

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.

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.

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

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.¹

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

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

dualism which gave birth to Austria-Hungary. It is not certain that these personal misfortunes affected this somewhat insensitive monarch, but political problems had made him cautious and hostile to any foreign venture.

Further, at the time of his great-nephew's assassination, he was in his summer residence 200 kilometres from Vienna, which reduced his influence on events. He was, however, more cautious than his Minister for Foreign Affairs since 1912, Count Leopold von Berchtold, one of the richest aristocrats in the Empire (and famous for his dilettante attitudes). Both he and Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, in command of Franz-Joseph's army, whose military abilities were very mediocre, favoured immediate action against Serbia – indeed, as Conrad had wanted long before Sarajevo. Franz-Joseph did not believe it was possible to leave the murder of his heir unpunished, even if he had disliked him, but since the military defeats of the first part of his reign – about half a century earlier – he was averse to any military venture of any kind. He considered above all that, even if action was decided on, it could not be undertaken without the agreement of Germany, which at the end of the Balkan wars, the preceding year, had been against Austrian intervention.

Yet none of these three emperors, despite their way of talking and their beliefs, like Nicholas II, was an autocrat. All the empires had constitutional regimes: in Russia since the laws of 1906; in Germany under the Reich Constitution of 1871; in Austria-Hungary following the establishment of dualism in 1867. All of these states had assemblies elected according to various forms of franchise – the Duma in Russia, the Reichstag and the Bundesrat in Germany, and different assemblies in Austria-Hungary – but apart from Hungary to some extent, they were still not parliamentary assemblies. The executive was not held responsible to the assemblies, and heads of government were nominated by the sovereign and subject to his recall. In practice, day-to-day governing was difficult without the agreement of the assemblies, even if only for budgetary matters, but questions of war or peace were not part of their role. Neither the Austrian Parliament, in recess at this time, nor the Hungarian Parliament played any part at all in the war crisis.

The Austrian Government was directed by Count Karl von Stürgkh from 1911 to 1915, when he was assassinated by Friedrich Adler, son of the socialist leader Victor Adler. Stürgkh was a somewhat listless bureaucrat, always preferring to await the results of enquiries. The Hungarian Prime Minister from 1911 to 1917 was Count Istvan Tisza, who had already held the post from 1902 to 1905; he was to be killed by revolutionary soldiers in 1918. Tisza was a strong personality, firmly against military intervention, particularly since he considered that there were more than enough Slavs in the Empire.

In Germany, the Chancellor since 1909 – as he would be until 1917 – was Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg. At the same time as being Chancellor of the Empire, he was the Prussian Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Coming from a family of bankers, jurists and university academics, his friendship with the Emperor with whom he had been a student had facilitated a rapid career in Prussian and imperial administrative circles. As François Roth put it: 'Just as his predecessor [von Bülow] was brilliant, but adequate and lightweight, Bethmann Hollweg was serious, applied, somewhat bureaucratic and professorial.'²

Conservative, calm, hardworking and efficient, he was not much concerned with external ventures. During the crisis, in the absence of the Secretary of State Gottlieb von Jagow, he was assisted by the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Arthur Zimmermann, whose attitudes were similar to his own. Zimmermann was later to be Secretary of State and directed Foreign Affairs from November 1916 until August 1917.

On 5 July 1914, the German leaders received a hand-written letter from the Emperor Franz-Joseph, but in fact prepared by Berchtold, and delivered by Count Alexandre Hoyos, the chief aide to the Austro-Hungarian Minister for Foreign Affairs. Contrary to their attitude a year before, Kaiser Wilhelm II and his ministers agreed to allow Austro-Hungarian intervention against Serbia, convinced that the conflict was bound to remain localised, in view of its circumstances, and that in particular Russia would not get involved.

Russia had been governed in recent years by two energetic political personalities, Serge de Witte – dismissed by Nicholas II in 1906 because he had forced him to accept certain institutional reforms – and Pyotr Stolypin, Prime Minister from 1906 until his assassination in 1911. Both men were opposed to external ventures. Stolypin was succeeded by Vladimir Kokotsov, a Prime Minister of quality, even though inferior to Stolypin; but he was replaced in January 1914 by Ivan Goremykin, who was to remain until 1916. A weak character, highly conservative, Goremykin would play only a very minor role. Sergei Sazonov, Minister of Foreign Affairs (and Stolypin's brother-in-law), then became Chief Minister. With a good appreciation of international affairs, he had been ambassador in Rome and London, and directed foreign affairs since 1910, but he was nervous and changeable.

The reactions of the Russian Government after the Sarajevo attack had been cautious and reserved, but they changed when, on 23 July, Austria-Hungary

2 François Roth, 'Bethmann-Hollweg', in François Lagrange (ed.), *Inventaire de la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Universalis, 2005).

addressed its ultimatum to Serbia. The reaction in urban Russian opinion was very strong, and it seemed to the government that it must act, in the hope that this reaction was aimed only at Austria-Hungary, leaving Germany out of the matter; hence the idea that partial mobilisation was preferable to general mobilisation. But for the leaders of the Russian army, partial mobilisation was technically impossible and, in truth, militarily useless because in their view it was impossible to avoid a general war.

Among the four front-rank continental powers, France was alone in having a parliamentary regime. Its main political personality at the time was Raymond Poincaré. A native of Lorraine, born in Bar-le-Duc in 1860, he was 11 years old when the city was occupied by Prussian troops in the war of 1870–1; this was an experience that marked him for life. Barrister, republican, secular, patriot, elected Deputy for La Meuse in 1887, when he was 27 years old, he was a rising star of the ‘new’ Republic, in Philippe Nivet’s words.³ Minister for the first time in 1893, at the age of 33, Senator for La Meuse in 1903 at an unusually early age, he was called to form a government in January 1912 following the Agadir Incident in the previous year. This eminent specialist in financial matters took on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, since he judged the international situation to be dangerous. Poincaré expected to strengthen ties with Russia, which had kept its distance from French policy at the time of Agadir, but he was concerned by what was stirring in the Balkans under Russian protection. France was not informed of Russian views on this matter. He decided to visit Russia (by sea in order to avoid having to cross Germany) and left Dunkirk on 5 August 1912. As soon as he arrived in St Petersburg, he demanded to see the documents on the formation of the Balkan League and its objectives.

Contrary to previous information, Poincaré understood that this alliance was not defensive, but offensive. ‘It is a treaty which leads to war’, he observed. The Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sazonov, wanted to reassure him, asserting that the Balkan states would not move into action without authorisation from Russia. In reality, even the Russian Government was short-circuited by its representatives on the spot, Anatol Nékloudoff in Bulgaria and Nicolas Hartwig in Serbia. He could do no more than slightly delay Balkan actions as they launched what became known as the ‘First Balkan War’ in October 1912. Much irritated, Poincaré still did not wish to oppose the action, which would have risked breaking the Franco-Russian alliance. This was extremely risky behaviour: Russia now knew that for Poincaré the

3 ‘Poincaré’, by Philippe Nivet, in *Inventaire de la Grande Guerre*.

Franco-Russian alliance was so fundamental that they had no need to consult France before launching an adventurous operation, which is what was to happen less than two years later.

In 1913, during the Second Balkan War (June to August 1913), Germany prevented Austria from getting involved, which might have unleashed a general war. But one consequence of the Balkan wars was that the head of the German army (Helmuth von Moltke, the younger, nephew of the victor of 1870) obtained from the Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg reinforcements for the army, despite Bethmann Hollweg's financial worries. The French command immediately decided that their troop numbers had to be augmented without delay: for this purpose, military service had to be extended from two to three years. Supported by a minority on the left and by the right as a whole, the Three Years' Law was voted through on 19 July 1913.

Raymond Poincaré had been elected President of the Republic on 17 January 1913. Generally classed as 'Centre-Left', he had needed support from the right to gain election. For the past thirty years the Presidents of the Republic had played a minor role, but Poincaré fully expected to take the lead in international politics, in particular to do everything in his power to protect the Three Years' Law in the face of violent protest from the socialist and radical left. The elections in May 1914 had been a success for the left, but a section of the left supported the Three Years' Law, thereby balancing the number of electors who favoured it and those who were against it. In order to ensure that the Three Years' Law would not be challenged, Poincaré tried to impose a government headed by Alexandre Ribot, a man of the Centre-Right who also favoured the law; but the Chamber of Deputies overturned him immediately, simply because a leftist assembly could not support a government of the right! Poincaré resigned himself to calling René Viviani to head the government. He was hardly a specialist in foreign affairs, despite having held this ministry. A lawyer, an eloquent and somewhat hollow character, Viviani was a socialist-republican – a group located between socialists and radicals. He was personally hostile to the Three Years' Law, but his government included a majority of ministers or secretaries of state who had voted in favour of the law. His was therefore a government which expected not to return to the matter, at least not in the immediate future.

Installed in mid-June 1914, a month later Viviani was on his way to Russia, accompanying the President of the Republic. In principle this was a routine voyage – it was customary for the newly elected Presidents of the Republic to visit Russia – but this trip, following so closely on Poincaré's visit as Prime

Minister, took on a different meaning so soon after the Sarajevo attack. The two national leaders stayed in Russia from 21 to 23 July 1914; they did not return to France until 29 July, abandoning some of the intended programme of stop-overs in Scandinavian capitals.

What had happened in Russia, while the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia on 23 July was not yet known, even though it was felt that something was in preparation? Nothing, apparently, except that Raymond Poincaré had spoken about the strength of the Franco-Russian alliance. He restated the firmness of the French, further convincing the Russians that they had no need to consult France before acting in case of necessity.

A fifth country dominated the European scene, the United Kingdom, but it had so many internal problems – the Irish question, labour problems, the suffragette movement – and a kind of free trade pacifism was so strongly developed that continental problems were of little interest. Moreover, the assassinations in Sarajevo had done nothing to dispel feelings of distaste for the Serbs in some quarters.

In practice, King George V had scarcely any power, although during the war he was not without influence on his military leaders. Real power lay with the government. In 1906, a thorough electoral landslide had driven out the Conservatives and put the Liberals in power. In 1914, the Prime Minister was Herbert Asquith, while Foreign Affairs was the preserve of Edward Grey, Minister from 1905 until 1916. Entirely hostile to being drawn into Balkan affairs, he could not, however, accept any change in the balance of power in favour of Germany. The German incursion into Belgium was its manifestation, and the consequence was British entry into the war on 4 August 1914.

In total, in a paradox which has been insufficiently appreciated, a war which concerned the greater part of Europe began in the early part of August 1914 when most of the heads of state and governments were against it. They had been the victims of an escalation process for which many of the military leaders must share responsibility. In Austria-Hungary and Russia too they had taken some part, but, still more significantly, they were also usurping the civil authorities in Germany. For General Moltke, while the Russian mobilisation was getting under way, to wait was to endanger the operation of a variant on the Schlieffen Plan, which required a rapid conclusion with France before turning all forces against Russia. This fear of 'delay' haunted all the military leaders. In France, for example, the Chief of the General Staff, General Joffre, literally snatched the order for general mobilisation from the government on 31 July at 3.30 pm to avoid taking the risk of further uncertainty.

Heads of state and the extension of the war

Expected to last but a few weeks or months, the war was to last for more than four years and to extend to far reaches of the world. The first non-European state to enter the war when it had barely begun was, paradoxically, Japan. A British ally, from 23 August 1914 Japan considered itself as being at war with Germany. Its aim was to seize the German possessions in China, but after the capture of Tsingtao on 7 November, the Japanese war effort halted. To the French Government which, in particular, wanted Japanese troops to be sent west, Baron Kato, Minister for Foreign Affairs, responded on 19 November: 'I am against sending troops to Europe.'

The Ottoman Empire came next. Since 1909 it had in principle been led by the Sultan Mehmet V. In reality, this peacable old man of 70 had no power, like his Grand Vizier Saïd Halim Pasha, who held the post from 1913 to 1917, and was no more than a sort of head of administration. The masters were the 'Young Turks', officers who had put Mehmet on the throne after overthrowing his brother Abduhamid II, the 'red sultan'. His nickname reflected his cruelty, particularly towards the Armenians in 1894 to 1896, but his zeal did not prevent a gradual dissolution of the Empire in the Balkans. A first revolution, which began in the Army of Salonica in 1908, was followed by a troubled period. There had even been an attempt at the restoration of the Sultan's powers, but from 1913, members of the Union and Progress movement, 'The Young Turks' governed absolutely. Originally a modernist and liberal movement, it had gradually become a nationalist movement which intended to achieve homogeneity in the whole of the Ottoman Empire, that is to 'turkify' the whole population. The movement was not united over the outbreak of war in Europe. It is possible to distinguish at least three factions: those who wanted to stay out of the war; those who wanted to be involved on the side of the Entente; and those who were on the German side. The three main leaders in 1914, Enver Pasha, Minister for War, Talat Pasha, Minister for the Interior, and Dejemal Pasha, Minister for the Navy (Enver and Dejemal were former officers in the Army of Salonica), finally came down in favour of the Germans, probably on the grounds of traditional hostility to Russia. They concluded a secret treaty with Germany on 30 July, then forced the hand of their colleagues by unleashing war on 29 October by using the two German ships of Admiral Souchon, which had taken shelter in the Straits, the *Goeben* and the *Breslau*, to attack Russian ships in the Black Sea. War between the Ottoman Empire and Russia was officially declared on 2 November 1914.

The war then took over the whole of the Balkans, where all the states had territorial ambitions at the expense of their neighbours or of Austria-Hungary.

Serbia, where the war had first begun, was the only one of the Balkan states to have a national royal dynasty. Two families had disputed power during the nineteenth century: the Karadjordjević and the Obrenovic. The last Obrenovic king, Alexander, who followed a policy of submission towards Austria, had been assassinated by Serb nationalists with his wife in 1903. Peter I (Karadjordjević), who then became king, was a former cadet at the French military academy at Saint-Cyr and had fought as a French officer during the war of 1870 – but he was old (70 years of age in 1914) and ill, and did not play a significant part. Indeed, in July 1914, he had given up most of his power to his son Alexander, who in turn left his Prime Minister, Nicola Pasic, to rule. Pasic, the chief Serbian (later Yugoslav) personality of this period, was not to give up power until shortly before his death in 1926. Energetically nationalist and anti-Austrian, he had directed national politics towards the Russian alliance and showed very strong opposition to Austria, not least over the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908. He was prudent, and despite hearing rumours of the assassination plot in advance, he had not succeeded in preventing the Sarajevo attack.

Romania, Bulgaria and Greece all had dynasties of German origin. King Carol I of Romania was from the Hohenzollern family; King Ferdinand I of Bulgaria from the Saxe-Coburg-Gotha family – he became Tsar of the Bulgarians in 1908 – and King Constantine I of Greece from the Holstein family. In addition, the King of Greece had married a sister of Kaiser Wilhelm II. They all, therefore, and particularly the King of Greece, had Germanophile sympathies. All of these states had constitutional regimes, but the monarch's powers remained considerable.

Bulgaria had the closest interest in taking revenge for the Balkan wars, but lacked the financial means and was traditionally close to Russia. King Ferdinand was convinced by a large financial donation from Austria-Hungary and Germany, and declared war on Serbia on 14 October 1915.

The King of Romania, Carol I, favoured the Central Powers, but he died in October 1914, and his successor, his nephew Ferdinand, tended to favour the Allies; yet until 1915 he hesitated to become involved. Seen from France, this delay gave the impression that the Romanian Government was above all following a 'carpet-bagger' policy, seeking the alliance of greatest benefit. This, according to Catherine Durandin, was a false impression:⁴ it was merely the reflection of the deep divisions in political circles and public opinion. Those in favour of the Entente were numerous in Bucharest, in both the

4 Catherine Durandin, *Histoire de la nation roumaine* (Paris: Editions Complext, 1994), pp. 66 ff.

Liberal Party and Democratic-Conservative Party. They made themselves heard in Parliament, in the government, the university, the press, while against them, there were also conservatives, Germanophiles and representatives of a 'peasant' left, heirs to a large peasant revolt in 1907. In addition, among the peasant mass of the nation, for the great majority, the chief wish was for peace. The head of government, Ionel Bratianu, son of Ion Bratianu who had led Romania to independence in 1878, had undertaken his advanced studies in Paris (the *École Polytechnique*) and was generally in favour of entering the war on the side of the Allies. He judged the moment favourable at the time of the Russian victories in 1916, and Romania declared war on Austria-Hungary on 27 August 1916.

Greece was equally divided, between a Germanophile court and a Prime Minister, Eleftherios Venizelos, who favoured the Entente – and who dreamed of reconstituting the Byzantine Empire. The result was a very chaotic policy. Venizelos encouraged the landing of Allied troops at Salonica in October 1915, then forced King Constantine to abdicate in 1917 in favour of his son Alexander, and took Greece into the war on 29 June 1917.

Two more European states were still to join the Allied cause in the war. First was Italy. It belonged to the Triple Alliance (with Germany and Austria-Hungary) at the moment of the outbreak of war, but the great majority of its political parties and public opinion favoured neutrality. This was also the opinion of the most important politician in Italy, the Liberal Giovanni Giolitti. In May 1914, another Liberal, Antonio Salandra, became Prime Minister. He was to remain in this post until May 1916 and was personally in favour of joining the war – on the Allied side, with the aim of taking back from Austria-Hungary the 'irredentist' (unrecovered) territories, consisting principally of the Trentino, Trieste and Fiume. His Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sidney Sonnino, signed the Treaty of London (26 April 1915) with the French and the British, which promised Italy these acquisitions in return for its participation in the war. In May, great nationalist demonstrations were fomented with the complicity of King Victor Emmanuel (the interventionists' 'radiant king') and Salandra took Italy into the war on 24 May 1915.

Finally, Portugal. Suffering substantial political instability, Portugal had become a republic in 1910, following the overthrowing of King Manuel. Despite the caution of Portugal's close ally, Britain, the most advanced democratic section of the Republicans wanted to take part in a war which would legitimise the republic. After an attempted coup d'état in 1915 by General Pimenta de Castro – who favoured Germany – the 'strong man' of the advanced republicans, Bernardino Machado, became President of the Republic in August

1915. Facing the hostile attitude of Portugal, it was indeed Germany which took the initiative itself and declared war on it on 9 March 1916.

The United States enters the war

Profiting from divisions within the Republican Party, it was a Democrat, Woodrow Wilson, who was elected President of the United States in 1912. When the war broke out in Europe, no one, either European or American, imagined that the United States might take part in it, particularly since the war was expected to last a few months at most. From 4 August 1914, Wilson had proclaimed the complete neutrality of the United States, and in 1916 he was triumphantly re-elected: he had managed to 'keep America at peace in a world at war'. From the beginning of the European war, he had imagined the creation of international organisations which would ensure the maintenance of world peace, but there were circumstances which would push the United States on to the side of the Allies. Because of the British blockade, only the Entente powers could trade with the United States, and loans from American banks had facilitated substantial purchases. In order to be repaid, the American banks had an interest in an Entente victory, an attitude which was strengthened by German actions. For Germany, it was essential to try to interrupt trade between the United States and the Entente states. To this end, on 31 January 1917, it proclaimed unrestricted submarine warfare, against neutral as well as enemy shipping, and therefore American shipping if the occasion arose. After further hesitation, following publication of the 'Zimmermann Telegram' which sought to push Mexico into a war against the United States, the sinking of three American ships by torpedo and also the fall of tsarism in Russia, Wilson engaged the United States in the war for the freedom of the seas and the survival of democracy in the world. On 6 April 1917, Congress voted to enter the war.

Political development among nations at war

Each nation at war faced several problems – the ability to maintain national unity, political stability and cordial and effective relations between the civil and military powers. The automatic reflex of the military powers everywhere was to consider that the only role of the civil powers was to supply them with the means that they needed; everything else was their responsibility.

In France, where political instability was more or less the rule, it did not disappear. In a little over four years of war, France had six governments.

Yet only one of these governments was voted out of office, that of Painlevé in 1917; the other six resigned. Following the elections in May 1914, France had been surprised by the war. The government in power was on the left, and its symbol was the Prime Minister, René Viviani. Initially, Raymond Poincaré, who considered himself entirely capable of leading the nation, did not think it necessary to change the composition of the government, but his own proclamation of the political truce, the *union sacrée*, made it necessary for a country such as France – this did not seem to be the case in other nations – to have a government which reflected this commitment. Here is the explanation for the establishment of a second government, still presided over by René Viviani, on 26 August 1914. In the circumstances, Poincaré could have called for a new Prime Minister. Among the first rank of politicians, there was one who stood out and would not have refused – Georges Clemenceau – but Poincaré did not want this, because he would have been immediately rejected, and because Clemenceau had refused to accept a post, even as important as that of Justice. Although there was no change of Prime Minister, the government itself was considerably modified. Even then, in a secular France, it did not seem possible to call on representatives of the Catholic Right, but it did seem conceivable to call on the left. The socialists agreed to join the government, in the form of Jules Guesde as Minister without Portfolio and Marcel Sembat as Minister for Public Works. Another socialist, Albert Thomas, was named as Under-Secretary of State for Artillery and Military Equipment. Although Jules Guesde and Marcel Sembat seemed somewhat background figures, the role of Albert Thomas grew steadily. A certain number of front-line personalities were also summoned: at Justice (Aristide Briand), Foreign Affairs (Théophile Delcassé) and War (Alexandre Millerand). Finance was handed to a man of the Republican Right, Alexandre Ribot.

The problem still remained, whatever its composition, to work out the role of governments in a nation at war. For the head of the army, General Joffre, the response was one of the greatest simplicity. Everything must depend on the High Command, the role of the government was at best simply to supply the army with what it needed. The President of the Republic soon complained that he was not even kept informed about the military situation. Indeed, at the beginning of September 1914, he and his government were even forced to leave Paris under the threat of the German advance, and settle in Bordeaux. When they wished to return to Paris, once the danger had passed, the High Command was very firm in its opposition. It was not until 10 December, three months after victory in the Battle of the Marne, that they managed to return. The Assemblies also returned, first for an extraordinary

session at the end of 1914, and then sat as normal from 1915. The commissions of the two chambers of government had the right to scrutinise military and civilian policy, and in particular the army commissions expected to play their part. This was particularly true of the senatorial commission of the army, under the chairmanship of Clemenceau from November 1915.

The return of the government and the Assemblies to Paris was not reflected in governmental stability. Alexandre Millerand, Minister for War since 26 August 1914, saw his role as being spokesman and filter for the High Command. To change this situation, the second Viviani government resigned on 28 October 1915 after fourteen months in office. The new government under Aristide Briand claimed to follow in the line of his predecessor; in reality, he extended the composition of the government, bringing in a representative of the Catholic Right, Denys Cochin, and his assumptions about the role of government were very different. Briand had already plunged into the management of the war and of diplomacy; he had been an active partisan for the despatch of an Allied contingent to Salonica, against Joffre's advice. Although he chose a general – Gallieni – as his Minister of War, this was a general who understood how to contain the General Headquarters within its customary powers and who had very stormy relations with General Joffre. However, when on 7 March 1915, Gallieni had read in the Council of Ministers a note which appeared to be an indictment of the High Command and the intervention of the General Headquarters in diplomatic, political or economic matters, this matter received little attention from the Prime Minister. Already in poor health, Gallieni resigned nine days later, only a few weeks before his death. He was replaced by General Roques, a friend of Joffre, who allowed the General Headquarters to recover the full powers which it had previously taken upon itself.

This did not prevent many parliamentary figures from being wearied by the ineffectiveness of the action of the High Command, as they showed at the secret committee sessions which Briand had not wanted but was forced to accept. To avoid being forced out of power, he had to reorganise command. General Joffre was replaced by General Nivelle on 13 December 1916. On 12 December, Briand had also been forced to reshuffle his government. The socialists left it, apart from Albert Thomas, who in contrast, was promoted. From being Under-Secretary of State, he was named as Minister for Armaments and War Manufacturing. But this new Briand government was very short-lived; his War Minister, General Lyautey, who had no confidence either in the new Commander-in-Chief nor in the parliamentarians with whom he was in conflict, resigned on 4 March, soon followed by the government as a whole. Briand had thus stayed in power during seventeen months of the war.

The Briand governments were succeeded by a government led by Alexandre Ribot, who was to remain in power for a little over five months, from late in March 1917 until the beginning of September. His political formula was the same: a socialist on one side, Albert Thomas, a representative of the Catholic Right on the other, Denys Cochin. Ribot was forced to resign following a major speech by Clemenceau on 22 July on 'defeatism', accusing Louis Malvy, the immovable Minister for the Interior since the outbreak of the war, of not having fought sufficiently hard against defeatist propaganda.

The new government, under Paul Painlevé, was the first government not to be part of the *union sacrée* – the socialists had refused to support it; he was overturned after barely two months by a coalition of socialists and the right who in their turn reproached him for not having tackled the many current rumours of treason.

There had already been three governments in 1917. President Poincaré could do nothing now but call on Clemenceau, whose government can be considered as the first 'war government'. He stated firmly that his only concern was to make war. The leader was at the same time War Minister – true, Painlevé had already combined the two roles, but above all, with Clemenceau, the question of the pre-eminence of military power, which had indeed already been considerably nibbled away, or of civil power, was no longer applicable. He was the only 'war leader'; and the generals, whether it was Pétain at the head of the French army since Nivelle's removal on 15 May 1917 (following the disastrous Chemin des Dames offensive), or Foch, who had step by step become Commander-in-Chief of the Allied forces after the Doullens conference in March 1918, were merely his subordinates who occasionally muttered in dissent. It was this Clemenceau government which was to lead France to victory, and would then conduct the peace negotiations. This government finally tendered its resignation in January 1920 after 26 months in power. In sum, France was the only country to have had six governments during the four years of war without any challenge to its political system.

When the war broke out, the British Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, a Liberal, did not feel it necessary to make more than very marginal changes in his Cabinet. He offered a post to the socialist Ramsay MacDonald – who refused since he was against the war. Asquith kept his government virtually unchanged because he anticipated a very short war, although he was very soon forced to accept that, contrary to general expectations, it would not be finished by Christmas. Nonetheless, in August he had appointed Britain's most famous general, Lord Kitchener, the Minister for War. He knew the war would last for years. It was immediately apparent that the British army was entirely

inadequate, but for the Liberals, for reasons of principle, there was still no question of introducing conscription to raise an army. It was Kitchener's great merit that he created a powerful movement for voluntary enlistment, symbolised by the poster showing him pointing his finger: 'Your country needs you' or 'I want you to enlist in the British Army'. Almost 2 million British men enlisted during the first year of the war, before the wave of volunteers declined. By January 1916, it was impossible to avoid a gradual move to compulsory military service, although exemptions remained numerous.

Despite the successful creation of a large British army, the government very quickly attracted press criticism on the conduct of the war; Asquith was not a very effective war leader, and in May 1915 the government became one of National Unity with twelve Liberals, eight Conservatives and even a Labour member, Arthur Henderson, the new leader of the Parliamentary Labour Party. Like Ramsay MacDonald, still opposed to the war, other Labour MPs and activists in the smaller socialist parties remained outside this national coalition.

The arguments remained very lively, however, between the Commander-in-Chief Sir John French – who was indeed less than entirely competent – and the Minister for War, Lord Kitchener, who died at sea en route to Russia in June 1916, as well as with the rest of the government. The Kitchener aura had diminished considerably; he did not recognise how the war had to be managed in a democratic regime. In a way, his death could be seen as fortunate: some thought that it was not entirely accidental, although there is no evidence to support this assertion.

Within the government itself, disagreements also accumulated with Asquith, accused of running the war too lethargically (many reproached him for having mismanaged the munitions supplies to the army). This criticism worked to the advantage of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lloyd George, who had been Minister of Munitions in 1915 and had replaced Kitchener as Minister for War. In December 1916, Asquith was obliged to resign and gave way to Lloyd George who, although a Liberal, was supported by all the Conservatives and only a section of the Liberal and Labour parties. From that time on, the war was managed by a War Cabinet of only five members led by Lloyd George, sometimes accused of dictatorship, but also sometimes seen as the 'British Clemenceau'. He led the nation to victory, while still on fairly bad terms with the new Commander-in-Chief, Sir Douglas Haig, who had replaced French in December 1915.

Italy was no more ready than the United Kingdom for the war; this related particularly to its army. Antonio Salandra's Liberal government was without

authority in the face of the army chief General Luigi Cadorna, who would have preferred to fight alongside the Central Powers, and who considered himself completely independent of the government. He was also the butt of a trend against the war, animated in particular by the great Liberal politician Giolitti. Defeated in June 1916 following an Austrian offensive in the Trentino which threatened to break through into the plain of the River Po, the Salandra government was replaced by an even weaker government led by the ageing Paolo Boselli. His Minister of Justice, the Sicilian and great professor of law Vittorio Orlando, was first accused by the nationalists of weakness towards pacifists, before he turned to firmness in the face of defeatist or subversive propaganda. At the rout after Caporetto, the Boselli government was thrown out (25 October 1917) and Orlando was summoned to replace him. His government included representatives of virtually all the parties, but Orlando still refused to be bound by any one political group. He started by dismissing General Cadorna, seen as responsible for the disaster, and discredited for his bloody and useless offensives and his brutality towards the soldiers whom he had accused of cowardice in the throes of battle. Cadorna was replaced by General Diaz, a strong personality but one general who wished to stay on good terms with the government.

Once the Italian front was established 100 kilometres to the west of the Isonzo, Orlando devoted himself to re-establishing internal order and managed to help forge a national consensus around the order of the day, 'Resist, resist, resist'. He had defeatists energetically pursued, condemned and imprisoned, and the great majority of the Chamber of Deputies, including Giolitti, gathered round him. Orlando was to lead Italy to victory. There was also something of Clemenceau about him. As Pierre Milza has stressed, it is to him that Italy owed the victory of Vittorio-Veneto at the very end of the war, when he commanded General Diaz to go on the offensive against the advice of the High Command and most ministers.⁵

With variations and even some important differences – France being highly distinctive – the three parliamentary nations, France, the United Kingdom and Italy, showed a similar pattern of development. The statesmen, Clemenceau, Lloyd George and Orlando, who led their nations to victory, appeared to represent the same kind of leader, with firmness towards defeatists or pacifists, a gift for creating unity of political or public opinion around them, and a degree of success in asserting civilian power over military power.

5 'Orlando', by Pierre Milza, in *Inventaire de la Grande Guerre*.

Matters were different in Germany, which did not have a parliamentary regime. Initially, all political forces (including the majority of the Social Democratic party members of the Reichstag accepting group discipline) had rallied behind the Kaiser, convinced that the war was defensive, in particular against Russia. This was the 'political truce', the *Burgfrieden*; but from the first days of the war the military conduct of the war had totally eluded Bethmann Hollweg. He was barely kept informed of operations, particularly as the army was convinced of a very rapid victory. In this war, which he had considered an impossibility, Bethmann Hollweg was persuaded by his belief in a quick victory to accept the programme of 9 September 1914, inspired by the army and the pan-germanists who foresaw large annexations in the west and east. The defeat on the Marne soon dispelled his hopes.

On 14 September, Moltke yielded his place at the head of the German army to the Prussian Minister for War, Eric von Falkenhayn. Relations between Bethmann Hollweg and the new Commander-in-Chief had always been difficult; they did not improve. The Chancellor saw Falkenhayn as a political competitor and disapproved of his military vision. Falkenhayn's belief that victory lay in the West led him, after limited successes in the east, to launch the Battle of Verdun. Faced with failure here, Falkenhayn found his position further weakened by Romania's entry into the war on the side of the Allies. Bethmann Hollweg, in agreement with Hindenburg and Ludendorff, who commanded in the East and sought total victory against Russia, persuaded the Kaiser to replace Falkenhayn. On 29 August 1916, Hindenburg took command of the whole of the German army, with Ludendorff, his Quartermaster General, holding effective power. But their relations with Bethmann Hollweg very quickly deteriorated; in their view, victory in the west depended on total victory in the east, while Bethmann Hollweg no longer believed this to be realistic and favoured a search for other solutions and negotiations with Russia, an apparent possibility after the February Revolution in 1917. In reality, increasingly isolated and impotent, Bethmann Hollweg's role was simply to gain a majority in the Reichstag to vote on war credits. Kaiser Wilhelm II himself retained barely greater importance. Bethmann Hollweg therefore had to submit to the decision to engage in total submarine warfare (9 January 1917), despite his conviction that this would bring the United States into the war, and sink any chances of a negotiated peace.

Faced with the prolongation of the war, two groups formed in the Reichstag. In July 1917, a majority of the Reichstag, behind the Catholic deputy Matthias Erzberger, Catholics of the *Zentrum*, progressives and socialists, called for peace talks to end the war. They were opposed by Conservatives and Nationalists,

representing a 'Patriotic Front' which wanted to resist defeatism. Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg was caught between two sides. Seen as too soft by the generals, he was forced to resign on 13 July 1917, and was replaced by individuals of lesser abilities. Georg Michaelis came first, a simple instrument of Hindenburg and Ludendorff, who survived for only three months. Next was Count Georg von Hertling, who belonged to the right wing of the *Zentrum* and, like the majority of the Reichstag, supported the search for a 'just peace'; but he was old and ill and played virtually no part in formulating war policy. Although it is altogether exaggerated to speak of a Clemenceau dictatorship in France – he was on the contrary the symbol of the pre-eminence of civil power – in Germany, Hindenburg and Ludendorff did indeed install a 'quasi-dictatorship' by further intensifying and accelerating the mobilisation of economic and human resources according to their own war plans.

The military were solely responsible for the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, much harsher than those sought by Richard von Kühlmann, the Minister for Foreign Affairs from 6 August 1917 to 9 July 1918. It was the military and the military alone which imposed extremely harsh conditions in preparation for a vast German expansion in the rest of Europe. This required large numbers of troops to be retained in the East – which in turn helped weaken the thrust for victory in the west in the last major German offensives in the spring of 1918.

Primacy of civil power in the parliamentary democracies of the west and primacy of military power in Germany, with Austria-Hungary on the side of the Central Powers, and Russia on the side of the Entente, were ill-matched. It appeared very quickly that military powers alone both achieved and were incapable of making effective use of the powers they held in such a war.

There were signs that some in power recognised this dilemma, and tried to take steps to forestall disaster. In Austria-Hungary, change was signalled by the death in November 1916 of the 86-year-old Emperor Franz-Joseph. He was succeeded by his very young great-nephew, Charles (aged 29). The new Emperor was convinced that the war could not be won and that moreover a dazzling victory for Germany, even if it were possible, would lead to her domination over Austria-Hungary. Defeat must, however, be avoided if possible, since it would precipitate the disintegration of the Empire. Emperor Charles intended to lead a complete reversal of Austro-Hungarian policy, internally and externally. He recalled Parliament and dismissed the Chief of the Army, Conrad von Hötzendorf, accused of being incapable of preventing the Austro-Hungarian army from passing under German authority on 28 February 1917. Reducing the pressure of the army on the nation, Charles in reality wanted if

possible to take Austria-Hungary out of the war. As he said, 'the duty of the Austro-Hungarian government was to seek peace' . . . 'if necessary against the wishes of Germany'. Indeed, secret conversations took place between France and Austria-Hungary, but without any chance of success for several reasons: among others, because Austria-Hungary, whose Minister for Foreign Affairs, Count Czernin, undoubtedly wanted peace but had rejected a separate peace (contrary to what has been thought in France), and because the Balkan and Italian allies of the Entente had no wish to give up their ambitions to occupy Austro-Hungarian territories. Further, the 'promise' to return Alsace and Lorraine to France was wholly unrealistic, since they were German possessions and Germany was totally opposed to ceding them. Too inexperienced beside his powerful German ally, Emperor Charles's initiatives came to nought. In fact, Austria-Hungary was adrift.

In Russia, after a fairly short period of political union, power was rapidly split. Very quickly, some governmental functions had been transferred to other bodies, the Pan-Russian Union of Zemstvos or the Pan-Russian Union of Cities. During 1915 and 1916, the political, economic and military situation deteriorated steadily, forcing the Duma to reassemble, although it had no effective power. Government ministers came and went; there were four Prime Ministers and six Ministers of the Interior in 1915 and 1916, all equally incompetent or impotent. Among them was Boris Stürmer, Prime Minister during 1916, a Rasputin man – and under suspicion of being a German agent. On 5 September 1915, the Tsar – entirely without authority – took command of the army, which led him to live in General Headquarters at Mohilev, several hundred kilometres from his capital. This left power more or less in the hands of the Tsarina under the influence of Rasputin. His assassination during the night of 30–31 December 1916 did not improve matters; this killing could have initiated an attempt at recovery, but the reverse occurred. The chaos grew, uninterrupted. Indeed, as Nicholas II commented: 'Just consider whether I, personally, must win back the confidence of my people or that *they* must win back mine.'⁶ Before such incompetence bordering on stupidity, *coups d'état* were in the works.

End of the war, and revolutions

In these circumstances, it is understandable that the first state to see its regime swept away by the war was the Russian Empire. A first revolution, in

⁶ Quoted by Renouvin, *La crise*, p. 397.

February/March 1917, had forced Nicholas II to abdicate (16 March in the modern calendar). Provisional governments then followed one another, presided over by a liberal prince, George Lvov, then, from July, by the socialist Alexander Kerensky. They had to share power, however, with the soviets of soldiers, workers and peasants, forming more or less everywhere. They were above all caught in an impossible contradiction: they did not want to leave the war, but it was impossible for them to carry on waging it.

They were in their turn to be swept away by a second revolution led by the Bolsheviks on 7 November 1917 (25 October in the Russian calendar). Lenin, Prime Minister of the People's Commissars, was convinced, unlike the other Bolshevik leaders, that getting out of the war as fast as possible, whatever the conditions, was essential to the survival of the new regime. Negotiations began on 3 December in Brest-Litovsk, which after a Soviet walk-out producing a massive German advance, ended in a peace treaty on 3 March 1918.

In this same year, 1918, having been within a hair's breadth of victory in the spring, the Central Powers crumbled one after the other. First was Bulgaria: following the abdication of King Ferdinand on 3 October, an armistice was signed on 30 October. On the same day, the Ottoman Empire capitulated in the Mudros armistice signed with the British, and its dismemberment began. The principal leaders of the Young Turks, Talaat, Djemal and Enver, fled and initially took refuge in Germany.

Also on the same day, the Austro-Hungarian Empire signed the armistice at Villa Giusti with the Italians – but there was already no more empire: national councils had proclaimed the independence of the Czechs on 18 October, the Serbo-Croats and the Slovenes on 29 October, the Hungarians on 30 October. Without abdicating formally, the Emperor Charles could only abandon power, and an Austrian Republic was proclaimed on 2 November.

There was still Germany – the last to fall. While the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Richard von Kühlmann, had been forced to resign for having engaged in secret negotiations designed to seek a balanced armistice during the summer of 1918, by the end of September Ludendorff insisted that the Armistice must be sought immediately, to save the army. To persuade the Allies that this was no ruse, he wanted a liberal prince, Max von Baden, who had the support of a parliamentary majority, to be called to the Chancellery. Not without reluctance, Max von Baden accepted on 1 October. It was under the orders of the general staff that he resigned himself to seeking the Armistice without delay.

On 9 November, Kaiser Wilhelm II was forced to abdicate both as King of Prussia and as German Emperor. On the same day, Chancellor Max von Baden

yielded his powers to the socialist Friedrich Ebert. Also on the same day, another socialist, Philipp Scheidemann, proclaimed the Republic. The Armistice was signed on 11 November, and the Kaiser sought and received sanctuary in the Netherlands, where he died twenty years later.

Conclusion

In 1913, one of the most important French socialist leaders, Marcel Sembat, had published a pamphlet entitled 'Make a king, or make a peace'. Paradoxically, Minister for Public Works in the war governments of René Viviani and then of Aristide Briand, from August 1914 to December 1916, he had wanted to say then that only a monarchical and authoritarian regime was capable of conducting a war. Disavowing this unfortunate prognostication, when the war ended, in all the nations or almost all where monarchs had retained sufficiently broad powers to 'conduct the war', regimes had tottered or collapsed and their sovereigns forced to flee or abdicate. To cite only the most important, the German Kaiser Wilhelm II, the Tsar of Russia Nicholas II and the Emperor Charles I of Austria-Hungary (Franz-Joseph having died in the meantime) had been swept away in the defeat. Some sovereigns had certainly survived in Europe or elsewhere in the world – the kings of England, Italy and Belgium, the Japanese Mikado – but their shared characteristic was that they no longer held more than symbolic powers and could not wage war (except perhaps the King of the Belgians).

Practically everywhere, sometimes for not very long of course, representative regimes were established and the victory camp was one of democracy. Does this mean that a representative authority was more capable of leading a nation to victory than an autocratic or authoritarian regime and that the victory had been the result of what the victorious nations had claimed they were fighting for, democracy?

It is always possible to imagine that matters could have evolved differently: but we cannot entirely ignore that it was a very finely balanced outcome as to whether the eventually victorious nations would be defeated or the reverse. Initially, more or less everywhere, men had fought for their country, had fought out of patriotism, and in this struggle for the nation at a time when military service had become the rule (although not initially in the United Kingdom), it may be considered that finally the representative regimes were the more capable of calling on the support of all their citizens and to compensate for a certain initial weakness. And yet it was only after nearly three years of war that the United States, in the voice of President Wilson – as

he made clear on 2 April 1917 – joined the war for democracy. It would have been more than ironic if Wilson was forced to become a brother in arms of the Tsar, but very opportunely Nicholas II had been forced to abdicate a fortnight earlier.

Even if we avoid belief in the systematic and inescapable nature of historic change, it is still the fact that it was the most representative regimes which won the war and that everywhere in Europe, after the war, democracy was predominant, even when it was not entirely wholly respected, or was even ridiculed or treated as a form of political hypocrisy.

Was the parliamentary form of political power ultimately strengthened by the Great War? Unquestionably, yes: both where it had already existed and where it was able to adapt. Consider for example the ‘secret committees’ of the French National Assembly and the ‘*Ausschüsse*’ of the Reichstag in Germany, and then consider where no such voices existed to challenge the domination of the military in matters of life and death. So much had been demanded of the peoples during the war, that the peoples of the world were bound to expect governments after the war to express their will and their voice. After all, that is the essence of democracy.