

## THE WAR OF IDEALS.

Eighteen months ago, when all sorts of people were seeing in the war a confirmation of their own philosophy, the Marxian Socialist, true to his doctrine of economic determinism, and to his habit of scenting everywhere the scheming capitalist, declared the war to be nothing more than a trade war. His view was excessively simple, and he was generally laughed at as a person with a bee in his bonnet, or scolded as a sordid Philistine, incapable of seeing the ideal aspect of the greatest struggle in history. The war was not a capitalists' war: it was a workers' war. It was not a struggle for commercial supremacy: it was a conflict of ideals. We were fighting for the sanctity of treaties, for the rights of small nations, to liberate the German people from Junkerdom, to preserve the decencies of civilisation. The war was a war between Nietzsche and Christ. Such were the contentions of the idealists who talked down the socialist—contentions often mutually contradictory, and still oftener composed of journalistic froth; but since no one cares to sustain the role of devil's advocate, those of us who were unconvinced by the idealist, and inclined to favour the socialist, allowed ourselves to be talked down. What really closed our mouths was not the force of our opponents' arguments, even when backed by the censor and the policeman, but the fact that whether mistakenly or not, thousands of young men, and many of our personal friends, were offering their lives for what they believed to be an ideal cause. If anything could ever justify war, it was this.

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We are now in the twenty-first month of the war, and the question may reasonably be asked, What has become of the ideal aspects of the war? Time seems to be justifying the contention of the socialist: the war, whatever issues it may once have seemed to involve, is more and more being frankly treated as a trade war. What connection is there between the heady abstract idealism which coloured the speeches of politicians eighteen months ago, and the gospel of commercial supremacy of which our own Mr. Hughes is so noisy an apostle? What is the subtle link which binds the cause of freedom and the rights of the weak to the prosperity of British capitalists? And, even supposing the before-mentioned socialist philosopher to have been quite wrong in his reading of the causes of the present war, who can fail to see in the gospel of Hughes the seeds of future wars? What has become, we cannot help asking again, of the war against war?

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Meanwhile, whatever may be the causes of international war and the issues it decides, let us never forget that another conflict is all the while raging, which is a genuine conflict of ideals and cultures. This is the war of liberation which is being fought by the wage-slaves against the masters. "We are engaged," said Mr. Lloyd George to the Clyde munition workers, "in probably the greatest war—" "At hame," came the prompt and pointed interjection. It is obvious to those who have realised the meaning of this war "at hame," that the most important event of the last couple of years has been taking place, not in France, or at Gallipoli, but on the Clyde.

Our capitalist press, with characteristic mendacity, and its readers, with characteristic docility, may cry out against war-time strikes as an example of working-class greed: they may do their best to seize what seems to them a golden opportunity to destroy working-class organisation; some may be found base enough to repeat the dastardly insinuation of the Northcliffe press about "German gold," or to applaud Lloyd George's cowardly attempt to lay on the strikers the blood of their fellow-workers at the front. But the very fact that this sort of talk is current only emphasises the cleavage between the ideals of the Northcliffe-George school, on the one hand, and of the workers on the other. The former class, feeling themselves almost beaten, and unable to take their beating like the gentlemen they are not, appeal finally to a morality which, like their patriotism, is of the John-sonian description, the last refuge of scoundrels. Anyone who takes the trouble to know the truth knows that the Clyde workers, for example, are fighting not for high wages, but for high principles. They are waging war, not against the nation, but against the nation's enemies, the profit-makers, who are also the enemies of civilisation. It is significant of the moral strength of the workers' claims, and of the moral weakness of their enemies' position, that that claim has not been allowed to find publicity in the press. Here is the official statement of the Clyde Workers' Committee: "Our demand is, that the Government must take over all industries and national resources, and vest organised Labour with a direct share in the management."

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It will be seen that the salient point of the demand is that the private profiteer is to be ignored. That is the real cause of the venomous attacks of the press, and not any high morality or patriotism. In asserting the right to be recognised as servants of the nation, with a share in the control of their own work, and in refusing to be the slaves of private profiteers, the Clyde workers are asserting a principle which, as it comes to be recognised, will bring about one of the greatest changes in history. If the workers thought fit to emulate the fustian of the Asquiths and Hollwegs, they might say that they did not intend to sheathe the sword till they had driven out the profiteer, the true Hun of the modern world. Their appointed task is to rescue civilisation from the damnable doctrine of production for profit and the false ethic deduced from that doctrine, and to substitute the true doctrine of production for use, with the ethic of service which grows out of it. No one who has grasped the difference between these two conceptions, and their reaction upon every department of life, will think it an exaggeration to describe the industrial struggle as a conflict of ideals and cultures. The downfall of the wage-system, and of production for private profit, and the building up of some kind of guild socialism to take its place, which are the objectives of the industrial revolution now going on, will change not only our social arrangements, but with them our art, morality, religion, and, in fact, every aspect of our lives. "After the war," it has been said, "nothing will be the same." True, if by the war we mean the war "at hame."