

WAR AIMS AND THE DANUBIAN AREA

By

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In his recent work "A Radical in Search of Hot Water" H. G. Wells, who during 1914—18 was in control of British propaganda from Crewe House, writes the following important lines:

"The work I did was done in absolute good faith, and the gist of the business is that we, who lent ourselves to propaganda, were made fools of and ultimately let down by the traditional tricks of the Foreign Office. We were kept in the dark about all sort of secret entanglements to which these gentry had committed the country, hopes to the German people of a liberal post-war settlement our masters had no intention of making. We were tricked and, through us, the German liberals were cheated."

"I am not going to be a stalking horse for the *British Foreign Office* again... Most of us know that this time the propaganda activities are going to be far more cunning and elaborately misleading than ever before."

This frank admission on the part of H. G. Wells gives rise to a host of ideas, one of which is that it is itself subject to criticism.

In a period when we were still living in the age of secret diplomacy, we cannot wonder at even Crewe House being kept in the dark about "certain entanglements". Mr. Wells's fundamental error is his one-sided conclusion that

"the German liberals were cheated", whereas in fact what the secret treaties aimed at, and effected, was the partition of *Austria, Hungary and Bulgaria*, i. e., of the *Danubian Basin*.

The lesson which it would be worth while to point out is that the "traditional tricks" of the 1914—18 Foreign Office were far less dangerous than the fundamental conception of the ensuing peace work, i. e., an atomising of the *Danubian Monarchy* which resulted in the post-war chaos and events of 1938—39.

The propagandists of 1914—18 and the Foreign Office should have known the great historic rôle played by the Danubian countries and should have studied the consequences of their partition; for then the world would look quite different now.

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The tragedy of our time is that the minor Foreign Offices created their fake *Crewe Houses* for a post-war propaganda activity which preached, with far less good faith than the great English writer, detrimental "truths", such as that the Monarchy "fell to pieces"; that the partition of the Habsburg Empire "followed the ethnographic lines"; that the new Succession States, if they happened to become rulers over minorities, would treat them better than the age-old "oppressors"; that the League of Nations would be there for the "redress of eventual grievances"; that it was high time to take the peoples out of the hands of "reaction" and place them in those of democracy, etc.

The blaring trumpet of this cheap propaganda penetrated everywhere and prevented the truth being heard.

Who knows in the Western countries even now that the disintegration of the *Austro-Hungarian Monarchy* set in only when the news came from Paris that, owing to the "secret entanglements" to which the Foreign Offices had

committed their countries, Serbia would be transformed into a large Yugoslavia and the young *Rumanian* kingdom into a Greater Rumania, that an entirely new country, which had never existed in the past, *Czechoslovakia*, was to be created, etc.?

Who knows even today that *Czechoslovakia* was a country in which the rulers, the *Czechs*, were in the minority, and that the other nationalities, *Germans*, *Slovaks*, *Magyars*, *Ruthenes*, *Poles*, had never been asked whether they wished to join the new republic? Who knows even today that 30% of *Greater Rumania* is not *Rumanian* or that 60% of *Yugoslavia* is not *Serbian*? Instead of "falling to pieces", following "ethnographic lines", the uncounted millions could be separated from their mother country only by brute force, bloodshed, atrocities, the history of which has not yet been written, although it would be highly instructive to those who committed, or connived at, the crimes of these arrangements.

Who knows even today that these irresponsible operations, which brought the *Balkans* to the heart of Europe, were conditional, — viz. that the many millions of Austrians, Hungarians, Bulgarians were subjected to the new ruling elements subject to the stipulation that the rights of the minorities should be under international control and must be strictly observed? And who knows that out of the innumerable complaints sent to Geneva during 20 years only three or four cases were examined by the League of Nations? No wonder that this unpardonable neglect led to the collapse of this international organisation, leaving everything unsolved.

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And now we are witnessing a new phase of propaganda. Is it going to be, as *H. G. Wells* said, "far more cunning and elaborately misleading than ever before?"

It is very difficult to say. Again, it is not the way propaganda is made, but the final purpose at which it aims, that is important. It is none the less important to remember that new errors may be made if decisions are taken in defiance of the principles of self-determination and of the postulates of justice.

It will be necessary not only to try to build up a happier new world, but to endeavour to eliminate all the injustices committed in the past.

Justice will not be found in the Chancelleries of the various well-paid but inspired sections of the *League of Nations*, but in the common consent of the peoples.

All persons interested in foreign politics should refrain from believing the ceaseless outpourings of post-war propaganda, — viz. that just boundaries cannot be drawn; all that this propaganda has in view is to suppress the truth that it would have been impossible to draw worse boundaries than those which made the life of *Austria* helpless and hopeless; which forced every third *Magyar* to live under a foreign yoke; which over-balkanised Bulgaria by tearing away her sons round her ancient boundaries. It would be a fundamental mistake to believe that the so-called War Aims are a matter which concern only the *Allies* and *Germany*, and that the consolidation of peace in the Danubian area may be neglected.

Had the peace conference of 1919 really divided the *Austro-Hungarian Monarchy* into its natural constituent elements, — i. e., had it not brutally cut that Monarchy up into unacceptable forms, — the economic crisis and the impending storm would have been able to re-unite them before Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland had experienced what 1938—39 meant to them, and would be able to face all the dangers which the "World War II" may bring them. But the lack of harmony and confidence resulting from the

bad conscience of the one side or from the spirit of the other, may bring about conditions in which the territories, the rôle of which should be to separate the two great neighbouring Powers in Central Europe, will follow the policy not of the moderates but of the extremists. It is a wonder that the Balkan powder magazine has not yet produced the usual explosions, and that Hungary, which is meanwhile carrying on the peaceful traditions of the Monarchy, has been able to maintain apparently good neighbourly relations within and without the Carpathians, the defence of which was her task in the difficult times of past centuries.

We have no space here for an adequate analysis of future developments; but we have no hesitation in saying that the *Danubian Basin*, which owing to its illogical partition has already brought about the present catastrophe, will be the source of ever-recurring conflicts until the roots of the injustices have been destroyed. The XIXth century wars started in the Balkans: the XXth century wars will all start in *Central Europe*.

The question is: who will be more successful? The "cunning and elaborately misleading" propaganda, or the Foreign Offices which have learned their lesson since 1919, and will try to put an end to the innumerable Danubian injustices in a constructive spirit?

In our mind no War Aim can be complete or circumspect without claiming a just solution of the Danubian problem, as no peace conference will achieve a sound work without placing, in harmonious collaboration with all the interested factors, the Danubian reconstruction on lasting foundations.