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*Siegfried Sassoon, Fellow-traveler: Poetry,  
Socialism, and the British Veterans' Movement*

**F**OR MANY STUDENTS OF MODERN BRITISH LETTERS Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967) is the paradigmatic “war-poet,” with all the power (and limitation) the term implies.<sup>1</sup> Shocked by his war experiences, as the story goes, he shed his pre-war romanticism and perfected a satiric and epigrammatic style ably suited to convey the harsh realities of trench warfare and the fraught relations between war front and home front. Without a cause to pursue, however, Sassoon’s postwar poetry lacked the force of his earlier work, and from the late 1920s on he spent the rest of his literary energies revisiting his war experiences in prose. Such is the general picture, and it is persuasive in part. His wartime verse is indeed more arresting than the later work, and, his prose, on the whole, illustrates a significant facet of the war.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, this image is too constricting. In excluding his early, postwar career, the narrative implies that nothing of import occurred between Sassoon’s wartime radicalism and the advent of his memoir-writing.

In fact, the immediate postwar years were eventful for Sassoon. He featured prominently in a Labour MP’s 1918 re-election campaign; he covered labor union issues as a journalist; in 1919 he served as literary editor at the Labour newspaper *The Daily Herald*; much of his poetic output in the postwar era strove to articulate his (and other veterans’) attitudes toward the war and the resultant peace. Examining these relatively neglected aspects of his postwar career allows us to fill in the received picture of Sassoon. At the same time, considering these writings and activities illuminates a key aspect of postwar history. As several million soldiers were discharged after the Armistice into civilian society, there followed a process of negotiation between veterans, the non-veteran public, and the state regarding what

veterans were owed for their war service and how peacetime Britain would best provide this. As a veteran / writer / activist, Sassoon participated in this process.

As this summary of his postwar work attests, Sassoon's veteran politics were often expressed in socialist, specifically Labourite terms.<sup>3</sup> For the most part, however, even when they address it scholars give rather short shrift to this period, interpreting his postwar politics as youthful, naïve idealism, in contrast to the moderation typified by his later autobiographical writing. For instance, like several other critics, biographer Jean Moorcroft-Wilson attributes Sassoon's socialism to his "immaturity" and "inconsistency."<sup>4</sup> I would argue that we should not read his postwar socialism in terms of what we might understand to be the later, more "mature" Sassoon; rather, we should consider his politics as significant in their own right. It may very well be the case that the scholarly tendency to discount the significance of Sassoon's early postwar period owes something to a general preference among literary critics for the introspective individualism of memoir and autobiography (especially insofar as they cleave to a conventional narrative of *bildung*) rather than more polemical or politically oriented genres. In any case, even if we were to construe Sassoon's politics as a function of immaturity or naïveté (which I believe we shouldn't), we would still be understanding it in individualist terms. Rather, my view is that his postwar writing and politics worked in tandem with the broader historical phenomenon of the organized veterans' movement.

To begin with, Sassoon's well-known wartime outrage (as expressed in his anti-war protest and in his poetry) against civilian complacency broadcast in the name of those fighting has an obvious affinity with a socialist worldview concerning class conflict and exploitation; both his and the socialist position attempt to intervene in a situation in which one group benefits from the labor and suffering of another group. Furthermore, Sassoon's postwar linkage of veterans and socialism in his political campaigning resonates with the ethos of a key organization in the veterans' movement, the National Union of Ex-Servicemen (NUX). As its initial manifesto put it, "We are ex-Service men, but we are also Workers, and we realise that our general interests are identical with those of all our fellow workers."<sup>5</sup> Moreover, as an individual writer-activist Sassoon performed much the same work as would an active member of a veterans' group like the 100,000-strong National Federation, including protest, participation in electoral politics, and journalism. The Federation, for its part, was initially aligned with the left-wing of the Liberal Party and the trades unions, and advocated pension reform, employment preference for veterans, abolition of the House of Lords, and public ownership of monopolies, among other things. In his postwar writing and political activities, Sassoon, like these two organizations, endeavored to serve not only war veterans but also the working classes in general, insofar as both groups were overused and underserved. If not a card-carrying member of a veterans group, Sassoon was a fellow-traveler in the veterans' movement.

But as with many other ex-soldiers, though his veteran identity was initially articulated in largely socialist terms, Sassoon moved toward a narrower vision dominated by war experience *per se*. By the mid-1920s, Sassoon gave up politics and settled into writing his fictionalized memoirs, in which he portrays himself as a well-meaning but naïve soldier and writer. Such a change was emblematic of the political progress of a veterans' movement that began in 1916-1917 with a pronounced left-wing and trade unionist bent only to become more moderate and oriented to the political status quo. This process was most noticeable in the Federation, whose members increasingly identified themselves on the basis of their war experience: even if they conceived of such experience in terms of exploitation, they nonetheless viewed it as inherently different from capitalist exploitation of labor. This more exclusive sense of veteran identity, though it motivated an energetic politics based on grievance, alienated the movement from sympathetic constituencies and starved it of needed structural and financial support from other political entities. This drift also contributed to the demise of the NUX and its melding of veteran identity to socialist politics. By 1921, the movement came to be dominated by groups like the Comrades of the Great War and, in turn, the British Legion, both well-funded by the social and political elite, socio-economically conservative, and benignly patriotic.<sup>6</sup>

### **Comrades in Protest**

Before we turn to Sassoon's postwar writing and politics, a brief glance at his 1917 public protest against the war is in order.<sup>7</sup> My interest here lies in the difference between his motives for mounting and then ending the protest, an asymmetry which, as we will see, is representative of his postwar political evolution. Sassoon's decision not to return to the front stemmed from a combination of trench experience and exposure to the political ideas of leftists and anti-war advocates such as the Morrells, Bertrand Russell, Middleton Murry, and H.G. Wells while on leave in 1916-1917.<sup>8</sup> We can see this dual political identity at work in the conclusion to his statement of protest:

On behalf of those who are suffering now, I make this protest against the deception which is being practised on them. Also I believe that it may help to destroy the callous complacency with which the majority of those at home regard the continuance of agonies which they do not share and which they have not sufficient imagination to realize.<sup>9</sup>

As a veteran soldier, Sassoon knew only too well the difference between the war as seen by combatants and that understood by civilians, and as a new member of the

anti-war left he was willing to expose the political machinations motivating the war's continuance. His experiences as a soldier provide the impetus for his protest, while his pacifist associates provide some of its terms: Sassoon the war veteran and Sassoon the anti-war activist were working here in common cause.

However, in turning to the manner in which Sassoon's protest was withdrawn, we see how his relationship with his fellow soldiers complicated and ultimately trumped his investment in the political goals of his anti-war associates. Having avoided a court martial through the intercession of Robert Graves (and through the desire of the military to avoid more controversy), Sassoon was sent to the psychiatric hospital for officers at Craiglockhart in the summer of 1917. As weeks at the hospital turned to months, and as it became apparent that his protest was having little or no effect, Sassoon was left with two choices: continue his protest in safety and isolation or return to France to share the dangers of the front with his comrades. Ultimately, Sassoon abandoned his protest. As an officer, he felt guilty for having left his men to continue what he would not, and he felt that the only way he could feasibly "support his troops" would be to rejoin them in the field. As he expressed it in "Banishment," a poem written at Craiglockhart: "Love drove me to rebel. / Love drives me back to grope with them through hell."<sup>10</sup> While here Sassoon equates his motives for mounting and then discontinuing his protest, it is fairly clear that, in his anti-war dissent at least, "love" for his comrades was combined with criticism of Britain's political strategizing. In the end, though Sassoon's anti-war associates were instrumental in shaping and publicizing his protest, they did not have the same emotional hold on him as did the comradely bonds with his fellow combatants. As we will see, this unstable blend of soldierly experience and political ideology would continue to influence his postwar career.

### **The Labour Campaign and Veterans' Organization Politics**

The end of the war marked the beginning of his involvement with a politics centered on both preventing another war and achieving a more economically and socially just peace, especially for veterans. Though he turned down an offer to run as the Labour Party's parliamentary candidate for Hampstead, in December 1918 he accepted an invitation to join Labour MP Philip Snowden's re-election campaign in Blackburn.<sup>11</sup> The offer was tendered by Max Plowman, also a former infantry officer who, inspired by Sassoon's example, had written a statement against the war in late 1917 (thus Sassoon's protest had had at least this effect). Unlike Sassoon, Plowman had declared himself a conscientious objector and was dismissed from the army.<sup>12</sup> Sassoon was asked to join the campaign not only because he and Snowden had both protested the war but because his decorated war record would serve as insulation against the Victoria Cross (Britain's highest military decoration) of Snowden's Conservative-Coalition opponent. As Snowden himself later described

his opponent in the election, "the Tories adopted as their candidate a local man who had won the V.C. for distinguished naval service in the Zeebrugge affair. He had no knowledge of politics, but it was expected that his war service would make a special appeal to the electors."<sup>13</sup>

This political pitting of one veteran against another (albeit at one remove) is important in two respects. First, it demonstrates that veterans were drawn to no single ideological position. Second, as veterans' political affiliations were essentially up for grabs, this electoral contest in Blackburn between the Labour and Conservative parties was part of a much wider conflict between left- and right-wing interests over the allegiance of veterans. This partisanship was clearly expressed in the rivalry between the National Federation and the NUX on one side and a third organization, the Comrades of the Great War, on the other. Founded in late 1917 as a foil to the Federation, the Comrades, while giving lip service to veterans' concerns regarding pensions and employment needs, assimilated these grievances into a program designed to blunt their political and economic effects. Thus the Comrades sought to redirect veterans' energies away from the more radical politics of groups like the Federation and the NUX and toward a charity-oriented organization with a conservative, capital-friendly platform.

The Comrades' program was consistent with the Lloyd-George coalition's desire to minimize veterans' political impact by calling an early election, a move which would disenfranchise many men in uniform awaiting demobilization, and by limiting government expenditure on veterans' programs.<sup>14</sup> The Labour Party, in contrast, sought to increase its political influence by linking the grievances of ex-soldiers to its socialist and internationalist program, as it did in sponsoring the NUX.<sup>15</sup> A long time member of the Independent Labour Party and its chairman from 1917-1920, Snowden had been an opponent of the war and in 1918 was campaigning on a Wilsonian platform of a non-vindictive peace with Germany, as well as more specifically Labourite planks as land and industry nationalization.<sup>16</sup> In his memoirs, Sassoon remarked that he had been "impressed" by Snowden's efforts "on behalf of private soldiers and their dependents."<sup>17</sup> Indeed, during the war Snowden had contributed to the formation of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, and was for a time involved in the Federation-esque National Association when its ties to Labour were still strong.<sup>18</sup> Snowden's sense of the common interests of veterans and the working classes echoed the philosophy of the NUX. As he later wrote, "Many of the ex-Service men have now realised how they have been duped by scheming politicians, and are turned to the Labour party, not merely because it will redress their grievances, but because they recognize the necessity for standing solid with the men and women of their own class."<sup>19</sup>

For his part, in December 1918 Sassoon gave twelve speeches on Snowden's behalf on such topics as a fair peace with Germany, the repeal of military conscription,

and soldiers' disenfranchisement. Later, in *Siegfried's Journey*, he would record a press notice of one of his speeches: "Captain Sassoon remarked that the soldiers on active service in France and elsewhere had not a dog's chance of registering their vote at the election."<sup>20</sup> Sassoon's speeches helped publicize several key issues that veterans faced in the postwar era, including their co-optation by conservative politics and the state's neglect of them and their families once their service was over. In campaigning for Snowden he articulated veteran identity in socialist terms, balancing a concern for issues specifically related to veterans with a broader program of nationalization and welfare provision.

### **Socialist Journalism and Poetry**

Snowden, like many other anti-war MPs, was trounced by Lloyd-George's coalition in an election dominated by popular sentiment to 'Hang the Kaiser.' This electoral setback, however, only whetted Sassoon's appetite for more Labour-related activity. In February 1919 he volunteered to cover the labor dispute in Scotland now known as "Red Clydeside" for *The Nation* (Sassoon had consulted its editor, H.W. Massingham, in preparing his 1917 statement of protest). In *Siegfried's Journey* he recalls arriving in Glasgow in the tense days following the violent disruption of a union demonstration, and being present at a strike leader's arraignment, visiting an engineering works, and attending a contentious meeting of the Glasgow city council.<sup>21</sup> In his *Nation* dispatch of February 8, Sassoon defends the legitimacy of the strike and criticizes the police for instigating the violence. The most striking feature of the article is the opening paragraph's claim that the purposes of the strike have been misrepresented in the mainstream press and are only knowable to those directly involved: "Those in the very center of the sphere of action are alone able to realize the true gravity of the Clyde situation—a gravity which lies chiefly in the false perspective of spectators in the South of England."<sup>22</sup> As with his war poetry and his protest, in which he had contrasted combatants' and non-combatants' perspectives on the war, here Sassoon opposes the orientation of the strikers on the Clyde to those elsewhere, especially in and near London, the center of British power. In this second episode of Sassoon's postwar political career, we have a socialist-affiliated war veteran reporting on a major labor action of the demobilization era of late 1918-1919; again, Sassoon the ex-soldier and Sassoon the Labourite were working in tandem.

After the journalism stint in Scotland, Sassoon, in an attempt to deepen his socialist acumen, was admitted to Oxford to study political economy. However, such academic pursuits attracted him less than active involvement in socialist politics, and he lasted barely a month. Nonetheless, the two episodes of Sassoon's postwar political career discussed thus far—the speeches for Snowden's campaign and the reportage on the Clydeside strike—together demonstrate that his socialism

was more than a superficial “flirtation.” But how much more? Would it be accurate to say, through these socialist acts, that Sassoon was a socialist? Readers familiar with *Siegfried’s Journey* will know that, in regard to his political commitment, Sassoon was still torn between his new attachments and his longstanding place in elite circles, whether among his upper-class family and friends in Kent or at the prestigious Reform Club in London (to which he had been elected in January 1919). For contemporaneous evidence regarding the nature of his commitment, we turn to the socialist-inspired poems he wrote in 1919.

“To Those Who Fight For Labour,” published in *The Herald* on January 4, 1919, revisits the electoral setback of the previous month and looks forward to socialism’s future political success.<sup>23</sup> Though “Reaction’s bloodstained flags deride you. / And the old ignorant gods for an hour prevail,” Sassoon, striking a propagandistic pitch, counsels his fellow socialists to “Remember you have toiled for something splendid, / And keep the vision stainless in your eyes / [...] Till Brotherhood unites the martyred lands.” If, aesthetically speaking, the poem is not one of his best efforts, the fact that Sassoon wrote it in the first place is significant. For the poem marks a return to the idealistic mode of his pre-combat war poetry, as in “Absolution” (1915), in which he is content to transcend the concrete destructiveness of war: “Horror of wounds and anger at the foe, / And loss of things desired; all these must pass.”<sup>24</sup> In contrast to his emphasis on the war’s costs in the major war poems, in both the early war poems and in “To Those Who Fight” Sassoon seems to have found causes which merit sacrifice. Yet there is a critical difference between this socialist poem and the war poetry.

In both the early and late war poetry, as with his anti-war protest, Sassoon explicitly identifies himself with his fellow combatants, whether as part of a group of comrades engaged in a noble cause (as in “Absolution”) or as the spokesman for fellow soldiers suffering both from trench warfare and non-combatant ignorance of the war’s realities. “To Those Who Fight,” however, is conspicuous in its repeated use of the second-person singular: “you” remember the past struggles, “you” remain faithful to the cause, and so on. It is as if Sassoon is counseling from the sidelines, or from above, as if he himself is not an integral player in the drama he presents. A similar distancing informs an unpublished diary entry written just after his participation in the 1918 election campaign. Though he “look[s] back on these days as a time filled with happy striving, jolly comradeship,” later in the entry the language registers his precarious place in the movement: “I have made a strong appeal to these Blackburn people... I have offered myself to the people.”<sup>25</sup> In other words, though he writes of “comradeship” and of “offering himself,” Sassoon reiterates distinctions between himself and “these people,” such that one wonders to what extent he has wholeheartedly joined the movement.

“Everyone Sang” is denser and more complex than “To Those Who Fight,” and intended, as Sassoon would later write, to “represent the Social Revolution which I

believed to be at hand.<sup>26</sup> Yet this April 1919 poem also expresses its author's ambivalent relation to this "Revolution," as we see in the opening lines of the first stanza:

Everyone suddenly burst out singing;  
And I was filled with such delight  
As prisoned birds must find in freedom.<sup>27</sup>

We first notice the juxtaposition of "Everyone" and "I." Perhaps "Everyone" includes this "I," but the redundancy, or singularity, of the latter nonetheless suggests a difference, or a distance, between the two entities, a distinction emphasized by the different acts of each: "Everyone" sings while the "I" is passively "filled with delight"; the masses produce song, while the speaker absorbs it. Likewise, in the second stanza,

Everyone's voice was suddenly lifted;  
And beauty came like the setting sun:  
My heart was shaken with tears [...]

Again we have the distinction between a collectively produced song and an individual's aesthetic experience of it. Functionally speaking, the poem exemplifies Sassoon's conflicted relation to socialist politics: he is both a part of Labour and apart from it; his commitment to the idea of socialism is not necessarily matched by a full-blooded commitment to the socialist movement. Whereas in "To Those Who Fight" Sassoon seems to be the interested bystander exhorting the masses to keep faith with Labour, in "Everyone Sang" he is likewise to one side but in this instance is the recipient or consumer of the masses' activity.

If "To Those Who Fight for Labour" and "Everyone Sang" register Sassoon's complex involvement with the Labour movement—a simultaneous investment and distance—his tenure as literary editor for *The Herald* from April-December 1919 marks the final episode of his socialist career. Salaried at £5 per week, Sassoon selected the books to be reviewed and wrote a dozen columns and reviews over the course of several months.<sup>28</sup> Looking over these pieces, one is struck by the contrast between, on the one hand, the *Herald's* consistent editorial viewpoint on world events, including the Versailles Treaty, the Allied incursion into Soviet Russia, and the British state's postwar social and economic policies, and, on the other hand, Sassoon's jocular and belletristic columns. Naturally, this difference between the news pages and the literary page may be a function of the normal diversity of features characterizing a daily newspaper intent on increasing its readership (and membership in the Labour movement). However, early on in his editorship Sassoon makes explicit his own sense of the separate spheres of literature and radical politics:

as he writes in his “Literary Notes” column of April 23, 1919, “I am *not* in the pay of Mssrs. Lenin and Trotsky” (emphasis in original).<sup>29</sup>

Likewise, a month later Sassoon opens his column with the following claim: “After many hours of profound thought I have decided that literary notes ought to deal only with Literature” (May 21, 1919). Though unstated, the implication is fairly clear. Sassoon’s literary editorship intends to promote worthwhile “Literature” as an autonomous category, rather than integrate literary texts and the issues and events of the day as understood from a political perspective. Much the same can be gathered from his May 3, 1919 review of John Drinkwater’s collection of poems *Loyalties*. Focusing exclusively on the poems’ aesthetic qualities, Sassoon makes no attempt to tie them to social or political concerns. In contrast, then, to his whole-hearted personal and literary identification with his fellow soldiers, with whom he had suffered, in his socialist poems and editorship at a Labour newspaper Sassoon never articulated a similar relationship with the rank-and-file of the Labour movement. While his comradeship with other soldiers was founded on their sharing the trauma and privation of trench experience, Sassoon, though he was active in socialist politics on many fronts, was never in “the trenches” of the Labour movement. Arguably, he would have had to have been a working class union member in order to feel the same visceral commitment to socialism that he felt toward his fellow combatants and ex-soldiers as a soldier-veteran.

### **From Veterans’ Politics to Literary Veteran**

By January 1920, Sassoon had left his position at *The Herald* and embarked on a reading and lecture tour in the United States. Arriving in New York, he toured the East Coast and Midwest for several months, appearing at literary societies, colleges, and a few pacifist organizations. Due to the success of his two wartime volumes of poetry, combined with the notoriety of his protest, Sassoon was feted as a minor celebrity, interviewed by the popular press, and introduced to several notable American writers, including Carl Sandburg. After the unfamiliar exertions of his socialist activities, perhaps the opportunity to return to the role of war poet was a welcome change. Whereas speaking to working class audiences in Blackburn or reporting on violent labor disputes in Scotland were novel and perhaps disconcerting experiences, reading his poems and speaking of the war to literary-minded people were much more familiar pursuits, with clear moral and social dimensions.

But as the tour came to a close in late summer 1920 Sassoon was obliged to give up the title of war poet upon his return to England. With a touch of self-pity he writes at the end of *Siegfried’s Journey*: “No interviewers had awaited ‘England’s Young Soldier-Poet’ when he arrived at Southampton. That object of interest had ceased to exist.”<sup>30</sup> Refusing to follow Arnold Bennett’s advice to give up “the carping school,” in the 1920s Sassoon attempted to apply his satirical pen to deflating the hubris

and pretension of the social and artistic elite in verse collected in *Satirical Poems*. However, these poems were often little more than choleric criticism of their subjects, and, lacking any comparative class analysis, did not pack the same punch as his major war verse or his socialist poems. An uncollected poem of the same period, "I Accuse the Rich" (published May 1, 1927 in the *Labour Weekly*), is a straightforward litany of upper class failings, with lines such as "I accuse the Rich of being vulgarly refined: / I accuse them of their crude and unconcealed barbarity."

The war, however, continued to provide the impetus for his better postwar poetry. In these poems Sassoon revived the combination of rendered experience and ideological critique that characterizes his best efforts in *The Old Huntsman* (1917) and *Counter-Attack* (1918). In "To One Who was With Me in the War" (1926), Sassoon structures a reluctant revisiting of his painful war experiences in terms of a reunion between himself and a fellow veteran. Though admitting that in "remembering [the war], we forget / Much that was monstrous," the poem makes clear that the still strong bonds of comradeship are a key motivation for the speaker's recollections, especially insofar as they constitute a linkage of the traumatic past to the present.<sup>31</sup> The sonnet "On Passing the New Menin Gate" (1927-28) is a crisp reminder of Sassoon's power as a critic of inflated rhetoric—the object in this case being the newly erected monument to the British war dead at Ypres, which he excoriates as a "sepulcher of crime" (*Collected Poems* 188). In both of these poems, the authority of his war experience once again comes to the fore, while linkages to socialism are left behind. Indeed, in the late 1920s Sassoon would embark on the project that would occupy the majority of his literary exertions for the next two decades: the three volumes of memoir and three volumes of autobiography, concluded with *Siegfried's Journey* in 1945, in which the recounting of his war experiences serves as his life's fulcrum.

Bertrand Russell, who had assisted him in preparing his 1917 statement of protest, once commented that Sassoon "sees war, not peace, from the point of view of the proletariat."<sup>32</sup> Later generations of scholars have offered similar opinions of Sassoon's career: for instance, Bernard Bergonzi has argued that the war "was to remain Sassoon's one authentic subject."<sup>33</sup> And Sassoon himself would note in a 1921 diary entry that in the years since the war he had been unable to "find a moral equivalent to war."<sup>34</sup> Such claims maintain that the war was the foundation of his life's work, so much so that other concerns and pursuits remained marginal. As we have seen with his poetry, prose, and political activity, to a certain extent this is true. However, as I have sought to demonstrate, we would be doing Sassoon a disservice if we were to so categorize his postwar socialism, and not only because his work in that regard was extensive and complex. We would also be forgetting that Sassoon's shift from a progressive politics to the stricter parameters of war experience was not merely a result of his own particular predilections, but rather was representative of

a broader shift within the veteran community in general, and thus a social (rather than personal or idiosyncratic) phenomenon.

In other words, such an itinerary describes in individual terms the political progress of organized British veterans: in its early stages, coming on the heels of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, the movement was linked to the Labour Party and the trades unions, and pursued (and sometimes won) significant reform of veteran/state relations and socio-economic structures in general. As we have noted, however, by 1921-22 the movements' political energy dissipated as it increasingly came under the control of the Comrades of the Great War and then, finally, the British Legion, the Comrades' ideological successor. The Legion's Poppy Day, first instituted in 1921 and soon thereafter its most visible symbolic action, appropriately combined that organization's charitable and commemorative ethos. As with the progress of the veterans' movement, Sassoon's conscious and multi-faceted attempt to link his veteran identity to broader social and political causes was followed by the eventual constriction of that identity into a narrower framework focusing on war experience and its effects. In this respect, Sassoon's shifts from dissenting combatant to socialist veteran to what I would call a literary veteran—in which one's veteran identity is expressed solely via symbolic production—typifies a narrative each episode of which we would do well to attend to.

## Notes

1. For representative analysis of Sassoon as war poet, see, among others, Bernard Bergonzi, *Heroes' Twilight*. 3rd Ed. (Manchester: Carcanet, 1996); Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Jon Silkin, *Out of Battle*. 2nd Ed. (London: Ark, 1987); George Parfitt, *English Poetry of the First World War*. (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990); and Adrian Caesar, *Taking It Like a Man* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).
2. See Fussell, chapter 3. His analysis of Sassoon is largely in accord with the predominant cultural memory of the war, or what is called the Great War "Myth." For a cogent exposition of the Myth, see Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined* (New York: Atheneum, 1991).
3. For convenience, I will be using socialism and Labour interchangeably. However, the two terms are not identical: socialism refers to a certain socio-economic philosophy, while the British Labour Party is a specific political expression of such a philosophy (or at least was such an expression, for most of the twentieth century). For a cogent discussion of Labour's place within British socialism, see Keith Laybourn, *The Rise of Socialism in Britain c. 1881-1951* (Thrupp, Gloucestershire: Sutton, 1997).
4. Jean Moorcroft-Wilson, *Siegfried Sassoon: Journey from the Trenches* (New York: Routledge, 2003) 36. Likewise, Caesar describes his involvement with Labour politics as a "brief flirtation" (99); Michael Thorpe writes that "Sassoon served his apprenticeship to radical ideas, with generous feeling, only to abandon them on realizing how poor were their immediate prospects." See *Siegfried Sassoon: A Critical Study* (Leiden: Universitaire Pers Leiden, 1967) 168. Fussell does not address Sassoon's early postwar work and politics.

5. National Union of Ex-Servicemen, *Statement of Aims and Policy* (Ilford: Ilford Co-operative Labour Press, n.d).
6. For reasons of space, my discussion of the veterans' movement will be necessarily brief. The scholars whose work I have drawn upon here include Graham Wootton, *The Politics of Influence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963); Steven Ward, "British Veterans Organizations of the First World War" (Diss. U of Cincinnati, 1969); Charles Kimball, "The Ex-Service Movement in England and Wales, 1916-1930" (Diss. Stanford University, 1990); and Andrew Latcham, "Journey's End: Ex-Servicemen and the State During and After the Great War" (Diss. Oxford University, 1996).
7. As his protest is fairly familiar to scholars of the period, I will refrain from rehearsing it here in its entirety.
8. *Siegfried's Journey* (London: Faber and Faber, 1945) 21-22.
9. Qtd. in Jean Moorcroft-Wilson, *Siegfried Sassoon: The Making of a War Poet* (London: Duckworth, 1998) 374.
10. *Collected Poems 1908-1956*. 2nd Ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1961) 86.
11. Moorcroft-Wilson, *Siegfried Sassoon: Journey from the Trenches*, 10.
12. Hynes, 184. Plowman would go on to publish the acclaimed memoir *A Subaltern on the Somme* in 1928.
13. Keith Laybourn, *Philip Snowden: A Biography: 1864-1937* (Aldershot, UK: Gower, 1988) 500.
14. This soon after the Armistice, several million men were still overseas. See Ward 159 for discussion of soldier/veteran disenfranchisement in the election.
15. In addition to being an official Labour Party affiliate, the NUX was also formally endorsed by Labour's Executive Council, whose members included Ethel Snowden (the MP's wife), Sidney Webb, and Ramsay MacDonald (National Union of Ex-Servicemen, *Leaflet* 31, n.d.)
16. Laybourn, *Philip Snowden*.
17. *Siegfried's Journey*, 112.
18. Wootton, 95.
19. Qtd. in Ward, 256.
20. *Siegfried's Journey*, 114.
21. Rather than opposing the interests of workers and presently unemployed ex-soldiers, the Clydeside Workers' Committee (CWC) stressed their common interests in opposition to employers and the state. On January 31, a 50,000-plus strong contingent of workers, veterans, and their followers gathered in Glasgow to support their union leaders' deputation to the Lord Provost; during the meeting, police attempted to disperse the crowd with batons (felling the leader of the CWC, David Kirkwood, in the process) and provoked a series of running skirmishes throughout the city. Fearing that a revolutionary threat was building, Lloyd-George sent in 10,000 English troops with tanks to restore order (Scottish troops were available, but were considered potentially sympathetic to the strikers and thus left in barracks). On

February 10 the strike was called off with a compromise between the union and employers. For more information on the strike, consult the Glasgow Digital Library, based at the University of Strathclyde, <http://gdl.cdrl.strath.ac.uk/>.

22. "The Strike on the Clyde." *The Nation* (London, Feb. 8, 1919) 541. The article is attributed to "Our Special Correspondent," which given our knowledge of the timing of his employment could only be Sassoon.
23. Though Lloyd-George's coalition won a strong majority in the Commons, the Labour Party's electoral performance had improved from 6% of the total vote in 1910 to 20% in 1918; in 1922, Labour won 30% of the votes, electing 142 MPs, and in 1923 the first Labour government was formed. See Laybourn, *The Rise of Socialism*.
24. *Collected Poems*, 11.
25. Qtd. in Moorcroft-Wilson, *Siegfried Sassoon: Journey from the Trenches*, 31.
26. *Siegfried's Journey*, 141.
27. *Collected Poems*, 124.
28. Moorcroft-Wilson, *Siegfried Sassoon: Journey from the Trenches*, 51.
29. *The Daily Herald*, London.
30. *Siegfried's Journey*, 224.
31. *Collected Poems*, 186-87.
32. Qtd. in Moeyes, 68.
33. Bergonzi, 105.
34. *Diaries 1920-1922*. Ed. Rupert Hart-Davis. (London: Faber and Faber, 1981) 73; qtd. in Caesar 100. The phrase "moral equivalent to war" appears in quotation marks in Sassoon's diary entry and is left unattributed. The source could very well be the title of William James' 1906 essay.

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