
The Second Great War, 1917-1923

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In this paper, I present a bifurcated interpretation of the history of the Great War, dividing it into two parts, the first lasting from 1914 to 1917, the second from 1917 to 1923. In this way, I want to take advantage of two major changes in historiography that have occurred in recent years: first, a shift of the geographical epicentre of the war from Paris to Warsaw, and secondly, a shift in the chronology of the war, one which recognises its failure to end in 1918. The interpretation I want to offer suggests that there was a crisis in 1917 that separates the first three years of the conflict from the years that followed, and which was largely the result of powerful economic and demographic pressures that destabilised all the combatants, though the Central powers more than the Allies. This crisis abated somewhat in the west in 1918 but continued in the east in an exacerbated form for the following five years. Hatred, hunger and class conflict were radicalising elements in the disorder of the post-Imperial world, set adrift by the collapse of the Romanoff, Hohenzollern, Habsburg and Ottoman empires. Post-imperial violence was endemic in these regions, merging civil war and ethnic and national conflicts that played out in what we might well call the Second Great War. My claim is that the passage from wartime crisis to post-imperial violence was seamless, and part of one complex but distinctive phase of European history, starting in 1917 and terminating more or less in 1923.

From One War to Another

The illusion that the Great War ended on 11 November 1918 grew out of a Western-front myopia about the war, which I for one shared for all too long. Thirty years ago, I argued that among the many reasons for war in 1914 was that Britain and Germany were pre-

pared to engage in armed conflict over control of northwestern Europe. Britain could not allow a German victory over France, which would place the German navy in occupation of the Channel ports, and thereby in control of British trade routes providing 75 percent of the British food supply in 1914. That war, won by France, Britain and their allies, ended in 1918, and the Peace Treaty of 1919 put a seal on the victory, lasted until Hitler's rewriting of 1918 in 1940 twenty-one years later.

But all the other theatres of the Great War were left in a state of chaos and uncertainty made all the more threatening by the potential spread of the Russian Revolution throughout Europe. Who can claim that the period 1919-1923 was one of peace? Various white armies, supported by a mismanaged military expedition of the victorious Allies, tried and failed to overthrow the Bolshevik regime. Civil war in Russia left only calamity in its wake, as did the Red thrust into Poland and its defeat not far from the gates of Warsaw. Italy lost the peace and her parliamentary regime collapsed, with a little help from Mussolini and King Victor Emmanuel. The states created out of the Austro-Hungarian Empire were riven by class and ethnic conflicts, which overlapped in ways that ensured the bloodshed would continue for a considerable period of time. And the collapse of the Ottoman Empire produced anything but peace. In the aftermath of the first peace treaty of Sèvres, elements of the defeated Ottoman army, reassembled and mobilised by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, reconquered their own soil, against Greek, British, French and Italian forces that had occupied Anatolia after November 1918.

War bled into civil war, transforming the face of Central, Southern, and Eastern Europe. One inevitable result of this shift of emphasis in violence from inter-



Fig. 1: Smyrna in flames and the panicked escape of the Greek population, September 1922.

national to internecine was ethnic cleansing. One of the most terrifying instances of demographic displacement occurred in Turkey, where Christians by the millions moved west from Anatolia to Europe, and Muslims moved east into what became the Turkish Republic in 1923. When the Treaty of Sèvres was scrapped and replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, the Turkification of the new nation was codified in international law. The process that began with the Armenian genocide of 1915 was completed on the shores of Smyrna, burned to the ground in 1922. Christian Smyrna vanished; Muslim Izmir rose in its place. The euphemism of ‘population exchange’ was coined to cover the naked reality of murder, rape, and pillage.

So my claim is, in fact, twofold. In addition to changing the chronological parameters of the war that began in 1914, we must also register a change in the character of collective violence over the subsequent decade; for I contend that there was a fundamental difference in the way war was waged in 1914-17 as compared to 1917-23.

What primarily separated these two phases was that prior to 1917, war mobilisation entailed the forced unification of social classes and ethnic groups behind a national or imperial war effort. To be sure, this effort succeeded in a muffling or masking of internal conflicts, as the combatants sought to provide their armies with the men and materiel needed for victory. After 1917, internal conflicts re-emerged, perhaps with added force because of their suppression during the previous three years, turning a culture of war mobilisation into a culture of war anxiety. The former aimed at unity, while the latter focused on internal divisions, hatreds and resentments, some long-standing, some newly invented or deployed in new ways.

In effect, in early 1917, after 30 months of war, all combatants faced the emergence of this different, second type of war culture. Alongside *l'Union sacrée* there emerged a host of fractures, with the suspicion, or worse, of one's fellow countrymen providing the basis for attacks – rhetorical or physical – that previously had focused on the enemy. By 1917, the enemy lived within the gates, posing a threat to the nation

and the war effort. This was as true of Irishmen in revolt against Britain in 1916 as it was of Jews in Imperial Germany, whose supposedly low levels of military participation became the subject of a botched army census that wound up proving the opposite. Jews were in fact disproportionately present at the front. The Jewish census was quickly shelved and the archives destroyed, but the sentiments behind it festered.

The war within took on a new form on the Ides of March 1917, the day that Tsar Nicholas II abdicated. Now, the old order on both sides faced a new menace: the prospect of social unrest leading to revolution and civil war. The spectre of trans-national class conflict intersecting with global military conflict justifies our sense of rupture in the midst of the Great War. That threat fed the new culture of war anxiety, which emerged as the material and human toll the conflict exacted spiralled to unprecedented levels. It is this upheaval, evident from the early months of 1917, which requires us to divide the war into two parts. Bitterness about domestic traitors grew and deepened ominously after the Armistice of November 1918. The politics of *domestic* division and hatred dominated political, economic, and social life for years thereafter.

Thus, by mid-1917 both sides of the conflict experienced a sea change in the way they understood the war. They moved away from a culture of war mobilisation, appropriate to what was essentially an imperial conflict, towards a culture of war anxiety informing the revolutionary and post-imperial conflicts in 1917-18 and after.

This difference between imperial and revolutionary perspectives was made blindingly explicit on 23 November 1917, when the new Bolshevik regime in Russia published verbatim in *Pravda* the contents of reports emanating from the Tsar's Foreign Ministry, producing undeniable evidence of the imperial future the Allies had in mind. These imperial ambitions became problematic when the United States entered the war in April 1917. President Wilson's commitment to open diplomacy and the principle of self-determination cut right across the imperial outlook and designs of the other belligerents. If tens of millions of men had suffered and died on both sides simply so that imperial power could change hands, then those leading these nations at war who claimed they were champions of democracy were liars and hypocrites.

Multiple social divisions re-emerged in a deepened form, in this, the opening phase of the Second Great

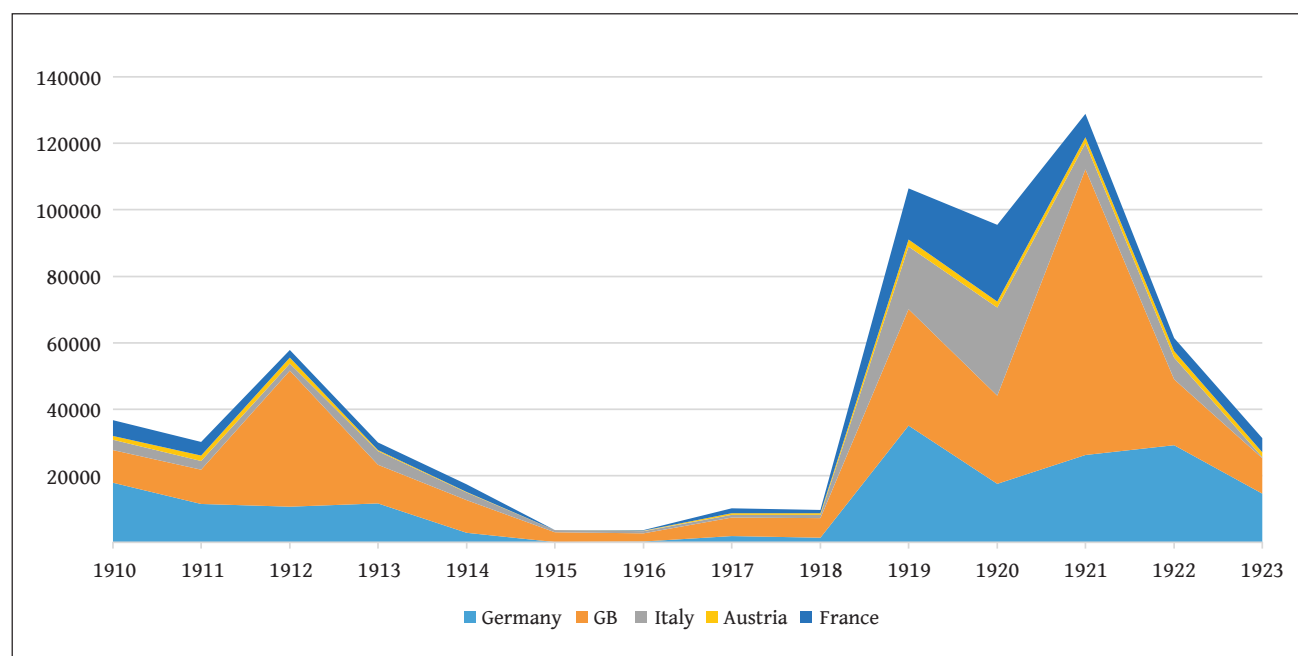


Fig. 2: The international wave of strikes: Germany, Britain, Italy, Austria and France, 1910-1923.

Month-Year	Specie in Reichsbank	Notes in Circulation
Sept-1914	1,787	4,491
Sept-1915	2,457	6,158
Sept-1916	2,503	7,370
Sept-1917	2,506	10,205
Sept-1918	2,563	15,334

Table 1 with Reichsbank gold holdings and paper notes in circulation, 1914-1918 (millions)¹.

War, and on both sides. Independently of the Russian revolution, domestic conflict broke out in industry. After three years of industrial mobilisation, the first stage of a series of massive strike-waves spread through Europe, lasting until roughly 1923.

The phenomenon was war-related in the way it reflected wartime inflation and inequality of sacrifice, but it also followed secular trends. Since the 1880s, moments of major trade union growth were often followed by strike activity. The year 1917 presented no exception; there had been a massive influx into trade unions in all combatant countries after 1914.

Furthermore, the intensity of the strikes in 1917 and after suggested that the postponement of workers' demands regarding wages and conditions of labour, which had occurred in all belligerent countries and some neutral ones since 1914, acted like the lid of a pressure cooker. Inflation fuelled the fire, and trade unions and other social groups, in particular women protesting shortages and outrageous food and fuel prices, took to the streets or laid down their tools. They did so despite understanding the desperate needs of the war machine.² Indeed, the March revolution in Russia was triggered by a women's protest over bread prices.

Wartime inflation was much worse among the Central powers than among the Allies. In part this was because Germany could not borrow on the international capital market in the way the Allies could. But it was also a political choice, a gamble by the German leadership that it could just print money and recover later by exploiting those countries they intended to crush. The critical moment when price inflation began its exponential leap was in late 1916, when the German high command came to power and ordered a

second industrial mobilisation as the means to victory. In Table 1, we can see that in mid-1917, Germany printed four times as many Deutschmarks as it had in its reserves; a year later, the figure was six times the reserves, and then the floodgates opened. In Table 2, we find confirmation that Germany ran its war effort differently than Britain did. Germany quadrupled the money in circulation; it paid for the war by inflation. Britain in contrast doubled the money supply; it paid for the war mostly by loans. Inflation destroyed savings, and created the conditions in which, despite or even because of price controls, a thriving black market operated. Inflation lined the pockets of the rich and made it necessary for everyone in Germany to break the law in order to feed their families. The way Germany waged the economic war ensured that class struggle would take on a new and more dangerous form in 1917; it pointed to the glaring gap between the profiteers and everyone else and between a corrupt elite and a cold and hungry population, worn out by three years of war.

Unsurprisingly, in 1917, the domestic political truce of the first half of the war came to an end. The German Social Democratic Party split in early 1917; those wanting an end to the war met at Gotha on 6 April and founded the USPD, the Independent Social Democratic Party. Once again, women's groups were prominent in this radicalisation of the political left. The British Liberal party also split, in part over personalities, in part over conscription and the suppression of the 1916 rising in Ireland. In France, Georges Clemenceau (1841-1929), who became prime minister in November, was a divisive leader. He had his Radical colleague Joseph Caillaux (1863-1944) arrested for advocating peace negotiations: Caillaux was convicted of treason in 1918.³

Wartime violence exposed violent internal conflicts within the combatant countries. In 1917, bloody race riots broke out in the United States in East St Louis, Illinois, and even more ominously in Houston, Texas, where 156 black soldiers mutinied. Sixteen civilians and four soldiers died during the riots. Subsequently, 19 soldiers were hanged and over 40 imprisoned for long terms.⁵ In 1918, American socialist leader Eugene Debs (1855-1926) went to prison for violating the Espionage Act by urging men to resist the draft.⁶ One opponent of the war, Robert Prager (1888-1918), a German national and trade unionist, was

	Monetary base				Money supply			
	Germany		Britain		Germany		Britain	
Date	Marks	% increase per annum	Pounds	% increase per annum	Marks	% increase per annum	Pounds	% increase per annum
31 Dec. 1913	7,22		259		17,233		1,154	
31 Dec. 1914	10,157	+ 41	367	+ 42	19,514	+ 13	1,329	+ 15
31 Dec. 1915	11,918	+ 17	359	- 2	23,175	+ 19	1,434	+ 8
31 Dec. 1916	15,912	+ 34	419	+ 17	29,202	+ 26	1,655	+ 15
31 Dec. 1917	24,789	+ 56	471	+ 12	43,801	+ 50	1,939	+ 17
31 Dec. 1918	43,608	+ 76	624	+ 32	66,359	+ 52	2,429	+ 25

Table 2 with changes (%) in the monetary base and money supply, Britain and Germany, 1913-1918⁴.

lynched in Maryville, Illinois. His killers were acquitted.⁷ The gloves were off in domestic as well as in global politics.

Polarisation marked the advent of the increasingly strident political right as well. When the German *Reichstag* issued its peace resolution in July 1917, disgruntled deputies and their supporters set up the *Vaterlandspartei* (Fatherland party), with the notable support of Admiral von Tirpitz (1849-1930) and the industrialist Alfred Hugenberg (1865-1951).⁸ By then, the German war effort was almost entirely in the hands of a military-industrial group that gave the army whatever it needed, but at the price of creating massive bottlenecks and shortages on the home front. Social protest intensified just as economic difficulties multiplied.

For the French, the war crisis of early 1917 antedated the Chemin des Dames offensive and the mutinies which followed its failure. There is no evidence that social agitation on France's home front influenced these mutinous soldiers, who refused to continue the futile and bloody offensive launched by General Nivelle (1856-1924) on 16 April.⁹ Instead, both the mutiny and the existence of widespread unrest on the home front reflected the exhaustion and anger felt by a substantial part of the French population. To them, as to many around the world, the war appeared to be endless. The war of 1914-1917 had pro-

duced a massive stalemate. Neither side enjoyed an advantage sufficient to bring the warring parties to the conference table. In 30 months of war, the two sides had lost perhaps seven million men killed in action or dead of wounds, and another 15 million wounded or made prisoners of war. The giant campaigns of 1916, which we today call the battles of Verdun and the Somme, had not changed by one iota the strategic balance on the Western front. Fatigue, anger, suspicion and social friction were evident everywhere.

If only for this reason, I believe it makes sense to divide the Great War in two. The first Russian revolution may be taken to be a turning point, the moment that the political character of the war changed. I call it the 'climacteric' of 1917, both internationally and domestically.¹⁰ The Russian revolution did not cause this crisis; it embodied a larger sea change in public attitudes to the war.

In France, the slow but palpable development in 1917 of a new set of representations of war was hardly surprising. After all, it was only 46 years earlier – that is, within living memory – that a communist revolution in Paris had followed a failed war. Earlier traditions of revolutionary warfare in the 1790s were also a mainstay of the history taught in French schools. In 1917, alongside older images of the determination of the French nation to fight on until victory, there

appeared a new and striking set of representations of la *Grande Guerre* as an apocalypse, as the end of one world and the beginning of another. For example, the winner of the Prix Goncourt in 1916, Henri Barbusse (1873-1925), ended his novel *Le Feu* with a post-apocalyptic scene of soldiers on both sides emerging from the trenches with a vision of a new world to build. Barbusse had been severely wounded in combat. He was not a pacifist, but a man who spoke for a growing number of people who believed that the war had to transform the international order that had precipitated the catastrophe.

The strength of the 'imperial' war cultures of the 1914-1917 period was that they were dominated by compelling representations of war as a fight to preserve old and valued ways of life.¹¹ The new 'revolutionary' war cultures of the 1917-and-after period were marked by anger and a sense of domestic injustice, as well as more than a touch of what Nietzsche termed *ressentiment*.¹² But they also gestured towards

positive transformations, in the hope that something good would come out of the conflict's immense suffering. The two antipodes – imperial war and revolutionary war – were both in play from 1917 on.

If I have persuaded you that the Great War fractured in 1917, it still remains for me to persuade you that the new culture of war anxiety, with its emphasis on the enemy within, informed the collective violence that continued in Europe, in particular in Central, Southern and Eastern Europe, until 1923. If so, it then follows that the Second Great War may be dated from 1917 to 1923.

Post-Imperial Violence against Civilians

The end of the war in 1918 signalled the beginning of a number of wars to determine the borders of post-imperial Eastern Europe. Much of this violence was directed against civilians. When the nascent Polish army defeated Ukrainians and captured the Galician



Fig. 3: Sacked Hasidic synagogue in Lwów, after November 1918 pogrom.

city of Lwów, there followed from 22 to 24 November an attack on Jews and Jewish property in the city. Approximately 150 Jews were killed and 500 shops destroyed.¹³

The Piłsudski-Paderewski government condemned the attacks, which they ascribed to bandits and others driven to violence by hardships and hunger. Hagen's study of the violence reveals the source of anger was the perceived difference between Jewish wealth and Polish poverty, configured in such a way that the Jews symbolically or materially 'owed' their Polish attackers the goods (and lives) they took. Here is evidence of the breakdown of law and order in the aftermath of the Armistice; the spill over of wartime hatreds into post-war violence directed against a Jewish minority whose 'neutrality' as between Ukrainians and Poles was seen as a smokescreen for betrayal. Violence, including murder, thus informed a kind of retributive justice in the eyes of the perpetrators.

There is substantial evidence of the unleashing of violence on ethnic, class or national enemies throughout Eastern Europe in the first months after the Armistice. One case is now known as the Finnish civil war. It started in February 1918, with an offensive by armed groups supported by the new Bolshevik regime. Aligned against them were conservative forces backed by the German army, whose military detachments were in Finland. Battles for Tampere and Helsinki were won by the White Guard and German force, and plans to establish a German-backed monarchy in Finland were dashed only by the November defeat of Germany. What made this encounter significant was the use of terror not only during the fighting, but in its aftermath as well. Perhaps 12,500 Red Guards died in captivity at the hands of the Whites. Here is one case among many to suggest that when national wars bled into civil wars, the limits on the maltreatment both of civilians and of those in uniform, whether prisoners or not, disappeared.¹⁴

The civil wars in the Baltic States showed the same resort to indiscriminate violence. On 1 December 1918, Latvian territory was invaded by Bolshevik forces. Riga fell to them on 3 January 1919. Thereafter, an unstable alliance of Latvian and Estonian forces, alongside elements of German para-military groups pushed back, first against the Bolsheviks, and then against each other. German forces captured Riga

on 22 May, but then refused to leave. They had their own agenda: to create a German presence in the Baltic States. This mad idea – mad in the context of a lost war – vanished when they were expelled by their erstwhile allies, the combined Latvian and Estonian forces. Further fighting established Latvian independence, ratified by the Latvian-Soviet Treaty of 1920.¹⁵

What happened in the Baltic States was a microcosm of the civil war that waged across Soviet Russia from 1917 to 1922. My aim is not to give a full account of the dozens of civil wars going on within the greater struggle for mastery of post-imperial Russia;¹⁶ it is merely to signal that from Helsinki to Yerevan and beyond that to Vladivostok, sporadic to intensive explosions of violence marked the conflicts over the future of what ultimately became the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.¹⁷

My claim here is twofold. First, these internecine conflicts were exercises in butchery and pillage under conditions of hunger verging on famine. Second, the civil war was deformed by the presence, albeit in relatively small numbers, of Western troops who initially took Bolshevik Russia's withdrawal from the conflict as treachery, and who were determined to reassert Western interests in Russia by the overthrow of the Bolshevik regime itself. Their failure and that of their many allies in the White armies to do so was as decisive in ending the second Great War as the Bolshevik revolution was in ending the first Great War in 1917.

What was distinctive about the Russian civil war – alongside the Polish war of Independence and the Baltic civil wars – was the extent to which civilians were caught up in the cross-fire in ways that made the first Great War in most instances look relatively polite and orderly. A taste of the cruelties of these civil wars may be gained by a perusal of Anna Akhmatova's (1889–1966) poetry, Isaac Babel's (1894–1940) *Red Cavalry* or Pasternak's *Dr Zhivago*.

The exception to this distinction between pre- and post-1917 is the Armenian genocide. That crime provides the bridge between the first Great War and the second, since it announced a policy of war against a people not for what they were said to have done – supported the Russian war effort – but for who they were. Biopolitics, in the form of the murder of a people, became a weapon of war in 1915.

Here was a harbinger of terrible things to come, both in the Second Great War and after.¹⁸ Similarly premonitory were the crimes associated with red and white terror, first in Berlin and Munich, and then in Budapest in 1919 and after. The violence of these civil wars left a legacy of bitterness that took generations to fade away.

Hunger and Famine

The Second Great War, stretching from 1917 to 1923, also resembles the first Great War with respect to hunger. Food shortages and the lack of basic necessities crippled the war effort of Germany and Austria-Hungary in 1917, just as they did in many parts of the Russian and Ottoman empires. Indeed, I have argued that these shortages were built into the way the war was waged within the Central powers. The Allies proved capable of distributing the goods and services needed by the armed forces without consigning their own peoples to hunger and disease. Here again, 1915 offered a foretaste of the problem of food shortages that spread throughout Eastern Europe from 1917 on.¹⁹ Civilians in occupied Belgium and France – children in particular – were fed by the first foreign aid programme in history, the American relief effort. In the last two years of the war, hunger was a major factor in exposing the fundamental weakness in the Central Powers' way of waging war. The problem lay less in supply than in distribution. The Allies controlled prices and profits, while in Germany the worst price inflation in world history began in 1917 and abated only in 1923. Inflation destroyed savings, crippled markets and distribution networks, empowered a massive black market and exacerbated internecine hatreds.

Twenty years later, Hitler made sure that the German people would not once again go hungry in a world war. He displaced onto the shoulders of Jews and other *Untermenschen* the misery that the German leadership had forced on its own population from 1917 on.²⁰

Worse was to come in the second Great War. Part of the reason was that Germany's military collapse left its forces deep within the old Russian Empire. Virtually all the grain-producing areas were sites of on-going violence, and the power vacuum produced by the Armistice meant that 1919 was going to be a year

of hunger for the bulk of the population living in the east, including in the new Bolshevik Russia, assailed on all sides by counter-revolutionary bands and armies.

The Allies made things worse – in clear violation of international law – by continuing the blockade of German ports until the German delegation signed the Peace Treaty in June 1919. That meant hunger and soaring death rates in Vienna and Berlin, but also in the densely populated areas of the new Poland and adjacent territories. A demographic crisis followed, with outbreaks of typhus, dysentery, and cholera made worse by the appearance of the worst influenza pandemic in world history.

In 1919, the US Congress established the American Relief Administration. In the following four years, it provided food aid to 23 European countries, as well as to Turkey and the remains of the Ottoman Empire. One-fifth of this aid went to Poland, feeding Polish schoolchildren, and probably feeding Polish soldiers in the Polish-Soviet war. In 1921, famine of potentially catastrophic proportions impelled the Bolshevik government to work with the Hoover Food Aid program. It worked because Hoover realised that even though agricultural production was crippled by war and civil war, the real problem of avoiding famine was the need to provide transportation through a chaotic and strife-torn rural landscape. That he did, using his expertise as a civil engineer with knowledge of the Russian terrain. He was not alone. There were many other European and local agents who made a difference. Together, they were able to save the lives of a generation of children in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus.²¹

No one has been able to provide a reliable accounting of the loss of life that took place during the Russian civil war and the Polish-Soviet War. Demographer Boris Urlanis (1906-1981) claimed that the figure of 300,000 was the most nearly accurate for those who died in combat in the Polish-Soviet war; of these deaths, perhaps 175,000 were suffered by the White armies and civilians, and 125,000 by the Red armies. But to account for those on both sides who died of disease he added a figure of 450,000. No one knows how many perished in the White and Red Terror in Russia, or in the countless skirmishes that marked the civil war as a whole. Caution suggests that we accept that the total number who died of disease, combat, or exe-



Fig. 4: Women thank the representatives of the American Aid Administration, Samara Province, 1922.

cution exceeded one million in what became the Soviet Union. These losses crippled the new regime, and according to Orlando Figes, the industrial working class, in whose name the Revolutions of 1917 were launched, had disappeared five years later. The Soviet state took the place of this vanished class, and we all know the devastating consequences of this series of catastrophes – Figes calls it ‘a people’s tragedy’²² – when Stalin and his circle took over the Soviet state and waged war on his own people for nearly 30 years.

Conclusion

I am not one of those historians who believe in the concept of a Thirty Years War lasting from 1914 to 1945. Hitler changed the meaning of war first in 1939 in Poland and then again in 1941 when he invaded the Soviet Union and turned war as politics into war as racial extermination. All the same, one of the advantages of the notion that there were two Great Wars between 1914 and 1923 – not just one which ended in 1918 – is that it provides us with clues as to what led from the First World War to the Second. The politics of hatred, of hunger and of the maltreatment of civilians can be traced directly to what I call the first

Great War from 1914 to 1917, but these vectors of violence were profoundly deepened and radicalised during the second Great War from 1918 to 1923. Anti-Semitism was alive and well before these dates, but it grew by leaps and bounds in 1918 and after. The viciousness of the confused fighting among different armies representing different national factions and ethnic groups only worsened when these conflicts were fused (and confused) with the Russian civil war.²³

It is in the period of 1918 to 1923 that we can find abundant evidence of the process historian George Mosse (1918-1999) terms ‘brutalisation’. He used it in a different sense than I use it today. He believed that exposure to mass death in 1914-18 brutalised both the men who endured it and the societies for which they fought.²⁴ I believe he is mistaken on this point. The shocking effects of the great battles of Verdun and the Somme should never be underestimated, but the overwhelming majority of the men who fought them returned either to combat or to their homes as recognisable human beings, with their commitments and values more or less intact.²⁵ Mosse, I contend, is wrong on the dating but right on the essence of the story; for there exists abundant evidence that there

was a far-reaching brutalisation of norms – much more damaging than the brutalisation of individuals – in the period 1918-23 and after. It was then that economic and demographic disasters hit societies in a state of disorder and weakness that simply did not exist on the eve of the First World War. 1913 was a good year; 1919 was a terrible one. After 1918, civil war was fought out against the backdrop of famine, class conflict and ethnic hatreds not unknown, certainly, before 1918, but not mixed together in the same witches' brew.

In a nutshell, the historiographic shift I propose in this keynote lecture is to limit the prevailing interpretation of total war to the years it best describes, namely, 1914 to 1917, and to apply the term 'post-imperial civil war' to the much more chaotic, vicious and costly configuration of violence that spread all over Eastern and Southern Europe in the period of the second Great War.

It is not in the first Great War of 1914-17 but in this second Great War that the seeds of the radical conflicts of the 1930s must be sought. The German army in 1914 to 1917 was in no sense a prototype of the Nazi armies under Hitler, but when Ludendorff and Hindenburg took over in late 1916, they started a transition that slowly but surely prepared the way for the dark future ahead. The same is true for the Soviet Union, where civil war turned a regime with many facets, including both liberal and authoritarian ones, into a monster. Without Italy's diplomatic failures in Paris in 1919 and the parallel intensification of class conflict in the immediate aftermath of the war, Mussolini would have had no chance of seizing power. Contingency matters. And the contingent processes that won out in the second Great War were hardly democratic. Despite a period of recovery in the later 1920s, the world economic crisis exposed the anti-democratic political tendencies feeding off the profound social and ethnic divisions that remained the ultimate legacy of the second Great War. The tragic dimension of the Great War was evident well before 1917, but until now historians have emphasised the theme of remobilisation, as marking the renewal in that year of the commitment of home populations to the even greater sacrifices required of them three years after the outbreak of the war.²⁶ The full story, however, is more complicated. It needs to acknowledge that after three years of war there was a

shift away from an emphasis on mobilisation of whole societies and a dangerous deepening of the social fissures within them. What I term the culture of war anxiety expressed an increasing sense of anger over injustice and privilege, which cut right across the *union sacrée* of the first part of the conflict. The emergence of this competing war culture, one of resentment rather than of rallying around the flag, constituted, I claim, a significant development in the cultural history of the Great War.

The culture of war anxiety remained in evidence long after the formal end of the conflict. At the level of family life, deep anxiety was inevitable in the case of widows, orphans and those caring for the millions of men wounded in the war. Divorce rates in many parts of Europe reached levels much higher than in pre-war years. Would the victors realise the peace for which they had paid so high a price? Would the vanquished ever be able to escape from the disaster of the war and of the peace following it?

Here, too, the concept of a different war culture emerging in the second half of the conflict and enduring after the armistice provides a way of avoiding the binary thinking that has long dominated the literature in the field. Instead of insisting on black and white choices – patriotism versus pacifism, consent versus coercion, mobilisation versus mutiny – we should recognise that the predominant colour of wartime was grey. Contradictory messages existed in vigorous incompatibility. The Great War was simply too big to be encompassed by one cultural code or by one war culture.

In 1917 and after, the culture of war anxiety did not so much displace the culture of war mobilisation as challenge and destabilise it. Most contemporaries still yearned for victory, but not at any price. This was the most disturbing message of the Bolshevik revolution, one which haunted all combatants in the last year of the war.

Focusing on the emergence of a culture of war anxiety in 1917 also helps us go beyond another binary division: that of cultural mobilisation during the war and cultural demobilisation thereafter. To be sure, there was a slow and painful disengagement of populations, social groups, and governments from wartime hatreds, but the lethal mixture of civil war and social revolution marked winners like Italy as much as it did losers like Germany, Austria, and Russia. The early

post-war anti-imperial violence in Egypt, India, Korea and China touched on the global interests of Britain, France and Japan in direct and palpable ways. While (with the exception of Russia, Ireland, Poland and Turkey) the culture of war mobilisation ended when the troops came home in 1919, the culture of war anxiety mutated into what I would term a culture of post-war anxiety, accompanying various forms of economic instability and social and racial conflict that flowed directly from the war itself. America's Red Scare and paroxysms of racial violence form part of the same tapestry of violence and exclusion woven both during and after the war. The conventional dates arising from the peace treaties have only a surface utility. There had been too much bloodshed and too much bitterness to enable societies to close the door on the hatreds, antagonisms, and anxieties of wartime.

Why did this paroxysm of violence between 1917 and 1923 come to an end? One reason is sheer exhaustion. There was a limit to the capacity of these societies to endure endless violence. Furthermore, by 1924, the economic chaos of the immediate post-war years had died down, and most European countries in both the east and the west renewed their pre-war growth trajectories that had been interrupted by the war.²⁷ One other reason European life stabilised in the mid-1920s was the Western powers' recognition that the Soviet Union was here to stay. Similarly, the slow but steady reincorporation of Weimar Germany into the European community and the League of Nations reduced international tensions for a time. Of course, after 1929, none of the stability conditions that had made post-war European recovery possible survived the world economic crisis, but that is another story. For these reasons, I urge a reconsideration of the terminal dates of the Great War. I stick to 1914 as its beginning, not because I underestimate the significance of the Balkan wars of 1912 and 1913, but because they did not trigger a global conflict. Neither did the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–1905, which could also be said to have set in motion forces that spanned the century. I do, however, propose the new ending date of 1923. The dividing point between my two Great Wars is 1917, when revolution and social conflict returned to the centre of the European stage and all societies had to confront significant social divisions. It was then that new representations of war, shot

through with anxiety, emerged alongside older representations of heroic solidarity. Those anxieties did not evaporate in 1918 but rather took on new and at times even more violent forms in the context of civil war and revolution. In the decade of the Great War, representations were not immutable: they changed over time as the war itself changed, giving to both the conflict and its aftermath the bitter taste they have never lost.

Endnotes

1. Source: Konrad Roesler, *Die Finanzpolitik des Deutschen Reiches im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot 1967), Appendix Table 13.
2. Charles Tilly, *Strikes, Wars and Revolutions in an International Perspective* (Cambridge and Paris: Cambridge University Press and Éditions de la MSH, 1989); Leopold Haimson with Giulio Sapelli (eds.), *Strikes, Social Conflict and the First World War. An International Perspective* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1992).
3. Manuel Gomez-Brufal, Joseph Caillaux: *Traître ou visionnaire* (Paris: Dualpha éditions, 2014).
4. Note: For Britain the money supply is M3 as defined by Cappie and Webber (Monetary history, pp. 13 ff., 241 ff.) to include all deposits with bank but excluding deposits at credit and mortgage banks and in postal giro accounts, but to exclude deposits at savings banks. Interbank deposits could not be deducted. Sources: (Germany) Carl-Ludwig Holtfrerich, *The German Inflation 1914–1923*, (Munich: DeGruyter, 1986), 50–51. (Britain) Forrest Cappie and Alan Webber, *A Monetary history of United Kingdom, 1870–1982*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984), 57, 84.
5. Harper Barnes, *Never Been a Time: The 1917 Race Riot That Sparked the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Walker & Company, 2008).
6. Ernest Freeberg, *Democracy's Prisoner: Eugene V. Debs, the Great War and the Right to Dissent* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).
7. E.A. Schwartz, 'The Lynching of Robert Prager, the United Mine Workers, and the Problems of Patriotism in 1918,' *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 95, no. 4 (Winter 2003), 414–437.
8. Richard Bessel, 'Mobilization and Demobilization in Germany, 1916–1919,' in *State, Society and Mobilization During the First World War*, edited by John Horne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 50–67.
9. André Loez and Nicolas Mariot (eds.), *Obéir / Désobéir. Les mutineries de 1917 en perspective* (Paris: La Découverte, 2008).
10. On the use of the term 'climacteric' in economic history, see Donald N. McCloskey, 'The British Iron and Steel Industry, 1870–1914: A Study of the Climacteric in Productivity,' *Journal of Economic History* 29, No. 1, The Tasks of Economic History (Mar., 1969), 173–175.

11. Stéphane Audoin Rouzeau and Annette Becker, 1914-1918 *Retrouver la guerre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000).
12. Marc Ferro, *Ressentiment dans l'histoire: Comprendre notre temps* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2007).
13. William W. Hagen, 'The Moral Economy of Ethnic Violence: The Pogrom in Lwow, November 1918,' *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 31, no. 2 (Apr. - Jun., 2005), 203-226.
14. Sirkka Arosalo, 'Social Conditions for Political Violence: Red and White Terror in the Finnish Civil War of 1918,' *Journal of Peace Research* 35, no. 2 (1998), 147-166.
15. On Latvia, see Geoffrey Swain, 'The Disillusioning of the Revolution's Praetorian Guard: The Latvian Riflemen, Summer-Autumn 1918,' *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, no. 4 (1999), 667-86.
16. On which, see Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).
17. Figes, Orlando, 'The Red Army and Mass Mobilization during the Russian Civil War 1918-1920,' *Past & Present*, no. 129 (1990), 168-211.
18. Jay Winter, 'Under Cover of War: The Armenian Genocide in the Context of Total War,' in Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan (eds.), *The Specter of Genocide. Mass Murder in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003), 189-214.
19. Jay Winter, 'Paris, London, Berlin: Capital cities at war,' in Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert (eds.), *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin 1914-1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3-24.
20. Lothar Borchardt, 'The Impact of the War Economy on the Civilian Population,' in *The German Military in the Age of Total War*, ed. William Deist (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1985), 110-120.
21. Benjamin M. Weissmann, 'The Aftereffects of the American Relief Mission to Soviet Russia,' *The Russian Review* 29, no. 4 (1970), 411-21.
22. Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy 1891-1924* (London: Penguin, 1996).
23. On this and on many other points, I share the interpretation of Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End, 1917-1923* (London: Allen Lane, 2016). My interpretation does not separate the vanquished and the victors.
24. George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
25. See Antoine Prost, 'Les limites de la brutalization. Tuer sur le front occidental, 1914-1918,' *Vingtième Siècle*, 81 (2004), 5-20.
26. John Horne has been at the forefront of this interpretation of cultural mobilisation and demobilisation. See his essay 'Demobilizing the Mind: France and the Legacy of the Great War 1919-1939', George Rudé lecture, <https://h-france.net/rude/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/vol2_Horne_Final_Version.pdf> (accessed 10 March 2018).
27. Stephen Broadberry and Alexander Klein, 'Aggregate and Per Capita GDP in Europe, 1870-2000: Continental, Regional and National Data with Changing Boundaries', <<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.361.386&rep=rep1&type=pdf>> (accessed 10 March 2018).

