

VICTIMS OF ALEC GORDON THE AGENT-PROVOCATEUR

The True Story of the Wheeldon Case

The following is an extract from the Parliamentary proceedings on Monday, February 18:

Mr. HOGGE (L., Edinburgh, East) asked for a definite answer "Yes" or "No" to the question—Did any of this £200,000 go in payment to secret agents in the employment of the Government now engaged in different parts of the country in provoking discontent and disorder among the industrial population?

Mr. BALDWIN (Financial Secretary to the Treasury) said it was impossible to give information as to the spending of Secret Service money. He had no knowledge as to where Secret Service money went.

JUST over a year ago a man, pretending to be a conscientious objector flying from the police, came to Mrs. Wheeldon's door in Derby and asked for shelter. Mrs. Wheeldon's own son was a C.O., and this man probably knew that such an appeal as his would meet with a ready response from her. The Wheeldons had not room to take him in themselves but they gave him addresses where he would be able to get put up, and he called on them every day, sometimes twice a day, for the greater part of a week. On his first visit he told the Wheeldons that his name was Gordon and that he was forwarding a scheme for getting conscientious objectors out of the country. He said, referring to Mrs. Wheeldon's son,

"Why doesn't he clear out of the country? It's simple enough." "Why don't you go if its so simple?" said Hetty Wheeldon. He said that his health would not stand the voyage.

On Gordon's next visit he told the Wheeldons how he had helped in the escape of Kehrhan from an internment camp, and said that he now wanted to help five Jewish boys out of an internment camp, but that since Kehrhan's escape extra guards had been put on, and also dogs.

"We can buy the guards, but not the dogs," was his remark.

When they told him that Winnie, one of Mrs. Wheeldon's daughters, was married to Alfred Mason, a chemist and dispenser at Southampton, Gordon said at once that Mason would be able to help him out of the dog difficulty by supplying poison, and it was agreed that Mrs. Wheeldon should write for some poison, while Gordon undertook in return to get her son, Alfred Mason, her son-in-law (also a C.O.), and another young man who was a friend of the Wheeldon's, out of the country.

From this beginning the famous "Plot to Poison Mr. Lloyd George" was worked up. Mrs. Wheeldon wrote for the poison, but this first letter was not stopped and so was not produced in court. It might have been stopped as their other letters were, for it was sent by train, and both Gordon and Booth knew how and when it was dispatched in time to prevent its delivery or to arrange for a copy to be taken. But while the later letters contained references to the poison without mentioning its object were stopped and photographed, *this first letter, which told of the object—i.e., to poison dogs—was not one which the Prosecution wanted.*

Later on Gordon introduced another man, Booth, who admitted in the witness-box that he was a secret-service agent in the pay of the Ministry of Munitions. This man was called to give evidence at the trial, and on his evidence alone Mrs. Wheeldon and the Masons were convicted. *Gordon was not produced*, although the defendants wished him to be called. Presumably this was either because his character was too shady to bear the light of cross-examination in the witness-box or else because he was so useful as an agent-provocateur that the Government did not wish his face to become known to the public.

The only verbatim statement of Mrs. Wheeldon which Booth quoted to prove that the poison was intended for the Prime Minister was this:

“Lloyd George has been the cause of millions of innocent lives being sacrificed; the —— should be killed to stop it.”

If everyone who had expressed an opinion, at one time or another, that “Lloyd George ought to be shot” were put in prison, the present accommodation would probably be inadequate.

On the most flimsy evidence Mrs. Wheeldon and the Masons were convicted. Imagine the position of these working-class people, suddenly confronted with such a charge and haled off to prison without time, money or influence to obtain legal assistance adequate to meet Sir F. E. Smith, the Attorney-General, and other eminent counsel arrayed against them by the Government. Yet anyone who read, not the one-sided accounts in the Press but the verbatim report of the trial, would hardly believe that anyone could be convicted on such an obviously trumped-up charge.

Great prejudice against the Wheeldons was produced in the mind of the public by the exaggerated emphasis laid on the few isolated examples of bad language used. Bad language is not of itself a crime, nor is it evidence of intention to murder.

A Press reporter who went to the trial believing them guilty came away expressing his private opinion that there was simply no case against them.

Yet these people were sentenced, Mrs. Wheeldon to ten years penal servitude, Alfred Mason to seven years, and Mrs. Mason to five years. About two months ago Mrs. Wheeldon hunger-struck as a protest against the way in which she was being treated in prison, and she was released. But her daughter and son-in-law are still in prison.

How much longer are these two victims of the agent-provocateur, Gordon, to waste their youth behind prison bars? Labour can get them out if it will. Demand their immediate release. Send resolutions to the Home Secretary, to Mr. J. H. Thomas, M.P. for Derby, and to your own Member.

As long as these people remain in prison the spy system has proved victorious. Act at once.

If you want any further information on this case apply to
Hetty Wheeldon, 278 Normanton Road, Derby.

At the Pelican Press, Gough Square, Fleet Street, E.C.4.