of the government's great white elephant fleet is being used to rush us into a policy for which we are not ready, and the need of which has by no means been demonstrated. In the reams of testimony taken at Washington this spring at the Congressional hearings, there is hardly a page of expert, impartial opinion on the question whether a subsidy is needed at all, and if so, to what extent. We do know that an expert employed by the Shipping Board to study the effect of subsidies in other countries made a report that they have hardly ever been effective except in the case of Japan, and that the greatest merchant marines have been built without them. We know that Mr. Furuseth testified there is virtually no differential against American ships today on the score of wages and subsistence costs. American ships, he declares, are paying their licensed men slightly more, their unlicensed men slightly less than the British, and under present rulings are permitted to employ a much smaller crew to work a ship of equivalent size. We know that practical shipping men are alarmed by the discriminatory powers granted the Shipping Board under the proposed law. They support it because they are convinced that it is a case of this or nothing, but both officially and privately their recommendations are substantially at variance with the terms of the bill.

Success in the operation of a merchant marine is very largely dependent upon two factors—ships of the best possible design, and expert and intelligent crews. Marine architecture is making great strides, particularly in the direction of substituting oil for coal; the nation which keeps not only abreast but ahead of the procession in improved methods, ruthlessly scrapping the antiquated, is most likely to succeed at sea. For half a century, in a foolish attempt to protect our shipbuilding industry, we forbade Americans to buy steel ships abroad for operation under our flag, and thereby throttled our own merchant marine to death, since American builders were inexperienced at the beginning and had no chance to learn. This unwise restriction has now been removed. As to intelligent and experienced crews, we have in recent years made a good start toward providing them from the ranks of our young men. The LaFollette law, properly enforced (as it has never been) would remove the one obstacle to the restoration of the sea-going tradition of our early history. The provision that a sailor on a foreign ship entering an American harbor may demand one-half of his wages and (if he sees a chance to better himself)

ship on another vessel, has done much to equalize both wages and subsistence on ships of all European nations.

What is needed at Washington is not the hasty passage of a dangerous and complicated bill, but an honest and dispassionate study of the whole question of subsidy, divorced from the problem of getting rid of our surplus war tonnage. Luckily, the agency and the man exist to conduct such a survey. Herbert Hoover, with a unique genius for research and a well-organized Department of Commerce to carry out the detail, could easily go to the bottom of a matter which has had inadequate treatment at the hands of the Shipping Board with its special interest in the question of getting rid of its ships. Mr. Lasker would not like the introduction of another agency; he would doubtless argue that there has been far too much investigating already. That is true; the trouble has not been with quantity but quality.

## A Peace Offensive

WHEN war is on, neutrals whose interests are prejudiced have the right and the duty to offer their friendly offices to effect a settlement. It is proper that they should advance concrete proposals and invite the adherence of both parties. But no mediator who is really seeking peace can possibly expect his first proposals, however well considered, to be accepted without discussion and subsequent modification. To insist that they shall be, and that the party which first balks at them has placed itself outside of the pale, is a peace offensive, not a peace initiative. Its effect, so far as it has any, is to throw the force of public opinion to the party which speaks last, with an acquiescence in conditions which it knows have already been rejected. President Harding's proposals for a coal settlement looked fair in intention. There were defects in them, these defects could have been removed, probably, in the course of discussion. The miners rejected them, but not in a bitter-ender spirit. Subsequently a "large majority" of the operators, not in a public document permitting general scrutiny, but by word of mouth in private conference, "pledged readiness to resume activity under the Government's proposal." Accordingly, the President pronounces his effort a failure, with the responsibility upon the miners, and invites the operators "to return to your mine properties and resume operation."

Let us bear in mind that the coal strike is not a fresh war, but a campaign in a long struggle between organized capital and organized labor which began with the collapse of the postwar