

## 2 'Die Legende von der Unschuld'

### Films about the run-up to the war, especially 1914. DIE LETZTEN TAGE VOR DEM WELTBRAND

The Weimar period was characterised by numerous burning questions which each in their turn, or simultaneously, troubled public opinion. One of these was receiving attention almost constantly: the negotiations surrounding the Treaty of Versailles and the issue linked to them, that is, the question whether or not Germany was to blame for the outbreak of the First World War. In order to prove that Germany did not bear any guilt for the war – and would therefore not have to pay for it – large-scale research was carried out into the period that had preceded the war. This chapter deals with the way films tried to contribute to the discussions surrounding the run-up to the First World War. One film especially will be central to the discussion in this chapter: 1914. DIE LETZTEN TAGE VOR DEM WELTBRAND (1931) (from now on referred to as 1914).<sup>2</sup> This film was director Richard Oswald's first (and only) serious attempt to make the complex issue of the question of guilt accessible to a large audience. In two earlier films that dealt with this subject, a central position had been taken up by the romantic aspect. They are DER DOPPELMORD VON SARAJEWO (1920) and BRANDSTIFTER EUROPAS (1926), which had originally been made in Austria. Since very little source material has been preserved about these films, they will be given less attention than 1914.

This chapter will deal with the question which interpretations of the question of guilt were possible in the Weimar period, especially in film and literature. Which means of representation did the directors and authors choose, what were their starting points, what obstacles did they find on their way, and finally, what were the reactions in the press? The three films were, to a greater or lesser degree, part of the debate surrounding the guilt question. In order to understand the outspoken reactions that came from the authorities and the press, we will analyse the above-mentioned films and discuss some of the specific sources that formed the basis for the 'film stories'. This procedure is especially useful for 1914. The controversies sparked by this film even before its release indicate the sensitive nature of the subject. Incidentally, war films were part of a group of films that induced critics to use different evaluation criteria. While critics judged films that had nothing to do with the recent war past mainly on the basis of their aesthetic and dramaturgical merits, war films were often judged in terms of how 'accurate' they were historically and how 'correctly' they reflected the recent past in political terms.

## The Weimar Republic and the *Kriegsschulddebatte*

On Wednesday 21 January 1931, an extraordinary event took place. In the Tauentzien-Palast, one of the oldest cinemas in Berlin-Schöneberg, Richard Oswald's film 1914. DIE LETZTEN TAGE VOR DEM WELTBRAND premiered.<sup>3</sup> Both the director and the film (and its run-up) already enjoyed some measure of fame.<sup>4</sup> The premiere sparked so much interest that many visitors had to be disappointed. The audience included a large number of officials: members of the Prussian federal government, senior civil servants, ambassadors and consuls, police officers, Foreign Ministry representatives and two Reichstag delegates, Philipp Scheidemann and Hermann Müller-Franken.<sup>5</sup> Scheidemann had been prime minister during the first round of negotiations at Versailles and had refused to sign the treaty, while Müller-Franken had been the eventual signatory as Foreign Minister. According to the *Film-Kurier*, the premiere was

... ein Ereignis nicht für die Filmwelt, sondern auch für weite Publikumskreise, die sich an der gerade in letzter Zeit sehr lebhaft gewordenen Debatte über die Zusammenhänge bei Kriegsausbruch interessieren.<sup>6</sup>

While the First World War was still being fought, secretary of state for Foreign Affairs Gottlieb von Jagow had ordered his civil servants to collect all documents that testified to the impossible situation which Germany had found itself in before the war. The country was said to have been surrounded by enemies, with the exception of Austria-Hungary. France was said to seek revenge at any cost following the defeat it had suffered in 1871. Since Russia was an ally of England and France – the Entente – it did not really count as a friend of Germany, and England would never accept Germany as a growing sea power in international waters. In this way, the 'Einkreisungsthese' was used to spread the notion that Germany was surrounded by enemies. During the war, and especially since the peace negotiations with U.S. president Woodrow Wilson, the Foreign Ministry document collection found its way into many brochures and notes that were made available to a select readership. Some years later, these documents, and others containing new evidence, would be used as evidence against the allied accusation that Germany was the sole party responsible for the outbreak of the First World War.

This accusation, laid down in article 231, was one of the most controversial paragraphs in the Treaty of Versailles, and it is generally considered an important factor in the eventual take-over by the national-socialists. Literally, the paragraph reads as follows:

Die alliierten und assoziierten Regierungen erklären, und Deutschland erkennt an, dass Deutschland und seine Verbündeten als Urheber für alle Verluste und alle Schäden verantwortlich sind, welche die alliierten und assoziierten Regierungen und ihre Angehörigen infolge des ihnen durch den Angriff Deutschlands und seiner Verbündeten aufgezwungenen Krieges erlitten haben.<sup>7</sup>

Blaming Germany also meant holding the country responsible for the damages inflicted. While the peace treaty had already been signed in 1919, the height of reparations was not established until 1921. Since Germany had not been allowed to bring anything substantial to the negotiating table – the German delegates were only allowed to respond in writing – public opinion would soon call the treaty a peace 'dictate'. Especially France, represented by Georges Clemenceau, 'Le Tigre', who chaired the conference, had no intention of letting Germany get off easy. Only the U.S.A. (Wilson) and Great Britain (Lloyd George) were more moderate in their approach of Germany. Besides reparations, Germany was also required to substantially reduce its army and military equipment, annul all border extensions, relinquish its colonies and place itself under foreign protection for a certain period of time. These and other drastic demands produced a consensus in Germany with respect to having the Treaty of Versailles reviewed. Before and during the negotiations, Germany was actively attempting to disprove its guilt. This resulted in the development of a huge propaganda effort under the special direction of the Foreign Ministry, which was led by Gustav Stresemann from 1923 to 1929. In 1919, a special department was created at the ministry, the so-called Kriegsschuldreferat.<sup>8</sup> The main advocates of influencing public opinion at home and abroad worked at this department. Besides, hundreds of interest groups were formed whose aim was to champion the cause in Germany, as well as two periodicals, *Die Kriegsschuldfrage*<sup>9</sup> and *Der Weg zur Freiheit*, which served as platforms for publications about the issue.<sup>10</sup> The pinnacle of all this activity was the publication in 1927 of a forty-volume document collection called *Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871-1914*.<sup>11</sup> Both at home and abroad, the publication sparked more admiration than criticism.<sup>12</sup> After all, it was the first serious piece of research into the run-up to the war. There was praise but also criticism, mainly about the selective presentation and arrangement of the documentary material. The outcome that Germany was not to blame at all for the outbreak of the war was of course a foregone conclusion. According to the publication, the guilty parties were firstly, the Russians and, secondly, and more implicitly, France and Great Britain. One of the reasons for this conclusion was the fact that the authors had to take into account the German negotiating position at Versailles; Russia hardly played any part in the treaty negotiations.

The height of the sum to be paid in reparations which was established in 1921, turned out to be extravagant. Germany suffered enormously from the economic crisis (1919-1923) and soon complained that it could not comply with the demands. The U.S. then decided to offer Germany financial assistance through the so-called Dawes plan. This ushered in a relatively stable period for Germany, lasting for five years until the economic crisis of 1929-1930. Despite this social stability, the war guilt issue continued to figure prominently on the political agenda. The numerous negotiations that followed time and again resulted in further reduction of reparations. Parallel to this development, relations between Germany and the other European powers also began to improve. The whole matter of reparations was finally laid to rest in 1932, when all remaining debts were cancelled. The success that Germany had achieved in the last phase of the republic did not mean that people were no longer interested in the war guilt issue. After Stresemann's death, a centre-right government led by prime minister Brüning was inaugurated in Berlin. This meant a further intensification of the struggle against the allied yoke which, according to the political right, was still holding Germany down. Rebuilding military power was prohibited and in spite of material success, Germany still felt dishonoured by the Treaty of Versailles. After all, the notorious paragraph 231 remained unaltered, despite separate adjustments to certain treaty stipulations.

It is generally agreed that the German desire to undo the so-called 'Kriegsschuldlüge', which Michael Salewski characterised as the 'Weimarer Revisionssyndrom'<sup>13</sup>, to a certain extent fulfilled the function of binding things together in the 'split' society which the Weimar Republic was in a number of respects.<sup>14</sup> The tentative sense of unity, that is to say, in this specific area, was hardly strong enough to support the young republic. According to the historian Wolfgang Jäger, the political importance as well as the emotional significance of the revision issue not only led to a taboo on pre-war politics, but also on the idealisation of the recent German past, which in turn stimulated nationalist tendencies.<sup>15</sup> Especially in the Brüning era (1930-1932), the Treaty of Versailles more and more became a propaganda vehicle for monarchist and nationalist ideas. Every attempt to make subtle distinctions in the representation of the war past was nipped in the bud or met with fierce reactions. In his book, Jäger stresses the strength of the Foreign Ministry's hold on the issue. Only two doctrines about the past were allowed: that of relative guilt, which said that all parties involved were guilty, or that of Germany's absolute innocence.<sup>16</sup>

1914. DIE LETZTEN TAGE VOR DEM WELTBRAND<sup>17</sup>

Produced in 1930, the film 1914 partly testified to the shift from silent movie to sound film.<sup>18</sup> While some films indulged in exuberant music and song to illustrate the state-of-the-art technology and craftsmanship of the German film industry, 1914 only used sound technology to reconstruct dialogues. Spoken word dominated the film to such an extent – music occurs only in the last scene – that the power of the images was reduced. A special gallows construction and a swivelling mechanism had been built especially for the film by sound engineer Charles Métain.<sup>19</sup> One would expect the actors to have more freedom to move<sup>20</sup>, but the opposite turned out to be the case: most actors appear to serve only as the static embodiments of a voice. The camera is almost completely static too, while the film is dominated by medium and total shots. The editing is very measured and unassuming, it is there simply to serve continuity. The film was shot entirely in the studio and does not contain any documentary footage. The historical characters played by well-known actors seem to come to life only at some moments. The dramaturgy is quite restrained, wooden even, with one or two notable exceptions. However, it may be true that the story itself contained enough drama for the audience, which was of course well aware of the outcome of the negotiations that had been conducted on the eve of the war. Besides that, the issue also continued to play an important role in public opinion.

The film 1914 opens with a voice-over announcing that Dr Eugen Fischer, about whom no further details are given, so that we may assume that he was a well-known public figure, will introduce the film and give an outline of events in the run-up to the war. Fischer then appears in shot, standing behind a lectern, and speaks the following words:

Meine Damen und Herren. Sie sollen einen Film sehen, in dem die freie Form der Kunst ein Stück Weltgeschichte darstellt. Und was für ein Stück! In der ganzen Geschichte ist kein Vorgang an Gehalt mit dem zu vergleichen, dass *ein* Machtwort fast 100 Millionen Männer aller Völker für Jahre zu Feinden machte; und zwar das Machtwort, das sich in den Sekunden formte, als der letzte Zar unter ein vorbereitetes Papier seinen Namen setzte: Nikolaus und somit den Befehl zur Mobilmachung des gesamten russischen Heeres gab.<sup>21</sup>

The first sentences of a speech, lasting about six minutes while there is no change to the image, set the tone for the film, and they are also its very core. Little in this film is left to free interpretation, even though opinions in the press were sharply divided. In the first few seconds of the film, it is established that

Russia is guilty of starting the war. The diplomatic negotiations that preceded the outbreak of the war are the main starting point for the narrative. Nevertheless, however self-assured the introduction may sound, the second sentence already seems to keep a number of options open: Speaking of the free form of art suggests that film is only 'one possible' interpretation of history. After the screening, Fischer and Oswald used this argument, among others, to defend themselves against attacks by critics.<sup>22</sup>

The speech closes with a sentence that leads into the short scene that follows ('... in den Strassen staute sich die Menge...'), which shows the assassination of archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo. The murderer, Gavrilo Princip, is arrested. There is no dialogue, the only thing to be heard is the crowds cheering. Fischer's introduction and the murder scene appear nearly completely detached from the narrative that follows. Fischer's speech is a commentary on the narrative as well as an introduction to it, and as such, it is no part of it. Although Fischer more or less blames Russia, he had become known and had gained respect as Dr Eugen Fischer, a left-liberal 'Kriegsschuldforscher'.<sup>23</sup> He had already given his views on the issue in his book *Die kritischen 39 Tage*.<sup>24</sup> Published in 1928, this book had failed to become a success. In a press conference about 1914, Fischer summarised his views as follows:

Fraglos liegt bei den kaiserlichen Regierungen von Deutschland und Österreich ein Teil von Schuld vor. Über das Mass sind die Meinungen geteilt, die Autoren des Films "1914" jedenfalls vertreten die mildere Richtung.<sup>25</sup>

The second scene, at Sarajevo, leads the viewer into the actual diegesis of the film.<sup>26</sup> Here, the film deviates from the scenes that follow in terms of its location, its relative exuberant nature and the fact that diplomatic history does not yet play a role. Ending with images of cheering anonymous crowds, the scene is followed by a series of scenes about the individual diplomats, politicians and monarchs who hold the key to Europe's fate. This makes the film an example of a historiography in which history is determined by individual agents. The first one to appear in shot is the emperor of Austria, Franz Joseph (Eugen Klopfer), who is being shown reports on the archduke's assassination. The film continues with a short and silent scene showing the questioning of Princip at the police station. From that moment on, the atmosphere of the film appears to change. All attention is focused on the diplomatic reactions and negotiations taking place behind closed doors. Although the film story covers 39 days, the proper succession of these days has not been taken as a starting point. No dates are shown, and the difference between one day and the next is often blurred. More attention is paid to establishing a distinction between the various locations where the negotiations are taking place. Separated by 'hard cuts', the individual scenes form important national landmarks. Depending on their





A conversation between Sasonow (standing) and a foreign diplomat

nationality, the main characters nearly all the time move about in the same recognisable rooms. For example, Franz Joseph can always be seen sitting at a desk in a spacious room, with two high windows that filter the sunlight. We see German Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg (Albert Bassermann) in a small, sparsely decorated room with a desk that is large yet simple, and with bookcases covering the walls. The French government leaders move in a room dominated by Napoleon's buste. However, the most striking rooms are those of the Russians. Czar Nicholas II (Reinhold Schünzel) moves almost without exception in an empire style room in his spacious and well-lit palace, containing few pieces of furniture but with ample decorations on walls and ceiling. The style and lighting contrast strongly with the dark room occupied by the Russian Foreign Minister, Sasonow (Oscar Homolka).

His room is full of baroque furniture, and his desk is entirely covered by all kinds of bric-a-brac, statuettes and candleholders. The splendour of the Russian court is sharply contrasted with the simplicity of the German and other 'national' locations. The Russian, German and Austrian locations are, in this order, the main contexts in which the short run-up to the war is played out. The



Grand duke Nicolai, the czar and the czarina

other locations, of Serbia, Great Britain and France, are also official rooms, but they are contrasted far less sharply than the above. The 'official spaces' are left only for the last scenes of the film, when we move to the shabby newsroom of the daily *L'Humanité*, with the portly figure of its founder, Dreyfussard, socialist and anti-war agitator Jean Jaurès (Heinrich George). After his murder in a restaurant, where he had just begun eating his entry, the last scene ends with the sound of church bells chiming.

As said before, the filmic representation of this history is very balanced and even, aesthetically speaking. Only a few scenes stand out, and it is no coincidence that these are the scenes in which an important role is played by the main agents in the narrative, the Russians. They are given the strongest profile in the narrative. The intrigue surrounding the czar, his wife (Lucie Höflich) and grand duke Nicolai (Ferdinand Hart) makes sure there is plenty of high drama in a number of scenes. We see the czar wrestle with the choice between the opinions of his pacifist wife and the views of the military men in power, led by the hawkish grand duke Nicolai. Put under pressure by Nicolai, the czar will eventually sign the order to mobilise.



The role of the czar was played by Reinhold Schünzel, who had earlier acted in the war drama *IN DER HEIMAT, DA GIBT'S EIN WIEDERSEH'N* (1926, Leo Müller and Reinhold Schünzel) and was known for his roles in countless romantic comedies. Lucie Höflich, also known as a comedienne, played his wife; Ferdinand Hart was grand duke Nicolai, while Sasonow, the Russian Foreign Minister, was played by Oskar Homolka. In this film, Schünzel and Höflich proved, not for the first time, that they were able to play tragic roles, and especially Schünzel was praised in the press. The choice for Homolka seemed a clear case of typecasting. Several years earlier, he had played the mysterious protagonist in *FELDGRAU*, also known as *DER MANN AUS DEM JENSEITS* (1926 Manfred Noa). Lurking about in his dark baroque rooms, Sasonow is the ultimate schemer, plotting with Nicolai, Defense Minister Suchomlinow (E.A. Licho) and Chief-of-staff, general Januskewitsch (Hermann Heilingner), to get the czar to adopt a firmer attitude against Austria-Hungary and its ally, Germany. In Sasonow's rooms, the ambassadors of Germany, France and Great Britain are coming and going. The first as a potential enemy, the other two as allies. The British ambassador, Buchanan (Fritz Alberti), points out that Great Britain will only be able to join the Russians in a war as an ally if the Germans take the initiative and strike first. He says Germany must be made to take responsibility for the war. In a long scene, lasting more than six minutes, the German ambassador tries to calm the Russians down by pointing out that Germany will not be able to avoid war if the Russians mobilise. Yet he wants to try to prevent a war. After this scene, they meet again twice, without making any progress towards rapprochement. Once Russia has been mobilised, a demoralised German ambassador Von Pourtales (Hans Peppler) hands Sasonow the German declaration of war. The relationship and contrast between the two men is worked out in three scenes, to the German ambassador's advantage, who clearly conveys the notion that his country does not want this war. Sasonow's cunning is shown in a later scene, persuading the czarina that Von Pourtales actually favours the war.

Meanwhile, Sasonow learns that Austria-Hungary has attacked Serbia. This was the moment to persuade the czar to issue the mobilisation order.

The scenes that follow are the narrative core of the film. We see how the czar is manipulated by the four conspirators to sign the mobilisation order. This order is countermanded when a telegram arrives indicating that Wilhelm II is not in favour of war. The telegram reveals Sasonow's lie, since he had told the czar that Germany wanted war. Angered by the cancellation of the mobilisation, Nicolai and his cronies step up pressure on the czar. They do not want any half measures, no partial mobilisation, but a total one. In this power struggle, czar Nicholas is represented as a weak and impressionable man, who appears in

shot with his eyes wide open with fear, chainsmoking, apparently unable to make a decision. A number of total shots serve to illustrate his weakness and despair. He is dwarfed by the enormity of the rooms, and he seems literally to carry the world on his shoulders. In the end, he caves in, and, under the watchful eye of the hawks, signs the order to mobilise.

In the meantime, the film switches to parallel scenes in Germany, to Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg's rooms. Chief-of-staff, general Von Moltke (Wolfgang von Schwind), makes clear that a German reaction to Russian activities at the border has become inevitable. Bethmann-Hollweg reacts in a loud, hoarse baritone voice when Defence Minister Von Falkenhayn calls on him 'los zu gehen'. And even when the kaiser, after the Russian mobilisation, urges him to react strongly, Bethmann-Hollweg will not have anything to do with war, and instead proposes to reopen negotiations. While the Russian czar is shown extensively, the figure of the German kaiser does not actually appear in the film, not even in the form of a picture.<sup>27</sup>

1914 confirmed the notion that in Germany as well as in Russia, politics was dominated by the military. This meant that the heads of state, kaiser Wilhelm II and czar Nicholas II, were kept out of range. The same was true for the main political players, like German Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg. The message appeared to be that war is something that is first set up and then fought between soldiers. Another notion is that the European cabinets failed to resist the military's belligerence. But the most important message the film wished to convey was the notion that Germany was not guilty of beginning the war. According to many of the advertisements for the film, this was the express purpose of the film.<sup>28</sup>

The question remains whether it was at all possible at the end of the Weimar period to offer a different take on pre-war history, or, indeed, to interpret the vast number of documents that had been collected and published in a different way than had been done in the film. Analysis of the film shows that 1914 closely follows the main conclusions of the document collection called *Die Europäischen Kabinette*. Blaming Russia was the safest way not to offend France and Great Britain, Germany's main partners in the treaty negotiations. It should hardly come as a surprise, therefore, that the roles played by the French and British government leaders do not receive much attention in the film.<sup>29</sup> Most of the time France gets in the film is not spent on government leaders, but on the great French pacifist, Jean Jaurès. Although Oswald has represented Jean Jaurès sympathetically, he puts words in his mouth to the effect that Russia is indicted for wanting the war, while France is blamed for failing to stop it.

Oswald's specific attention to Jaurès also betrays the director's signature. His interest in recent French history had already become apparent with his

1930 film about the Dreyfus affair.<sup>30</sup> As a Jew and a democrat, Oswald had explained the shameful events surrounding this affair. It was no wonder, therefore, that he would portray Jaurès in a sympathetic light in 1914.

The country that received most screening time – a total 45 minutes – was Russia. This was probably so because it was blamed for the war, for these scenes were the dramatic climax of the film. The mechanisms of political power operating between the Russian army, the czar and his ministers were represented in a relatively subtle way. Oswald showed the czar's inner struggle with much compassion. The Soviet Union, which could hardly be suspected of harbouring a great love for the czar, appears to have filed an official protest with the German government in 1931, saying it objected strongly to Oswald's interpretation.<sup>31</sup>

It is clear that the film did not deviate much from the official German reading of the causes of the war. It is strange, therefore, that the Foreign Ministry and the censor should have reacted the way they did.

### **'Zensur – der böse Engel'<sup>32</sup>**

In October 1930, Richard Oswald began shooting 1914 in the Ufa studios at Babelsberg. Since the subject was a sensitive one, both nationally and internationally, he had at an early stage asked the Foreign Ministry for help. He did not just want official approval of the script, so that he would be covered against any objections from the powerful censorship authorities, he also wanted the ministry's advice on this historically complicated issue. It is not known how exactly the ministry handled the assessment of the script and the supervision of the production process. If we are to believe the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, the situation at the Foreign Ministry was close to complete chaos, and the entire matter was left in the hands of an inexperienced junior civil servant.<sup>33</sup>

The shooting finished in early December, after which the film was given to the censor (Filmprüfstelle) in Berlin for approval.<sup>34</sup> At the session on 23 December, no fewer than six expert representatives of the Foreign Ministry were present.<sup>35</sup> The press was not allowed to witness the session, as had been the case with the assessment of the film *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT*, which had premiered in Germany earlier that same month.<sup>36</sup> After a long and enervating session, the committee returned a negative advice. The committee issued a ban because it deemed the film capable of 'Beziehungen Deutschlands zu auswärtigen Staaten zu trüben', and because it believed the film might damage Germany's prestige abroad.<sup>37</sup>

The press was rife with speculations about the true reason for the ban. While the conservative *Kinematograph*, without offering any arguments, claimed to understand the ban, the left-liberal press was furious, since it did

not understand the reasons why this film should have been banned. The left-liberal press was especially puzzled by the ban because the film had been produced with the support of the Foreign Ministry. A *Lichtbildbühne* editor had seen the film and, after having given it some thought, could find no reason for the ban<sup>38</sup>, since the film completely refuted the 'Kriegsschuldlüge'. The anonymous *Lichtbildbühne* editor further remarked that the film also showed that the war had been an ill-fated concurrence of circumstances and misunderstandings, and that Germany had been left with no other choice than to mobilise. At any rate, the film did not point to Germany as the only guilty party: 'Soweit Berlin den Schauplatz bildet, ist Vermittlungs- und Verständigungswille immer wieder der Grundton.'<sup>39</sup>

Oswald, too, was furious, especially since the film had been produced with the support of the Foreign Ministry. He planned to sue the federal tax service for damages.<sup>40</sup> However, events took another turn.

It goes without saying that the negotiations did not end with the Filmprüfstelle's negative and poorly motivated decision. It turned out that the decision had not been taken by a clear majority. Two participants in the meeting, a lawyer and a representative of the film company, filed a protest with the 'Oberfilmprüfstelle'.<sup>41</sup> This meant that the film would at least have to be re-examined. However, in the end this would not happen. After long and difficult deliberations, a solution was found: some substantial changes would be made, and a scene would be added at the beginning of the narrative in which 'Kriegsschuldforscher' Eugen Fischer would read out an introduction<sup>42</sup>, thus filling out the historiographical gaps in the film. This also meant that the objection would not have to be heard at the 'Oberfilmprüfstelle'. But the film would now have to be approved by a lower censorship authority, and this occurred on 9 January 1931.<sup>43</sup> The press was again barred from the meeting. One day later, it became known who had been on the committee and which scenes had earlier been considered offensive by the Foreign Ministry.<sup>44</sup> The first scene was one in which the then Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, wants to step down because he does not want to take responsibility for war. The second offensive scene involved the czar and Sasonow discussing the declaration of war. The way this episode was portrayed was said not to correspond to the facts.<sup>45</sup>

In the end, after discussions lasting about five hours, the film was finally approved for release, 'ohne Ausschnitt'.<sup>46</sup> The film was also approved for the young, and it was given the predicate 'künstlerisch'. The press said it was mostly thanks to the pleading of one of Oswald's scriptwriters, Dr Wenzel Goldbaum, that the committee decided to approve the film.<sup>47</sup>

The history of the film in the period between its production and the actual premiere provides an insight into how much room there was to manoeuvre when

a film represented anything to do with the war. Oswald wanted to base his film on official war documents. In order to make the story of the run-up to the war accessible and attractive for a large audience, he had to find a way to select, interpret and dramatisé these documents so that the result would be a suitable production. Although he adopted the conclusion and a number of dialogues from the document collection, he was probably also inspired by earlier literary and historical accounts of the period. For example, contemporary reports and reviews refer to both Eugen Fischer's book *Die kritischen 39 Tage* and to Emil Ludwig's book *Juli 14*.<sup>48</sup> Fischer's book, which had hardly received any attention at all in the press, was soon lost in oblivion, as was indeed its author. The reception of Emil Ludwig's *Juli 14*, however, has been extensively documented and is an example of the way that non-academic, narrative historiography was perceived and assessed, both in the press and by professional and academically-trained historians. Audio-visual historiography may also be included in this form of historiography, and especially the war films studied here, which were, or were said to have been, based on historical sources. *1914* is such a film. The next paragraph sketches part of the context in which historically oriented war films were produced and viewed.

## Emil Ludwig and the *Kriegsschuldfrage*

The book *Juli 14*, published in 1929 by Rowohlt publishers, was at least as controversial as Oswald's film. It appears that, while the film credits do not actually refer to the book, the writers of the screenplay, Heinz Goldberg and Fritz Wendhausen, had at least allowed themselves to be inspired by Ludwig's book. A report that appeared in *Lichtbildbühne* of 12 September 1930 seems to underline this. It said that Oswald and Rowohlt had been negotiating about the production of a film version of *Juli 14*.<sup>49</sup> Nothing is known about the outcome of these talks, and yet it is meaningful enough that the book was referred to, since there are important similarities between the approaches and points of view in the book and in the film.

*Juli 14* was a huge success. Around 140,000 copies were sold before 1931, 60,000 of which within two weeks after its publication.<sup>50</sup> Ludwig had written his first draft as early as 1921. It was not until 1929 that he deemed the time right to publish a revised version of his manuscript, an account of the crisis that had led to the First World War.<sup>51</sup> In a spirited style he described the negotiations, thoughts and emotions of the main characters who played lead roles on the European stage. Much emphasis was given to Nicholas II, Wilhelm II, Franz Joseph, Bethmann-Hollweg, count Berchtold (Austria's Foreign Minis-

ter), Sasonow, Sir Edward Grey (Great Britain's Foreign Minister) and others. The fact that the book did not appear until the late twenties can only have benefitted its author, since at that moment, the largest international document collections pertaining to the run-up to the war had already been published.<sup>52</sup> Part of the source material used by Ludwig had begun appearing in 1926, including the forty-volume standard work published by the Foreign Ministry.<sup>53</sup> It had been his idea to reconstruct the main conversations and actions of the moment on the basis of the documents. Even though Ludwig was not an academically-trained historian, he tried to meet the criteria of professional historiography in his own way. Despite this, he came into conflict with several prominent German historians because of his style and methods. It was especially the historians on the political right who were not impressed with Ludwig's historical novels and biographies. The new genre that was introduced in Germany by Ludwig and others became known under the neologism 'historische Belletristik'. Ludwig himself preferred to describe his work as belonging to a new school of historiography, as opposed to the old historiography practised by professional historians.<sup>54</sup> Especially Wilhelm Mommsen revolted against this, among other things by writing an article entitled '*Legitime*' und '*illegitime*' *Geschichtsschreibung*.<sup>55</sup> Needless to say perhaps that Mommsen considered Ludwig's writing as an example of 'illegitime' historiography.

In the end, however, the controversy was not so much about Ludwig's style or method, but about his position in the debate about the guilt issue. The preface to his book opened with the following lines:

Die Schuld am Kriege trifft das gesamte Europa: das hat die Forschung in allen Ländern erwiesen. Deutschlands Alleinschuld und Deutschlands Unschuld sind Märchen für Kinder jenseits und diesseits des Rheines.<sup>56</sup>

This view was later expressed by Lloyd George as well, and later German historiography was dominated by the notion that Germany did not bear guilt, and was certainly not the only country to blame. Until much later this view was attacked in the early sixties by the Hamburg historian Fritz Fischer in his *Griff nach der Weltmacht* and caused much controversy amongst German historians.

Yet Ludwig did not deny that some countries had to bear more guilt than others:

... mit der Schuld (sind) Wien und Petersburg am stärksten belastet; Berlin und Paris folgen ihnen in sehr verschiedener Entfernung als Sekundanten; London folgt in viel weiterer Distanz.<sup>57</sup>

In fact, Ludwig puts into perspective the hypothesis of innocence that was propagated so often. Though he did not put most of the blame on Germany, he



did put the country in a shared second place of guilty parties. However, by not pointing at Germany as the main guilty party, he also undermined the Treaty of Versailles. According to Christoph Gradmann in his study of 'historische Belletristik' from the Weimar period, this meant that Ludwig placed himself in the camp of the moderate pacifists.<sup>58</sup> Ludwig's table of guilt also shows that he did not so much consider the peoples concerned guilty, as the various governments residing in the various capitals of Europe. This made his book a protest against the pre-war political system, which offended those still harbouring warm feelings for the former imperial Germany. Witness Ludwig in his preface: 'Die Gesamtschuld lag in den Kabinetten, die Gesamtunschuld auf den Strassen Europas.'<sup>59</sup> The masses as such were innocent and had been thrown into despair by the deceit practised on them by the generals and politicians: 'Dieses Buch ist eine Studie über die Dummheit der damals Mächtigen und den rechten Instinkt der damals Machtlosen.'<sup>60</sup>

Reviews of the book can be distinguished on the basis of political preferences. Kurt Tucholsky proved right when he said about Ludwig and his book: 'Er weiss, welche Dreckfluten sich nun auf ihn ergiessen werden. Der Mann hat Zivilcourage.'<sup>61</sup> It is obvious that these 'Dreckfluten' would mostly be poured over Ludwig by the right-wing press, which emphatically disagreed with his democratic stance and his efforts to put Germany's role into perspective.<sup>62</sup> The left-liberal press praised the pacifist message in the book<sup>63</sup> and also agreed with Tucholsky that the masses got off much too lightly in the book. In fact, Tucholsky argued, they were as guilty of the outbreak of war as the politicians and generals.<sup>64</sup>

In any case, the good reputation Ludwig had enjoyed was finished in some circles after the publication of his book in 1929. Gradmann writes: 'Von nun an wurde er, zusammen mit Autoren wie Remarque, verstärkt zur Zielscheibe völkischer und nationalsozialistischer Kritiker.'<sup>65</sup> These were exactly the two groups that would increasingly come to dominate political life in Germany. Not surprisingly, it became more and more difficult to present a balanced view on Germany's role in the outbreak of the war. Any so-called 'Popularisierung' of history was anathema to academic historians and drew fire from the right if it defended views that did not suit them. Yet the majority of historical novels, a genre that was very popular at the time, hardly received any serious attention at all.

It is rather obvious to label the reactions to Ludwig's book as a sign of an ever more powerful shift to the right, and of the erosion of democratic government at the end of the Weimar period. Although this is certainly true, it does not tell us anything about the way the political right intervened on various social levels (press, politics, university) in the discussion about the different ways of representing the German war past. Besides taking restrictive measures

to curb books and theatre plays, which were applied with restraint, the authorities also used the press to influence public opinion. As far as Ludwig's book was concerned, it was especially the right-wing professional historians and journalists with a right-wing orientation who initiated and to a great extent determined the discussions about the perspective represented by Ludwig. As Gradmann already indicates in his conclusion, these reactions can also be seen as a sign of a 'soziale und intellektuelle Krise des Bildungsbürgertums der Zeit'.<sup>66</sup> The fact that the book was a bestseller in spite of this, can partly be explained by the popularity of the genre and by the successes Ludwig had achieved with his earlier books, in a word, by his popular reputation. Besides that, the sensation caused by the book would surely not have hurt the sales figures.

Similar factors also played a role with respect to the film *1914*, although it was less successful. Besides the fact that the film had been inspired by Ludwig's book, that this 'genre' of historical films was hugely popular and that the director, Richard Oswald, enjoyed a certain prestige, the press gave more attention to the film than it normally would have done, both before and after the film's premiere. Unlike Ludwig's book, the film met with strict censorship measures.

The film *1914* and the book *Juli 14* were released in roughly the same period. However, it was not just the film that had a connection with Ludwig's book, a play entitled *1914* was also associated with his work. The play premiered in Max Reinhardt's Deutsches Theater on 1 September 1930. This play, referred to as a 'dokumentarisches Schauspiel' or 'Zeitstück', was shrouded in mystery. No one seemed to know who was the actual author behind the name of Georg Wilhelm Müller. Critics speculated that it was Emil Ludwig himself, but since he categorically denied any involvement (and if he had been the author, the critics said he would certainly have admitted this) everyone was in the dark about the author's identity. The question whether someone like Eugen Fischer could have written the play was never asked. Whatever the case may have been, the play immediately sparked negative reactions from nearly all reviewers. They were unanimous in their dislike for especially the dialogues, which followed the original documents literally, creating a completely lifeless theatrical performance. Only the direction, by Gustaf Gründgens, earned some praise.<sup>67</sup>

The remarkable thing is that, in the end, neither Ludwig's book nor Müller's play caused the kind of controversy stirred up by Oswald's film.

## DER DOPPELMORD VON SARAJEWO

The film 1914 was not the only film about the run-up to the war and the guilt issue, respectively. It was preceded by DER DOPPELMORD VON SARAJEWO (1920) and the Austrian production BRANDSTIFTER EUROPAS (1926), two films that were substantially different in terms of narrative strategy. While 1914 shows us the history of diplomatic efforts prior to the war, the emphasis in DER DOPPELMORD VON SARAJEWO, must have been, as the title already indicates, on the assassination of Franz Ferdinand and his wife. In BRANDSTIFTER EUROPAS, the places of action, according to the programme brochure, were especially the Austrian and Russian courts before and during the war. Both 1914 and BRANDSTIFTER EUROPAS present the Russians as the main instigators of the war. Unfortunately, the two early films have not been preserved, and secondary information about them is scarce. As far as we know, nothing is left of DER DOPPELMORD VON SARAJEWO but a programme brochure containing the credits, a few still photographs from the film and a description of its contents.<sup>68</sup> Even critical reviews for specialist publications could not be found, though it must be said that in the early twenties, film criticism was not developed to such an extent that a review was written of every single film that appeared. More information has been preserved about BRANDSTIFTER EUROPAS, most of it in the form of reviews.

Although the three film narratives appear to be different from each other in many respects, the similarity in the subtitles is remarkable. All three refer explicitly to the guilt issue: the subtitle of DER DOPPELMORD VON SARAJEWO was *Die Schuld am Weltkriege*; BRANDSTIFTER EUROPAS was also called *Ein Beitrag zur Kriegsschuldfrage*<sup>69</sup> and 1914 was presented as a *Film gegen die Kriegsschuldfrage*.<sup>70</sup> The first thing that strikes one, is the fact that the suffix... *lüge* is missing in the subtitle of the 1920 film. While the other two films referred directly to the public debate, DER DOPPELMORD VON SARAJEWO may not have been more than a relatively innocent historical film. Besides, the debate on the guilt issue did not yet have the intensity that it would develop later. True, the guilt paragraph included in the 1919 Treaty of Versailles was actually known among the general public, but the height of the reparations was not established until 1921. From then on, the debate intensified considerably. The main research bodies were also set up after 1921. It is likely, therefore, that the word 'Kriegsschuldfrage' did not yet have the currency that it would later gain.

Since BRANDSTIFTER EUROPAS and 1914 referred to the guilt issue and tried to clear Germany from any guilt, they directly or indirectly contributed to the propaganda campaign against German guilt. Judging from reports in the press, it is not likely that the Foreign Ministry interfered with BRANDSTIFTER

EUROPAS the way it did with 1914. Nevertheless, 1914 was in the end approved for people under eighteen, unlike BRANDSTIFTER EUROPAS.<sup>71</sup> The reason for this must have had something to do with the kind of love drama that BRANDSTIFTER EUROPAS showed, which was apparently considered likely to corrupt the 'sittliche, geistige oder gesundheitliche Entwicklung oder eine Ueberreizung der Phantasie der Jugendlichen...'.<sup>72</sup>

It is also striking, but altogether not very surprising, that only the promotion of these films referred to the use of documentary material. For example, the front page of the *Illustrierter Film-Kurier* and an advertisement in the specialist publication *Lichtbildbühne* said that BRANDSTIFTER EUROPAS had been made 'nach wahren Begebenheit und Material aus den Geheimdokumenten eines russischen Diplomaten'.<sup>73</sup> We will find out later, from reviews of the film, whether presenting anonymous sources such as 'a' Russian diplomat lent the film any additional credibility. Advertisements for 1914 said the film had been made 'unter Verwendung internationaler Staatsdokumente'.<sup>74</sup> This may sound at least as obligatory, but the film received so much publicity, even before it was premiered, that it had meanwhile been revealed that those documents that came from the national archives had also been used by Foreign Ministry researchers in their struggle to refute Germany's guilt. This did not mean, however, that the film was accepted at face value simply because it was based on official source material, as will emerge from the reviews.

The programme brochure of DER DOPPELMORD VON SARAJEWO did not refer to the use of any documents, probably because of the nature of the narrative. Judging from the description of the contents in this brochure, *Der Doppelmord* had nothing to do with diplomatic history, nor did it point an accusing finger at certain governments or military leaderships. In fact, this film showed what had happened before the July crisis of 1914. After all, the diplomatic entanglement did not develop until after the murder of Franz Ferdinand and the infamous Austrian ultimatum to Serbia. The emphasis was therefore on the activities carried out by the conspirators, who were all supposed to be members of Narodna Obdrana.<sup>75</sup> Although the film opened and closed with the figure of Franz Ferdinand, four of the six acts in the film were devoted to the men set to kill him.<sup>76</sup> Only a few lines were spent on the motives for the murder. After it had been indicated that Franz Ferdinand was not exactly loved by everyone – to which he reacted with the words: 'Wer hasst und liebt, niederreisst und aufbaut, muss sich auch Hass und Liebe gefallen lassen!'<sup>77</sup> – tensions in the empire were described as follows:

Und schon spinnen sich langsam die Fäden, die ihn zu Fall bringen sollen. – Panslavisten, Revolutionäre und Antimilitaristen, sehen in ihm das schreckliche Hindernis zur Verwirklichung ihrer Ideen, in allen erdenklichen Formen erhält der

Thronfolger Warnungsbriefe dieser Geheimverschwörung, doch lächelnd geht er seinen geraden Weg des Wollens.<sup>78</sup>

In the film, the things that happened to Franz Ferdinand in the circle of his family have served as a contrast to the events threatening him from the outside. Although his marriage with lady-in-waiting countess Sophie von Chotek had met with fierce opposition because of her lowly birth, he persevered in his wish to marry for love, despite the consequences for Sophie's position at court. This morganatic marriage was probably closed privately.

Ratlos arbeiten aber die unbekannten Gegenspieler. "Bosnien, du Träne im Auge Serbiens, du Waisenkind unter allen Ländern", predigt der Lehrer Illic seinen jungen Schülern und mit glühenden Augen nehmen Princip, Grabez und Grabilowic den Fanatismus in sich auf und gedeihen zum Handwerkzeuge der Verschwörer.<sup>79</sup>

The narrative ends with their departure for Bosnia, where the fatal shots will ring out.

## BRANDSTIFTER EUROPAS

Six years after *DER DOPPELMORD*, the Austrian film *BRANDSTIFTER EUROPAS* premiered in Berlin on 17 September 1926. Judging from the story in the programme brochure, the *Illustrierter Film-Kurier*, this film was far more ambitious than the 1920 film. The time span in which the narrative unfolded was wider, and the film was not limited to events in Austria-Hungary. As far as the first aspect is concerned, the narrative opens with colonel Alfred Redl's suicide in 1913 and ends with Rasputin's death and subsequent downfall of the Romanov dynasty in 1917. The two central countries must therefore have been Austria-Hungary and Russia. The narrative focuses on the Russian dancer and spy Sonja Starewna, who has come into the possession of secret Austrian army documents because of colonel Redl's untimely death, which may, or indeed, may not have been entirely voluntary. Starewna hands the documents containing Austria's 'Aufmarsch' plans, to the Russian grand duke, who then falls in love with her.

Der erste Schritt zu der kommenden Welt-Katastrophe ist getan – der Zar ordnet, auf Veranlassung des Grossfürsten, den Aufmarsch der sibirischen Regimenter (sic) an die österreichische Grenze an. – Die russische Militärpartei drängt den Zaren zur Kriegserklärung.<sup>80</sup>

Besides Starewna and the Russian grand duke (probably referring to grand duke Nicolai), who both make an effort on behalf of armed battle, the figure of Rasputin plays an important role. He is against the war and tries to use his huge influence on the czar. He fails to win the czar for his cause, however, and war breaks out. Despite her love for the grand duke, Starewna is engaged to the Austrian lieutenant Michael Korsakow. He gets the worst of it in a duel with the grand duke and is sent to Siberia. However, he manages to escape and falls in love with another woman. In the meantime, Rasputin has gained so much influence that he is able to persuade the czar to relieve the grand duke of his duties. For the grand duke's military party, this is the signal they have been waiting for to get rid of Rasputin, with the help of Starewna. Meanwhile, Lenin has arrived in the country. Rasputin's prophecy that his death will also mean the end of czarism has come true, according to the *Illustrierter Film-Kurier*.

The contents description indicates that the director intended to heighten the film's romantic and dramatic action by including non-historical figures like Sonja Starewna and Michael Korsakow. The historical characters' actions have been romanticised to such an extent that it seems as if the director meant to replace all objective-diplomatic negotiations by personal interest and intrigue. This is all in stark contrast to what the film promised to be, namely a film 'Nach wahren Begebenheiten'. The promise that the film would be a contribution to the guilt debate is, based on the story, made good, however. Germany is kept out of range. The guilty party was Russia, and in particular the faction around the grand duke, which the text in the programme brochure refers to as the 'Militärpartei' (which seems to confirm the likelihood that the grand duke refers to the historic count Nicolai). The czar is presented as a weak and impressionable cog in the wheel of state.

Things were rather more complicated with respect to Austria. This country was blamed only indirectly. After all, the documents Starewna takes to Russia were said to contain plans for the Austrian advance against Russia, which was an act of aggression. In response, Russia stationed a regiment at the Austrian border.<sup>81</sup> Although there was some attention to the murder of Franz Ferdinand, the narrative keeps silent about the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia. Austria refused to put on the hair shirt with this film, as Germany had done in 1914.

The occasional reviews provide a limited yet interesting insight into the reactions to *BRANDSTIFTER EUROPAS*. It is interesting, for example, to work out how serious critics took the historical perspective of the film and whether they explicitly connected the film with the public debate about the guilt issue.

The specialist publications unanimously passed a positive judgement on the film, though they had some marginal comments. Reviews in the *Kinematograph* and *Reichsfilmbblatt* both opened by paying attention to the film's



promise of providing 'Ein Beitrag zur Kriegsschuldlüge'. This promise was immediately shown up as a nice publicity stunt by the *Kinematograph*. The film itself was said to have nothing to do with the guilt issue, and as far as the narrative itself was concerned, history '... erzählt uns etwas anderes', according to the critic.<sup>82</sup> Yet, he reasoned, the historical aspects did not matter where the dramatic action of the film was concerned. It was clear that he emphasized the effect that the film might have on an audience, by which he also presupposed that historical reliability was of secondary importance.

The *Reichsfilmblatt* tentatively decided to give the film the benefit of the doubt. The critic believed that BRANDSTIFTER EUROPAS was nothing more, but absolutely nothing more, than only a very small contribution to the guilt issue debate. There were issues at stake which the audience '... gern übersehen, wissen möchte – und die doch noch so unerkant tief verborgen liegen, für spätere Zeiten objektiverer Erkenntnismöglichkeiten'.<sup>83</sup> Twelve years after the facts, the critic said, it had turned out that 'objective' knowledge about what actually happened was almost impossible to come by. Nevertheless, he assessed the way the director had represented the history from colonel Redl up to Lenin in a positive light. Though he indicated in the above statement that there could not yet be any objective knowledge, some lines down he wrote that it is always risky to visualise historical events and characters. 'Man sollte dem Film in dieser Beziehung mehr Freiheit gönnen und sich nicht unbedingt immer an die absolute Treue der Wiedergabe halten.'<sup>84</sup> Like his colleague in the *Kinematograph*, this critic did not consider historical reliability necessary for the success and appreciation of a film. It might even have an adverse effect – 'Es wirkt der Versuch der genauen Nachahmung zu hölzern, zu steif'<sup>85</sup> – and it might rob the audience of its viewing pleasure, so he argued.

The *Film-Kurier* also paid much attention to the excellent acting performances and the captivating drama. Only at the end of his review, the critic briefly discussed the historical level of the film. The first point he made was that the film refrained from passing any kind of political judgement. The film was said to present the facts in a sober and objective manner, but whether it actually told the truth 'was left aside'. However, 'Da aber die Debatte über die Ursachen des Krieges noch lange die Menschheit beschäftigen wird, dürfte er überall auf stärkstes Interesse stossen.'<sup>86</sup> No one distanced themselves from the film because it was an Austrian film.

Of the three daily newspapers, only *Vorwärts* and *Der Montag* discussed the question of historical reliability and the guilt issue in their reviews of BRANDSTIFTER EUROPAS. The third daily, *Germania*, did little else than briefly describe the film's contents and pronounce a eulogy on the actors and actresses. Only the first two sentences of the review mentioned, without any further comment, that the film wanted to be 'ein Kapitel zur Kriegsschuldlüge'

and that this was what it actually was.<sup>87</sup> The *Vorwärts* critic, however, hardly paid any attention to the contents at all, but, from the first line down, went in for blanket rubbishing of the entire film, ending his review with the deprecatory remark that the film was in fact nothing more than a 'Kasperlespiel der Weltgeschichte'. In any case, the film was said not to fulfil its promise of being a contribution to the debate surrounding the Kriegsschuldlüge. Besides, the 'linked-up scenes' were nothing more than a 'banales Zerrbild der Geschichte', said the author. 'Mit der historischen Wahrheit und mit dem Filmwerk ist es also beide Male nichts.' In short, *Vorwärts* could find nothing but fault in the film.<sup>88</sup> The critic writing for *Der Montag* was very superficial. It said the assertion that the film was a contribution to the Kriegsschuldlüge debate was an exaggeration. The critic thought it was no more than 'Ein kleines Scherflein, bei dem man noch nicht weiss, ob die Münze, in der es entrichtet wird echt ist' and in the end called the film an 'Anekdotenbüchlein'. The film was finally deemed worthy of the predicate 'mediocre'.<sup>89</sup>

There is a certain paradox in these reviews. On the one hand, the film was said to be historically unreliable, while on the other hand, the reviews said that, since there was a lack of information, no final pronouncements could be made about the past. It is remarkable, therefore, that no critic indicated the exact reasons why the film was unreliable. Without giving any reasons, the film was judged too pretentious in its promise to offer a contribution to the guilt discussion. The only motive shining through was that a genuine contribution to the debate was at that time considered not yet expedient or even possible. *Vorwärts* found the film's assertions an important ground for disapproval. Despite the assumed lack of knowledge in the area of guilt research, the reviews did not contain any explicit protest against the film's notion that Russia was especially guilty of the outbreak of the war. Nor was there anything about the fact that the film did not pay any attention at all to the role played by Germany in the run-up to the war. This would suggest that, at least in the reviews discussed here, there was implicit approval of the perspective offered by the film. Broadly speaking, this perspective was the same as the one put forward by the Foreign Ministry's 'researchers'.

## Critical reception of 1914

There is an abundance of source material about 1914, at least as far as film reviews are concerned. 1914 is quite different from what the other two films discussed above may have been. The director of 1914 apparently meant to make

a serious historical production, and, accordingly, based his film on source material that had received official approval. This also meant that most critics did not approach this film the way they would have done any other film. In several reviews, it is clear that the author feels that a 'historische Reportage' as some critics called it, should be assessed in different terms than other completely fictional narratives. For example, fictional narratives would have to be judged on their dramaturgical and cinematographical merits, while 'historische Reportagen' deserved an assessment in terms derived from the historical discipline. This distinction sometimes also seemed to refer to another distinction, namely that between art and politics. If a critic discussed the historical content of the film, the review would almost automatically get a political dimension, at least in the case of 1914. As was shown in the previous chapter, the majority of critics wanted a clear distinction between politics ('Tendenz') and film. However, it turned out to be almost impossible to review 1914 without making political statements. Only confessional newspapers such as *Der Deutsche* and *Germania* refrained, as was their custom, from making explicit political comments.<sup>90</sup>

Critics writing for the specialist publications tried to confine their reviews to the dramaturgical and cinematographic aspects of a film. However, 1914 clearly gave cause for a different approach. If a reviewer held on to his traditional understanding of his job, he apparently also felt the need to justify himself. For example, Hans Wollenberg explained to the *Lichtbildbühne* readership that it was the critic's most important task to deal exclusively with the 'Filmische eines Films'.<sup>91</sup> His review of 1914, therefore, not only discussed the type of film – according to Wollenberg, 1914 struck a balance between report and drama – but also paid attention to the acting performances and direction, and gave a short account of the contents. No attention was paid to the role played by the government and the censorship authorities, probably because the periodical had extensively reported on these matters in previous issues. According to Wollenberg, the dramatic impact of a film depended on 'die Gestaltung persönlichen, menschlichen Einzelschicksals'.<sup>92</sup> The main task of the writers of the screenplay, therefore, had been to reduce this world event to the level of psychology. They had succeeded in this, according to Wollenberg, by making the events at the Russian czar's court the emotional epicentre of the film. It should hardly come as a surprise that the *Lichtbildbühne* critic was not interested in the historical authenticity of the film narrative. The important thing was conveying human experience and perception which 'unter allen Umständen echter ist als jede "Echtheit" aller Dokumente'.<sup>93</sup> According to Wollenberg, Richard Oswald's film was an excellent achievement based on this principle.

The other major specialist publications, *Reichsfilmblatt*, *Der Film*, *Kinematograph* and the *Film-Kurier*, as well as most daily newspapers, had an opposite

approach. They paid much more attention to the historical content than to the cinematographical qualities of the film. One of the film's most outspoken critics was Hans-Walther Betz, writing for *Der Film*: 'Man muss diesen Film politisch nehmen und kann ihn nicht als nur filmisches Werk beurteilen, unter ängstlicher Vermeidung alles dessen, was für ihn Idee, Antrieb und inhaltliche Notwendigkeit war.'<sup>94</sup> Other specialist periodicals also believed that 1914 was 'kein Kinowerk im üblichen Sinne (...) sondern eine historische Reportage'<sup>95</sup> or 'ein Geschichts-Bildbericht'<sup>96</sup>, which means that these periodicals also focused on examining the historical content of the film.<sup>97</sup> Although the film was mostly considered as a work of history, this did not mean that its other qualities were not taken into account. Nevertheless, the pressing question continued to be asked whether this film was a 'dokumentarisch-historische, wahrheitenthüllende Arbeit' or 'ein Film(kunst)werk'.<sup>98</sup>

As has been said before, concentrating on the historical content of 1914 almost inevitably prompted reviewers to make political statements or observations. The subtitles and main titles of the reviews are an indication of the tone of voice of the critics. The 'indicative' titles below both reflect the political range of the daily press and the critical assessments of 1914.

*Die Rote Fahne*: 'Im Westen 1914' (subtitle).<sup>99</sup>

*Welt am Abend*: 'Die Legende von der Unschuld des deutschen Imperialismus' (subtitle).<sup>100</sup>

*Vorwärts*: 'Ein Narrenstück der Filmzensur/kein Meisterstück der Filmkunst!' (subtitle).<sup>101</sup>

*Frankfurter Zeitung*: 'Filmspiel und Politik' (main title).<sup>102</sup>

*Kreuz-Zeitung*: 'Verschleierung der historischen Wahrheit durch den Film' (with the following caption: 'Ein neuer Skandal').<sup>103</sup>

*Der Angriff*: 'Hausse in Weltkrieg' (main title).<sup>104</sup>

Practically all aspects of the history of 1914 are reflected implicitly or explicitly in these newspaper headlines: the recent scandal surrounding ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT; the role played by the censorship authorities and the interference of politics; the mythologizing of the guilt issue, and the enormous commercial interest that war films attracted.

## Political context

As we saw earlier, the meaning of 1914 as a controversial film had already been pre-figured by the problems created by the censorship authorities. It was not the first time, nor would it be the last, that the censor made a name for him-

self in this way. Due to the various vicissitudes surrounding German or foreign films, the need arose in the early nineteen thirties, especially with the right-wing political parties Zentrum, DVP, DNVP and NSDAP, to review, that is, sharpen up, the 1920 censorship laws. Since agreement could not be reached among all federal states, a number of adjustments were made in 1931 that mainly involved the sound film. This meant that from then on, spoken text was also subject to censorship.<sup>105</sup>

Following the inauguration of the first presidential cabinet led by Brüning, in March 1930, and following the Reichstag elections in September of that same year, which saw huge gains by NSDAP and KPD, anti-democratic influences on political life increased noticeably. These developments had clear repercussions on cultural policy, especially where it involved the censor, who more and more became a political instrument. Nevertheless, all this political power had been unable to prevent the screening of a film such as 1914. Still, it became increasingly clear that the right's battle to get a film such as ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT banned, could also be waged outside the parliament. In the previous chapter, we already discussed how Goebbels' henchmen managed to get this film banned even after it had received official approval for release.

Rumours were circulating about the screening of 1914 that it might suffer from disturbances by NSDAP supporters. According to the national-socialist *Der Angriff*, the *12-Uhr Zeitung* (actually the liberal *12 Uhr Blatt*) had deliberately created this 'smear campaign' against the NSDAP.<sup>106</sup> However, according to the daily newspaper coverage, actual disturbances did not occur.

It should be clear from the above that attention to the historical contents and political observations did not only involve the film and its previous history, which had extensively been covered in the press, but also the volatile political situation. Opponents of film censorship, especially leftist liberals and social democrats, watched the film with an appropriate measure of distrust, with in the back of their heads the question how the censorship measures had affected the film.<sup>107</sup> In this respect, the connection with ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT, released one month earlier, that *Vorwärts* discerned is interesting:

Warum die Zensur diesen Film ursprünglich verboten hat, um ihn dann mit einer ledernen Vorrede laufen zu lassen, wäre gänzlich unerfindlich, wenn es nicht einen Remarque-Skandal, wenn es nicht einen gewissen Herrn Goebbels und weisse Mäuse gäbe. (...) Dieses Zensurstück ist ein Gradmesser für die ans Pathologische grenzende Hysterie, in die unsere Filmzensur durch das Goebbelssche Lärmtheater hineingepeitscht worden ist. Hysterie ist ein Fremdwort. Sagen wir auf Deutsch: Bibbernde Feigheit.<sup>108</sup>

Advocates of censorship, however, also being very distrustful, wondered whether the director had sufficiently been subject to official supervision, or they expressed their grievances in a motion of no-confidence against the government in its entirety.<sup>109</sup> For example, a statement in the *Kreuz-Zeitung* read as follows:

Worin der Kampf unserer Regierung gegen diese Lüge besteht, ist uns bisher nicht klar geworden. (...) Wenn aber ein Film der Öffentlichkeit übergeben werden soll, der unumwunden zugibt dass wir *nicht* frei von Kriegsschuld sind, dann gibt die Regierung ihre Zustimmung, dieselbe Regierung, die angeblich gegen die Kriegsschuldlüge kämpft.

The only newspaper that was actually behind the Foreign Ministry's decisions was the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*. As the Foreign Ministry's mouthpiece, it was also the only newspaper that had something relatively positive to say about the film. The critic found that the censored version served historical truth much better than the first, banned, version. The extent to which the critic identified with the whole procedure was indicated by the last sentence of the review, in which he used the pronoun 'our': 'Aber immerhin muss es als begrüßenswert verzeichnet werden, dass Richard Oswald *unseren* berechtigten Vorwürfen gegen die früheren Fassungen in gewissem Ausmass entgegengekommen ist' [italics BK].<sup>110</sup> This statement would imply that *Vorwärts*, in the passage cited above, was right, and that the ministry had allowed itself to be swayed by fears of right-wing protests. However, reports in the specialist publications prove that changes to the film had only been minimal. The most important change was adding Eugen Fischer's introduction and making minor adjustments to two scenes. No single scene was said to have been cut.<sup>111</sup> However, this was contradicted by two left-liberal quality publications, *Vossische Zeitung* and *Die Weltbühne*, which mentioned the cutting of the Von Pourtales scene in Petersburg.<sup>112</sup> Even if this was actually the case, we may nevertheless establish that it was not entirely clear to many other critics what exact changes had actually been made to the film – only a few critics had been able to see the first version of the film –, which was clear from the reporting on a number of occasions. Some critics said major alterations had been made, others said there were none, apart from the brief introduction that had been added to the film.

In comparison with the reactions to *BRANDSTIFTER EUROPAS*, made five years earlier, it is striking that the cautious attitude towards the notion of 'objective' knowledge about the July crisis that existed in 1926 had completely disappeared in 1931. Nearly all critics had meanwhile lost their timidity with respect to the run-up to the war. Pronouncements on the dramatic licence one was allowed to take with historical subject matter, such as had been made by the *Reichsfilmblatt* and the *Kinematograph* about *BRANDSTIFTER EUROPAS* could



not be found in reviews of 1914. The reaction to a statement that Eugen Fischer was said to have made during a 'Pressetee' may serve to illustrate the point. Fischer said that, for him, it was 'doch nur ganz einfach "Spielfilm", kein Kulturfilm', to which a critic replied: 'Ein "Spiel" aber ist mit solchen Dingen, die uns allen bitterernst sind, nicht erlaubt.'<sup>113</sup>

How serious critics took the issue can be seen from their reviews. Most of them were afraid the general public might be subjected to 'wrong' influences. They believed most people based their knowledge on what they were told by the mass media, and film in particular. In order to protect the public from 'wrong' ideas, some critics adopted the confident attitude of the expert and, without indicating any sources, gave an alternative 'objective' interpretation of the war past. Depending on his newspaper's political persuasion, the reader was able to digest a wide variety of views on the past. Besides that, many readers turned out to have developed completely individual interpretations of the film.

Communist newspapers such as *Die Rote Fahne* and *Welt am Abend* interpreted 1914 as a film that cleared Wilhelm II, Franz Joseph, King Karel and czar Nicholas II of all guilt, while blaming Russia, and grand duke Nicolai in particular. Besides Russia, France was also partly held responsible for the war, via the statement made by Jaurès. The alternative that was offered by the papers, especially by *Die Rote Fahne*, was an analysis in which German and Austrian-Hungarian imperialism, incompetent diplomacy by Berchtold and Pourtalès, German-French relations and the ultimatum to Serbia were seen as the main factors contributing to the outbreak of the war.<sup>114</sup>

The reviews in those newspapers (and specialist publications<sup>115</sup>) that belonged to the left-liberal, social democratic and confessional<sup>116</sup> centre, however different their political persuasions, were closer to the communist view than to the one represented in the nationalist press.<sup>117</sup> No wonder that a number of authors could see no justification for the right-wing accusation of support for the Kriegsschuldlüge. Their alternative interpretation was that German and Austria-Hungary, through their diplomatic activities, and because of the role played by Wilhelm II, had actually played a part in the outbreak of the war. Besides that, the problem was not any neglect of the run-up to the war, but the fact that the social context – the people, the press, the soldiers – had been left out completely, which made the film rather lifeless.

At the other end of the political spectrum, there were newspapers such as the nationalist and monarchist *Kreuz-Zeitung*, *Der Montag*, *Der Tag* and the National Socialist *Der Angriff*.<sup>118</sup> The *Kreuz-Zeitung* especially reviewed the film extensively, though the author only discussed the historical contents. It is also the most emotional and fiercest review of all the pieces I have been able to find. In

contrast to the communist papers, the *Kreuz-Zeitung* and *Der Angriff* were absolutely convinced that the film did actually blame Germany, Austria-Hungary and especially Russia for the outbreak of the war. Serbia, France and especially Great Britain had no guilt, or so the film suggested, according to the *Kreuz-Zeitung* and *Der Angriff*. This reasoning prompted the notion that the so-called historical falsifications had been inspired by commercial motives, to avoid the film being banned in France and Great Britain. However, the emotions in the *Kreuz-Zeitung* concerned the fact that the film only seemed to confirm the accusations laid down in the Treaty of Versailles.

The main objection that the three newspapers had, although the *Kreuz-Zeitung* paid the most attention to this, was that the run-up to the war was left out of consideration too much. According to the papers, it was supposed to begin in 1870/71 (also the point of departure for the Foreign Ministry document collection), and address such matters as the threat that Serbian pan-Slavism posed to Austria-Hungary, the Entente Cordiale between France, Russia and Great Britain and their deliberate tactic of surrounding Germany, and the rampant revanchism that had dominated in France since the defeat in 1871 (the role played by Jaurès was considered ridiculous). In this alternative version of history, it was not so much Russia that deserved the blame, but Great Britain. Sir Edward Grey was not so much against the war itself, according to the author, but he found it had come too soon. The director had also left out the naval rivalry between Germany and Great Britain. According to the *Kreuz-Zeitung*, it was exactly those factors that had caused the war. *Der Tag* added that the secret Anglo-Belgian treaties and the Poincaré visit to St. Petersburg had been left out of the film. The *Kreuz-Zeitung* critic was one of the few who mentioned a source: *Wie es zum grossen Kriege kam* by Alfred von Wegener, one of the most influential figures in the 'Revisionsbewegung', former staff officer and DNVP supporter.<sup>119</sup> Only the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* and the specialist publication *Kinematograph* positioned themselves squarely behind the film.<sup>120</sup>

To sum up, there were critics all across the political spectrum who pointed that the film failed to show the 'truth'. The arguments they used to support their case differed considerably. Although the consensus was that the guilt section in the Treaty of Versailles should be altered, there was no agreement on the causes of the war, nor on the guilt issue.