

## Introduction to Volume II

JAY WINTER

The First World War was a test of the legitimacy of the states which waged it. They had to provide the weapons and manpower needed to win the war, and at the same time ensure that the war effort did not reduce the population to hunger, misery and despair. With the major exception of Russia, the Allies passed the test of legitimacy, winning the war on the battlefields while maintaining adequate standards of living among the civilians whom the armies were purportedly defending. The Central Powers failed that test, and as a consequence, the major imperial powers in that alliance – Germany, Austria-Hungary and Ottoman Turkey – collapsed.

This volume tells the story of the First World War as a test of state and imperial power, but it also considers ways in which the structure of the state and its relationship to civil society were transformed by the conflict. Carl Schmitt defined the sovereign as he who has the right to declare a state of exception, a time when normal legal, bureaucratic and political rules are suspended.<sup>1</sup> The greatest, most catastrophic, state of exception to date in world history was the First World War, and the radical concentration of power in the hands of an array of executive and military leaders in wartime had lasting effects on the history of all combatant states thereafter.

One implication of Schmitt's view, which he developed in the immediate aftermath of the war, was the collapse of parliamentarianism as a way of waging war, either external or internal. 'The pinnacle of great politics is the moment in which the enemy comes into view in concrete clarity as the enemy', Schmitt wrote in 1927.<sup>2</sup> That 'moment' occurred during the Great

- 1 Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology. Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (1922), trans. by G. Schwab (University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 5, 10, 12–13; Andrew Norris, 'Sovereignty, exception, and norm', *Journal of Law and Society*, 24:1 (2007), pp. 31–45.
- 2 Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Berlin: Duncker Humblot, 1963, 1st edn, 1927), as cited in Richard Wolin, 'Carl Schmitt: the conservative revolutionary habitus and the aesthetics of horror', *Political Theory*, 20:3 (1992), p. 425.

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War, and deformed both domestic political conflict and the terms in which the war against external enemies was understood. War was the state of the permanent 'abnormal', that moment when legal, parliamentary, and bureaucratic rules had to be set aside in the effort to ensure the survival of the state. So much for dissent, for divisions of opinion, for the division of powers in states. It is hardly surprising that Schmitt's 'state of exception' continued long after the Armistice in a vast number of countries where violence followed the war in Ireland, Poland, Russia, Turkey, Egypt, India, Korea and China. Blood continued to flow long after the peace treaties were formally concluded.

This volume shows the ways in which the different functions of the state – political, military, economic, diplomatic – were changed by and during the war. In some cases, this transformation was radical and permanent, as in Russia; in others, it was temporary and transient, as in Great Britain. In all countries, though, the state after the war was very different from the state before the war. What economists refer to as the threshold and concentration effects of war reflected the way in which armed conflict brought more and more of the resources of the nation under the direct or indirect control of the state. In 1914, the 'threshold' was passed whereby the percentage of gross domestic product occupied by the state was limited to single figures. In 1918, despite demobilisation, the share of the state in the nation's economy never returned to pre-1914 levels. The 'concentration' of services and functions in the central institutions of the state, providing pensions, social insurance and education in wartime, continued after the Armistice. It was the cost of maintaining these services alongside servicing war debt which ensured that the 'threshold effect' would be irreversible.<sup>3</sup> In effect, the state grew in size, in its multiple functions and in its authority in wartime: this history is at the core of this, the second volume of the *Cambridge History of the First World War*.

These developments were truly transnational, happening everywhere, but their coloration and significance varied in every national case. Issues of military-civilian relations, or of parliamentary review of military policy, of the growth of war economies, were shared by all states at war. Problems of logistics, morale, innovation in tactics and weapons systems, the use and abuse of science in wartime, problems of indiscipline or mutiny: all were ubiquitous during the conflict. Armies went home, but to a degree, the state never fully demobilised.

This volume therefore explores the multi-faceted history of state power under the terms of Schmitt's 'state of exception', and shows the ways in which

3 Alan T. Peacock and Jack Wiseman, *The Growth of Public Expenditure in the United Kingdom* (Princeton University Press, 1961).

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different political systems responded to and were deformed by the almost unbearable pressures of war. To understand the crisis of interwar liberalism, the survival of parliamentary regimes in some states and their displacement by dictatorships elsewhere in the 1920s and 1930s, we must fully understand a war which transformed the limits of state power and first enforced and then subverted its monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force.

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PART I

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POLITICAL POWER

## Introduction to Part I

JEAN-JACQUES BECKER AND GERD KRUMEICH

Had the war lasted as long as contemporaries thought it would – a few weeks or a few months at most – this section would not have been necessary to write. Instead, an account of military operations, soldiers and commanders would have sufficed. But reflecting on a war which lasted longer than four years requires us to pose the question differently. It took considerable time for many people to understand or to admit the difference between the war they had anticipated and the war they were forced to endure.

General Joffre, Commander-in-Chief of the French army, believed that everything depended on him and on the army; he held this view virtually until he was relieved of his command on 26 December 1916. The two men who ran the German war effort from 29 August 1916 until the autumn of 1918, Hindenburg and Ludendorff, shared this view, at least until Ludendorff asserted that civil authorities had to take the responsibility for arranging an Armistice when he saw that the war was lost.

The lever which enabled civil authorities, in Britain and with greater difficulty in France, to seize the reins of power was the combination of the economic effort and in particular an industrial effort unimaginable before the conflict, to equip and re-equip the armies without impoverishing the civilian population. This view constituted a recognition of the significance of home-front mobilisation, without which the military effort would have ground to a halt.

Consequently, in some places, the war enabled civilians to reaffirm their authority over the military. This was true certainly of Clemenceau in France, but also of Orlando in Italy and, to a debatable extent, of Lloyd George in Britain. In a mixed parliamentary and imperial regime as in Germany, in contrast, the military dominated civilian authorities. In all combatant countries, there was friction and at times open conflict between the civilian and the military leadership. But there was conflict on this matter within the civilian leadership itself. The overt hostility between Poincaré and Clemenceau in France, between the head of state and the head of government, is a case in

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point. Strife was constant between parliaments and governments too, for instance in the case of the German Reichstag, issuing its own peace terms in July 1917, a peace without conquests or indemnities, much to the chagrin of some civilian and military leaders alike. There were other patterns of conflict in countries less well able to meet the challenges of war, for instance in Russia and Austria-Hungary, where the ruling authorities lost legitimacy and power in 1917 and 1918 respectively.

The pressure of war transformed diplomacy too. Ambassadors were entrusted with the important task of bringing new allies into the war, maintaining the links between allies and preventing them going over to the other side.

We use the terms 'the First World War' and 'the first total war' not only because they describe a conflict which straddled the globe, taking in vast colonial empires, but also because the war mobilised societies and the social and political structures which ran them. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the war was almost global, since the key theatre of operations was in Europe, and almost total, since apart from the Armenian genocide, the difficulties posed by the German occupation of Belgium and France, by the Austrian occupation of Serbia and the German occupation of parts of the Russian Empire, most civilians worldwide were outside the primary theatres of military operations. But in any case, the history of political power in wartime, told in this section, is a vital part of the history of the war.

## I

## Heads of state and government

JEAN-JACQUES BECKER

One of the central questions of the history of the First World War is whether autocracies or democracies were better at waging war. Political philosopher Carl Schmitt saw the merits of a sovereign who solely had the right to declare and manage what he termed the state of exception. The parallel between such a conception of politics and the vertical structure of the military chain of command would suggest that in wartime, autocrats hold the trump card. They have the information and the authority needed to decide the fate of nations on their own. They can act with speed and remain unencumbered by civilian committees or delegates or representatives. And yet, the opposite case can be made. Yes, democracy is slow, but when finally geared into action, it can move decisively and stay the course whatever the price. The mobilisation required in the First World War was so vast that it required the consent of the governed to be realised effectively. In this chapter I survey the way in which very different political structures responded to the challenge of war.

The First World War was essentially a European event, but how was the world governed, politically, in 1914? Apart from Switzerland, Europe's only republics were France, which developed gradually after the fall of Napoleon III in 1870, and Portugal, from 1910. All other European states were headed by a monarch.

In North America, the most powerful country, the United States, had been a republic since the American Revolution and was governed under the Constitution of 1787, while Canada was still linked to Great Britain as a self-governing dominion. Most Latin American states were republics, including the largest, Brazil, which had become a republic in 1891 after a long period of monarchy; but constitutional principles were seldom respected in these nations. Political life was marked by violent eruptions, 'pronunciamentos', which generally overthrew one dictatorship in order to install another. The great states of the south – Argentina, Brazil and Chile – were republics. Their

Helen McPhail translated this chapter from French into English.

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political institutions were more European in character, and the role of the military was weaker. Social conflicts resembled those in Europe; Argentina's Socialist Party was indeed a member of the Second International.

Gradually, sympathy for the Allies won over the countries which were not directly concerned by the European war, despite moderately strong British and Italian influence in Argentina and German influence in Chile and Bolivia; but when the United States entered the war, its influence brought in a large part of Latin America – Cuba, Panama, Bolivia from April 1917, and Brazil, Peru, Uruguay and Ecuador later in the year. Others were content to break off diplomatic relations, but the role of South and Central America remained marginal during the Great War. There were, though, important effects on this region in the long term (see Volume I Chapter 20). The indirect economic effects of the war, in encouraging import substitution and in weakening the British economic hold on Latin America, were more significant, although the political repercussions of these changes were muted in the short term.

Most of Africa was wholly or almost wholly under European imperial control, as well as the greater part of Asia, except to some extent the Far East. Japan, a monarchy, had opened up and modernised since the Meiji era at the end of the 1860s as it moved from feudal conditions to modern statehood, but it was constitutional in appearance only. Even though the powers of the Emperor Mutsuhito (1867–1912) and then of his son Yoshihito had been much weakened, the Parliament (the Diet), with a small number of electors, played a very limited role despite the efforts of liberal or progressive parties to win a greater share. Power belonged to the five members of the Genro, a sort of Council of Elders, who held their places for life. Two clans, heirs of feudal ancestry, the Choshu and the Satsuma, controlled the land army and navy respectively. The latter designated prime ministers. From 1914 to 1916, this was Marquis Shigenobu Okuma (1838–1922), a Samurai and much earlier a leader of the progressive party. For some forty years he had occupied numerous ministerial posts, including Foreign Affairs on several occasions.

China became a republic in 1911–12 after overturning the Manchu dynasty, but its main feature was a considerable state of anarchy. Supported by the bourgeoisie of Shanghai, the revolutionary Sun Yat Sen at the head of the Kuo Mintang became President of the Republic in October 1911 in Nanking, but stood down at the end of a few weeks in favour of Yuan Shikai, the leader of the imperial army. In his turn, the new leader was elected President in October 1913 and sought to establish his dictatorship over China, with little success. With the exception of Japan, the Far East's opening into the modern world was still too recent for it to be able to confront Europe either politically or militarily.



## Heads of state and government

Talk of a 'world war' made sense mainly because of the existence of the European colonial empires. The global character of military conflict was limited, except with respect to Japan and to the United States at a late stage, both with great consequences.

### Heads of state and governments at the outbreak of war

When the war broke out, five European states were at the centre of events: Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary, France and, after a slight delay, the United Kingdom. The emperors of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia in theory still held substantial power, but in reality their effective roles depended to a large extent on their personalities – weak in the case of Nicholas II of Russia, diminished by age for Franz-Joseph in Austria-Hungary, and very active and highly interventionist in the case of Wilhelm II in Germany.

In 1914, Wilhelm was 55 years of age and in the prime of life. He came to imperial power unexpectedly in 1888 when his elder brother, Frederick II, died of cancer after a few months' reign. He plunged into great activity and was soon in conflict with Chancellor Bismarck, whom he forced to resign in 1890. His subsequent actions ensured that successive chancellors were weaker personalities. His great enthusiasm was for stormy declarations, spectacular voyages and military display, and the birth defect in his left arm may have led him to exaggerate this character trait. In 1900, as the German contingent set off to take part in the international expedition against the Boxer Revolt in China, he wrote a note for himself: 'Act so that for a thousand years a Chinaman will not dare look a German in the face.' As one of the important German diplomats of this time, Fritz von Holstein, was to say: 'He had a taste for theatre, not for politics . . .' Intelligent, the Kaiser loved talking. In reality, he was thoroughly unstable and also quite cautious, despite his deliberately bellicose speeches. As a grandson of Queen Victoria, he had confidence in the stabilising effects of family links between the European sovereigns. He was close to Archduke Franz-Ferdinand, whose assassination initially led him to support the violent reaction of the Austro-Hungarian Government. Following Serbia's conciliatory response, however, Wilhelm considered the affair settled. He was in the habit of annotating diplomatic documents, and on this occasion he wrote: 'brilliant success obtained in less than 48 hours! It was more than one could hope. A great moral victory for Vienna'.

The Russian Emperor, Tsar Nicholas II, came to power in 1894 at the age of 26, on the premature death of his father Alexander III. He was thus 40 years

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old in 1914, the youngest of the three emperors. Limited in intelligence, he had received very little intellectual education and was completely unprepared to lead his Empire. In Pierre Renouvin's words, he was:

a weak man, who seeks to hide his hesitations behind an appearance of authority; the stubbornness of which he gave frequent proof was merely one aspect of this weakness. In all, a man of narrow ideas and irritable temper, a leader without clear-sightedness and without energy.<sup>1</sup>

He held one strong conviction; he was an autocrat, and he was totally unaware of how Russia was changing. Leading a very retired life in his palace of Tsarskoye-Selo and loving only family life, he knew neither the people he was supposed to rule nor even the aristocracy. He was under the influence of his wife, Alexandra of Hesse, a superstitious and mystical German princess who attracted adventurers and charlatans. The most famous of these was Rasputin, who from 1905 onwards exercised great influence over the imperial couple, particularly because Alexis, their son and heir to the throne, born in 1904, suffered from the then-incurable disease of haemophilia.

Wilhelm II and Nicholas II, who were both very reluctant to see the European crisis turn into a general war, famously exchanged telegrams at the end of July 1914, signed Nicky and Willy. Nicolas's ministers and generals had the greatest difficulty in convincing him to accept war, and for a long time he resisted the arguments of his Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sazonov: 'Think of the responsibility that you are advising me to take! Think of the thousands and thousands of men who will be sent to their death.' It was only on 30 July that he agreed to give the order for general mobilisation.

Of the three emperors, the most senior and the oldest was the Austro-Hungarian Emperor Franz-Joseph. Nephew of the Emperor Ferdinand I, who was forced to abdicate in 1848, in 1914 Franz-Joseph was 84 years old and recovering from illness at the moment of the July crisis. After his accession to the throne at the age of 18, his interminable reign had been marked only by a succession of family and political misfortunes: his brother Maximilian executed by firing squad in Mexico; his sister-in-law Charlotte mad with grief; his only son Rudolph's suicide at Mayerling; his wife Elizabeth assassinated by an Italian anarchist in Geneva. On the political level, the Austrian Empire had been chased out of Germany and Italy and had been forced to accept the

<sup>1</sup> Pierre Renouvin, *La crise européenne et la première guerre mondiale* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), vol. XIX, p. 102.