

# **COUNTRY FIRST, THEN UNIONISM**

---

**Returned Soldiers Discuss Question of Shipyard Strike But Take No Definite Action.**

---

**HOLDING MASS MEETING  
AT IMPERIAL TONIGHT**

---

**Majority Taking Position That Shipbuilding is of Greatest Importance.**

The meeting of returned soldiers which was held last night in the large room of the Army and Navy Club resolved itself into an animated discussion which lasted until 11 o'clock and resulted ultimately in an adjournment to the Imperial Theatre tonight at 8 o'clock when a mass meeting will be held. At a late hour last night the Imperial Theatre was engaged. It was agreed to ask Sergt.-Major Jimmy Robinson and through the day arrangements are being carried forward so as to make tonight a full expression of the opinion of the returned soldiers of this city and vicinity on the present crisis in the ship producing industry.

At last night's meeting there were delegates from the Great War Veterans' Association of Victoria, from the same body of this city, from the

comrades of the Great War and from other organizations of returned men. But as delicate questions involving matters of principle cropped up it was agreed that the expressions of opinion should be taken as that of individual returned soldiers and not as delegates with a mandate from their associations as to how they should vote.

### **A Divided Duty.**

It was evident from the start that the returned men felt themselves confronted with a divided duty. Before they went away to fight the Empire's battle the majority of the men present last night had been ardent trades unionists and nearly every speaker declared himself a trades unionist carrying his working card. Such men naturally detested the idea of acting as "scabs" but as one very tersely put it, "If it is a question of trades unionism or the British Empire then I am for the British Empire to build the ships which are vital and let the trades union question be adjusted either while the work is going on or when it is done." This seemed to be the spirit of the entire meeting, although there was hesitation in actually endorsing the action of the men at Victoria. There was no hesitation, however, in discussing the questions of aliens in the shipyards. On this question every speaker was most emphatic, declaring that men of alien enemy nations must go, and also men belonging to our allies who are of military age.

This will be made by the returned soldiers a great point in their meeting tonight and instance after instance was given of Germans placed in positions of authority in the shipyards where they have plenty of opportunities of doing injury to the British cause, if so minded, and several speakers declared that these opportunities were not being neglected.

### **Unionism Secondary.**

The attitude of the soldier towards the shipbuilding strike was very well put by one speaker, who said: "When I enlisted I did so for the duration of the war. I have come back unfit for further military service, but ready to do something to help win the war in which I have been fighting. If that something is helping to build a ship to carry food for my comrades still in the trenches, then I regard that as part of the duty I enlisted for, and if trades unionism stands between me and my fighting comrade it is him and not unionism that I am for. I have a boy not yet 18 years of age who has been 25 months in the battle zone. Am I going to stay my hand from helping to build the ship which will carry him the food? and men who have come back are ready to declare today that the fighting men, unless they have ships, have starvation not many hours ahead of them." In conclusion it was agreed that the whole of last night's meeting should be regarded as only preliminary to the great meeting of tonight, when it is hoped that some arrangement can be come to by which the rights of workers and the principles of the unions can be made to square with a "win the war" policy, the attitude of every returned soldier being that he wants to do his duty by labor when labor is reasonable and patriotic, but it must not be allowed that any minor matter of

hours and pay shall interfere with the vital interests of the Empire in the terrible times through which we are passing.