

THE 'WHY' OF THE CONFLICT

For What Are The Nations Fighting?

By Leon Goldmerstein



TSAR NICHOLAS
RUSSIA



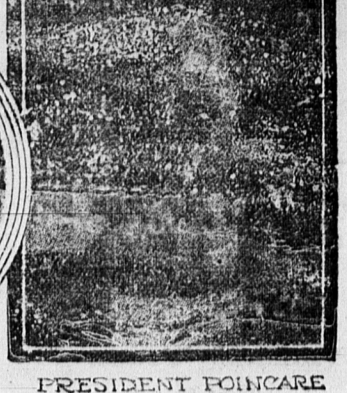
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KAISER OF GERMANY AND KING OF ENGLAND PHOTOGRAPHED
DURING THEIR LAST RIDE TOGETHER
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KING PETER
SERVIA



PRESIDENT POINCARÉ
FRANCE

PICTURE a Western mining town in its lawless days. It boasts four storekeepers—three old timers and one newcomer. Imagine that Merchant No. 4—the new man—has somehow managed to take away a lot of trade from the others. He is afraid they may try to even matters by attempting to run him out of town, so he buys a revolver and naturally becomes overbearing. The only thing for the others to do is to carry "irons." The newcomer now faces a much greater danger than before he "neeked" himself. It is a question if his competitors would have used force to put him out of business if he had not disclosed his own readiness for trouble.

By his own act the fourth merchant created bad feeling. They to break out at any minute. Armed, he finds his enemies also ready. Worse, he is faced by a combination of three against one. So he sends away and hires a couple of gunmen. Four concerns, supporting eight gunmen besides their usual selling force. At best, they are no honor to the community; they do not increase its productive powers. Gunmen are gunmen the world over. When they cannot fight each other they resort to beating up innocent citizens.

Now, under such conditions, what would the community demand? First, eliminating the gunmen. Then, establishing a state of trade that does not have to be protected by revolvers at the cost of the welfare of the entire community. And it would not be surprising if, deep down in their hearts, those who work for the man who first introduced the gunmen were willing to work without jumping for cover every time a box accidentally crashed to the floor. Nervousness in business is a very poor asset.

On a large scale this is exactly the present situation in the European war. The fight started ostensibly because Austria sent out an unacceptable note to Serbia and Russia refused to stand by and see its Slavonic ally crushed. But the profound reason for war was the vital necessity for deciding if militarism is to continue and grow or whether European nations can arrive at an arrangement of reasonable expenditure for national defence.

The pace in European armaments was set by the Germans in the middle eighties, when that nation showed it intended to make a second raid on France. The attempt was frustrated by Russia, but it proved that the peace of Europe could be maintained only by opposing the Triple Alliance with a force equally as strong. The preparations that began in 1885 have proved in 1914 to be useful to the Allies.

Europe has paid a terrible price for peace, and none has paid more heavily than Germany. This price has not been so much expressed in dollars and cents as in social conditions which have seared the very soul of the German empire, a nation whose genius has entitled it to a better fate than that by which it is apparently confronted. Germany is a poor country. Except by the most extraordinary methods it could not have created in less than two generations an army powerful enough to wage war against the whole of Europe.

Germany held an honorable place in the councils of civilized nations, a position of which her sons may well have been proud.

No territorial expansion was needed to give Germany rights equal to other nations.

Nationalism had not demanded armaments to the tooth.

Her trade expansion was hampered rather than promoted by the eternal talk of German aggression, German system of armed peace, "muffled fists" and "shining armor."

Germany's best foreign markets outside of the United States were in Russia, England, France and Belgium. Trade in some of them was promoted by any conviction that every trading by Germany was a potential enemy of the country in which he was trying to make a living.

German interests were not enhanced by any necessity for maintaining, on a permanent war footing among only 69,000,000 people, a standing army equal to that of Russia, a nation of 180,000,000 population.

Germany has paid for all this—as every nation must pay where militarism is carried to excess—by the depressing birth rate.

What, then, is Germany fighting for? To maintain a feudal aristocracy that it despises, yet which exists on the hunger of the people? Or to maintain an aristocracy of officers who are insulted if invited to sit at a table with a merchant or a Jew, unless provided with marriageable daughters? Is Germany fighting for the right to eat horseflesh because burdensome taxes force the cost of life much higher than wages? Or is it to see other nations, supposing France and Belgium conquered, submitting to the same treatment?

The best a German can tell you is that he is fighting to protect his fatherland from other nations. To a certain extent he is right. Germany must be protected now, because it is vital to the interests of every other European nation to crush German militarism—which Prussia has made synonymous with Germany—lest it spread to all the rest of the world.

For what is France fighting? The idea of revanche for the loss of Alsace and Lorraine has been practically as dead in France for fifteen years as the issue that brought about the American civil war. But this French loss has been universally recognized as a punishment for the insurrection of an administrative system that had no chance to come back—the price paid for getting rid of the Napoleonic régime.

That price was not too high! France in twenty years has built an empire in Africa, the wealth and extent of which will surprise any one who visits the wide stretches from the Mediterranean to Timbuctoo.

But France has been solving the great problems at home—eliminating the dangerous influences of many religious orders; strengthening the foundations of a republican system of government that is the basis of her prosperity.

France has been fighting—without sacrificing the people's real rights—tempering of unbridled license and anarchy among certain laboring classes that became familiar during recent strikes. And all through this struggle to do her part in the world's work there has passed like a red thread the fear of Germany pouring its mighty legions across the border and destroying the very structure of French national existence.

FRANCE HAD THE RIGHT TO FEAR GERMANY!

In 1885 Russian intervention alone saved France from a renewal of the horrors of 1871.

Twenty years later France had to dismiss Delcasse, her best Minister of Foreign Affairs, because Berlin threatened war unless she did.

In the Agadir incident the republic again was almost on the brink of war with her troublesome neighbor.

Because certain powerful German interests could maintain in Germany a permanent menace to peace, the French peasant, who hates the military service, which interrupts his business when he is beginning to enjoy the fruits of his work, was forced to stay an extra year in the army and pay higher and still higher taxes to maintain the line of fortresses in constant readiness along the German border.

The Frenchman is essentially economical. He boasts the largest per capita savings. And by making a garden of his wonderful country he saves up enough to lend several billions to Russia, while he is picking up a stray couple of billion dollars of American and British securities. He wants the certainty that his savings will be safe and that his land will not be attacked without cause. He has already the most democratic system of government in Europe. He has practically done away with feudalism, and desires only assured peace to develop the nation's wealth to heights that will astonish the world.

THE FRENCHMAN, MORE THAN ANY ONE ELSE, FIGHTS FOR PEACE, AND FOR PEACE ALONE. Given that, he will pass to those other great changes which he cannot attempt until peace is assured.

And England? Does England fight Germany because of fear of German expansion, or because Britain aims to seize German colonial possessions?

GERMANY'S ENTIRE COLONIAL HOLDINGS ARE NOT WORTH TO ENGLAND THE COST OF ONE MONTH OF THE WAR. And at the beginning it was clear that the war would last more than one month.

Besides, England has seldom expanded her colonial possessions at the expense of the leading European nations. She is not likely to expand in that way, at least, not while so many weak non-European nations, Persia, China, Central Africa, etc., may still be amicably divided. Britain's rule of territorial expansion has been always based on the

principle: *Help yourself, but do not interfere with our doing the same.* It is not worth while changing this policy.

This war was not entered into by Great Britain solely to crush German commercial expansion. The British colonies, for the last ten years, have been among the best markets for German industry. Indeed, the British Isles have probably been the best. Unless Great Britain was strong enough to close her markets to Germany by imposing tariffs and laws, this could scarcely be accomplished by war. Colonies willing to disobey the mother country by peacefully excluding German goods would not be likely to rally round her flag to gain that end by an expensive war. England never threatened to send battle ships to bombard New York and Baltimore because line after line of British specialties have passed into the hands of Americans.

The same toleration might have been expected by Germany if that nation, with almost brutal openness, had not deliberately engaged on a plan to eliminate British trade by crushing England in a war.

Great Britain has faced a situation that obliged her to spend enormous sums for maintaining a supreme navy to protect herself against the enemy across the Channel. While she has been doing this look at her dilemma:—

Her agriculture has been made unprofitable by importations from the richer countries of the New World.

Her manufactures have been forced to compete with the more modern methods of younger nations that produce their output at lower cost.

She has had to face the problem of a labor population that has shifted, in a country where profits are shaded almost to the vanishing point, to live as workmen live across the sea in the midst of booming industry.

Her railways can expect no rapid increase in traffic because of local conditions, yet must raise wages to avoid strikes and improve equipment to satisfy a public educated by the accomplishments of other countries that can afford to invest capital because of these countries' greater expansion.

With all this, naval expenses were not the only burden that militarism laid on England. The nation, to meet her emergency—to fight "for all we have and are"—had to raise more than a billion dollars in the first week of war by taxing chiefly the poor man. Any tax on the rich may fall at a pinch. Large fortunes are elusive. But the poor man is always there, with no lawyers to advise how to conceal safely his income from collectors; no bankers to arrange for him to escape the taxes by the transfer of funds to foreign banks.

Here Lloyd George's mighty effort to shift at least part of the burden to the shoulders of the rich was doomed to partial failure. The army, and even more the navy, expenses became so heavy that the total taxation could not be borne by the classes that could afford to pay them.

England is fighting to reduce her crushing militaristic expenses to reasonable limits, so that the poor man can be relieved of paying taxes beyond his resources and still live a decent life.

England as a nation grew to its omniscience and maintained its liberties through ten centuries of historical development because her three fundamental forces have remained in a happy balance. The upper classes, helped by the people,

prevented the Crown from dangerously encroaching on the nation's liberties. But the upper classes were not strong enough to put the people under the yoke of an economic dependence, worse than living under an absolute hereditary monarchy. The British people—those lower classes which form the backbone of every nation—had sufficient share in the government's administration and in the good things of life to make them stand for a peaceful evolution of the existing order rather than look for deliverance to an overthrow of the entire economic and political structure.

Thus, British trade unionism, by its conservatism, has at ways designated the hotbeds of the Continental labor movement. And, so essential for a long time could not get a hold north of the Channel.

But as the financial burdens of the common people become more than they can bear, there ensues a state of deranged equilibrium; the poor become poorer, and the rich richer, all at the cost of those too poor to sell their labor and their product at a fair price. This economic law works everywhere. The rise of the few modern English millionaires among a population driven to adopt the same destructive doctrines it abhorred only a few years ago is due to the same causes that allowed men like Li-Hung-Chang to amass a fortune of Morganlike proportions in a land where children are thrown into rivers because there are no means of raising them. And when one man grows richer, day by day, where hundreds grow poorer, that one man acquires a political and moral ascendancy. The rights of the community begin to depend on his good will. The class distinction throughout British history has freely recognized the hereditary rights of a group of men. And, as a whole, the country may well be proud of that group. But of late these distinctions have more and more assumed the nature of that feudal distinction between baron and vassal.

The twentieth century is a bad "time" for attempting a recrudescence of feudal conditions.

BUT ENGLAND IS FIGHTING ABOVE ALL FOR A READJUSTMENT OF POLITICAL CONDITIONS IN EUROPE THAT WILL PERMIT ENGLAND TO PUT ASIDE THE TERRIBLE BURDEN OF MILITARISM, WHICH EVEN IN SO RICH A NATION IS STEADILY EVOKING ALL THE MONSTERS OF A FEUDAL SYSTEM OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE AT A TIME WHEN NO PEOPLE WILL SUBMIT TO A REVERSION TO FEUDALISM.

Abolish the excesses of militarism and the British workman hopes to see the method of taxation change so that he will not have to bear the heaviest burden. He hopes to see the cost of living come into closer accord with the motion of wages, since the nation's untold millions will not be spent on battle ships and fortresses. He hopes to see an enlarged market for his products, and that means higher wages for all European nations will become better purchasers of British products, and be better able to buy clothing, rather than see their money go for ammunition. And machinery will hold preference over rifles.

Always it is the same old story of turning the swords into ploughshares. But for the Britisher it has a special and terrible significance! He, himself, and all who once bought the product of his in-

dustry, have been forced in twenty years—to spend so much on swords that nothing remains for ploughshares. ALL OVER EUROPE, LITERALLY AND FIGURATIVELY, LAND LIES FALLOW THAT FORTRESSES MAY RISE—and that Krupp may sell his guns.

The Englishman's home is but a small island. But his interests, industrial, political and commercial, are scattered over the world. And he, more than any one, wishes to see the world live a life which prevents so many from engaging in useful production. Unless this is done, the Englishman, with his world's trade, his ships that sail the seven seas, his investments in every corner of the wide earth, will perish. So, he is stubbornly fighting for lasting peace.

The scenes are the repetition of the Napoleonic wars. Then, as now, Great Britain did not wish to acquire any territory from France, or to crush its national existence. It did not insist on the payment of tribute. But, with Napoleon in France, peace was impossible. The British Lion for fifteen years fought a stubborn battle for the peace of Europe. And there can be no doubt that life in Europe has been better for that fight, or that Waterloo did more for the liberty of Germany itself than did the Sedan.

Later, when Russia became a danger in the East, Britain fought it out in the Crimea.

Now it is Germany which has become the storm centre of Europe. British regiments are aligned with the French. England always pays its historical bills, and is willing again to purchase peace with war.

But what is Russia fighting for? The reason is probably understood least of all in the United States. America is only slightly familiar with Russian conditions and the Russian emigrant belongs largely to a class not able to express its views lucidly in English.

Let this be understood:— Neither the Russian government nor its people are anxious to expand westward, either toward Germany or Austria! Excepting the few millions of Galician Ruthenians, the peoples who will pass under Russian domination by reason of Russia acquiring any new provinces will be Poles or Germans or Jews—exactly the three nationalities least likely to amalgamate with the pure Russian stock. This applies especially to Poles and Jews.

While Polish autonomy may be considered as certain, the Russian people are not interested in having Polish provinces too large. At least, not until the Poles prove good neighbors. Yet, at the best, even if Poland becomes a buffer State, Russia does not consider an increase of the Polish element in her border provinces worth fighting for. As to the Jews, their presence in any new province is to be decidedly regretted, because right now, when there is an apparent possibility of Russia settling the Jewish question humanely and liberally, an influx of something like a million to a million and a half of new Jews is likely to complicate matters, especially if the foreign Jews show a tendency to regard themselves as conquered Germans or Austrians.

Thus, the Russians will find their new provinces thickly populated by two alien races and another race of common blood, but of alien tongue and religion. That any considerable number of Russians will settle in the new provinces can

scarcely be expected. Russia has owned Poland for more than a century yet Russian families who have settled in the nine provinces of the Polish kingdom, outside of those of officers and Russian officials, total a few thousands.

Russia is therefore not fighting for territorial expansion. Neither is Russia fighting for markets. Russia occupies about the same position as the United States did before the Spanish-American war—exporting chiefly raw materials and agricultural products and importing the higher classes of manufactures, such as machinery, chemicals, etc. Russia has a very extensive trade with Germany, which is of great advantage to both countries; and many years and many events will pass before Russia and Germany begin seriously to compete with each other in any of the world's markets.

CONTRARY TO THE POPULAR VIEW, BASED PRINCIPALLY ON HEARSAY, RUSSIA DOES NOT SEEK AN OUTLET TO THE GREAT SEAS.

Time was when she had other ambitious projects on the same line. That time is past.

What would Russia do with a harbor, say on the Mediterranean? Twenty years ago, when the world's fleets were small, cheap and easy to build, and when European politics centred around the Eastern Mediterranean and the smaller seas, Russia, with Constantinople in her hands, might have dictated to Turkey, Austria and Italy and have treated with England as an equal.

Today, besides holding Constantinople, Russia would have to spend something like \$500,000,000 on a navy, with the pleasant alternative of either not wanting a navy at all—if England is her ally—or needlessly retaining this navy under the protection of shore forts, as Germany is doing to-day.

The invention of the dreadnought and the heavily armored fast cruiser has created a situation where nothing short of the best and largest navy is of any use. Russia cannot possess a navy equal to that of Great Britain or Germany. Thus, a military harbor is of no use.

A harbor is useful commercially only when it decreases the cost of delivering goods to a market. It is cheaper to ship grain to France through Odessa, which is a Russian harbor, than to deliver it by rail to Constantinople and there load it on steamships.

So that persons who ascribe to Russia ardent desires for a warm water harbor are about twenty years behind their time!

What, then, is Russia fighting for? To understand it, keep in mind the peculiar position of Russia, in that, while Germany is the chief enemy of France and England, the enemy of Russia is Austria. Germany is only Russia's adversary.

Even in fighting Austria, Russia fights not her own battle. She is battling for the cause of the little Slavonic nations of the Balkans, whose existence for years has been threatened by the Austrian "Drang nach Osten" pressure eastward. These little nations, whose economic and political progress has been deliberately impeded by Vienna's intrigues, are the solicitude of Russia.

In 1877-1878, Russia fought the "last of the crusades," as bloody as and perhaps bloodier than when Christendom fought in the Holy Land to liberate the Christian "Slavs" from the Turkish yoke. During the last quarter of a century the Balkan Slavs have suffered more directly from Austrian intrigues than they ever did from Turkish misrule, and Austria's recent deliberate attempt to crush Serbia proved that as long as Austria, supported by the German War Machine, maintains its armies intact there can be no lasting peace in the Balkans. Russia must see its sister nations crushed under the weight of the Teutonic juggernaut or always be prepared to resist attacks as unprovoked as unexpected.

One of the purposes of the war for Russia therefore is to increase on one hand the holdings of Serbia and Bulgaria, and on the other to reduce those of Austria, so that their relative dimensions will serve as a guarantee of peace in the Balkans.

To bring about a reconciliation between the Russian government and its people a profound event was needed—an event that would make exceptional measures justifiable. The European war, WHICH, AS THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE FIRMLY BELIEVE, WAS NOT BROUGHT ABOUT BY ITS OWN GOVERNMENT, gave such an opportunity to extend the olive branch to the Poles, to abolish the most inhumane restrictions of Jewish rights, to conciliate the Finns, to open prison doors to many revolutionaries, to close the wine shops all over the empire and to start generally a

reconstruction of the nation on a new basis of national and racial justice.

Russia is fighting against Austria for the bare right of the small Slavonic nations to live.

In the battles in East Prussia is being decided a home question:—Whether in Eastern Europe shall prevail the principles of stern militarism, accompanied by ruthless political and economic oppression of the common people, or whether national government shall rest on democratic principles, now considered even in Russia as an essential spirit of its peculiar Slav population, and of which Americans showed a knowledge in their own Declaration of Independence.

It is vitally important to remember that here again, through a curious irony of history, Russia fights not only its own battles but the battle of another nation—in this instance the battle of its own enemies. Because, if Germany is beaten, Russia's reconstruction will be inevitably followed by a similar reconstruction of Germany.

Militarism can only exist if it is successful. If Napoleon III had beaten his way to Berlin, we might now see an Emperor in Paris. We might witness France playing the rôle of Germany—storm centre of Europe. Sedan made France a republic and the world's banker.

It is not likely that the German system of militarism will survive the capture of Koenigsberg and Posen, the payment of a contribution to Belgium and to France, and the opening of a real Parliament at Petrograd. Nations want results and militarism has not achieved itself enough to stay after a failure—even in Germany.

Austria had not been mentioned, because as a nation the Austrians do not know what they are fighting for, and we do not wish to pretend to know, either. Led like cattle to a useless slaughter by an agreement between the Pan-Germanic party at Vienna and the Kaiser at Berlin, they have everything to lose and very little to gain. Their bodies fill the deep valleys of Western Poland, Galicia and Bukovina, useless hecatombs to the Graven Image of Prussian militarism.

Military aristocracy in Germany and Austria brought about this war, and its issue will decide whether the rule of the Sabre Lieutenant is to continue, or whether it is to be replaced by democracy.

The question of taxation is also to be settled. There can be no peace that does not bring a limitation of expense on armaments. This, with the financing of the war burden, must be followed by a readjustment of taxation to shift at least part of the burden on the wealthier classes, especially owners of large estates.

The fall of militarism, more than anything, will help bring down the structure of caste differences. The lower classes will gain socially. Limiting armaments will turn vast wealth into thousands of profitable industry. For several years vast labor will be required to repair the damage done by war. All these changes must not immediately follow the signing of peace. They will come gradually, and when they do come labor will meet capital on an equal social ground, man to man, not under the bayonets of an army.

Labor in Europe confidently hopes that the result will ultimately bring a readjustment of relations between capital and labor, to the benefit of labor and the small investor. This is why the masses of Italy are so anxious to step in and help the Allies, even though fully realizing the great sacrifices that such a step would entail.

To sum up what the nations are fighting for:—

GERMANY IS FIGHTING FOR AN EXPANSION OF ITS COUNTRY FAR BEYOND ITS PRESENT FRONTIERS. HER SUCCESS WOULD MEAN MAINTAINING THE PRESENT MILITARIST SYSTEM, WITH ALL ITS UGLY INFLUENCES ON THE LIFE OF THE GERMAN PEOPLE; AND MOST LIKELY A STILL GREATER DEEPENING OF THE GULF BETWEEN THE GOVERNING MILITARIST ARISTOCRACY AND THE COMMON PEOPLE.

THE ALLIES ARE CHIEFLY FIGHTING FOR THE CRUSHING OF THE SPIRIT OF MILITARISM, AS THE GOVERNING CONCEPTION OF THE LIFE OF THE GREAT STATES OF EUROPE. PEACE WILL NOT BE EITHER THE PERMANENT END OF WARFARE IN EUROPE OR THE MILLENIUM IN FRANCE AND GERMANY.

BUT PEACE WILL MAKE LIFE IN EUROPE LIVABLE, WHICH IT IS NOT TO-DAY. THAT ALONE IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR.