The Last War

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The great European war has come. The truth has almost staggered our imagination, we do not know what to do and the one only definite thought is that we must win. To this end all our efforts are bent. We fight, with the men and women of France, of Russia, of Belgium. It is exactly the same, alas! with the men and women of Germany and Austria. We are all prompted by the same strong feelings of patriotism. We and they rejoice to give our lives that our country may be victorious, and more than all do we each rejoice if we may take the life of another.

Such is war. It is strange, is it not? Almost to a man we, in the countries concerned, have thrown aside what belief we had in charity, love, and the rest of the christian virtues and openly declare for destruction and death to our enemies. In what do we believe?

Do not think that I am trying to preach to you Christianity — "Love your enemies," "Do good to them that despitefully use you." I am not, for have not all the peoples of Europe agreed to say "Hate your enemies," and "Blow to pieces those who despitefully use you"? Yet, I believe, that both you and I hate war, and would rather give our life to save a brother man, no matter of what nation, than we would give it in an attempt to kill him. What then is it that has led us so far from our ideals? In what do we really believe? Let us think quite candidly about the whole matter.

Patriotism

It is certain that the German soldier whom we are trying to kill marches to war prompted by the same feelings as the Englishman. If the Englishman is doing right when he obeys the call of his king and country, and without questioning places his life at their disposal, then also so is the soldier of Germany doing his duty when he acts similarly.

Yet these men each try to kill the other! Something is wrong, for it is clear that if they did well in offering their services, and if they both succeed in their task, their reward will be death. Someone is to blame for bringing about such a state of affairs as this. Who is it? If a native of one of the allied countries you probably reply without hesitation: It is the Kaiser and his gang. If you chance to have been born over the other side of the French or Russian frontier, that is if you are a German you will be equally positive that the fault lies with the English government.

It is so in every war. Had you been born in Russia, it would have appeared to you certain that the government of Japan was to blame for the Russo-Japanese war a few years ago. If Japan had claimed to be your birthplace, then the Czar would have been the criminal.

Now it is clear to all of us that if there is any difference between that which is true and that which is false, between that which is and that which is not, then such differences do not change about simply because you or I were born this or that side of a certain frontier.

If patriotism is to lead us to think that the others are always wrong; it will also lead others to think that we are never right. Patriotism has ever been inclined to play this trick on people, and consequently every army that has gone out to slay or be slain has done so with the calm assurance that God is on its side.

Our Lack of Ideas

I argue this point because I want it to be clear that if we are really to understand what is wrong and how to ensure that the last of all wars shall soon be reached, then we must be guided

in our judgment by something greater than this patriotism which allows us to see one side of the question only.

Let us frankly confess to ourselves what we have done. We are certainly not a savage or blood-thirsty people in our everyday life, and yet we are now doing, or helping others to do, the bloodiest deeds that imagination and science can make possible.

The truth is we are, as a people, at that stage when we don't really believe in anything. The teachings of 2,000 years ago will not fit the affairs of today. Most of us are a little afraid to say we will have no more to do with them, but we should be still more afraid to start practising them.

Turning from religion we fall back on our faith in patriotism, but, as we have already seen, it is an ill guide to reason. Finally we don't know in what we believe and as a result — because we have no definite ideas about life and what it means to us and what we mean to it — we have allowed ourselves to be thus easily led into killing one another, when really we have no liking for the occupation. Those who have led us, we may be assured, have their ideas fixed and firm. The Kaiser and his gang have their views about the German empire and its future, and this makes their action purposeful and therefore powerful. The czar of Russia and his friends, who have been hanging or imprisoning ever thinker in Russia for many years, they have their reasons for joining in this great game of finance and murder. The politicians of France and England too know what they are about — but what of us. We who are not politicians, or kings, or czars, or kaisers; we who serve in the shops, who work in the factories, drive the trains — and, in a word, make and distribute all that is necessary for life; we surely have a very different view of things from those who have organised this war and who call on us to fight it.

If we had a clear idea of life and its purpose, if we knew what we wanted as clearly as do these great men, might we not organise our own wars for our own purpose, instead of merely fighting in their wars for their purposes — much better still — might we not finally organise an universal peace.

It is because some among the workers have a clear idea of what we need and for what we ought to work that this pamphlet is written with the hope that in the near future the workers of all nations will see their way to fight their own fight against the common enemy, and will no longer kill each other because they are told to do so by their masters.

I

Patriots and Invasion

Let us begin with the man in the trench, for though the war does not start with him, it depends on him. If there were no man willing to go into the trench there would be no war — a fact worthy of remembrance for future reference. Today he is a romantic figure, his life is so unlike the monotony of our existence here at home, and, moreover, does he not wake and sleep in the presence of death?

Instinctively we feel reverence for him who stands in the shadow of death, for strangely enough we have more respect for the barren and useless end of things than for the active, fruitful course of life itself but more of this hereafter. Let us for a minute consider the life he has lived rather than concern ourselves with the death he is possibly about to die.

Perhaps our man is a volunteer, or a reservist, and till the start of the war was engaged as a miner or railwayman, or it may be working in some factory. Possibly he has recently taken part

in some strike, and side by side with his comrades of the workshop he has begun to mildly fight for a little more of the wealth of his native land than has been granted to him by those who own it. Perhaps he has begun to realise that the wealth he and his friends are day by day producing, in the factories which their mates have built, is most of it being used to enrich those who take no part in the work and who form a class apart from and superior (as it believes) to the workers.

To the wife and kiddies whom he dearly loved he had been able to give only the bare necessities of life. He has seen them cut off from the luxuries of the world and the joys of culture. His little world, his country and his life have been rendered unbeautiful to him because the best of all which the worker can produce goes to make rich the master class. He has fought against this, fought so that he might bring a little more beauty into the lives of those he loves, and to help the class of which he is one.

His Enemy

And who has been opposed to him in this fight? Is it those whom he is now trying to kill, the German soldiers, or the Austrians? No, both of them, if they are workers like himself, have been suffering from the same wrongs in their own land; they have been fighting the same battles and striving in the same way against those who own the country in which they live.

Our man in the trench then, when he returns from the war — if he ever does — and when he renews his fight for a fuller life at home, will find himself face to face, not with an alien enemy, but with the British soldiers who were fighting side by side with him in the trenches. At the word of command they will fire, upon him, so great is the power of discipline in the army.

The German also, when this sad business is over will return to his daily work, and should he, with his friends, try also to capture a little of the country and its wealth for the workers, instead of the wealth owning class, he will find soon that the German military are ready to shoot him. These facts surely force us to think. And we pause before we rejoice in the honour of dying for our country, for is it not true that we who are asked to die this glorious death in a foreign land are compelled even by the military to live but sad, inglorious lives here at home.

Such thoughts bring us within sight of an important fact, a truth that in future will make us see a quite new meaning to that word "patriotism," so loved by the politicians and all who live comfortable lives.

And what is this new, very simple truth?

It is this: the English army is not kept because of the danger that England may be taken possession of by the Germans or some other foreign power, but it is kept most of all lest this island should be taken possession of by the English. That would be the disaster of all disasters.

If those who today spend their lives in toil and service, were to turn "patriotic" in a new sense of the word, and were to tell each other that the love of their country was so great that in future they themselves meant to possess it, then indeed we should see how far goes the patriotism of those rich people who today are asking us to fight in their quarrel.

Our Quarrel

Suppose that the worker lifted his head as high as does the warlike spirit of the present day. Suppose he argues thus: The factories have been built by us and the machinery constructed by us. The factory gates have been made by us, the lock has been manufactured in our workshops, and

it was we who shaped the key to fit it. What then remains for the master class to claim? Then no longer will we work within on the terms dictated by a class who constructed nothing and only can destroy.

Suppose they argued thus, and further, did something much greater than mere argument, and began to wage this real war — the war of the poor against the few who own the country and its wealth. This indeed would be the conquest of England by the English people, and that is the foe whom our present landlords and war lords would most of all hate.

Now the position of the Britisher, which we are beginning to understand, is not peculiar. The German is in the same plight, as we have already seen. The Russian, the Spaniard — it makes no difference where you may go, there you will find a small party, who own the country, the factories, the railroads, and everything else. In every case this party is backed by hired men, who are prepared to hold their master's position and wealth by force against any who may lay claim to it. This is why in every country the great majority of the people are poor; this is why they are huddled together in the dark and gloomy streets. It is for this reason that their clothes are rough and coarse, their minds immature and their bodies ill fed.

It is to this cause we must attribute the poverty and monotony which lays low the life of the great bulk of the people. This indeed we workers of the world are beginning to understand is an international matter in which we may well take part. It is no question of this or that treaty secretly signed by the representatives of the classes who own the various countries of the world. Let those who sign such treaties, see that they are kept, and if they cannot agree about these matters then let them fight. It is not our business. We have a treaty to keep, it has been signed by the blood of our comrades in every nation of the world, for there is not one of the governments but it has shown itself ready and over anxious to shoot down the workers directly they begin to think of recapturing the land that has been taken from them.

The Patriotism of the Rich

And these great newspapers, politicians and learned men to whom we look up with such reverence, all of them today are teaching us the virtues of patriotism, and asking us to fight side by side with our soldiers in the trenches. But tomorrow, when we have peace, these same kind people who now can think of nothing but woollen comforts and shrapnel, will be quite well satisfied when the soldier now in the trench, is commanded to fire on the crowd of workers outside the factory, whose only sin has been that they loved their country and their kith and kin, so much that they have tried to reconquer some of the wealth of the land for their unhappy brothers.

Indeed is not the patriotic zeal of these great men past all understanding? Today, if the German is taken prisoner, he is treated as well as circumstances permit, and his freedom restored when the dispute is ended; but let an English factory worker escape the soldier's bullet and fall into the hands of the police and he is imprisoned, while his wife and children starve as surely as the wounded veteran thrown on the military scrap heap.

II

The Lesson of Boldness

Bravery is one of the greatest of our attributes, but if it merely consists in shutting our eyes and doing what we are told, then even our courage is not worth much. To be quite frank with one another and with ourselves, we must admit that there is not much to admire in a man who, for a little cash, is ready to kill anyone whom his boss may tell him to shoot. This is the part a soldier has to play. It is his duty to obey without question, to ask if the cause is just is to commit an offence which will bring on him serious consequences.

We cannot admire the position of a man so placed though we may perhaps make excuses for it on the ground that the owners of the country have, by hoarding all the wealth, compelled him either to join the army or starve. Thus is the freedom of our empire maintained.

The Politician's Bold Scheme

The man of true courage is he who thinks as boldly as he acts and acts as boldly as he thinks. Now if we remember this we shall see that neither we, as workers, nor the rich people — the politicians, pressmen, and junkers, who have organised this war — are really brave. In thinking these latter have done excellently, boldly. In England, for example, while the war was being arranged they increased the naval expenditure up to and over £50,000,000 and formed an alliance with Russia (the most brutally reactionary government in Europe) and France, in order to meet the growing power of Germany who was busy in just the same way.

When we have thrown aside all humbug and cant, we are bound to admire the greatness of the scheme that has been thought out. We workers who have organised our petty strikes, and found nine out of ten of the strikers wavering and timidly wondering if they were quite justified in so upsetting the work-a-day world; we who have sometimes, in a strike, known a comrade break a window or seen a policeman's bludgeon answered by a well-aimed bottle, and then have had to listen to the apologies of the labour leaders and the timid among the strikers, who declare that such actions are confined to hooligans and outsiders; we who have seen this lack of boldness can understand at once that we have much to learn from the master class in that property is a detail. Even in its most beautiful form it must be blown to pieces if it stands in the way. Human life, well! that too is a detail compared with their prearranged plans which must be carried through.

Thus Europe is strewn with ruins of towns and villages, and thousands of corpses, and all this destruction has been brought about by scientifically conceived instruments, carefully prepared for that sole purpose during many years of labour. Indeed it would seem that these politicians have the boldness to think and plan on a scale that we workers may well envy. I do not say let us imitate them, for their brutality is too great, but as we shall presently see, our cause is greater than theirs, and our plans must be drawn up with, at least, equal courage.

The Workers' Bold Action

Let us not forget however that while we give credit to the upper class for their boldness in thinking out their plan, we cannot allow that they come within our definition of brave men, for their action falls far short. It is the workers who build and man their ships, their guns; and who manufacture dreary lives to make these marvels of destruction possible. It is the workers who

submit themselves in their thousands to be blown to pieces by these weapons, it is they who bear the poverty that follows in the wake of war — grows so great that in the workhouses of the country our veterans weep with joy in reading of our glory!

Thus we see that it is the worker who has the courage to act boldly, but it is the master class who can courageously think, and so we find the working-class constantly doing great things, but never becoming great itself, because it is merely fulfilling the plans of others, and adding to their splendour.

Great is the power created by the workers who spend their lives in armament factories, but it is power which will be turned against them if one day being in need of bread (baked by their comrades) they should attempt to take it.

Rich are the palaces the workers can build and furnish with the utmost wealth, but should they attempt to enter them they will meet the bludgeon which they have made for the policeman, and be conducted to the prison they have so substantially built, and locked in by the lock they have so carefully constructed.

The artistic dress made by the hands of ill-paid seamstresses is passed on to grace the figure of some women in the upper class and to assist her in the belief that she is superior to the workers who created it.

Verily our blessing have become our curses. The more we produce, the greater our courage and endurance, the greater is the power which oppresses us. And why are we in this dilemma? It is because, though we are great in the power of action, we are mighty small and timid in our ability to think.

Our Future Plans

We have allowed others to plan — and they have done it in the only way we might expect. They have decided that the palaces, the factories, the houses and the land belong to them. This decision they call the law and, as we have seen, scientific force, from the bludgeon to the aeroplane, awaits him who disturbs the "peace" — for such is this state of affairs commonly and comically called.

Thus we are learning slowly, and very, very painfully. Our masters have long taught us the lesson of humility, but now they have set us the example of quite another creed. We see them ready to sacrifice countless lives, to secure the success of their well laid plans, and by the side of their efforts our little timid movements seem shamefully small, even as their purpose seems mean and petty beside ours.

Inspired by great ideals, our plan of action should be worthy of them, we should scheme and organise, and fight on as bold and brave a scale as they.

It is not intellect, but courage that we lack. They are no more wise than we. The policy of the politician everywhere is to increase the size and influence of his country for the benefit of big financiers, and as there is but one planet to divide between them, it follows that each nation can grow only at the expense of another. It needs little intellect to grasp that fact. The politician understands it, and beyond that he uses his intellect no further, but simply accumulates strength to fight.

The scheme by which a small group in every country are made the owners of all things, while the remainder who are forced to work are allowed from their master's warehouses less than enough to go round is, similarly, not intellectually brilliant, but it is audacious, and it is backed by force.

If now we turn to the worker's plan of action and draw it up boldly without fearing to destroy old ideas as ruthless as the master class destroy life and wealth, if we cast aside our humility and timidity, we shall find that our plan of action is so simple, and so plain and obvious that the meanest among us, if he has courage enough, certainly has intellect enough to understand it.

III

The Conquest of England

Let us leave it to the bomb-throwers and war lards to boast of their love of peace. We will leave it to the christians of the churches who have pronounced their blessing on the war, to boast of their humility and their habit or turning the other cheek to the smiter. We will be bold enough to proclaim that we know no peace while men and women of every land are ill-clothed, badly housed and starving in the midst of plenty. What! would they plunge Europe into war because of some broken treaty! Then, my brothers, what will we do when we think of the broken lives around us? Is it war or peace while the babies die in the slums and the rich grow richer on the cheap labour of their mothers?

The War of the Future

It is war we proclaim, the last war, the international war in which the workers of all lands shall be united against the invaders — the rich who have seized the land and lived on the labour of the poor.

This is the war that remains yet to be fought. Is it possible? Nay, it is inevitable. It may be delayed but it cannot be prevented. Already and everywhere dimly the worker sees the injustice of his lot and recognises his folly in labouring so hard, while he enjoys so little of the fruit of his work. Many a man in each army engaged today knows in his heart that the enemy soldiers are men just as he is, no better and but little worse. These dim thoughts only lack boldness, and they would make of each such soldier a revolutionist, who would refuse to fire in such a cause.

It is by this growing courage that the international workers will presently form their army — not indeed an army like that which their masters possess, were the soldiers blindly obey their officers and care not if their cause is right or wrong. The workers army organised for a different purpose must be a very different affair.

Our Power

To understand this we only have to contrast the position in which the bosses and big people find themselves today with that which we, the workers, occupy.

When we make this comparison we shall find to our surprise, that though we have been letting them have it all their own way, their position is weak compared to ours. It is we who manufacture the wealth, and it is they who enjoy it. It is they who organise wars, but as we have already seen it is we who supply the material and fight them. It is they who order our comrades of the army to shoot us down, but it is we who manufacture the rifle. Every time it is our activity, but we have allowed them to think it out.

We may understand from this that our power is of a very different nature from theirs. They give the order, but there is no strength in that alone. It is the prison, the bludgeon, the rifle and the maxim gun — all of them instruments of destruction — these which lurk behind the order and the law, are the real power of the master class.

The power of the worker is of quite a different nature and much more effective. He, when he is bold enough to know it, is the master of the situation because he is the maker of all the things upon which the master class depends. Their power is that of destruction, ours is that of construction. Theirs indeed is the army of death, and ours the army of life.

They will keep from war upon us only so long as the factory worker does his allotted task and produces what the master needs. We will refrain from war upon them only when the factory workers are free and when the people of the slums come out to work with us and enjoy the world's wealth.

More Wars

This is the class war, about which the socialists have so often talked but which they have never waged. It is the only war which can bring the final settlement, and until it is reached nation after nation will rise and fall, and in the process millions will be slaughtered and millions more degraded and depraved in the trade of murder.

It is worthwhile here to lay special stress on this point, especially as some of our amateur recruiting agents have tried to hearten others to give their lives in the present conflict, with the promise that it shall be the last. Let no one believe it. So long as the great empires last there will be wars.

Is it to be supposed that England will maintain unquestioned for all time her position as ruler of the waves and owner of vast colonies all over the world, when we know that young and vigorous races and nations are developing. So long as national ideals, the world over, lead men only to rejoice in the extension of their empire, so long will there be ceaselessly war and preparations for wars.

So long as there are sufficient men who are willing to give themselves in military service to those who own the country in which they live, and others who undertake to supply all the necessities of war, just so long, we may be sure, will the masters be willing to use them to fight their quarrels and settle their disputes.

Wars will cease only when the people have higher national ambition than quarrels of empire, when the people are no longer contented to have their country owned by a class which lives entirely on their labour. In a word the last war will be fought when the workers of all the various nations begin to capture their own countries from the real enemy which now holds them — an enemy so brutal that not only is it ever prepared to wage relentless war against the workers, but in time of peace commits more outrages than the most savage armies of the most ruthless war lords. Figures and facts condemn them beyond the lowest damnation.

What German atrocity can equal that committed by the master class here at home, which enjoys the wealth of the land while millions struggle with and even succumb to poverty? What German outrage can be equal to that which is told of in our infantile mortality returns? None, except those same atrocities which are committed by the German rich on the German poor in their own country.

May we and they soon have the patriotism to conquer our own countries from those who now hold them.

IV

To Defeat the Invaders

Before summing up and pronouncing our final sentence, it may be well to consider one other objection that possibly will be raised. Suppose, it may be urged, that even if we admit all this that has so far been argued, yet the fact remains that the Germans are at our gates. Are we not even to resist this invasion? Let us see where it leads us if we agree that at all costs the Germans must be defeated. It is clear to begin with that, if we are able-bodied, we shall first join the army, and in addition try to persuade others to do the same. After we have taken these steps any opinions we may have against the military system we had better keep to ourselves. We become as hopelessly involved and responsible for the whole thing as is Kitchener himself or any other military enthusiasts, for we have admitted that under circumstances over which we have no control, it becomes necessary to fight.

The military man has understood that if fighting is necessary it is also desirable to prepare for a fight — hence the permanent army and navy. If therefore we admit that the German army must be defeated by that of England we are practically agreeing to the whole army system. Hence we see that there must be no compromise, we must allow those who have orgainsed the war to fight it themselves. It is no concern of ours.

A yet more fatal result there is to this so thoughtless attitude of so many, who while half opposed to war still maintain that we must defeat the Germans. The politicians in this democratic land are very fond of what is termed secret diplomacy. By which the people are kept in ignorance as to the friendships and enmities of the various governments. By this plan our government may be secretly pledged by our politicians to fight, say, with France against Germany without our knowing anything about it, and without parliament itself knowing.

When we are called upon to fight wars so arranged, are we going to reply by saying: “Well, since you have already picked the quarrel we will fight”? Is not such an answer absolutely asking the ministers to continue their secret diplomacy?

What does it really imply? It means: if you were to ask us before things were settled we might disagree with you, but since you settle the matter first we will not dispute it, and will fight for you. And so, taught by the folly of his crowd, the politicians continue to settle matters first; and to manufacture the causes of war in private, knowing that the people will be willing to fight when the enemy is on the march. What is the alternative it may still be asked. How can we do other than defeat the Germans by helping our government who, tomorrow, will send the army to shoot us?

Indeed the only other course that we can take is that which I have tried to indicate, and that is to join the army of workers, who would oppose in every possible way all invaders as much those who now possess our country as those who are quarrelling for it. Each government wants it in order that the rich men of its country may get richer by the labour of the worker.

It is, as I have insisted throughout, the business of the workers to resist the invader, but it is no concern of his to help one invader against the other.

A Golden Opportunity

Indeed there is an old saying that when thieves fall out honest men come by their own. A few workers seemed to understand this when the war started, including those who were responsible for supplying coal to our battleships. They refused to undertake the extra work entailed by the war. But alas! Where small signs of understanding did appear we had the pitiful sequel of the leaders apologising to the politicians for this slight interference in their ruthless murder plans.

Unimportant as these one or two strikes were however, they ought to have been enough to remind us of our power. The labour movement of this country has been composed of men who faithfully followed their leaders without question. They have fought many brave struggles, but they have also been led into many shameful failures, like that of the miner's strike, for which their leaders stand utterly condemned. Now, after cheering, year after year, the speeches made by their orators, declaring that the workers of all lands were united, they have been persuaded by these same leaders to allow the rich of all lands to lead out the workers of all lands to fight each other.

Suppose instead of this labour movement being composed of men who are led by leaders, it was made up by those who, not being blind, needed no leaders. Supposed those who formed it had their common purpose, and that that purpose was to conquer the world for the workers. Their reply to the war minister's call to arms would then be clear, would it not?

We — for it would be we who should form this movement — should be able first of all to rely upon our friends of other nations, for always our movement must be international. We, like our foreign brothers, should tell our war lords that they might fight their own battle. The coal miners would politely suggest that they might dig their own coal, while the transport workers would invite them to carry their own troops to whatever part of the world they desired.

Our Answer

Surely this is the answer we ought to be preparing ourselves to make. It would create a revolutionary situation, and no government faced with such internal difficulties, even thought the workers were not yet strong enough to make a revolution, would dare to go to war. This would be the surest way to prevent an invasion, for certain it is that even though our comrades abroad were not perhaps so strong in their organisation as we were or we so bold as they, yet the workers would still be able to organise sufficient militant strikes to make their government very reluctant to send their army out of the country.

Have we not seen the huge military camps established in Liverpool, London and other great centres during the recent great strike period, that the master class feels none too safe, even when the workers are, as now, entirely unarmed. It would need but a comparatively small labour movement in England and Germany at the present time to make these governments very quickly change their minds as to who was the real enemy.

The danger of rebellion at home would make a fellow-feeling between the opposing governments, and they would very quickly agree to withdraw their armies to shoot their own countrymen. True, it is that we are not yet strong enough to thus defeat war and invasion, but great things have small beginnings, and if we are to wait until we can be successful before we throw our energies into a movement, we shall find that we are always behind.

If we are but a few in this movement, which will by and by make war and oppression impossible, it is certain that we should exercise no more influence by joining the hosts of English, French, and Russian invaders than we have by raising the standard of revolt in our countries at home. Powerful, or even powerless then, as the workers' movement may now be, it should take up its stand of definite and uncompromising opposition to the war.

War is a part of the present system, but it is one of its most vulnerable parts, for the system is based on violence, and when the means of violence are fully occupied, a great opportunity occurs for those who have been kept in subjection and poverty by them at home. When we are prepared to take advantage of this opportunity, we shall find that we have not only rendered war impossible, but that we are perhaps powerful enough to capture our country from the invaders who now hold it.

V

Hate Thy Neighbor

The task which is before the workers is indeed no easy matter, but it is not so difficult as it at first appears. The army is not so powerful a weapon as it sometimes seems. Already the master class have realised that a comradeship instinctively springs up and will take the place of the hatred which it would like to see existing between the soldier and his victim. Referring once more to the recent strike period, the "Don't Shoot" leaflet will probably be remembered. This was a quite simple appeal to the workers not to kill their comrades of the working class when ordered to do so by their masters.

Christianity and the Rich

It is well known that some few soldiers refused to fire on the crowds of workers, and the masters were so enraged that they imprisoned those who had distributed the leaflet, in which had been revived the old teaching, "Thou shalt not kill" — a dogma ever hated by the master class. Several historical examples might be quoted where the army — the last support of the masters — has failed at the critical moment. Thus for example, in the famous Commune of Paris, when the people of France made such a brilliant effort to put into practice some of the ideas expressed above, the Parisian soldiers made friends with the "mob" and refused to fire. These facts all indicate how insecure a weapon the master class hold. At any moment the soldier may become a real, live thinking man, and at the moment he begins to think for himself, he is useless to those whom he now serves.

Friendly Enemies

In the present war there have been certain symptoms which must have filled the war lords with alarm. The daily papers have done their dirty duty with enthusiasm, if with some stupidity. Never a chance has been missed to stir up hatred between the two parties.

According to the German papers the English are little better than savages, and according to those of England the Germans are a little worse. Yet in spite of the huge campaign of lies and all the efforts of the good, respectable, christian people of England and Germany, to make the

working class of each country hate the workers of the other, they have but partially succeeded. In spite of the fact that they have, to their satisfaction, succeeded in getting the workers of so many countries to slay each other, nevertheless the war furnishes some remarkable examples of a comradeship between the soldiers of enemy trenches. Is it not a proof that this comradeship has a tremendous vitality and wish to live, when we see it springing into existence and bearing fruit in such hell holes of hatred as are the battlefield? It is more than worthwhile to give some examples of the friendship of German and English soldiers.

All the following quotations have been taken from letters written to friends at home and subsequently published in the *Times*. Many others might have been quoted, indeed these have been taken from the issue of January 2nd alone. Some of those not quoted draw special attention to the fact that the truce was made by the men themselves, without the knowledge of the officers. An officer of a Highland regiment was evidently taken by surprise by this friendly movement among his men. He says:

> "I was horrified at discovering some of our men actually had gone out, imbued more with the idea of seeing the German trenches than anything else; they met half-way, and there ensued the giving of cigarettes and receiving of cigars, and they arranged (the private soldiers of one army and the private soldiers of the other) a 48-hour's armistice."
>
> "It was all most irregular, but the Peninsular and other wars will furnish many such examples; eventually both sides were induced to return to their respective trenches … Christmas Day was very misty, and out came those Germans to wish us 'Happy Day'; we went out, told them we were at war with them, and that really they must play the game and pretend to fight; they went back, but again attempted to come towards us, so we fired over their heads, they fired back a shot to show they understood, and the rest of the day passed quietly in this part of the line, but in others a deal of fraternising went on."
>
> "So there you are: all this talk of hate, all this fury at each other that has raged since the beginning of the war, quelled and stayed by the magic of Christmas."

The letter from an officer of the North Staffordshire Regiment is peculiarly interesting, because the writer has observed that natural and easy friendship among the "enemies," which is existing underneath the artificial and unreal hate and fury to which the last writer has referred.

> "We had been calling to one another for some time Christmas wishes and other things. I went out and they shouted 'No shooting,' and then somehow the scene became a peaceful one… All were very nice, and we fixed up that the men should not go near their opponents' trenches, but remain about midway between the lines. The whole thing is extraordinary. The men were all so natural and friendly… The Germans are Saxons, a good-looking lot, only wishing for peace, in a manly way, and they seem in no way at their last gasp. I was astonished at the easy way in which our men and theirs got on with each other. We have just knocked off for dinner and have arranged to meet again afterwards until dusk, when we go in again and have songs until 9 pm, when 'war' begins again. I wonder who will start the shooting. They say

> ‘fire in the air and we will,’ and such things, but, of course, it will start, and tomorrow we shall be at it hard, killing one another.”

The third letter from which I quote is that of a Belgian soldier, and its general tone comes as a pleasant contrast to the hatred which our good people have been trying to foster in that quarter.

> “At dawn the Germans displayed a placard over the trenches on which was written ‘Happy Christmas,’ and then, leaving their trenches, unarmed, they advanced toward us singing and shouting ‘Comrades!’ No one fired. We also had left our trenches and, separated from each other only by the half-frozen Yser, we exchanged presents. They gave us cigars, and we threw them some chocolate. Thus almost fraternising we passed all the morning. Unlikely, indeed, but true. I saw it, but thought I was dreaming. They asked us to spend Christmas without firing, and the whole day passed without any firing.”

The last quotation is from an officer of the Rifle Brigade. In some respects it is the most interesting because of the type of man the writer shows himself to be. He tells that the Germans “had got little Christmas-trees lining all along the parapet of their trench,” and adds “I was all for not allowing the blighters to enjoy themselves.” Later, he rejoices that he had his excuse and “I quickly lined up my platoon and had those Christmas-trees down and out.”

Yet in spite of his unfriendly feelings this officer is forced to realise the comradeship which exists, and the all-important result that it someday must have. English and Germans unite to bury the German dead. And then a little later:

> “We gave them some wooden crosses for them, which completely won them over, and soon the men were on the best of terms and laughing. Several of the Saxons spoke very fair English, and some hailed from London, much to our Cockneys’ delight, and talk became general and ‘Peecadeely,’ etc.”
>
> “It’s really an extraordinary state of affairs. We had an inter-platoon game of football in the afternoon, a cap comforter stuffed with straw did for the ball, much to the Saxons’ amusement.”
>
> “It is a rum show: I believe politicians will be wrong now, and that the war will come to an end because everyone will get fed up and refuse to go on shooting!”

Will they? What excellent good sense they would show if they did. Nothing so well as these examples of friendship and comradeship among the men of the enemy armies can illustrate better the fact that the war is not ours of theirs. It is an affair of the governments and we have been asked to be fools enough to fight it. How thin is the mask of hatred that the rich and respectable have managed to stretch over the faces of the opposing countries! Through the mask we are constantly seeing appear that look of comradeship and fellow feeling which is destined by and by to bring together the workers of all lands in a common brotherhood. How clearly we may see how the last war will be reached — when the workers “will be fed up and refuse to go on shooting.”

VI

The Final Victory

Our programme is now becoming clear. It is based upon two simple facts. The first is that the human race has reached a stage where it can command more wealth and luxury, and combat suffering far better than any other race of animals on the earth. The second is that the human race has reached a stage were it is beset with more poverty and suffers more pain that any other race of animals.

These are the great outstanding facts that demand attention. To be so powerful to produce richness and yet so powerless to prevent abject poverty and starvation is surely an absurdity. At the whim of any rich man a palace of infinite beauty and luxury is hewn out of the stone and takes shape and form, but the thousands in our slums live and die generation after generation in fruitless longing, for they are ever surrounded in their hovels by dirt and poverty.

The Real Problem

It is to this great contradiction in human affairs — on the one hand our undoubted power to achieve great things of infinite worth, and on the other our inability even to fill our stomachs or supply ourselves with clean beds on which to lie — it is this that demands the first attention of all who would work in any great cause. It is exactly this subject, however, that is avoided by all our great movements, which are financed by the very people who have captured the wealth of our countries, and who thus produce poverty.

The churches, for example, are engaged for the most part in bitter quarrels among themselves, as to the best correct ceremony by which to show their love of God and humanity. They touch the problem only in sometimes giving to the poor in the name of charity and of God a little of the wealth which these same poor have produced. But for the law and the brute force behind it, which the churches uphold, this wealth would never have been taken in the first place from those who needed it.

The politician it is perhaps most of all who is anxious to keep the people from noticing and dealing with this greatest of all questions. One of the most useful of the many tricks he has for diverting public attention from the real issue is that which he calls patriotism. We have seen how little his patriotism is worth to us, but it is of great value to him. Sometimes it has to be carried to the extreme of war, and at others it takes the form of a huge sham fight on Tariff Reform and Free Trade, but all the time the politicians of all parties and all countries agree that the poor shall be kept from the wealth they produce.

"Look!" cries the cunning candidate at the election. "Look at the German waiter, he is taking your job — the very bread out of your mouths." And thus we are got to quarrel with our German comrade, as to whether he or we shall have the honour of carrying the dinner up to our master. How much better to shake hands and eat the dinner between us without taking it upstairs at all! Is it not clear that they would try to keep us quarrelling among ourselves as to which shall have the pleasure of working for and waiting on them, whereas we should be uniting to work for ourselves and one another, and those dependent on us.

Something to Fight For

There is the whole problem. It is as simple as you like, and when we understand it and face it there will be an end of poverty, of slums and of wars and, in short, of the great bulk of human suffering. Today, the genius and ability of the human race is used to enrich a few and thus make poor the many. It is our work to see that in the future those who create all the greatness shall themselves become great in enjoying what they produce.

Is not this more worth fighting for than the cause to which thousands of lives are being sacrificed today. This is indeed the real purpose and meaning of the labour movement, and thus we begin to see that there is much more to be done than merely refusing to shoot in the wars which are run by the master class, although such action may be a good starting point.

If there is ever to be a time when there is no poverty and no slums, in other words, if the time is coming when the wealth manufactured in our factories will be kept and used by those who labour, and when the land will be free to those who alone can make it bear fruit, then it is certain that that class which now owns it will die hard, and fight to maintain its happy existence living on the labour of the poor.

It is for this coming struggle that the army of workers should be preparing itself today. By refusing to take part in the present war they might have confused their real enemies, strengthened their own forces and come a step nearer the desired end, but the real task before them is the war of the mines, the railways, the factories and the fields. When this has been fought then we shall find there is no master class to make wars and slay us by thousands. There will be no longer the military power, the prisons and our law courts, by which the poor are kept in their slums. Men and women will be free, united by the common purpose of building up a rich and beautiful community, in which they shall have their place and play their part.

***

I, who write this pamphlet, am an anarchist. An anarchist is one who believes in and strives for liberty and is therefore opposed to all forms of government. He believes that the factory workers should organise and run their factories themselves, and that an agreement between this section of workers and the transport group would bring about the distribution of what was produced.

If extensions to factories were needed, those who worked in them would be best judges of what was required and then would apply to the builders' union. Thus by these agreements and activities we should see developing a new complex society, in which there were no bosses living on the labour of the workers, and in which all were free, and where there was no poverty, because the workers would be labouring only to supply the needs of the people, and not slaving as now to produce profits and luxuries for the masters.

It is towards this end, of liberty and wide-spread happiness of earth, that anarchists struggle today.

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The Last War
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Our Masters Are Helpless (ISBN 978-1-904491-32-3) pp. 31-50

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