

A Case History: Britain, Empire Decline, and the Origins of WW1 Or, Might the Lessons of the Boer War have Saved The Day?

Ian Buckley (referenced transcript of ANU Emeritus Faculty talk of July 18, 2007)

I'll start with a short quote from Winston Churchill, one of the key players of our war-time past, taken from the preface to *"The Gathering Storm"*, that is the first volume of his history of WW Two. (WC4) Now that might seem strange, but you will note that there he's also making a comment on the outcome of World War One where he says,

"One day President Roosevelt told me that he was asking publicly for suggestions about what the war should be called. I said at once "the unnecessary war". But then he goes on, ...

There never was a war more easy to stop than that which has just wrecked what was left of the world from the previous struggle." - an obvious reference to the lack of success of the First World War, hardly the glowing endorsement one might have expected, - even a hint perhaps that (at least for we of British stock) World War One was not necessary either, - which is the theme of this talk!

Now when we look carefully at Churchill's writings, we find many such insightful revelations, 'though these are often interspersed with less insightful enthusiastic passages about the necessity of, plus all sorts of exciting details about preparations for war, as occurred in the case of the First World War.

Well today, when we're allowing our Western, self-proclaimed Christian leaders to take us, and more to the point our children and grandchildren into more and more bizarrely unnecessary wars, it seems a good idea to look into the origins and consequences of the wars we were involved in last century and, - taking Britain and Australia's involvement in WW1 as a case history, - ask whether it was morally justified?, was it necessary for our common survival, for example?

Or was it, rather, that the outcome for Britain, along with Australia - and all of the nations initially involved, - such that *all* would have been far, far better off without it, that this war (like just so many others) was totally counter-productive?

Like me, you may feel the answer is all too obvious, but still I think its valuable to hear the judgement of some of that war's lead players at different stages of their political careers.

For example, in his maiden speech to the House of Commons in 1901, the 26-year-old Winston Churchill had the following to say about the counter-productivity of any future war between Europe's *industrial* powers, and I quote:

"We must not regard war with a modern Power as a kind of game in which we may take a hand, and with good luck may come safe home with our winnings. It is not that, and I rejoice that it cannot be that."

"A European war cannot be anything but a cruel, heartrending struggle, which, if we are ever to enjoy the fruits of victory, (a little ambivalence creeping in there, I think!) must demand, perhaps for several years, the whole manhood of the nation, the entire suspension of peaceful industries, and the concentrating to one end of every vital energy in the community....."

"I have frequently been astonished since I have been in this House to hear with what composure and how glibly Members and even Ministers, talk of a European war."

And now follows the guts of his warning.....

“But now, when mighty populations are impelled on each other, when the resources of science and civilisation sweep away everything that might mitigate their fury, a European war can only end in the ruin of the vanquished and the scarcely less fatal commercial dislocation of the conquerors....”

“We do not know what war is. We have had a glimpse of it in South Africa. Even in miniature it is hideous and appalling.” (MG1, 51-2)

Remarkable, yes, both for its authorship and its very clear insight as to what would be *that* wars utter counter-productivity to *all* of the nations participating – Britain, for example, never being the same again.

Moreover, considering the inevitability of such an outcome in that industrial age, why was that insight *not* shared by *all* the Imperial powers?!

Well, at leadership level, it appears that all were mesmerised by the lure of never-ending economic growth, expanding wealth and power, - which meant ever-greater expansion Colonially to the detriment of others, - ultimately these others to include their Empire competitors. Competition was the watchword, Social Darwinism was in the air. (JH; MH; AN; BT1; BT2)

So, as this line of thinking went, just like the survival of the fittest *individuals*, the fittest nations, the fittest Empires could only survive, would reach their zeniths, their ‘manifest destinies’, only through what United States’ Admiral Mahan termed ‘honest collision’ in the field of war, with their Imperial rivals. (BT1, 249-50)

And let there be no illusions as to the very real threat of war at this very time. For as George F. Kennan, historian and former United States Ambassador to the Soviet Union (see <http://www.answers.com/topic/george-f-kennan>) wrote, ever since what he termed the ‘*Fateful Alliance*’ of 1892/4, between *France* and *Russia*, whereby these two committed themselves to “*Immediate and simultaneous mobilisation*” whenever any component of the Triple Alliance should mobilise, (as later occurred following Austria’s *partial* mobilisation against Serbia in 1914) Europe had stood teetering on the very edge of general war. (GK, 238-258; <http://www.gwpda.org/1914m/franruss.html>) Indeed, there followed a number of international ‘incidents’, including the 1898 crisis between Britain and France, - over the arrival of a rather small French military mission at Fashoda on the Upper Nile, - which went very close to war. (BT1, 57, 231, 255) And yet, as Barbara Tuchman so well describes in her account of the 1899 Hague Peace Conference, - which had called for agreements on arms limitation *and* negotiation to deal with such crises, - the response of Europe’s Powers was utter disdain, total rejection! (BT1, 227-288)

OK, but why would *Britain’s* Parliamentarians want to engage in ‘glib talk’ of a European war between competing Empires? After all, by 1901 the British Empire was the greatest of all, controlling over 13 million square miles of foreign territory along with some 366 million of its inhabitants, (JH, 20) - added to which Britain itself, as an island state girt by sea and protected by the world’s strongest navy, could feel totally secure regardless of what struggles might occur across Europe.

However, the reality was that by the late 1800s (indeed from about 1884) Britain’s *competitive* economic position was on the decline, it being challenged by the more rapidly-developing economies of the US, Japan and Germany, - added to which these powers (and others), by laying

claim to various bits of China and other parts of the globe, were simply ignoring Lord Salisbury's plea that they respect the status quo, - i.e., what Great Britain laid claim to. (KW1, 158-60)

It was all of great concern to those in the know. As Secretary of State for India, Lord George Hamilton, wrote to Lord Curzon on October 11, 1900, "*Unless we are prepared to ... throw in our lot with some of the great European Powers we cannot expect them to stand in with us in protecting our own interests*". Indeed, as he emphasised to Curzon the following year, "*As we now stand, we are an object of envy and of greed to all the other Powers. Our interests are so vast and ramified that we touch, in some shape or other, the interests of almost every great country in every continent.*" And that, he said, made it impossible, "*...to deter foreign nations from trying to encroach upon our interests...*". (KW1, 160)

OK, well that explained Britain's Imperial position, that of its Conservatives under Salisbury - including their desire for 'Allies', - such leading to Treaties and other 'arrangements' (shall we say), which could, indeed, involve Britain in a European war.

Now although I'll be emphasising the strong opposition to this approach within Britain's Liberal Party, I need here to outline the Conservative's early moves to gather useful 'Allies' and some 'downside' consequences. First, bearing in mind Britain's principal adversaries, its centuries-long enemy, France and the currently more-pressing Czarist Russia, Britain's initial move was to make a full military alliance with the ever-so fast-developing Japan, through its Anglo-Japanese Treaty of 1902.

As an interesting aside, I should quote Churchill on its historical background, - his reflections on Japan's meteoric rise to power from the 1850s, this taken from the third volume of his World War Two series. (WC5)

On Japan's forced awakening by the West, Churchill has this to say: "*Uncle Sam and Britannia were the god-parents of the new Japan. In less than two generations, with no background but the remote past, the Japanese people advanced from the two-handed sword of the Samurai to the ironclad ship, the rifled cannon, the torpedo, and the Maxim gun; and a similar revolution took place in industry. The transition of Japan under British and American guidance from the Middle Ages to modern times was swift and violent.*" (WC5, 515)

Churchill then goes on to comment on Japan's earlier assaults on China, its 1904/5 defeat of Russia, and how Japan "*...took her place amongst the Great Powers*", and then how the Japanese leaders were "*...astonished at the respect with which they were viewed.*" He further admits how he had sided with them in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904; that he had welcomed the Anglo-Japanese Treaty (1902; and 1904 - to 1921) and how he 'rejoiced' when Japan, joining the Allies during WWI, took over Germany's 'possessions' in the Far East, China's port of Kiao Chow, and 4 Pacific island groups: (Palau, the Marianas, the Carolines and the Marshalls) (WC5, 516; MG1, 333-4) Well, it certainly was a fast 'learning time' for these Japanese 'modernisers', those artful imitators of the West!

Yet, despite these wonderfully insightful revelations, instead of drawing the obvious conclusion that Japan was simply emulating, 'ever too successfully', the behaviour of the Western Powers, he then goes to much trouble to show how 'different' they were, how one has to *struggle* to understand "*...the Japanese mind. It was indeed inscrutable.*". For example, rather than interpret the tensions that developed between the First and Second World Wars, as a growing disagreement between Great Powers as to who should get what of colonial spoils in the Far East, Churchill sought to explain such disagreements in terms of these '*differences*' - of the *Japanese* mind and thus, by implication, of *Japanese* militarism. (WC5, 516-8)

Of course, while we might doubt the wisdom of The West having thus ‘awakened Japan’, yet at the time its Conservative promoters truly appreciated its negative effects on both Russia and France. Indeed, as Churchill related in *“The World Crisis”* (his history of the origins and course of WW1), despite concerns about the growing economy of Germany, *“She was invited to join with us in the Alliance with Japan.”* (WC2, 21) Hard to believe, - and how different our history might have been!

However, as events transpired, Germany declined and, instead, Britain came soon to recognise that its differences with France and Russia were not insuperable after all! So, in Churchill’s words, *“...Initially that meant from 1902 cultivating good relations with France..”* (WC2, 21) a process which advanced rapidly once France sensed her weakened position following her Ally, Russia’s, defeat by Japan in 1904.

And as he went on to explain, what emerged was the Anglo-French Agreement of 1904 in which *“.....the essence of the compact was that the French desisted from opposition to British interests in Egypt, and Britain gave general support to the French views about Morocco”* (WC2, 22) Truly a gentleman’s agreement, and what marvelous language to describe a compact between competing Empires which so easily delineates their respective powers over other countries, other peoples. And what a tragic outcome that rapprochement would ultimately have, one alluded to by Lord Rosebury who at the time commented: *“My mournful and supreme conviction is that this agreement is much more likely to lead to complications than to peace.”* (WC2, 22) Again, like Churchill’s Maiden Speech of 1901, very insightful, yet sadly to no avail!

Now aside from the injustices to the people of those countries that had just been bargained away, what was the problem for Britain, France and the rest of Europe in all this? Well important background is the *1880 Treaty of Madrid* entered into by Europe’s powers, this guaranteeing Morocco’s independence and open trade access to *all* those Treaty nations, - whereas France’s clear intention was to bag Morocco as its exclusive preserve.

As described by Churchill, *“Early in 1905 a French mission arrived in Fez. Their language and actions seemed to show an intention of treating Morocco as a French Protectorate, thereby ignoring the international obligations of the Treaty of Madrid. The Sultan of Morocco appealed to Germany, asking if France was authorised in the name of Europe.”* (WC2, 31) Germany succeeded in calling an international conference of the Treaty’s signatories (at Algeciras) and despite Churchill’s judgement that, *“France had not a good case”*, Britain sided with France. And yet, although ultimately the conference supported the principle of open trade access, Germany was as Churchill put it *“effectively isolated.”* More than that, he added, had the crisis come to war, *“...Great Britain could not remain indifferent”*. (WC2, 32)

And, emphasizing what this would mean if any future crisis led to war between France and Germany, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, incoming Liberal British Prime Minister instituted what were termed *“military conversations”* between the British and French General Staffs *“...with a view to concerted action in the event of war.”* (WC2, 32) Looking back from 1927, Churchill commented, *“This was a step of profound significance and of far-reaching reactions.,”* – he going on to proclaim that, *“The attitude of Great Britain at Algeciras turned the scale against Germany.”* Yet, precisely because, as he so rightly added, *“Algeciras was a milestone on the road to Armageddon”* (WC2, 32-3) the greater reality was that the scale was turned against *all* of the prime combatant countries of WW1 since, in both human and economic terms, all engulfed in that tragedy, (including Britain and Australia) became the losers.

However, going back to the days of the Liberal Party's accession to government in 1906, there seemed to be distinct indications of hope because that party was dominated by the self-proclaimed 'Liberal Radicals' who, while they favoured progressive social reforms at home, were utterly opposed to military adventures abroad. Now, one of these Radicals, Winston Churchill, although originally a Conservative, had transferred in 1904 to the Liberals where he began a close collaboration with the Liberal Radical David Lloyd George. And there Winston's insights on both social policy and foreign affairs are so remarkable I just have to quote from his 1909 speech titled, "*The Spirit of the Budget*", given in Leicester on September 5 that year, then (along with other speeches) published in book form, as "*Liberalism and the Social Problem*", and now, glory be!, available online via the Gutenberg Project. (see WC1 under 'Spirit of the Budget', 357)

Here's a slab of it:

"The social conditions of the British people in the early years of the twentieth century cannot be contemplated without deep anxiety. We are at the cross-ways. If we stand on in the old happy-go-lucky way, the richer classes ever growing in wealth and in number, and ever declining in responsibility, the very poor remaining plunged or plunging even deeper into helpless, hopeless misery, then I think there is nothing before us but savage strife between class and class,

"Now we have had over here lately colonial editors from all the Colonies of the British Empire, and what is the opinion which they expressed as to the worst thing they saw in the old country? ... Is it not impressive to find that they are all agreed, coming as they do from Australia, or Canada, or South Africa, or New Zealand, that the greatest danger to the British Empire and to the British people is not to be found among the enormous fleets and armies of the European Continent, nor in the solemn problems of Hindustan; it is not the Yellow peril nor the Black peril nor any danger in the wide circuit of colonial and foreign affairs.

No, it is here in our midst, in the vast growing cities of England and Scotland, and in the dwindling and cramped villages of our denuded countryside. It is there you will find the seeds of Imperial ruin and national decay—the unnatural gap between rich and poor, the divorce of the people from the land, the exploitation of boy labour, the physical degeneration which seems to follow so swiftly on civilized poverty, the awful jumbles of an obsolete Poor Law, the absence of any established minimum standard of life and comfort among the workers, and, at the other end, the swift increase of vulgar, joyless luxury—here are the enemies of Britain. Beware lest they shatter the foundations of her power."

Quite extraordinary stuff, for I doubt you'd have guessed its authorship. Moreover, considering that the Liberals were not only in power then, but remained so through to the very eve of Britain's declaration of war in 1914, - *and* that the Liberal Imperialists in the Cabinet were vastly outnumbered by the Liberal Radicals, who were absolutely determined *not* to become embroiled in any European conflict, - one might have expected that Britain's Liberal government could not only have saved *Britain's* youth and wealth, but by its good example and other diplomatic measures, might even have saved the youth and wealth of Continental Europe as well.

So why did this not occur? And how might it have turned out more happily? - obviously a tale of relevance for our less-than-sane, 'crazy mixed up world' of today.

Well, one vital factor was that among the *minority* Imperialists in Cabinet, were those 3 or 4 key players, principally Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, Foreign Secretary, Edward Grey, and, third, Britain's aptly-named Minister for War, Richard Haldane who were *highly* motivated to pursue the policy the Liberals had inherited from the Conservatives at the time of the first Moroccan crisis of 1905/6, -- namely to continue with the secret military contingency plans that was very likely to involve Britain in war, - namely, to support France at any time it might be at war with Germany.(KW2; WC2, 32-4; GK; WW1Docs; BT1))

Indeed, those contingency plans, inherited by Campbell-Bannerman in 1906 were strengthened once Asquith succeeded him in 1908, at which time Lloyd George became Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Churchill joined Cabinet as President of the Board of Trade, these two then (seemingly) firmly in the ranks of the Liberal Radicals, - cooperating to advance social justice at home, and determined to oppose involvement in any European war. (WC2, 33-4)

Now, we do not know just when Churchill's views on the wisdom of such involvement turned around, but it's clear that by the second Moroccan crisis of 1911 (triggered by another French 'expedition' occupying its capital Fez followed by Germany's response, an attempt to set up a trading post on the Atlantic coast at Agadir), Churchill, by then in the Imperialist camp, was encouraging Lloyd George to likewise declare himself. (WC2, 46-7)

And so it came to pass that, thus encouraged, Lloyd George agreed to present his '*Mansion House*' speech, one drafted by Asquith and Grey, that gives one the clear impression of an Empire more than a little anxious as to its declining position, - at one point Lloyd George saying, "*I believe it is essential in the highest interests not merely of this country, but of the world, that Britain should at all hazards maintain her place and her prestige amongst the Great Powers of the world.*" That beginning a long passage which ends by proclaiming, "*I would make great sacrifices to maintain peace. I conceive that nothing would justify a disturbance of international goodwill except questions of the gravest national moment. But if a situation were to be forced upon us in which peace could only be preserved by the surrender of the great and beneficent position Britain has won by centuries of heroism and achievement, by allowing Britain to be treated where her interests are vitally affected as if she were of no account in the Cabinet of nations, then I say emphatically that peace at that price would be a humiliation intolerable for a great country like ours to endure.*" (WC2, 47) So you see what I mean. And, indeed, according to Churchill, it was a message that set off alarm bells across Europe! (WC2, 46-50)

Yet, notwithstanding Lloyd George's shift of position, I should emphasise the ongoing strength of the opposition across the Liberal Cabinet to this line of thinking. That opposition was led by Lord Morley, John Viscount Morley, a seasoned parliamentary veteran who in the mid 1880s had strived with Gladstone to introduce the first *Irish Home Rule Bill* and other enlightened measures. With his ideals and ambitions uncorrupted, he could clearly see that, inevitably, a general European war would, in human and economic terms, be mutually tragic, absolutely catastrophic for *all* combatant nations involved. Moreover, as he realised, far from maintaining Britain's predominant position in the world, such a war could only undermine it. (KW2, 232)

And Morley's views were backed by an overwhelming majority of the Cabinet (indeed 15 to 5) such that when various covert activities of the Liberal Imperial faction were uncovered during this 1911 crisis, that majority insisted on a full Cabinet debate, - this resulting in a show-down and clarifying 'note' (dated November 29, 1911) which appeared to be decisive. Agreed to by all, its 3 points stated:

"1. That at no time has the Cabinet decided whether or not to give either military or naval assistance to France in the event of her being at war with Germany.

2. That at no time has the British Government given any promise of such assistance to France.

3. That the Cabinet was not informed till the end of October of any naval or military preparations being made to meet the contingency of war this summer or autumn, nor was any plan for a landing on the Continent any time communicated to or approved by the Cabinet."
(KW2, 234, quoting Burns MSS Add. MSS 46308)

However, notwithstanding that agreement, there continued through to the outbreak of the First

World War not only a heightening of these covert military and naval arrangements with the French but greatly accelerated preparations at home, preparations for what all in the Imperial camp saw as the inevitable, “*only a matter of time*”, Churchill enthusiastically taking a leading role as the Admiralty’s First Lord. Yet, one should note that whenever recognized, these preparations were challenged not only within the Cabinet but more widely as an on-going public relations battle. (KW2, 239-244).

Now although at this point its extremely hard to condense, let alone satisfactorily explain, how, in an avowed Democracy, the final tragedy emerged despite the long-concerted majority opposition, a general idea of what happened comes from Churchill’s “*The World Crisis*” and Lord John Morley’s account, the Memorandum written following his August 1914 resignation. (WC2; JM)

For example, in documenting the strength of the opposition to war, not only within Cabinet but across the Parliament - even throughout the week preceding war’s outbreak on August 4, 1914, Churchill, (referring to the crucial meeting of Monday July 27) begins, “*The Cabinet was overwhelmingly pacific. At least three-quarters of its members were determined not to be drawn into a European quarrel, unless Great Britain were herself attacked, which was not likely.*” (WC2, 199)

A little later Churchill stresses how this opposition remained as firm as ever into the following Wednesday or Thursday for, as he writes, “*Suppose again, that now after the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia, (i.e., July 23, 1914) the Foreign Secretary had proposed to the Cabinet that if Germany attacked France or violated Belgian territory, Great Britain would declare war on her. Would the Cabinet have assented to such a communication? I cannot believe it.*” ...and then, further emphasizing the like stand across the Commons, Churchill later writes, “*....I am certain that if Sir Edward Grey had sent the kind of ultimatum suggested, the Cabinet would have broken up, and it is also my belief that up till Wednesday or Thursday at least, (i.e., July 29, 30) the House of Commons would have repudiated his action. Nothing less than the deeds of Germany would have converted the British nation to war.*”(WC2, 204)

Thus while it might have appeared that nothing could change the extent of the Cabinet and popular opposition to war, -- which should have translated into reality, -- this last sentence indicated the finally decisive political ‘formula’ or device for getting around that opposition.

A key aspect of this device was to plead that ‘as a matter of honour’ Britain must go to war on behalf of Belgium, - notwithstanding that as both Churchill and Morley’s accounts stressed, the altogether fundamental aim of British involvement was, as ever, the backing of France. (WC2, 202-5; JM, see sections 3, 9 II, &14)

Linked to that, a second line of argument was to give the impression of a binding legal obligation to France, Edward Grey in his August 3 speech, imploring the House to focus on “*British interests, British honour and British obligations*”- though it’s all too clear from both Morley’s and Churchill’s accounts that there certainly was no *Alliance* commitment to France. Indeed Churchill, made the point that there never had been such a binding commitment precisely because the parliament would never have supported it, he regretting this because in his view an openly declared Alliance might have altered Germany’s actions following Sarejevo. (WC2, 205; JM, section 9 II)

But, getting to the crux of what it was all about, the third line of argument, one raised by Foreign Secretary Grey in his speech to the House of August 3rd, centred on Britain’s paramount Economic interests where he says, “*I ask the House from the point of view of British interests to consider what may be at stake. If France is beaten to her kneesI do not believe for a moment that, at the end of this war,.....we should be able to undo what had happened,to prevent the whole of the West of Europe opposite us from falling under the domination of a single power....and we should.... not escape the most serious and grave economic consequences.*”

(BT2,122)

Indeed, as Grey stressed, England must make her stand “....against the unmeasured aggrandizement of any power whatsoever”, (BT2, 121) - a stand well understood by Morley who in his resignation *Memorandum*, commented that *the great vice of diplomacy is that it does not allow for new planets, or world powers, swimming into the skies, e.g. Japan and the United States,- his chief objection to Eyre Crowe’s Foreign Office advice being that it makes too much of German Imperialism and too little of British Imperialism.* (JM, at xvii)

And here one should stress that Morley was concerned not only to be fair-minded, but he desperately wanted to save his country from helping to promote, and then *itself* fall into such a totally counterproductive, catastrophic war.

Yet, while Morley could see the flaws in the Imperialist’s case, others, mesmerized by the Imperial logic, were further encouraged by other flawed ideas, such as that inevitably, such a war would not only be victorious (with all sorts of benefits to follow), but short, and that anyway it was to be fought only by those who had volunteered!

And tragically, notwithstanding Morley’s clear insights, eventually, one-by-one, all of his Liberal Radical supporters, save one, John Burns, changed sides, these two then resigning from Cabinet, - the rest going along with the government’s final decision to join the war. (JM)

Sadly, at this time Churchill was more than a little enthusiastic about the prospect of war and the role he would play. Indeed, as time passed he became more and more excited with the prospect, - to the point that in a letter to his wife Duff on war’s eve (quoted by his official biographer, Martin Gilbert who took over after Randolph Churchill) he wrote, *“Everything tends towards catastrophe and collapse. I’m interested Dear Duff, and happy. Is it not horrible to be built like that? The preparations have a hideous fascination for me. I pray to God to forgive me for such terrible moods of levity. You know I would do my best for peace, and nothing would induce me wrongfully to strike the blow. I wonder whether those stupid Kings and Emperors could not assemble together and revivify Kingship by saving the Nations from hell. But we all drift on, hour by hour in a kind of dull, cataleptic trance, as if it was somebody else’s operation.”* (MG2, para. 18)

However, in contrast to this, - by war’s end, when it was all over, it was a very different story from Churchill, for in *‘The Aftermath’*, (sequel to *“The World Crisis”*), while he could begin by assuring us that:, *“The conclusion of the Great War raised England to the highest position she has yet attained. For the fourth time in four successive centuries she has headed and sustained the resistance of Europe to a military tyranny; and for the fourth time the war had ended leaving the group of small States of the Low Countries, for whose protection England had declared war, in full independence.”* (WC3, 17)

Yet, ... by the end of this first chapter (which he titled *“The Broken Spell”*), we learn that when that spell was broken, *“Every victorious country subsided to its old levels and previous arrangements; The boundless hopes that had cheered the soldiers and the peoplesdied swiftly away. The vision of a sunlit world redeemed by valour, Where Justice and Freedom reigned .. was soon replaced by cold, grey reality. How could it have been otherwise? By what process could the slaughter of ten million men and the destruction of one-third of the entire savings of the greatest nations of the world have ushered in a Golden Age?”* (WC3, 30-31)

A cruel disillusionment was at hand All .. were looking forward to some great expansion, and there lay before them but a sharp contraction; a contraction in the material conditions for the masses;”. Then, all-too-significantly, Churchill adds, *“...the contrast between the victors and the vanquished tended continually to diminish.”* (And as the chapter concluded, *“Through all its five acts the drama has run its course; the light of history is switched off, the world stage dims, the actors shrivel, the chorus sinks. The war of the giants has ended; the quarrels of the pygmies have*

begun.”) (WC3, 31) Indeed, all something of an understatement which, together with other comments from Churchill, Lord Robert Cecil, and others, adds up to an admission of failure to attain for the British Empire what it was meant to, and of course the accomplishment of a whole lot more that was hugely destructive to all directly involved.

As just one example to illustrate an important judgement on that point, I'll quote what Australia's Governor-General, Lord Gowrie, a VC winner from 1899 and a WW1 veteran of Gallipoli and France (- severely wounded at Gallipoli) said at the opening of the Australian War Memorial, on November 11, 1941.

Now, while praising the heroic efforts of Australia's soldiers with whom he of course had the greatest sympathy, including their willingness to sacrifice their lives in a cause they believed would advance the freedom and welfare of mankind, Lord Gowrie went on to say,

“Now the war had lasted for four years. It was responsible for the death of over eight million able-bodied men. It was responsible for the wounding and maiming of many, many millions more. It caused universal destruction, desolation and distress without bringing any compensating advantage to any one of the belligerents. It was a war which settled nothing; it was a war in which all concerned came out losers.” (LG)

To me that sounds a good summing up of the outcome of the First World War. Of course one should add to that, WW1's terrible man-made sequelae, numbers of which culminated, all too soon, in the Second World War, much of this travesty of the so-called Peace well described in Lord Robert Cecil's *All the Way* (RC) and Churchill's *The Gathering Storm*, (WC4) - but that would take another story.

Finally, in light of this history of WW1, I wonder if we might give some thought to comparable problems we face today.

For example, the rising tension between the United States and China over *its* ever-so-fast economic growth - and the US response, with its aim of 'full-spectrum – nuclear - dominance' which Hugh White has warned of recently, counselling Australia, in the cause of sanity and our own self-esteem, to sensibly intervene. (HW1; HW2)

Another example relates to those further issues critical for human survival: - namely economic and environmental sustainability, issues raised by Jeffrey Sachs in his recent highly-insightful Reith lecture series, - including his final plea that it is high time indeed that we take seriously all of Adam Smith's principles aimed at the attainment of sustainable and just human societies. (AS1; AS2; JSa)

Sources

Buckley, Ian, *Australia's Foreign Wars: Origins, Costs, Future?!*, Online at:
<http://users.cyberone.com.au/ibuckley> (IB)

Cecil, Lord Robert. *All the Way*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1949. (RC)

**Churchill, Winston S. *Liberalism and the Social Problem*, Hodder and Stoughton, Lond.1909
Online at: <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/18419> (Spirit of the Budget, p.357) (WC1)**

Churchill, Winston S *The World Crisis* Vol.1. (1911-14) Thornton Butterworth, Lond.1927

(WC2)

Churchill, Winston S. *The Aftermath - being a sequel to The World Crisis*. Macmillan, London, 1944 (WC3)

Churchill, Winston S. *The Second World War Vol.1. The Gathering Storm*, Penguin, London, 1985. (WC4)

Churchill, Winston S. *The Second World War Vol.3. The Grand Alliance*, Cassell, London, 1985. (WC5)

Gilbert, Martin, *A History of the Twentieth Century*, Vol.1, Harper Collins, Lond., 1997 (MG1)

Gilbert, Martin, *In Churchill and Canada*, Proceedings of International Churchill Societies, 1988-89. (Includes letter to Duff see para. 18) Available online at:
<http://www.winstonchurchill.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=579> (MG2)

Gooch, G.P, *History of Modern Europe 1878-1919*, Cassell, London, 1923 (GG)

Gowrie, Lord Alexander, Governor-General of Australia, Address opening the Australian War Memorial November 11, 1941. (Canb.Times, 11.11.1941) (LG)
http://espace.library.curtin.edu.au:80/R?func=dbin_jump_full&object_id=86157&local_base=era01jcpml

Hobson, John A. *Imperialism: A Study*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1902, 1905 & 1938 (JH)
<http://www.econlib.org/library/YPDBooks/Hobson/hbsnImp.html>

Howard, Sir Michael *The Lessons of History*, O U P, Oxford, 1993 (MH)

Kennan, George F., *The Fateful Alliance: France, Russia, and the Coming of the First World War*, Manchester University Press, 1984, (GK)

Keynes, John Maynard. *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, Macmillan, London 1920
Online at: <http://www.gwpda.org/1918p/keynespeace.htm> (JMK)

Kitson, Jill, *Patriots Three*, ABC RN (Aug./Sept, 2004) Billy Hughes, Lloyd George in WW1
Online at: <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/bigidea/features/patriots/default.htm> (JK1-6)

Morley, Lord John, *Memorandum on Resignation August 1914*. Online at:
<http://tmh.floonet.net/articles/lordmorley.shtml> (JM)

Nutting, Anthony. *Scramble for Africa: The Great Trek to the Boer War*, Constable, London, 1970. (AN)

Sachs, Jeffrey, *Bursting at the Seams*, Reith Lectures, BBC, 2007. Online at:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith2007/> (JSa)

Schlefer, Jonathan, *Today's Most Mischievous Quotation*, Atlantic Monthly, Mar. 1998. (also online). <http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/98mar/misquote.htm> (JSc)

- Smith**, Adam. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* Books I-V, (1776) Edwin Cannan, ed., 5th Edition, Methuen, London, 1904.
<http://www.econlib.org/library/Smith/smWN.html> (AS1)
- Smith**, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Glasgow, 1759, Also online:
<http://www.econlib.org/library/Smith/smMS.html> (AS2)
- Tuchman**, Barbara. *The Proud Tower: A Portrait of the World Before the War 1890-1914*, Bantam, 1970. (BT1)
- Tuchman**, Barbara. *August 1914, The First Month of the First World War*, Papermac, Lond. 1980 (BT2)
- Tuchman**, Barbara, *The March of Folly*, Abacus, London, 1984. (BT3)
- White**, Hugh, *Five Minutes to Midnight: Nuclear Threat in Asia*, Asialink lecture, Melbourne, May 10, 2007, Audio avail. at:
<http://harangue.lecture.unimelb.edu.au/ilectures/ilectures.lasso?ut=554&id=35662> (HW1)
- White**, Hugh, *A nuclear arms race between China and the United States: what Australia can do to stop it!*. Lowy Institute, May 23, 2007 Audio available at:
http://www.lowyinstitute.org/Program_IntSecurity.asp (HW2)
- Wilson**, Keith M. *The Boer War in the Context of Britain's Imperial Problems*, In *The International Impact of the Boer War*, pp.158-167, Ed. Keith Wilson, Palgrave, New York, 2001 (KW1)
- Wilson**, Keith M. *The Making and Putative Implementation of a British Foreign Policy of Gesture, December 1905 to August 1914: The Anglo-French Entente Revisited*, Canadian Journal of History, V.31, 227-255, 1996. Text, without footnote references, available online at: <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/peer.htm> (KW2)
- World War One Document Archive**. See 'Franco-Russian Military Alliance Convention'. Online:
<http://www.gwpda.org/1914m.html> (WW1Docs)

Addenda (information relevant to points raised in discussion)

Could Foreign Secretary Grey in 1912 have taken action to prevent WW1?

Writing some years after WWI, Churchill reflects: "*Suppose after Agadir or on the announcement of the new German Navy Law in 1912 the Foreign Secretary had, in cold blood, proposed a formal alliance with France and Russia, and in execution of military conventions consequential upon the alliance had begun to raise by compulsion an army adequate to our responsibilities and to the part we were playing in the world's affairs; and suppose we had taken this action as a united nation, who shall say whether that would have prevented or precipitated the war? But what chance was there of such action being unitedly taken? The Cabinet of the*

day would never have agreed to it. I doubt if four Ministers would have agreed to it. But if the Cabinet had been united upon it, the House of Commons would not have accepted their guidance. Therefore the Foreign Minister would have had to resign. The policy which he had advocated would have stood condemned and perhaps violently repudiated; and with that repudiation would have come an absolute veto upon all those informal preparations and non-committal discussions on which the defensive power of the Triple Entente was erected. Therefore, by taking such a course in 1912, Sir Edward Grey would only have paralysed Britain, isolated France, and increased the preponderant and growing power of Germany." (WC2, 203-4)

Pre-WW1 Relations with Germany (1912-1914)

As Churchill put it, "The spring and summer of 1914 were marked in Europe by an exceptional tranquillity. Ever since Agadir the policy of Germany towards Great Britain had not only been correct, but considerate. All through the Balkan Conferences British and German diplomacy laboured in harmony. The peaceful solution of the Balkan difficulties afforded justification for the feeling of confidence. For months we had negotiated upon the most delicate questions on the brink of local rupture, and no rupture had come. There had been a score of opportunities had any Power wished to make war. British and German diplomacy laboured in harmony. Germany seemed, with us, to be set on peace. There seemed also to be a prospect that the personal goodwill and mutual respect which had grown up between the principal people on both sides might play a useful part in the future; and some there were who looked forward to a wider combination in which Great Britain and Germany, without prejudice to their respective friendships or alliances, might together bring the two opposing European systems into harmony and give to all the anxious nations solid assurances of safety and fair-play." (WC2, 178-9)

And as Churchill went on, "Naval rivalry had at the moment ceased to be a cause of friction. We were proceeding inflexibly for the third year in succession with our series of programmes according to scale and declaration. Germany had made no further increases in naval power since the beginning of 1912. It was certain that we could not be overtaken as far as capital ships were concerned." (WC2, 179, & see also 244-7).

Origins of the War: Post-War Assessments

After the war, we have Lord Grey, Britain's Foreign Secretary in the decade before WWI, saying how "great armaments inevitably lead to war", - that armament competition was the "true and final cause of the war". (N-B1,396; see also N-B2) Similarly, we have Lloyd George referring to the need for "....a general reduction of the huge armaments responsible for precipitating the Great War." (DLG, 601) Both so wise, - or were they? (see IB Essay 7)...

However, it took eminent British historian G. P. Gooch to see the effect of the prior excessive arms build-up in its proper context. As Gooch emphasised, "The Old World had degenerated into a powder magazine, in which the dropping of a lighted match, whether by accident or design, was almost certain to produce a conflagration.....It is a mistake to imagine that the conflict of 1914 took Europe unawares, for the statesmen and soldiers had been expecting it and preparing for it for many years." (GG, 559; see also GK, BT2 & IB,Essay 3, B(b)(c))

Gooch, G.P., *History of Modern Europe 1878-1919*, Cassell, London, 1923 (GG)

Lloyd George, David. *The Truth About the Peace Treaties*, V1, Gollancz, Lond., 1938 (DLG)

Noel-Baker, Philip. *The Private Manufacture of Armaments*, Dover Publications, New York,

1938. (First published in 1936 by Gollancz)

(N-B1)

Noel-Baker, Philip. *The First World Disarmament Conference 1932-1933 and Why it Failed*, Pergamon, Oxford, 1979.

(N-B2)

Economic Motivations

Commenting in 1920 on the Versailles Treaty's punitive conditions aimed at crushing permanently the German economy, economist John Maynard Keynes in his highly illuminating *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, wrote, "*The politics of power are inevitable, and there is nothing very new to learn about this war or the end it was fought for; England had destroyed, as in each preceding century, a trade rival;...*".(JMK, 30, 33) It was, indeed, as he said, "*a Carthaginian Peace*" the motives of which are clearly revealed in the documented war-time words of David Lloyd George and Billy Hughes through Jill Kitson's radio series, *Patriots Three*, (Online, see JK, 1-6; & IB Essay 5)