

The Balkan Conspiracy

To arms! To arms! Thus once again is the "Eastern Question" answered. Turk and Bulgarian, Mohammedan and Christian, are at one another's throats in a frenzy of blood-lust. The clash of arms and the roar of guns once more shake the hills and mountains of the near East, and the cries of wounded and dying men fill fair valleys with horror.

What does it all mean? What has it got to do with us of the working class?

Although some say it is no affair of ours, we emphatically hold otherwise. Before almost all else we Socialists are internationalists. We belong to the international working class. Our grievance is international; our only hope is international, and our enemy is international also. Hence we are interested in every activity that hurts, hinders, or helps our fellow workers anywhere and everywhere.

The Press, the politicians and the parsons are quite certain the war is the fight of Christian martyrs against the infamies of the Turk! We hear from them much of the gross barbarities, the murders and the miseries, inflicted upon helpless Macedonia by the Terrible Turk. But we are unconvinced. It may all be true. The Christian may be as meek and mild as he is usually painted. All the provocation may be on the side of the unspeakable Turk. But the information is suspect. Black and bad as the crimes of the Turks may be, criticism comes with little grace from Russia, reeking with the blood of butchered workmen, or from Spain, dank yet with her blood-feast of Barcelona, or from Italy, washing her hands after her callous inhumanities in Tripoli, or from France or Germany where as late as this year even, peaceful gatherings of unarmed workers have been ruthlessly crushed with the sword, or from Belgium with her Congo record, or from Britain whose capital has almost blotted a people out in the Putomayo district of Peru, with every fiendish cruelty that could be cheaply inflicted.

To mouth the horrors of Armenia, to point to the infamies of the Sultan in Macedonia, as do those who are trying to find excuses for this stupendous waste of working-class life, it is quite obvious, is nothing but the sheerest humbug. Why, then, this war?

Montenegro was the first with its declaration of war—a country with under 250,000 inhabitants—not, in that respect, the equal of the London suburb, West Ham—and as poor as the oft-quoted church mouse. Where did she get her armaments? Bulgaria, Servia, Greece, every one of them poor—who backed them and why?

Why did Russia take up the Montenegrin war loan? Why did "The Powers" take up the Bulgarian loan? Were they moved to do so by the promptings of humanity? Read the cynical answer in the story of past wars.

Japan fought Russia for the forests of Manchuria. Korea helped Japan—now Korea belongs to Japan. The United States fought Spain ostensibly on the ground of the Cuban "horrors", and the Yankee Eagle has his beak in the hearts of the Cubans and the Phillipinos.

The English Government "sought neither gold nor territory" in South Africa, but the Transvaal and the Orange Free State went the way of Zululand and the Basutos'

country—and it was the wrongs of the Uitlanders, who hadn't got the vote, that justified the war!

Every brutal and bloody gang of rulers, sitting armed on the backs of their groaning, bleeding and starving multitudes, have sobbed and slobbered and shed crocodile's tears over the suffering subjects of the Sultan. Austria was so shocked by the miseries of the poor people of Bosnia and Herzegovina that she had to soothe her feelings by "annexing" both these countries. Britain also has been sorely troubled over the horrors perpetrated in the Ottoman Empire, so she relieved the Crescent of Egypt and Cyprus. Russia wrung her hands in agony, and then laid them on Bessarabia. That monument to Garibaldi's genius, A United Italy, itched to stop the villainies of the Porte, so she seized Tripoli at the admitted cost of 9,000 Italian workers' lives, and goodness knows what cost to "the enemy", if we are to believe the Italian boasts of slaughter.

Have we answered the question of why this war? It is the old story of Grab! The monopolists of the means of life are out for plunder. Already the *Daily News and Leader* has published a possible division list of the spoils—of the division of Macedonia—the filching of Turkish territory.

The world's financiers, the world's brigands, are seeking wider fields for exploitation. The owners of the New World are grasping at the old. Bulgarian peasants, Servian toilers, Grecian slaves, are to sacrifice their lives to provide plunder for the moneyed tyrannies of Europe. Women of our class are to be widowed, children to be orphaned, homes to be desolated, to make a masters' holiday. Hence the war fever is aroused, religious rivalries stirred up, racial hatreds and jealousies fanned to fury by judicious but unscrupulous lying—and all that Macedonia may go the way of Persia.

We counsel our toiling brothers of the Balkans, be their religion what it may, to seriously ask themselves who really is to benefit by this war. The "Powers", who so applaud their "heroism", who affect such pained surprise at each new enormity of the Porte, could have prevented those enormities, could have prevented this war, if they had been in agreement upon anything else than the desire for plunder. But they were not. For a generation they have been sitting like vultures on the mountain tops waiting for a beakful of carrion. For a generation they have carefully treasured every discordant element that could possibly engender strife and evolve into "atrocities" because they knew that out of that strife and "atrocities", sooner or later, would come the dismemberment of the Turkish Empire, and the attendant rich pickings for whoever was strong enough to take them.

Make no mistake about it—the "Powers" wanted war. Just as the Christian religion has been the stalking horse of European diplomacy for the last half century, preserving ever fresh the excuse of "Turkish misrule", so now the Balkan States are the stalking horse of that same callous diplomacy. If that diplomacy has not entirely overreached itself; if it has not set up in this Balkan League a power it is afraid to tackle; if the fruits of its machinations have not developed into something beyond its control, then the plums of the Turkish cake will find their way into the insatiable maws of the "powers" at last.

The lesson of it all for the workers is that nothing in the world is sacred that stands in the way of capitalist aggrandisement—which is spelt: "Profits". In pursuit of profits no

crime is too stupendous to be undertaken. We have examples of this everywhere, from the supplying of poisonous provisions to American troops by American contractors during the War of Independence to the deliberate raising of the load line of ships by the present British Government.

Some years ago a novel was published, the essence of which was the situation of a man who had a great fortune within his reach if he would, by the mere pressure of an electric button, slay an unknown man many thousands of miles away. The book created something of a sensation—which shows how very ignorant are the average man and woman of the obvious facts of the world about them. The situation depicted by the author presented nothing new. It just reduced to the private individual the situation groups of the dominant section of society are always finding themselves in, with, of course, different details—the situation they use all their diplomatic forces to place themselves in. In the pursuit of this end every known means is exploited without compunction. Religion, patriotism, greed—any human emotion will serve. Hence the Jameson raid as a prelude to the South African War—it roused the "patriotic" fervour of the "bull-dog breed" to frenzy. Hence religious strife has been fostered in the Near East by the great European powers, in order to provide the excuse that it was the Cross against the Crescent.

It doesn't need the inducement of a great fortune for the button of murder to be pressed in our modern civilisation. We have just been told the price English capital sets upon human life. The silk hats of Throgmorton Street have manipulated the button which sent a Peruvian native to death for—guess what—two hundredweight of rubber! In the Congo human beings were much cheaper. Every fourteen pounds of Congo rubber produced under the auspices of that moral turpitude, the late King of Belgium, cost one human life.

For the mines of Morocco hundreds of French soldiers went to their doom. The armies of Russia and Japan died on account of forest concessions in Manchuria in the hands of a few Russian nobles. An English court of enquiry has just found that 23 British seamen were sacrificed for the freightage of 160 tons of overload cargo. The chairman of the Consolidated Mines spoke volumes when he told his shareholders some thirteen years ago that a victory for the British arms in the war then raging (S. Africa) would mean £4,000,000 a year in extra profits.

Workers of the world, it is necessary for you to understand these things in order that you may penetrate the curtain of excuses behind which it is endeavoured to hide the real reasons for this new butchery. You see from the above how much value the rulers anywhere set on the lives of the workers. What, then, think you, are the sufferings of Macedonian Christians to them? They would press the murder button on the lot for the sake of a concession to run a railway over their corpses.

The working class of the world has only one enemy—the master class. We call earnestly upon all working men and women to join with us for the overthrow of that enemy.

To arms!

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