
Nationalism — A Cause of War

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Published in *The New York Call*, vol. 10, no. 294 (Oct. 21, 1917),
Sunday magazine section, pg. 6.

Socialists have always claimed that at the bottom of all war there is an economic cause. This claim is substantiated by a careful study of the causes and results of all the great wars that have disturbed the peace of the world since the time of Alexander's expedition, and even further back than that. The present breakdown of civilization in Europe is more than ever due to economic rivalry. It is notorious to all students of history that "spheres of influence" and "places in the sun" are only elegant phrases that really mean exclusive possession of foreign markets and trade privilege. But these things are known only to the careful investigator into facts and to the unprejudiced historian. Kings and capitalists may fight for these things — *people, never!*

Yet it is peoples that must make wars. So kings and capitalists must find some other means of enlisting their subjects in their fights. Many schemes have been used by them — the hope of plunder and booty, the opportunity for rape, and the fostering of the military tradition. But in the 20th Century the teachings of humanness, the softening influences of civilization, have progressed so far that another means is needed to stir one nation against another. That means has been found. It is Nationalism.

The 19th Century presents the phenomenon of the small nation. In America and in Europe dozens of small peoples whose national individuality had long been absorbed in that of some other nation reasserted themselves. Serbia, Greece, Rumania, and Bulgaria arose to threaten by their existence the peace of Europe. Other nations not so successful make their national aspirations felt and heard. These were the Poles in three nations, the Czechs, the Welsh, the Irish, the Finns, and the Jews. On every hand there was the recrudescence of forgotten languages, the revival of "cultures" a long time dead, and with it came the national concomitants: petty national pride, small jealousies, disunion, bloodshed, and war.

At first the rulers of the world fought this new spirit, but gradually they came to see its possibilities, and then, by seeming to oppress it, they fostered its growth and increased its strength. Manifestations that would have appeared silly had there been no opposition seemed patriotic duties in the face of "foreign oppression." So the "oppression" continued, while the forces of nationalism, bottled up for a while, increased until they were capable of exerting a tremendous pressure. Then came cataclysm after cataclysm, and, finally, the great catastrophe of 1914, a monument forever to nationalism in its finest flower.

Economic causes are, of course, the root of wars. But today, with all this nationalistic preaching playing right into the hands of the powers that be, it is easier than ever to obscure this fact. Nationalism is the cloak behind which the economic causes work.

Let us examine carefully the opening of this war. A Serbian nationalist killed an Austrian Archduke. This act, with proper management, was made to appear an offense against Austrian nationalism. Austria made certain demands — immaterial to us — on Serbia. Serbia, deeming her national pride offended, protested. Russia, protector of Serbia's national existence, stepped in. Austria objected to Russia's interference on the ground of infringement of her national sovereignty. Russia mobilized. Germany, under the influence of a nationalistic mania, Pan-Germanism, lined up with Austria. War followed.

French nationalism smarted under the sting of 1870. So France formed an alliance with Russia. Hence, France is in the war. Belgium, too, has a nationalism. Her nationalism was offended. This constituted an offense against England's "honor." Hence, England's entry into the war. Italy, most nationalistic of all countries, saw a chance to "redeem" more of her "nation" from the "foreign oppressor," and joined in the mess. In every case we find *nationalism*.

Of course, the orthodox Socialist will say, "But nationalism is not the real reason; the real cause of this war is economic rivalry." Admitted! But the *people* think it is their national pride that was offended, and this, and *this only*, has made the *people* fight. Kings and capitalists have made a very clever use of the people's movement. They have turned the people's weapon against the people, and the people do not as yet know it.

Someday the large nations, too, will see that one nation is better than many, and then will come internationalism, which means no nationalism.

Nationalism always claims certain virtues as the peculiar, exclusive possession of certain nations. If individuals make such claims, they are laughed to scorn. Why — with what logic — may nations make such claims? Nationalism claims that the culture belonging to one nation is distinct from that belonging to any other. This was so in the past, but the natural evolution of mankind is making it less so. Increased means of communication — the telegraph, wireless, the railroad, the steamboat, the airplane — have caused nations to exchange their products until today there is no essential difference between any one of the countries of the world. Even language is tending to become universal. More people understand each other today than ever before. Governments are coming to resemble each other. Codes of ethics are becoming international. It is only by the most artificial kind of propaganda that nationalism is kept alive.

Nationalists often claim the doctrine enunciated by [Herbert] Spencer, that evolution proceeds from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous as their special justification. It is true that out of promiscuity of savagery rose the nation, and that in the past 2,000 years great nations have crumbled and given way to small nations. But if the nationalists will follow out this doctrine to its final conclusion they will note that it predicates the breaking up of the nation into individuals. This, finally, means the end of nationalism, of group morality, of national consciousness, all of which will be lost in the individual consciousness.

Nationalism is an unmitigated curse. It leads inevitably to chauvinism and to national aggression. It leads to a patriotism for the soil, for the particular bit of the earth's surface on which a particular person has been born. It leads to narrowness and bigotry, to national jealousy and petty pride. Pan-Slavism and Pan-Germanism are its children.

In the end nationalism is the best of cloaks for the intrigues and machinations of kings and capitalists.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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