5

# Revolution

RICHARD BESSEL

> These two phenomena, world war and world revolution, are much more closely inter-related than a first glance would indicate. They are two sides of an event of cosmic significance, whose outbreak and origins are interdependent in numerous respects.[1]
>
> Arising from the war, the social revolution did not emerge so much from the factory as from the barracks.[2]
>
> A war of the masses ends with the triumph of the masses ... The bourgeois revolution of 1789 – which was revolution and war in one – opened the gates of the world to the bourgeoisie ... The present revolution, which is also a war, seems to open the gates of the future to the masses, who have served their apprenticeship of blood and death in the trenches.[3]
>
> All around us madness and danger rules, [...] a thickening dark cloud is gathering above us, and a great black abyss opens before us.[4]

The First World War was the great catalyst for revolution in the twentieth century. Not only did it lead directly to political revolution, understood as 'the destruction of an independent state by members of its own society and its replacement by a regime based on new political principles';[5] it also led to revolution in a deeper sense, if we understand revolution more broadly as the erosion and dissolution of established hierarchies and the reconstruction of

1 Ernst Jünger, 'Total mobilization', in Richard Wolin (ed.), *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 123.
2 Otto Bauer, *Die österreichische Revolution* (Vienna: Volksbuchhandlung, 1923), p. 96.
3 Benito Mussolini, *Opera omnia*, ed. E. and D. Susmel, 35 vols. (Florence: La Fenice, 1951–63), speech at Bologna, 19 May 1918, vol. XI, p. 87; *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 5 and 8 March 1919, vol. XII, pp. 268, 310. Quoted in Christopher Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism* (London: Methuen, 1967), p. 517.
4 Solomon Grigor'evich Gurevich, quoted in Michael C. Hickey, 'Revolution on the Jewish street: Smolensk, 1917', *Journal of Social History*, 31:4 (1998), p. 838.
5 Stephen M. Walt, 'Revolution and war', *World Politics*, 44:3 (1992), p. 323.

societies as well as polities on the basis of new concepts, allegiances and structures of power and authority. The First World War spread destruction over wide swathes of territory; it triggered vast campaigns of forced removal; it shattered communities; it strengthened the hand of those who sought the end of old dynastic regimes; it undermined the legitimacy of states that seemed to offer their populations never-ending privation and ever-rising casualties. In short, the war created the conditions for revolution.

The aim of this chapter is not so much to sketch a history of revolution in 1917 or 1918 as to focus on the causal relationship between the First World War and the revolutionary transformations that took place towards its end. The revolutionary upheaval that was a consequence of military defeat for the great European empires – those of the Romanovs, Hohenzollerns and Habsburgs – together with the political challenges that shook Allied and neutral countries around the world, led to what many at the time were convinced was the dawn of a new revolutionary age. Yet that revolutionary age did not take the shape envisaged by those who had looked forward to the birth of a brave new socialist world. For revolution during and after the First World War was inspired not just by socialism, but also by nationalism; it was driven not just by political conviction, but also by anger over hardships caused by war; and it involved not just the destruction of old power structures, but also the erosion of norms of civilised behaviour.

The contrast with the pre-1914 world was profound. While it may not have seemed so at the time, Europe on the eve of the First World War appears at least in hindsight to have been remarkably stable. The ruling systems of the major European powers appeared strong; social and economic hierarchies appeared firmly in place; European domination around the globe appeared to be secure. In Russia, revolution had been beaten back after the outburst of 1905; and it was the – now largely forgotten – ostentatious celebration of the tercentenary of the Romanov dynasty in 1913 rather than memories of the Petrograd Soviet that seemed to express the spirit of the age.[6] Germany too saw self-congratulatory celebrations in the 'festive year' 1913, commemorating the centenary of the Battle of the Nations and the silver jubilee of Kaiser Wilhelm II, staged to celebrate a quarter of a century of peace and progress.[7] The Hohenzollern state appeared strong and confident, certainly not without political and social tensions, but with an increasingly large number of people

6 See Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891–1924* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1996), pp. 3–6.

7 Jeffrey R. Smith, *A People's War: Germany's Political Revolution, 1913–1918* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007), pp. 25–49.

participating in the political system (as evidenced by voting) and with a growing Socialist Party set on a reformist rather than revolutionary path.

The impression of peaceful progress rather than revolutionary upheaval was underpinned by substantial growth among Europe's industrial economies in the years before the First World War, most notably those of Germany and Russia – the two most prominent states whose governments soon would be overthrown through revolution. Economic development fuelled the growth of industrial workforces, and consequently of political organisations that aimed to represent working-class interests, as well as rising incomes and living standards. In 1913, therefore, Europe did not appear to be on the verge of a revolutionary transformation. Had it not been for the outbreak of war in 1914, it is doubtful whether such a wave of revolution would have swept across Europe in the second decade of the twentieth century.

The picture of a largely peaceful pre-1914 Europe, of a continent seemingly on a path of gradual political, economic and social progress, excludes the Balkans. Yet the Balkans should not be excluded from the discussion. In South-Eastern Europe, war began not in 1914, but in 1912, and the revolutionary consequences of war were a matter not so much of socialist as of nationalist transformations that altered politics and society. The Balkan wars of 1912 to 1913, Richard Hall has written, 'represent the beginning of an era in European history dominated by nationalism and conflict' and 'introduced an age of modern warfare encompassing mass armies, machines, and entire civilian populations'.[8] What occurred in the Balkans – and one should not forget that the First World War began in the Balkans and that some of the areas most damaged by that war were in the Balkans – heralded nationalist upheavals across Eastern Europe; and the violence that was to dissolve the glue of civilisation across a continent already was undermining society and community in the Balkans before the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914.

There was no more ferocious assault on civilised values than the onslaught against the Armenians of eastern Anatolia that occurred in what Ronald Suny has described as 'the fierce context of the First World War'.[9] It began with administrative measures taken by the Ottoman Government between the autumn of 1914 and the summer of 1915 and culminated in the massacre and

8 Richard C. Hall, *The Balkan Wars, 1912–1913: Prelude to the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. ix, 130.

9 Thus, Suny describes the radicalisation of Young Turk policies in the Ottoman Empire at the time. See Ronald Suny, 'Explaining genocide: the fate of the Armenians in the late Ottoman Empire', in Richard Bessel and Claudia Haake (eds.), *Removing Peoples. Forced Removal in the Modern World* (Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 220.

deportation of roughly 1 million people in 1916.[10] This first great 'ethnic cleansing' of the twentieth century was in its way a revolutionary product of the First World War. It occurred in the wake of a Russian military campaign against the Ottomans, resulted in hundreds of thousands of Armenians fleeing to the Russian Empire, where many stayed for years,[11] and constituted a key event in the wartime histories of two of the multi-national empires that would not survive into the post-war world.

When revolution broke out during the First World War, it broke out first in Russia. And it was war that generated the tensions and pressures that precipitated the Russian Revolution. The failure to pursue the war successfully, Russia's huge military losses (dead, wounded and soldiers taken prisoner) and the destruction of social and economic networks in the western provinces of the Russian Empire fuelled unrest and fostered revolution. Rapid turnover in the Russian army, which lost more men than any other army during the First World War, undermined discipline and morale. A huge 'army of the rear', which numbered some 2 million men in January 1917 and which was stationed in and around many towns including Petrograd, consisted in large measure of poorly trained, poorly led and poorly disciplined replacement units. At the same time, the Russian war economy had drawn large numbers of people into munitions and other factories, roughly a quarter of a million in Petrograd alone. And they had to be fed. So it was of critical importance that these changes took place against the background of what was described in Russian newspapers during 1916 as a wartime 'food-supply crisis', due in large measure to government mismanagement: 'A grain-rich country – the world's leading exporter of grain – had found itself facing grain shortages by the third winter of the war.'[12] Not surprisingly, there was substantial inflation, and the wages of most workers did not keep pace with the rising cost of food.

The food crisis was the catalyst for the revolution that brought down the tsarist regime in February/March 1917. The immediate spark, in March 1917, was provided by protests in Petrograd over bread shortages, coinciding with a

10 See Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

11 Joshua Sanborn, 'Unsettling the empire: violent migrations and social disaster in Russia during World War I', *Journal of Modern History*, 77:2 (2005), p. 313. On the conflict between the Ottoman and Russian empires, see Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

12 Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution. Russia's Continuum of Crisis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 30, 44. See also Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front 1914–1917* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1975), pp. 291–301.

lock-out at the Putilov armaments works. Within a few days, replacement troops around the city had mutinied, workers' stoppages had led to a general strike and protests over bread shortages had escalated into riots. Within the army, discipline disintegrated and the number of desertions rose steeply from March 1917. As replacement troops increasingly joined what in effect had become an uprising, armed groups began to take over the capital. Government buildings were seized and police disarmed, and with the 'soldiers' outbreak' of 12 March, in the words of P. N. Miliukov (Foreign Minister in the Provisional Government), 'a real revolution broke out'.[13]

The course of the Russian Revolution during 1917, a course that eventually led to the successful coup by Lenin's Bolsheviks in the autumn, was bound up with Russia's involvement in the First World War. The failure of the Provisional Government to maintain its grip on power was due in no small measure to its determination to continue Russia's participation in the war despite widespread war-weariness and popular demands that Russia exit from the conflict. The hope that the population of the Empire would unite behind the Provisional Government to pursue the war to a successful conclusion proved an illusion. Military failure, in the shape of the collapse of the July offensive in Galicia, led to the crumbling of the army itself and opened the door to the more radical politics of those who promised an early exit from the war. And it was only the Bolsheviks who advocated peace unequivocally. Revolution in Russia thus stemmed directly from war-related problems of provision, war-weariness and the disintegration of the army under the pressures created by an unsuccessful war.

Although the outcome was different, revolution in Germany also was a consequence of military disaster after the state had been weakened economically and socially; and the immediate causes also stemmed from war-related problems of provision, war-weariness and the disintegration of the armed forces. As in Russia, in Germany the revolutionary events were sparked by shortages, strikes among industrial workers and discontent among military personnel. The strains of war undermined the legitimacy of the imperial regime and the 'silent' military dictatorship into which it degenerated[14] – a regime that was able neither to mitigate the hardships of the civilian population nor to bring the war to the promised victorious conclusion. As the conflict dragged on, discontent mounted, and soldiers on leave contributed to the

13 Quoted in A. M. Nikolaieff, 'The February Revolution and the Russian Army', *Russian Review*, 6(1) (1946), 20.

14 Martin Kitchen, *The Silent Dictatorship. The Politics of the German High Command under Hindenburg and Ludendorff, 1916–1918* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1976).

deterioration of civilian morale with their accounts from the front. In the summer of 1917, as the war was about to enter its fourth year, the army command in Karlsruhe reported:

> In so far as one is in a position to draw a picture of the morale of the soldiers from letters from the military post, conversations etc., one certainly would not be exaggerating if one were to prophesy a result with the next political elections that will open the eyes of certain statesmen. The men in field grey are angry and if they finally get the opportunity to express their feelings about what one justifiably can hope for from the new political orientation, the overt and covert opponents of that orientation would experience the shock of their lives.[15]

The shock arrived in 1918. In January 1918, roughly 400,000 workers in Berlin munitions and metal-working factories went out on strike. While the German military offensive in the spring of 1918 initially raised hopes for a positive and rapid conclusion to the war, after it stalled and then was reversed in the summer, civilian and military morale plummeted. As in Russia, military defeat led to revolution. With the military collapse in the autumn of 1918, support for the imperial state evaporated. The deterioration of military discipline, the crumbling of the authoritarian governing system, the external pressure from the Allies (in particular, the 'Fourteen Points' articulated by American President Woodrow Wilson) alongside extreme war-weariness at home, and the example of Russia that inspired the workers' and soldiers' councils that emerged in Germany in late 1918 – combined to create a crisis of legitimacy. What this meant within the German armed forces was summed up neatly in a conversation between two soldiers in a reserve military hospital in Bremerhaven in mid August 1918 (as overheard by a police spy): 'You see comrade [*Kamerad*], we've had it, no one believes in victory any more, what the newspapers write is all lies and deception. [. . .] If we quit now, we still can save a lot, money, people. [. . .] We are bringing our comrades to the point that they all get involved like in Russia, we have nothing more to lose.'[16]

The German Revolution itself began with a revolt by sailors and by soldiers stationed within the country. The immediate spark was the order of 28 October 1918 by the Imperial Naval Command to send out the fleet to confront the

15 Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe, 456/E.V.8, Bund 86: Stellv. Gen. Kdo. XIV. A.K. [to the Kriegsamt, Abteilung für Volksernährungsfragen, Berlin], [Karlsruhe], 1.7.17.

16 'Aus einem belauschten gespräch zweier Soldaten im Reservelazarett Bremerhaven. Mitteilung des Kommandanten der Befestungen an der Wesermündung vom 14.8.1918', in Jörg Berlin (ed.), *Die deutsche Revolution 1918/19. Quellen und Dokumente* (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1979), p. 110.

Royal Navy in a final battle. After having spent much of the war in port, German sailors had little enthusiasm to be sacrificed in a suicide mission for what, by this point, obviously was a lost cause and could serve only to scupper Armistice negotiations. Instead, they mutinied. Unrest spread, and by 30 October it had overwhelmed the naval base at Kiel and industrial workers joined in; a week later the rebellion had reached the port cities of Bremen, Lübeck, Wismar, Cuxhaven, Wilhelmshaven, Bremerhaven and Hamburg, and then spread to cities and towns in the interior. Revolutionary sailors and soldiers acted as missionaries for revolution, and workers' and soldiers' councils formed.[17] By 9 November, the old regime had been overwhelmed by protest, a republic was declared and the Kaiser abdicated. During the weeks and months that followed, what initially had been a remarkably peaceful political transition turned increasingly violent, not least with the intervention of Freikorps units (led by war veterans) that were used by Germany's provisional government to suppress left-wing revolutionary activity. The First World War bankrupted the old regime in every sense – militarily, politically, financially and morally – and paved the way for revolution in Germany, and for its suppression.

The end of the war and the revolutionary upheaval in Austria-Hungary bore similarities to those in Germany, but within a complicated multi-national and multi-ethnic context. It generally has been assumed that the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the revolutionary transformations that occurred in its wake were due primarily to nationalism, to the long-term development of national consciousnesses and to nationalist movements that were able to seize their chance as the Habsburg state disintegrated at the end of the war.[18] There can be little doubt that Slav nationalisms eroded the ties that had bound the multi-ethnic state together and contributed to the upheavals that transformed the Habsburg Empire into a patchwork of smaller states in 1918 and 1919. However, the immediate consequences of Austro-Hungarian participation in the First World War were at least as important as long-term, nationalist undercurrents in fomenting revolution.

17 Ulrich Kluge, 'Militärrevolte und Staatsumsturz. Ausbreitung und Konsolidierung der Räteorganisation im rheinisch-westfälischen Industriegebiet', in Reinhard Rürup (ed.), *Arbeiter- und Soldatenräte im rheinisch-westfälischen Industriegebiet* (Wuppertal: Hammer, 1975), pp. 39–82.

18 Clifford F. Wargelin, 'A high price for bread: the first treaty of Brest-Litovsk and the break-up of Austria-Hungary, 1917–1918', *International History Review*, 19:4 (1997), pp. 757–8. Wargalin outlines this traditional position as an introduction to his attempt to offer a rather different perspective that privileges developments during the final stages of the war.

Prominent among these were the acute food shortages that affected the Austrian parts of the Empire in 1917 to 1918. According to Clifford Wargelin, 'by the end of 1917, the domestic food supply had shrunk so far that the inhabitants of Austria's cities faced starvation, confronting the government for the first time with the spectre of serious internal unrest.'[19] Increasingly, strikes in Austria took the form of protests against high food prices and poor food distribution. As in Russia in 1917 and in Germany in 1918, food shortages undermined the legitimacy of the state and demands for bread and peace fuelled unrest that eventually provided a spark for revolution. In January 1918, strikes broke out in various parts of the Habsburg Empire, with calls for the election of workers' and soldiers' councils and for 'immediate general peace', as well as for the end of the existing government; and on 14 January, after an announcement that the flour ration in Austrian cities would be halved, industrial workers at the Daimler-Motorenwerke in Wiener Neustadt downed tools. Within a few days, nearly 1 million workers had stopped work across Austria, Hungary, Galicia and Moravia; demands grew for 'the most speedy end to the war' and for national self-determination.[20] (News of the strikes in Austria also inspired workers to strike in Berlin at the end of January.) This was followed at the beginning of February by a short-lived sailors' mutiny, driven by demands for better food, democracy and an immediate peace on the basis of Wilson's Fourteen Points, at Cattaro (Kotor) in Montenegro, one of the main bases for the Austro-Hungarian navy.[21] Mutinies followed among army units in the Balkans, amidst calls for peace and a 'socialist revolution', as well as crude expressions of anti-Semitism.[22]

As in Germany, in Austria-Hungary the January strikes did not lead immediately to revolution, but, as in Germany, they provided a foretaste of what was to come later in the year. Central to the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire was the fate of its army. The fighting record of the Austro-Hungarian army during the First World War was not unblemished, having had to be

19 Wargelin, 'A high price for bread', p. 762.

20 Bauer, *Die österreichische Revolution*, p. 63; Reinhard J. Sieder, 'Behind the lines: working-class family life in wartime Vienna', in Richard Wall and Jay Winter (eds.), *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work and Welfare in Europe, 1914–1918* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 125–8; Wargelin, 'A high price for bread', p. 777. For the strikes, see Richard G. Plaschka *et al.*, *Innere Front. Militärassistenz, Widerstand und Umsturz in der Donaumonarchie 1918* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1974), vol. 1, pp. 59–106, 251–74.

21 Bauer, *Die österreichische Revolution*, p. 66; Plaschka *et al.*, *Innere Front*, vol. 1, pp. 107–48; Clifford F. Wargelin, 'A high price for bread', p. 783. The sailors in question were nearly all South Slavs.

22 Plaschka *et al.*, *Innere Front*, vol. 1, pp. 148–58, 251–74, and on anti-Semitic outbursts, pp. 385–6.

rescued repeatedly by their German allies and losing enormous numbers of soldiers as prisoners. The release and return of soldiers who had been in Russian captivity in 1917 helped to spread the revolutionary message; and in the last months of the war the Austro-Hungarian army, once a main pillar of the multi-ethnic Empire, crumbled. By the autumn of 1918, the army was acutely short of supplies and its soldiers were going hungry; increasing incidence of desertion left the army in no position to fight effectively.[23] Once it became apparent, with the failure of the Austrian offensive in Italy and the German defeats in the West, that the war was lost, the Habsburg Empire's army fell apart as military discipline collapsed.[24] Non-Germans in the Habsburg armed forces no longer proved willing to fight and die for the Empire; towards the end of October 1918, Slav and Hungarian soldiers were refusing to obey their officers; on 23 October, Croatian troops in Fiume mutinied and on 28 October, Croatian sailors began to mutiny as well; one unit after another refused to obey orders; and in the end not even German-Austrian units could be counted on and military discipline had broken down even in barracks in Vienna.[25] As with their German allies, in the Austro-Hungarian army growing animosity was directed against officers by the men under their command, men who were increasingly less willing to follow orders that might lead to their deaths and seemed designed only to prolong a lost war.

The revolutionary upheavals in Central and Eastern Europe had some, rather more muted, parallels in the West. In France, waves of strikes occurred in the metal industry between July 1916 and May 1918, and in the spring of 1917 strikes spread through the French workforce, with calls for higher wages and an end to the war; and in May and June 1917, the French army suffered mutinies, a 'crisis of discipline' that affected perhaps half the French divisions on the Western Front, sometimes accompanied by calls of 'Vive la Révolution' as soldiers staged demonstrations and refused to go back to the front lines.[26]

23 Bauer, *Die österreichische Revolution*, pp. 71–2; Plaschka *et al.*, *Innere Front*, vol. II, pp. 62–103.

24 Karel Pichlík, 'Der militärische Zusammenbruch der Mittelmächte im Jahre 1918', in Richard G. Plaschka and Karlheinz Mack (eds.), *Die Auflösung des Habsburgerreiches. Zusammenbruch und Neuorientierung im Donauraum* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1970), pp. 249–65.

25 Bauer, *Die österreichische Revolution*, pp. 79, 82, 90–2, 97; Manfred Reichensteiner, *Der Tod des Doppeladlers. Österreich-Ungarn und der Erste Weltkrieg* (Graz, Vienna and Cologne: Styria Verlag, 1993), pp. 612–14.

26 Guy Pedroncini, *Les Mutineries de 1917*, 3rd edn (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996); Leonard V. Smith *et al.*, *France and the Great War* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 113–45.

Nevertheless, worrying though the unrest was, it was contained, and did not develop into a fully-fledged French revolution. In northern Italy, too, the spring and summer of 1917 saw disturbances and protests (often by women) against rising prices, food shortages and the continuation of the war, culminating in major riots in Turin in August 1917 that had been triggered by a bread shortage. 'The shadow of revolution had fallen on Italy.'[27] But it remained only a shadow, and not until after the 'mutilated peace' did an explosion of unrest bring Italy to the brink of revolution during the *biennio rosso* ('the two red years'), and subsequently to fascism. In Britain, the extent and frequency of strikes increased during the war, but only in Ireland with the Easter Rising in Dublin, the nationalist urban insurrection launched on 24 April 1916 by the Irish Volunteers, did a revolutionary initiative really erupt in the United Kingdom during wartime, and subsequently develop into what William Kautt has termed a 'people's war'.[28] However, the Easter Rising had no real impact on Irish soldiers fighting in British uniform on the European continent, and was brutally suppressed; indeed, the rising was significant far more with regard to what followed in the coming years – Irish independence and civil war – than for the threat it may have posed to British rule at the time. Revolutionary unrest, if not successful revolution, also extended to neutral Spain, which witnessed its *Trienio Bolchevique* ('the three Bolshevik years') from 1918 to 1920, when unrest spread across the rural south.[29]

Unlike the imperial states of Central and Eastern Europe, the Western powers were not pushed across the threshold to revolution by the discontent that spread through soldiers' ranks and civilian workforces. Of course, it helped to have been on the winning side, although the prospect that France or Britain would emerge victorious was far from obvious in 1917. Furthermore, the problems of supplying food to the civilian population were more severe in Russia, Germany and Austria-Hungary than in the Western countries. But there was another important cause of the difference between France, Britain and even Italy, on the one hand, and Russia, Germany and Austria-Hungary, on the other. Unlike the former, the latter entered the war as autocratic political formations in which the majority of the population had limited, if any, input. Participation in the war, and the sacrifices that were demanded of the mass of the population,

27 Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism*, p. 471.
28 William H. Kautt, *The Anglo-Irish War, 1916–1921. A People's War* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger Press, 1999).
29 See Edward E. Malefakis, *Agrarian Reform and Peasant Revolution in Spain: Origins of the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970); and Gerald H. Meaker, *The Revolutionary Left in Spain 1914–1923* (Stanford University Press, 1974).

led to increasingly loud calls for popular participation in the political system. As casualties mounted, prices rose and food became scarce, economic and political demands inevitably were linked. Protest against deteriorating living conditions and bread shortages in Russia, Germany or Austria-Hungary spilled over into demands for a meaningful say in the political system, for democratic government and popular sovereignty, and thus posed a challenge to existing governing structures in a way that unrest in France, for example, did not.

This was one set of causes for the eruption of revolution in the East rather than the West during the First World War. The course of the war itself was another. As many men fought and died on the Eastern Front as on the Western Front during the First World War; the country that suffered the highest number of casualties overall was Russia (which mobilised roughly 15.8 million men in its armed forces and lost altogether roughly 3.5 million dead, military and civilian); and the country that suffered the highest number of casualties relative to its population was Serbia (with over 16 per cent of the entire population killed), followed by Romania. In the East, unlike in the West, the war was more a war of movement, as the military front moved back and forth across vast areas, and the conflict led to a crumbling of the social and economic cement that had held systems of rule together. A central element of that crumbling was the forced removal of large numbers of people. Perhaps because of the even greater scale of forced removal during and after the Second World War, we tend to forget the magnitude of what happened during the First. Nevertheless, during the First World War, millions of people were affected. 'Refugees', writes Pierre Purseigle, 'were in many ways the paradigmatic embodiment of the culture of warfare in 1914–1918'.[30]

Within Europe, at least 7.7 million people were displaced during the First World War,[31] and while all sides engaged in the practice, this was in large measure an Eastern European story, where communities were destroyed as their populations were violently uprooted. The worst of this coincided with the 'Great Retreat' from April to October 1915 (when the Russian army was driven from Galicia and Poland), when at least 300,000 Lithuanians, 250,000

30 Pierre Purseigle, '"A wave on to our shores": the exile and resettlement of refugees from the Western Front, 1914–1918', *Contemporary European History*, 16, Special Issue 4 (2007), p. 432.

31 Nick Baron and Peter Gatrell, 'Population displacement, state-building and social identity in the lands of the former Russian Empire, 1917–1923', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 4:1 (2003), p. 61; Peter Gatrell, 'Introduction: world wars and population displacement in Europe in the twentieth century', *Contemporary European History*, 16, Special Issue 4 (2007), p. 418; Alan Kramer, 'Deportationen', in Gerhard Hirschfeld *et al.* (eds.), *Enzyklopädie Erster Weltkrieg* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2009), pp. 434–5.

Latvians, more than half a million Jews and between 750,000 and 1 million Poles were deported to the Russian interior.[32] The tally of human displacement in the Russian Empire was staggering: over 3.3 million refugees by the end of 1915, and more than 6 million – roughly 5 per cent of the Empire's entire population – by the beginning of 1917.[33] This in itself constituted a revolutionary upheaval, as 'mass population displacement [. . .] simultaneously became a cause and an effect of the collapse of the Russian Empire'.[34] It not only undermined loyalty to the Russian state among the minority groups on the receiving end of the violence, but it also effectively destroyed social and state structures over wide swathes of the western provinces of the Russian Empire.

The extent of the social upheaval brought by the First World War to Eastern Europe is illustrated well by the example of Riga. Before the war, Riga had been the fourth largest city in the Russian Empire, a multicultural metropolis with more than half a million inhabitants (including a substantial German minority, which still dominated the city's commercial life, as well as Latvians, Russians and Jews). During the conflict, it became a front city and lost much of its population, in large measure as a consequence of the evacuation of workers in war industries and their families.[35] Beginning in August 1915, Latvian volunteer units formed in the city, and fought against the German forces on the Riga front, with substantial losses. By 1916, the city had been transformed into a military camp; in July 1917, following the 'February Revolution' in Russia, various groups claimed Latvia's autonomy within the new Russian Republic; in September 1917, the Germans finally entered the city; and after the German defeat in the autumn of 1918, and a declaration of Latvian independence in Riga on 18 November, the German army left. Shortly thereafter, on 3 January 1919, Bolshevik forces entered the city and established a short-lived Latvian Soviet Government, until they in turn were driven out by

32 Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction. Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 151; Kramer, 'Deportationen', pp. 434–5; Gatrell, 'Introduction', p. 420.

33 Sanborn, 'Unsettling the empire', p. 310; Joshua Sanborn, 'The genesis of Russian warlordism: violence and governance during the First World War and the Civil War', *Contemporary European History*, 19:3 (2010), esp. 198–208; Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 3. See also Mark von Hagen, *War in a European Borderland: Occupations and Occupation Plans in Galicia and Ukraine, 1914–1918* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2008).

34 Baron and Gatrell, 'Population displacement', p. 99.

35 Julien Gueslin, 'Riga, de la métropole russe à la capitale de la Lettonie 1915–1919', in Philippe Chassaigne and Jean-Marc Largeaud (eds.), *Villes en guerre (1914–1945)* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004), pp. 185–95.

German formations (*Landeswehr*) on 22 May. (Latvian units entered the city on the next day.) By the time the fighting in and around Riga was over, the city – now capital of an independent Latvia – had lost half its population; its industry (which had driven the rapid growth of the city in the decades before the First World War) largely had ceased to exist; its infrastructure was in tatters; unemployment was substantial. The history of Riga during the conflict is a history of a city transformed by war. The changes that it experienced – the devastation caused by fighting, occupation, the evacuation of industrial firms and their workforces, the flight of refugees trying to escape the worst of the war[36] – constituted a social revolution and created the stage for political revolution.

In Riga, after the transformation of society and economy through war, it was not socialism but nationalism that triumphed. Nationalism, as much as socialism, undermined dynastic loyalties, multi-national political formations and colonial empires. It was, Dominic Lieven has pointed out, 'the most powerful ideology of the day'.[37] However, context matters. The revolutionary potential of nationalism, like that of socialism, became revolutionary reality in the context of world war.

This was true not only in Europe. The defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War was followed by its break-up, by nationalist revolts in its former Arab territories, by military campaigns launched against the newly established Democratic Republic of Armenia, by war with the Greeks and, in October 1923, by the proclamation of a nationalist, secular Turkish Republic. (The Caliphate was abolished formally in March 1924.) This – the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic under the leadership of the former Ottoman General Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), and the terrible intercommunal violence that accompanied that transition[38] – also numbers among the great revolutionary transformations to emerge from the First World War.

It was not only in Turkey that the break-up of the Ottoman Empire was followed by a revolutionary upsurge. In March and April 1919, Egypt, which nominally had been part of the Ottoman Empire before the First World War but was proclaimed a protectorate by the British in 1914, witnessed 'one of the great peasant revolts of her history and of the 20th century', a revolt that

36 Uldis Ģērmanis, *Oberst Vācietis und die lettischen Schützen im Weltkrieg und in der Oktoberrevolution* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1974), pp. 147, 155.

37 Dominic Lieven, 'Dilemmas of empire 1850–1918. Power, territory, identity', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 34:2 (1999), p. 196.

38 See Ryan Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores: Violence, Ethnicity, and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1912–1923* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

'marks the emergence of Egyptian liberalism and the construction of the modern state'.[39] Against a background of food shortages, the 1919 revolt was triggered by the arrest and exiling of leaders of the Egyptian national movement (most prominent among them Sa'd Zaghoul), who wanted an Egyptian delegation to be recognised at Versailles in order to demand Egyptian independence. Here, a popular, anti-colonialist insurrection was sparked by demands for popular and national sovereignty, and could be suppressed only by the deployment of tens of thousands of British troops (which did not prevent Sa'd Zaghoul's populist Wafd movement from winning elections overwhelmingly in 1923).

Popular challenges to imperial rule in the wake of the First World War were by no means limited to Egypt. In Iraq, the British, the mandate power, suffered substantial casualties when suppressing the revolution that broke out in protest against British occupation in the summer of 1920. In India, where the British were fearful that the Russian Revolution had 'given an impetus to Indian political aspirations',[40] the political atmosphere was transformed in the wake of the First World War with the massacre of hundreds of people in the city of Amritsar in the Punjab. (There, in April 1919, the commanding British Brigadier General Reginald E. H. Dyer, fearing a revolt, ordered his troops to fire on a large unarmed crowd that had assembled for a traditional festival.) In response, in the summer of 1919, Gandhi launched the Indian National Congress's mass campaign of non-cooperation against the British authorities in support of the struggle for Indian independence.

This suggests that what happened in Dublin in 1916 and its aftermath needs to be understood not just in an Irish or European context, but in a broader, global framework. The First World War led to a wave of revolutionary nationalist and anti-colonialist agitation and unrest, whereby 'all sorts of self-appointed movements and spokesmen were demanding national independence' as 'the cry of self-determination spread far beyond Europe'.[41] The First World War stirred up revolutionary demands for popular and national sovereignty not only in Europe, but globally.

39 Ellis Goldberg, 'Peasants in revolt – Egypt 1919', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 24:2 (1992), p. 261.

40 The Montagu-Chelmsford Report, published on 8 July 1918, quoted in H Tinker, 'India in the First World War and after', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 3:4 (1968), p. 92.

41 Eric D. Weitz, 'From the Vienna to the Paris system: international politics and the entangled histories of human rights, forced deportations, and civilizing missions', *American Historical Review*, 113:5 (2008), p. 1315.

How can we summarise the relationship between the First World War, war on an unprecedented scale, and the revolutionary upsurge that came in its wake? It would appear that the war precipitated revolutionary politics and change as a consequence of a number of fundamentally destabilising factors:

1. *The increases in physical hardship, especially shortages of food that provoked popular discontent*. The hardships caused by a war that consumed vastly more resources than had been imagined possible before 1914 provoked anger and protest in numerous countries. The most sensitive area was food supply, and it was hardly coincidental that revolutionary upheavals in the Russian, German and Austro-Hungarian empires all were sparked by food shortages, rapid rises in food prices and dismay at the failure of governments to ensure an adequate and equitable food supply. From factory workers in Berlin to peasants in Egypt, it was food shortages resulting from war that provoked revolutionary unrest. This was particularly incendiary during a period of war-fuelled rapid inflation (after a long period of price stability), provoking anger when prices rose and a conviction that profiteering was rife. These reactions contributed mightily to the erosion of support for governments, particularly for the autocratic governments of Central and Eastern Europe.
2. *The growth of the state and its responsibilities, and the simultaneous undermining of the legitimacy of the state*. The scale of the First World War, of its human and material cost, led to the state being charged with new and enhanced responsibility for the welfare of its citizens. Increased state involvement in managing the war economy and compensating for wartime sacrifice undermined its legitimacy when it failed to deliver. The millions of people who had lost family members, whose property had been damaged or destroyed, who had been injured and suffered long-term physical consequences of combat, left the states of combatant countries with huge economic, political and moral liabilities. The wartime social contract between the state and its subjects, that the sacrifice of the population would be honoured through support by the state – neatly summed up in the phrase repeated in Germany during the First World War, 'You can be sure of the thanks of the Fatherland' – became a source of bitterness when the state could not make good on its promises. War vastly increased the size and responsibilities of the state, while it simultaneously reduced the resources available to meet those responsibilities, and enhanced popular expectations during a time of hardship undermined the legitimacy of the old regime.

3. *The expectations of political change as a result of mass popular participation in the war*. In the same way that those who sacrificed their health and well-being for their state expected that the wartime social contract be made good, those who contributed to the war effort generally expected that the state honour an implicit political contract: that those who fought for the nation ought to have a meaningful political voice. Mass participation in combat and in supporting the war effort fuelled demands for popular political participation, for the extension of the franchise, democratic republican government, and recognition of the right to national self-determination – demands that were by their nature revolutionary in autocratic, multi-national and colonial empires.
4. *The interaction among soldiers and civilians of different nationalities and the spread of revolutionary ideas and sentiment*. The war brought soldiers into contact with other peoples and other lands and, particularly after the outbreak of revolution in Russia, exposed them to revolutionary ideas. During the First World War, unprecedented numbers of soldiers were taken captive. Altogether, between 6.6 and 8 million soldiers were captured during the First World War; the Russian army alone had between 2.5 and 3.5 million of its soldiers taken prisoner and captured roughly 2 million soldiers of opposing armies, and estimates of the numbers of soldiers of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy taken prisoner range from 2.2 to over 2.7 million.[42] Of the roughly 2.4 million prisoners taken by the Germans during the 1914–18 conflict, 1.4 million were from the Russian Empire.[43] Not only did this contribute to social upheaval, but it also spread the revolutionary message – for example, among the roughly 2 million soldiers of the Austro-Hungarian army who had been taken prisoner by the Russians, many of whom experienced the Russian Revolutions of 1917 at first hand; they were freed by the Bolsheviks at the time of the October

42 Uta Hinz, 'Kriegsgefangene', in Hirschfeld *et al.*, *Enzyklopädie Erster Weltkrieg*, p. 641; Sanborn, 'Unsettling the empire', p. 317; Matthew Stibbe, 'The internment of civilians by belligerent states during the First World War and the response of the International Committee of the Red Cross', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41:1 (2006), p. 5; Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I* (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 369; John Paul Newman, 'Post-imperial and post-war violence in the south Slav lands, 1917–1923', *Contemporary European History*, 19:3 (2010), pp. 251–2. Newman notes that for a large number of soldiers in Habsburg armies on the Eastern Front, 'the war was over by June 1916'.

43 Uta Hinz, *Gefangen im Großen Krieg. Kriegsgefangenschaft in Deutschland 1914–1921* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2006), p. 10; Mark Spoerer, 'The mortality of Allied prisoners of war and Belgian civilian deportees in German custody during the First World War: a reappraisal of the effects of forced labour', *Population Studies*, 60:2 (2006), p. 127.

Revolution, and upon their return refused to re-enlist in their regiments and instead proselytised revolution at home.[44]

5. *The crumbling of armed forces and the growing conviction that the only way to bring the war to an end was through revolution*. The apparent military stalemate that set in after the German offensive of 1914 in northern France had been stopped at the Marne gradually undermined support for governments that persisted in fighting. On the eve of revolution the conviction grew that 'it cannot go on this way' and that upheaval was imminent.[45] The fact that the fighting, with the huge numbers of casualties it generated and the miserable conditions that soldiers had to endure, had gone on for years and with no apparent end in sight led to a growing conviction that if the war was going to be brought to an end this had to be done through the overthrow of the governments that insisted on continuing the war. It was the government, and in the case of Germany the Kaiser himself, that came to be regarded as the obstacle to achieving the peace desired so passionately after years of hardship and death. Calls grew louder for 'peace at any price',[46] and the price was the abolition of the old regime. In all the countries where there was a revolutionary overthrow of the old regime, the armed forces cracked under the pressure of an unsuccessful pursuit of war. Riddled with discontent, plagued by lack of adequate supplies, faced with increasing incidence of desertion, the armed forces no longer were in a position to defend the state from revolutionary threats and instead came to constitute a revolutionary threat themselves. Thus, the last line of defence of the old regime disintegrated under the pressures created by the First World War. Where the armed forces held together – for example, those of France and Britain – revolution was avoided; where they did not – for example, in Russia, Germany and Austria-Hungary – revolution brought down the old regime.
6. *The weakening of the imperialist world order of the nineteenth century*. Not only did the war bring destruction to the three main continental European empires; it also shook the belief in the solidity of European global domination

44 Newman, 'Post-imperial and post-war violence', p. 253. Roughly half a million returned from Russian captivity during the first half of 1918. See Richard G. Plaschka *et al.*, *Innere Front. Militärassistenz, Widerstand und Umsturz in der Donaumonarchie 1918* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1974), vol. 1, pp. 278–80.

45 'So kanns nicht weitergehen!', quoted in V. Ulrich, 'Zur inneren Revolutionierung der wilhelminischen Gesellschaft des Jahres 1918', in Jörg Duppler and Gerhard P. Groß (eds.), *Kriegsende 1918. Ereignis, Wirkung, Nachwirkung* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1999), p. 281.

46 Benjamin Ziemann, 'Enttäuschte Erwartung und kollektive Erschöpfung. Die deutschen Soldaten an der Westfront 1918 auf dem Weg zur Revolution', in Duppler and Groß, *Kriegsende 1918*, p. 176.

> and created an international forum where demands for popular and national sovereignty could be articulated. Revolutionary calls for popular and national sovereignty were not limited to European peoples who lacked their own state, but were echoed around the world as the conviction grew that what was valid for Europeans should be valid for non-Europeans as well. This constituted a revolutionary challenge to imperial power, in Cairo no less than in Dublin.

Taken together, these observations suggest that the revolutionary nature of the First World War may not best be understood simply with reference to the ideologies and activities of self-proclaimed revolutionaries, who saw their opportunity to achieve their goals in the crucible of the war. There was nothing inevitable about the triumph of political movements inspired by socialist or nationalist visions, for in the end revolution is about power, and revolutionary transfers of power need to be understood in context. Contingency, as much if not more than ideology, made possible the revolutionary transformations that followed from the First World War, and it was war that framed contingency. Particularly in Eastern Europe, in the context of a vast war of movement, societies and communities already had undergone revolutionary transformations before political revolution arrived. It was there that hundreds of thousands of Europeans were forced from their homes, that communities were destroyed as populations were torn from their towns and villages, that normative constraints on behaviour that had taken decades to coalesce were eroded by war. It was there that the revolutionary breaking and remaking of European civilisation in the twentieth century occurred.

The revolution unleashed by the First World War thus needs to be seen in the context of the violence unleashed through war. At its most basic, the revolutionary element of the First World War was violence – the remaking of political, economic and social formations through violence. That was the fundamental link between war and revolution unleashed by a conflict that opened the floodgates to violence on an extraordinary scale and with an extraordinary intensity. Welcoming the new world of violence precipitated by the Great War, Ernst Jünger wrote in *Der Kampf als Inneres Erlebnis* the oft-quoted passage:

> This war is not the end but the beginning of violence. It is the forge in which the world will be hammered into new borders and new communities. New forms want to be filled with blood, and power will be wielded with a hard fist. The war is a great school, and the new man will bear our stamp.[47]

47 Ernst Jünger, *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis* (Berlin: Mittler, 1928), pp. 70–1.

The deep revolutionary character of the First World War was that it constituted, as Michael Geyer has observed, 'the beginning of a *Zivilisationsbruch*, a rupture in civility, that shook Europe to its foundations'; 'the general history of the twentieth century in Europe is the history of the aftershocks of World War I. It is the history of the trauma inflicted by fighting.'[48]

The First World War did not end with the Armistice of November 1918, or even with the peace conferences in 1919 and 1920. War and conflict continued – in the campaigns of paramilitary formations in Central and Eastern Europe, in anti-colonial struggles in the Arab world and beyond, in civil wars in Russia, Finland and Ireland, in inter-state wars from the Polish-Soviet War to the war between Turkey and Greece and British campaigns from Egypt to Afghanistan, and in the political violence committed by formations of war veterans across Europe. The First World War was indeed revolutionary, as a catalyst not only for the destruction of political and social systems and hierarchies, but also for the creation of a new world of violence.[49] At the time, the First World War indeed seemed to herald what Karl Kraus referred to as 'the last days of mankind'. In fact, the revolutionary violence and the violent revolutions of the First World War remade the modern world.

48 Michael Geyer, 'War and the context of general history in an age of total war: comment on Peter Paret, "Justifying the obligation of military service," and Michael Howard, "World War One: the crisis in European history"', *Journal of Military History*, 57:5 (1993), pp. 159–60.

49 On the violent legacy of the First World War in Europe, see Chapter 23 in this volume by Robert Gerwarth, 'The continuum of violence'.