

# What America is Fighting For

[By Lord Northcliffe, head of the British War Mission, in Current Opinion.]

There are many delusions about the upheaval of the world which has been causing the solid ground to quake in Europe, Asia and Africa for three years past, and which has now begun to make this continent feel its disquieting tremors. The German people have been purposely deluded into the belief that they are defending themselves against foes who are set upon crushing them out of existence, a design which nobody but a lunatic would conceive or imagine possible of execution. Austria fancies that she went to war to defend herself against Russia, the truth being that she was used as a cat's-paw by the Hohenzollern gang. Bulgaria is still under the delusion that she will gain the reward promised her by Prussian Junkerdom for her treachery to her fellow-Slavs.

Even among the Allies there exist misconceptions as to the causes and aims of the struggle. A number of English people still fancy that Britain could have kept out of the conflict if Belgium had not been invaded. These people are still unable to understand that Prussia's object in forcing war upon France and Russia was in order to clear them out of the way and be able to attack England and, in course of time, the United States, with a good prospect of success later on.

In Russia the pro-Prussian propagandists have infected many with the crazy notion that the new republic has no interests of its own to defend against Germany, and only remains in the war for the benefit of France and Britain. I have even heard French people speak as if their country took up arms for the purpose of regaining Alsace and Lorraine, whereas we know that France would never have brought upon the world the frightful calamity of war for selfish aims.

Here in the United States I am told, and I have discovered proof for myself, that there are people deluded by German and pro-German propagandists into supposing that "this is a commercial war." It is not very easy to make out exactly what these people mean by that expression. So far as I can learn, they suppose that the cause of the war was commercial rivalry, and that the combatants are each seeking to obtain control of the world's markets. They even suggest that it was a motive of this kind which brought the United States in. The argument runs thus:

The big business interests in the United States were heavily committed by their dealings with the Allies, and they forced the government of the United States to step in so that they might not lose their money.

### False Notes Disseminated by Enemies.

I am afraid that some of my readers, having read thus far, may lose patience and throw Current Opinion down, saying, "What is the use of taking any notice of such arguments as that?" I make an appeal to those who feel that way. I ask them to read on. I suggest to them that it is better to show up the falsity of notions disseminated by enemies than to let them have the field to themselves. It will be useful, I am sure, to examine this delusion and to knock away the props on which it stands.

Prussia's reason for making war, we know. It was not commercial. It was dynastic. No doubt there were commercial interests in Germany which were foolish enough to believe that they would be benefited. But the aim of the Hohenzollerns and of Prussian Junkerdom was to establish a world-dominion. Commerce was to lend its aid, but commerce was to be a means towards the attainment of the war-party's object, and not an end in itself. So much is certain. Equally certain is it that commercial ambitions had nothing to do with

Austria-Hungary's reasons for fighting, nor with those of Turkey and Bulgaria. They joined with Germany because Germany alternately threatened and cajoled their rulers. The men who bear the guilt of their sufferings and losses are the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, who was murdered (many believe with Prussia's connivance) after he had been made use of; secondly, Enver Pasha; thirdly, King Ferdinand, the Coburg fox, who was taken out of his dissolute obscurity to be the tool of the real rulers of Bulgaria, and who has ended by selling the country which was foolish enough to let him dishonor its throne. These three men have not, to my knowledge, ever been accused of desiring to improve the commercial positions of their countries through war. Indeed, their countries are commercially so unimportant that the very idea is absurd.

### How Russia Was Goaded Into War.

Now we come to the Allies. Russia is not a commercial country. Almost all the commerce she possessed was in German hands for many years before the war. She was goaded into mobilizing her armies by the attempt of Prussia and Austria to establish German influence in the Balkans; to insult and injure Russia by showing that she could not save her Slav brethren, the Serbs, from being crushed out of existence as a free nation. Next, it would be stupid to suggest that France made war for commercial aggrandizement. France stood by her ally Russia, as she had bound herself to do by "a scrap of paper." France is an honorable country. Her people keep their engagements. If France now asks for the return of Alsace and Lorraine, it is because she desires a guarantee against further Prussian aggression and because the population are in favor of French instead of German rule.

This brings us to the British Empire. It is at her that fingers are pointed when there is talk of this being a "commercial war." With what justification? With none at all. It is quite true that some classes of German commerce had been catching up with British commerce. It is quite true that German competition, very clever and active competition, had captured some markets and seized a share of others which once were entirely in British hands. But in other directions British trade was advancing by leaps and bounds. No one in England was ever insane enough to propose that Britain should try to meet German competition by fighting Germany.

### Why Great Britain Was Unprepared.

The proposal was made that Britain should abandon her system of free trade under which Germans were able to do business as freely as Britons in any British dominion or dependency. But that proposal was not adopted. What would have been the good of Britain going to war with Germany in order to secure markets? As soon as she had secured them, they would have been open to German as freely as to British trade. The German vice-chancellor, Dr. Helfferich, has asserted that Great Britain's object was "the economic oppression of Germany." How could Britain oppress any nation so long as she allowed the traders of all nations to compete with her own traders upon equal terms?

Further, if Britain had planned a commercial war, is it likely that she would have been caught unprepared? How unprepared she was all the world knows. She had her navy, but it had been plain for many years (all the military writers insisted upon it) that the Germans would keep their

fleet in port and would strive to win victories in as short a time as possible on land. Yet Britain refused to form a large army, in spite of the knowledge that on land her assistance would be essential to prevent France and Russia from being defeated, in spite of the plain truth that after France and Russia had been defeated, Prussia would attack Britain, and so dispose separately of all who stood in the way of a Hohenzollern domination of the world.

Britain had no motive for taking up arms beyond the saving of Belgium and the assertion of the right of all peoples to develop freely and securely as they desire, except the motive which led her to fight Philip of Spain and the Spanish Armada in the sixteenth century, and that which made her the leader of the nations in the struggle against the attempt of Napoleon to become the master of Europe in the early eighteen hundreds. She saw that she must fight for her life, for the security of her communications, which are the arteries carrying her life blood. "The war," Sir Robert Borden said in New York last winter, "has taught us two things. First, that the liberty, the security and the free existence of the British Empire are dependent upon the safety of the ocean pathways, whether in peace or war; next, that sea-power is the most powerful instrument by which world-dominion can be effectually crushed."

### "A Pistol at the Heart of England."

The peoples of the British Empire did not want war. They had nothing to gain from war. They were threatened. They were attacked. Whether Prussia had invaded Belgium or not, Britain would have been obliged to fight in self-defence. It was not Brussels that the Germans wanted

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