Sheffield,(2001). *Forgotten Victory.*

CHAPTER 10

THE AFTERMATH AND THE CONSEQUENCES

The First World War was the key event of the twentieth century, from which everything else flowed. The way the war ended and its immediate aftermath is as controversial as the war itself. This final chapter examines the end of the war and the Peace that followed, before looking at the place of the war in the development of modern warfare and the history of the twentieth century.

The End of Imperial Germany

'Britain and France did not defeat us on the battle-field. That was a great lie.'[1] When Adolf Hitler made this claim, in a speech on 8 November 1939, he was returning to a theme that had served the Nazis well since the foundation of the Party. Hitler was not the author of the assertion that the undefeated German army had been stabbed in the back by traitorous elements on the home front. It had its origins in the last days of Imperial Germany. The German generals might have failed dismally in their attempt to defeat the Allies, but they were highly successful in shifting the blame for their defeat away from

the army. At the beginning of the Second World War, it was seen as worthwhile for a prominent British military historian to write a pamphlet to counter the myth that the German army had not been defeated in the field in 1918. Even today the notion crops up now and again.

The longevity of the stab-in-the-back myth is testimony to the success of the 'great lie' – not the Anglo-French one to which Hitler referred, which was in fact not a lie at all – but the one that Hitler himself propagated. As Ian Kershaw has stated in his masterly biography of Hitler: 'In reality, of course, there had been no treachery, no stab-in-the-back. This was a pure invention of the Right ... Unrest at home was a consequence, not a cause, of military failure.'[2]

The genesis of the stab-in-the-back myth can perhaps be traced back to 1 October 1918.[3] At a meeting of German army high command Ludendorff candidly admitted that the war was lost, and that 'an unavoidable and conclusive defeat' beckoned. The Chancellor having resigned, Ludendorff had advised the Kaiser to 'bring ... into the government [those Social Democrats and Liberals] whom we can mainly thank that we have come to this ... They should make the peace that must now be made. They made their bed, now they must lie in it!'[4] Ludendorff's instructions came to pass. The liberally inclined Prince Max of Baden became Chancellor on 3 October and two days later asked President Wilson to bring about a peace founded on the Fourteen Points, which in the face of military defeat suddenly possessed virtues that had previously gone unnoticed by the German leadership. On 28 October the Imperial Constitution was altered in such a way that Germany became something close to a constitutional monarchy on the British pattern. But this was building sandcastles to resist a high tide. Hindenburg, having belatedly discovered that Wilson had no intention of dealing with the existing regime in Berlin, tried to sabotage Prince Max's attempt to bring about peace. Ludendorff fled to Sweden on 26 October and was replaced by General Wilhelm Groener, who rapidly and accurately assessed the state of the German army as perilous. Modern historians have referred to soldiers taking a form of

'strike action', which fed into the outbreak of revolution.[5] The Imperial navy, which had contributed so mightily to the tensions that led to war, had one final part to play. Admirals Scheer and von Hipper ordered the High Seas Fleet to carry out one last mission in the North Sea. For the sailors, this was the last straw. Mutiny broke out on 29 October.

German high command was located at Spa, in Belgium. Here, on 9 November 1918, was played out one of the last acts of the reign of Wilhelm II, Kaiser of Germany and King of Prussia. After consultations with generals on the reliability of their troops, Groener was forced to confront Wilhelm with the truth that the 'All Highest' still refused to face:

> Sire, you no longer have an army. The army will march home in peace and order under its leaders and commanding generals, but not under the command of Your Majesty, for it no longer stands behind Your Majesty.[6]

Events in Berlin complemented those in Spa. The same day, with Germany in revolution, Prince Max resigned the Chancellorship in favour of a moderate Social Democrat, Friedrich Ebert. The German Republic, also proclaimed on 9 November 1918, survived the months of revolution with the aid of an alliance between the army and the new political leadership. 'After half a century in opposition to and excluded from all imperial agencies of power, the Social Democrats were asked to pick up the pieces.'[7] It was to prove a difficult legacy.

A Carthaginian Peace?

The Peace that ended the German war of 1914–18 is one of the most vilified treaties in history. It is widely seen as a harsh, 'Carthaginian' peace that simply stored up resentment and made a German bid to reverse it – and hence the Second World War – inevitable.[8] A mirror image of this view is that the Peace was far too lenient, that Germany escaped relatively lightly from the war. I take a middle position: that

the Peace was insufficiently harsh to crush Germany and thus ensure that it would no longer be in a position to menace its neighbours, but neither was it moderate enough to conciliate the Germans. The peacemakers of 1919 thus opted for the worst of all worlds. Four hundred years earlier, Machiavelli had wisely advised that defeated enemies 'must be either pampered or crushed'.[9] The treaty of Versailles did neither. It inflicted humiliations on Germany but did not cripple it. Furthermore, by signing an unpopular Peace, the new German republic was tainted almost from its birth and thus the chances of democracy taking root were significantly undermined. Twenty years later Germany re-emerged as a threat, hungry for revenge. It is easy to portray the Allies as having won the war but lost the peace. The victorious Allies did not make the same mistake in 1945, when a defeated, occupied and partitioned Germany had fresh political and social structures imposed upon it.

One of the major problems that faced the peacemakers in Paris was the unwillingness of Germany to accept the reality of military defeat. Fed on a diet of victory in early 1918, and shielded from the events on the front line until the very last minute, many Germans refused to come to terms with what had happened to them. The Allies unwittingly aided this collective self-denial by granting Armistice terms that allowed German troops to march home rather than insisting on their surrender. This seemed to compensate for other tokens of defeat – evacuation of captured territory, surrender of war goods, occupation of the Rhineland by Allied troops. German soldiers returned to streets bedecked with flowers and flags, to be greeted as victors. The new Chancellor, Friedrich Ebert, proclaimed in December 1918 that troops were returning without having been defeated.[10]

Some Allied commanders, Pershing among them, were in favour of fighting on in November 1918 until the Germans agreed to unconditional surrender. Others, including Haig and Henry Wilson and politicians such as Lloyd George, who underestimated the extent of the crisis afflicting the German army and state, favoured more moderate terms. Sir Eric Geddes, by now First Lord of the Admiralty, wrote on 12 November: 'Had we known how bad things were in

Germany, we might have got stiffer terms; however, it is easy to be wise after the event.'[11] Even if 'stiffer terms' had fallen short of unconditional surrender, they might have included occupation of German territory on the east bank of the Rhine. The west bank was occupied, and as a consequence Rhinelanders lived with the visible evidence of defeat – British, French and American troops on German soil. The temporary incarceration of the German army, and Allied victory parades in Berlin, Munich and other major cities would undoubtedly have forced the German people as a whole to face the actuality of defeat. In the absence of such reminders of the Allied victory, the stab-in-the-back myth flourished and Adolf Hitler was the eventual beneficiary.

Given the 'dreamland' inhabited by the German delegates to Versailles and the German people alike, it is not surprising that the eventual terms came as a body blow.[12] In truth, the terms were not unduly severe. After beginning, fighting and losing a total world war Germany was deprived of about 13.5 per cent of its territory, about 27,000 square miles, which went principally to the reconstituted Polish state and to France, in the shape of Alsace-Lorraine. Along with this territory went approximately 7 million people and 13.5 per cent of Germany's economic productivity. In addition Germany had to pay £6,000 million in reparations; her overseas colonies were forfeited; and restrictions were placed on her armed forces – the army was limited to 100,000 men, there were to be no tanks, no submarines, no aircraft.[13] Compared to the treatment that Germany had meted out to defeated Russia in 1918 at the Peace of Brest-Litovsk the terms seem almost moderate. They bear no comparison with what happened to Germany in 1945.

The same self-delusion enabled some Germans to cling to the belief that Wilson's Fourteen Points would spare them from the wrath of the Allies. Some of the new German leadership, Matthias Erzberger of the Centre Party for one, had genuinely supported the Fourteen Points for some time, but the deathbed conversion of the Imperial German elite to Wilsonian idealism had fooled few on the Allied side. Later, Germans were able to claim that Germany had been 'cheated', that it

had accepted an armistice on the basis of the Fourteen Points and a lenient peace, but the subsequent settlement had not been moderate.[14] Such claims were disingenuous in the extreme. The Fourteen Points underpinned the policy of the United States but not that of France and Britain. Ever since their announcement the British and French had been sceptical, and bitterness followed when London and Paris were excluded from the bilateral exchanges between Berlin and Washington in October 1918. On 13 October the British CIGS Henry Wilson noted that his American namesake 'must make it clear to the Boches that his 14 points (with which we do not agree) were not a basis for an armistice, which is what the Boches pretend they are ... Everyone angry and contemptuous of Wilson.'[15] In the short term, Britain and France, backed into a corner, were forced to go along with Wilson's view. Nevertheless, Germans were soon to discover that their leaders' belated espousal of the Fourteen Points had not handed them a 'get out of jail free' card that absolved them of any responsibility for the events of the previous four years. The reality, as German historian Klaus Schwabe has recently written, was that Germany had lost the war and thus had to pay the price of a Peace imposed by the victors.[16]

From a distance of eighty years it is possible to make a good case that the 'Big Three' – Lloyd George, Wilson and the French leader Clemenceau – should have willingly granted the mildest of terms to Germany. This would have given the infant German republic the best of all christening presents and would have laid the ground for reconciliation. Regrettably, the circumstances of 1918–19 militated against such an enlightened approach. At the end of a long, bitter war public opinion in the victorious states was crying out for revenge and security. A combination of primal desire for retribution and concerns about future security made a thoroughly high-minded Peace all but impossible to achieve.

That the settlement was not high-minded was a central theme of an immensely influential book, published in December 1919, by the British economist John Maynard Keynes. As a Treasury official, Keynes had been present at the peace discussions, and he asserted that Germany was unable to meet the reparations payments demanded by the Allies,

and that French plans to enhance their security by keeping Germany weak were counterproductive. British and French politicians, Keynes claimed, 'run the risk of completing the ruin, which Germany began, by a Peace which ... must impair yet further ... the delicate, complicated organisation ... through which alone the European peoples can employ themselves and live'.[17] Keynes's book *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* helped to undermine the validity of the Versailles settlement almost before the ink on the treaty was dry.

Feelings of guilt among the Anglo-American liberal elite at the way Germany had been treated in 1919 were to contribute significantly towards the undermining of the Versailles settlement in the interwar period. A major source of this remorse was the so-called 'war guilt' clause, discussed in chapter 2, which, ironically, was intended to limit German responsibility to pay reparations. Article 231 stated that the Allies were morally entitled to demand that Germany pay for the war in its entirety, but Article 232 set out that reparations would be confined to sums that Germany could actually pay. Being saddled with the blame for the war outraged the Germans, but it gave their politicians and diplomats a powerful weapon that was wielded with some skill to undermine the moral validity of the Peace, thus hastening Germany's re-admittance into the international community.[18]

So, was the Second World War an inevitable consequence of the Treaty of Versailles? Or should the major origins of the war that broke out in 1939 be located in the peculiar circumstances of the previous decade? In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, the causes of the conflict seemed straightforward. The First World War and the deeply flawed Versailles settlement between them destroyed the old balance of power and left a host of intractable territorial disputes. The imposition of reparations on Germany, it was pointed out, was damaging to the world economy, and the harshness of the settlement helped Adolf Hitler to power. In his political testimony *Mein Kampf*, written in 1924, Hitler set out a plan for world domination that he began to set in motion shortly after his appointment as German Chancellor nine years later. Western leaders misguidedly attempted to appease Hitler, the interpretation went, thus allowing him to achieve

his aims more or less bloodlessly, while whetting his appetite for more. Only when Hitler ripped up the Munich agreement signed only a few months before and occupied the whole of Czechoslovakia in spring 1939, did the scales fall from their eyes. Hitler's next move, against Poland, triggered a war with Britain and France that expanded into a global total war and cost millions of lives. If only the peacemakers of 1919 had had the foresight to be more generous, or if the democracies had taken prompt and resolute action when Hitler began to menace the peace of Europe, this 'unnecessary war', to use Winston Churchill's phrase,[19] could have been avoided.

This consensus was shattered in 1961 by the publication of A.J.P. Taylor's *The Origins of the Second World War*.[20] Taylor caused outrage in some circles by treating Hitler as a 'wicked' but otherwise normal statesman who reacted to events, rather than as a uniquely evil monster coldly executing a master plan for world domination.[21] Worse, in the view of his critics, Taylor refused to join in the ritual denunciation of Neville Chamberlain and appeasement. While this upset many Anglo-American readers, statements such as 'Hitler (like every other German statesman) intended Germany to become the dominant power in Europe' offended many Germans, already reeling from Fritz Fischer's work on the origins of the First World War which, coincidentally, appeared in the same year.[22] By denying the uniqueness of Hitler, by seeing his foreign policy as a continuation of that of Bismarck and Wilhelmine Germany, Taylor helped to challenge the use of the Führer as Germany's alibi for the crimes of the Third Reich. In doing so he reinforced the notion of a new Thirty Years War that began in 1914 and ended in 1945, with a breathing space of twenty years in the middle.

One of the major problems in accepting the Thirty Years War thesis, as Michael Howard has observed, is that twenty years after the Armistice 'the verdict of Versailles had been effectively reversed without a shot being fired'.[23] Most of the grievances that emerged from the Peace of 1919, from reparations to territorial losses, had either been settled in Germany's favour, were in the process of being settled, or at the very least were likely to be resolved. In

truth, Versailles was not the Carthaginian Peace that Keynes had feared. His views on reparations were challenged subsequently,[24] and are still the subject of historical debate.[25] In the end Germany and the Allies compromised on reparations, and against the opposition of Britain and the USA the French were unable to force through the more extreme of their demands, for instance that the Rhineland be detached from Germany. Indeed, in relative terms, Germany emerged from the First World War in good shape. The German state, even after its losses, remained fundamentally intact and was the largest and potentially the most powerful entity in central Europe: Austria-Hungary had fragmented into a number of smaller countries and the Soviet Union was a weakened pariah state.

By contrast France's strategic position was weaker than it had been in 1914. In place of the might of Imperial Russia as an ally on Germany's eastern frontier, France now had smaller and weaker states such as Poland. That the wartime alliance had disintegrated was forcibly demonstrated by Britain's refusal in 1923 to support the Franco-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr, mounted to force the continued payment of reparations. France could no longer count on British support even to the limited degree that had existed prior to 1914. Certainly, neither of the Anglo-Saxon powers would join France in a formal alliance guaranteeing her security against future German aggression. Many historians agree that the Versailles settlement could have been enforced, but two of the victors, Britain and the United States, lacked the will to do so.[26] The United States turned its back on Europe and retreated into isolationism while Britain preferred to conciliate Germany. Bereft of the support of their erstwhile allies, the French were unable to implement the Peace as rigorously as they would have liked.

Under Gustav Stresemann, foreign minister from 1923 to the end of the decade, Germany pursued a 'strategy of accommodation' with Britain and France. By signing the Locarno Treaty in 1925 (thus guaranteeing Germany's western frontiers, but not, significantly, the eastern), renegotiating the reparations terms, taking up a seat on the League of Nations, and getting American loans to rebuild its economy,

the Weimar government improved both Germany's international status and domestic position.[27] Stresemann certainly wanted to revise the Versailles settlement – Taylor was right about that – but he sought to do so through conciliation with the Western powers. The British and, more reluctantly, the French worked with him to these ends, and continued this policy for the best part of a decade after Stresemann's death in October 1929 – right up to the spring of 1939, in fact. Thus in the 1920s and 1930s, the Versailles Treaty, which was anyway far from being a 'Carthaginian Peace' to begin with, was steadily revised in Germany's favour. This process resulted in Germany's return to a position of dominance in central Europe without war. Why, then, did the Second World War break out?

Ten years after the signature of the Treaty of Versailles many problems remained unresolved. Eastern Europe in particular was an obvious source of political instability, and the Weimar state continued to rest on somewhat rickety foundations. Overall, however, observers could be cautiously optimistic about the outlook for peace and stability in Europe. Then, in October 1929, came the Wall Street Crash. In the USA and Britain democracy survived the subsequent worldwide economic Depression battered, but in reasonable shape. In France, democracy was weakened but tottered on; across the Rhine, the blow was fatal. The sufferings of the masses led to the radicalisation and polarisation of German politics, with both Hitler's Nazi party and the German Communist Party making electoral gains. The German political elite, many of whom had never been reconciled to the Weimar republic, abandoned democracy. Even before Hitler's appointment as Chancellor in January 1933, authoritarian rule had effectively replaced parliamentary democracy.[28]

Hitler was the child of the Depression. But for the Wall Street Crash, it seems unlikely that the circumstances which brought him to power would have ever arisen. Once in power, he set about a policy of expansion, which at first Britain was prepared to tolerate and even encourage. Up to a point, he was indeed, as Taylor suggested, pursuing traditional German foreign policy goals. But Hitler was an altogether different character from Bismarck or even the men who took Germany

to war in 1914. His racist ideology, the sheer scale of his ambitions, and the ruthlessness with which he set out to achieve them, set him apart from what had gone before. By September 1939 Hitler's expansionism had reached a stage that the Western democracies, especially Britain, were no longer prepared to accept. At that moment Britain once again returned to its policy of maintaining the balance of power in Europe. For the second time in twenty years, Britain and France went to war against a German regime seeking hegemony.

The war that broke out in September 1939 was *not* the inevitable consequence of the settlement of 1919.[29] To play the game of 'what if', Weimar Germany might well have survived but for the Depression of 1929. Even if it had not, it was not inevitable that Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party would have come to power. It is entirely plausible to postulate the collapse of democracy in Germany and the emergence of a right-wing, nationalist, possibly military regime that did not embark on a course which led to war with Britain and France. Such a regime could have revised its borders with Poland, even by force, with Britain's acquiescence or even encouragement. There may well have been conflict as the result of Germany flexing its muscles, but not carnage on the scale of that unleashed by Hitler in September 1939. A limited conflict with Poland over the Danzig corridor would have been of a very different order to the genocidal war launched against the Soviet Union by Hitler in June 1941. Imperfect as it undoubtedly was, the Treaty of Versailles was not the direct 'cause' of the Second World War.

The First World War and the Development of Warfare

The Armistice of 11 November 1918 was signed in a French railway carriage. The very same carriage was used for the same purpose on 22 June 1940, although this time it was the Germans who forced the French to agree to a humiliating armistice. In a campaign lasting only six weeks, the German army had smashed the forces of France, Britain, Belgium and the Netherlands; had occupied Paris and the Channel

ports; had forced the British into mounting a seaborne evacuation – and all this had been achieved at a cost of only 27,000 German fatalities. The first day of Operation *Michael* in 1918 had alone cost 11,000 German dead. The *Blitzkrieg* (lightning war) of 1940 might seem to point to the emergence of a radically new type of warfare, the antithesis of the attritional fighting of 1918. The truth is somewhat different.

Most of the methods of fighting battles and campaigns in the Second World War built upon First World War prototypes. The effectiveness of the exceptions, such as paratroops and commando-style Special Forces, remains a matter of some controversy. The 'mainstream' weapons, such as artillery, aircraft, tanks, and machine guns were more powerful and reliable than their Great War ancestors, but remained essentially similar and were most effective when used in all-arms teams, just as in 1918. Two new developments were especially significant. The first was the evolution of radio communications, which enabled a measure of voice control to return to the battlefield. The second was a significant increase in the range and reliability of armoured vehicles. These two factors restored the triad of infantry, artillery and 'cavalry'; once again commanders had the ability rapidly to exploit opportunities and vigorously pursue a retreating enemy. To a great extent these developments freed Second World War commanders from the shackles worn by their Great War predecessors.

Better tanks and communications were not the only advantages enjoyed by the German forces in 1940, or even the most important ones. The key factor was a vast gulf in the fighting power of the two sides. The balance of forces and technology was roughly equal between the Allies and the Germans, but in terms of doctrine, tactics and morale the latter had a significant advantage. The same was true of the initial stages of Operation *Barbarossa* in 1941, which came close to defeating the Soviet Union.

Blitzkrieg was an aberration, born of a disparity in fighting power between adversaries. By 1942 Germany's enemies had returned to rough parity as their tactics and doctrine improved. Given the advances in armour and communications, battles were rather more mobile than

in 1914–18, but they were no less attritional, and the Second World War had its share of static fighting, such as the battles of Stalingrad, Cassino and Normandy. Just as in the Great War, artillery was a dominant weapon in most theatres in 1939–45. All this resulted in 'butcher's bills' that exceeded those of the earlier war. Soviet military casualties in 1941–45 amounted to some 13 million, which sets the total of British dead of both world wars into sobering context. The lower British figure for the later war reflects the lack of a long-running commitment to a ground campaign on the scale of the Western Front. Nevertheless, casualties in individual units and campaigns exceeded those of the Great War. The loss rate in British and Canadian infantry battalions ran at about 100 per month on the Western Front. In the campaign in north-west Europe from D-Day to V.E. Day in 1944–45, battalions suffered a minimum of 100 casualties per month, but figures of 175 were not uncommon.[30] 1st Battalion Gordon Highlanders sustained losses of 75 officers and 986 soldiers in the ten and a half months that followed their arrival in France. Of the 55 officers who had commanded rifle platoons, 'fifty-three per cent were wounded, twenty-four per cent invalided, and five per cent had survived'. On average, their service with the Gordons amounted to 38 days.[31] In 1945, as in 1918, high intensity warfare took a fearful toll of soldiers' lives.

Conventional wars since 1945 have reinforced the impression that methods of fighting have not changed markedly from the all-arms, air-ground model that emerged in 1917–18. When one side has an overwhelming advantage in combat power, as the Israelis had over the Egyptians in 1967, success is swift. Where two sides are evenly matched, as were the Iranians and the Iraqis in 1980–88, deadlock ensues. The one major attempt to move away from the all-arms concept, when in 1973 the Israelis, misreading the lessons of 1967, tried to fight an armour-heavy battle against strong Egyptian defences on the banks of the Suez Canal, ended in heavy losses for the attackers. The Israelis rapidly revised their tactics, returning to an all-arms approach, and defeated the Egyptians. Currently, some military analysts are predicting that sophisticated new weapons will transform the nature of warfare,

while others see new weapons as producing more of the same, with ever-heavier casualties.

> The armies of Europe and the United States still train for essentially the same style of warfare that was developed on the Western Front in 1914–18 . . .[32]

This statement was written in 1987, but at the beginning of the twenty-first century it still holds true.

The First World War and the Short Twentieth Century

Between 1989 and 1991 the Cold War came to an end. The collapse of Communism created in Europe a situation that, as many commentators pointed out, bore a resemblance to the end of the First World War. New states emerged, and instability and conflict replaced the certainties of the bi-polar world of the Cold War. In retrospect, the years 1914 to 1991 can be seen as one discrete period, dubbed by historians the 'Short Twentieth Century'. It was a time of confrontations between ideologies, dominated by war and its aftermath, distinctly different both from the 'Long Nineteenth Century' (1789–1914) that preceded it, and the world at the turn of the twenty-first century.[33] The notion of a Short Twentieth Century is a helpful one, providing that it is not understood as implying that the war that broke out in 1914 inevitably led to a further global conflict. The two World Wars and the Cold War fit into a pattern stretching back to the late fifteenth century. Since 1494, ten or so major wars have occurred in times when the international system was undergoing fundamental change, with power shifting away from some actors and towards others. Indeed, no general (as opposed to smaller scale, local and limited) conflicts have taken place unless there was a major upheaval in the international system.[34] Against this background of the rise of Germany, the USA, Japan, and the USSR, and the decline of Britain and France, conflict in some form, if not the wars that actually occurred, begins to look inevitable.

One charge that can be levelled against Woodrow Wilson is that his policies, the product of naïvety and idealism, helped to create the conditions of instability that succeeded the First World War. His lofty ideals of self-determination clashed head on with the realities of Central and Eastern Europe. Ethnic groups did not live in self-contained areas that could easily be converted into nation states. This led to the situation where, for instance, the new Czechoslovakian state contained 10 million Czechs and Slovaks, 3 million ethnic Germans, 700,000 Hungarians, 500,000 Ukrainians and 60,000 Poles. Moreover, democracy, another of Wilson's cherished ideals, did not take root in Germany nor in most of the newly independent states. Wilson's third ideal, collective security through the newly created League of Nations, proved useless in the face of determined aggression in the 1930s.

But that is not the end of the story. From the perspective of the early twenty-first century Wilson appears as something other than a mere naïve idealist. Behind Wilson's inflated rhetoric and expectations was a shrewd recognition that American security would be improved by establishing democratic regimes around the world. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the future had seemed to belong to large empires. But when Britain and France enlarged their empires at the end of the war, they were walking into a blind alley, with the dead-end already visible to the clear-sighted. Wilson, by contrast, had correctly identified the future, embracing the concept of nationalism at the very moment when empires began to break up, and then attempted to set the agenda for the newly emergent states. In such countries, and for the Anglo-American liberal/left, Wilson became a hero. In the 1930s H.G. Wells wrote that Wilson, for a short period, 'ceased to be a common statesman; he became a Messiah. Millions believed in him as the bringer of untold blessings . . .'[35] In contrast, some have viewed Wilson's liberal internationalism as a cloak for the advancement of American capitalism. They are wrong in seeing this as a prime motive in Wilson's behaviour, although he certainly believed that the free market was the essential partner of democracy.

Wilson's approach was rejected in his own country even while he remained in office. Later, successive American administrations

found it expedient to support right-wing, undemocratic regimes with strong anti-Communist credentials, with sometimes unhappy results. Nevertheless, Wilson's stance provided a key element in American foreign policy for much of the twentieth century. Ultimately, Woodrow Wilson achieved a posthumous victory. In the Second World War the democracies – Britain as well as the USA – were a source of hope to peoples under Nazi oppression, and by the end both states had adopted Wilsonian principles to a greater or lesser degree. After 1945 they remoulded West Germany and Japan in their own democratic image. Collective security was reborn in a modified form at the United Nations. The UN proved a little more successful than its predecessor, the League, if only because governments of all ideological stripes felt the need to pay it at least lip service. In the 1970s another Democratic president, Jimmy Carter, insisted on placing human rights on the international agenda. Although Carter was reviled at the time as another naïve idealist, it is now clear that his strategy played a significant role in undermining the legitimacy of Soviet rule.[36] Ronald Reagan, in most respects a most un-Wilsonian president, followed Carter. Reagan fought the Cold War with a relish that would have been alien to Wilson; yet Reagan's broad-fronted attack on Soviet power included a crusade for democracy. With the 'People Power' revolutions of 1989 in Central and Eastern Europe, Wilson, '. . . the first world leader to respect the power of nationalism and to try to channel its great strength in the direction of democracy and international cooperation . . .',[37] was finally vindicated.

In 1989 an American political scientist, Francis Fukuyama, celebrated the conclusion of the Cold War by declaring that history had come to an end – that the triumph of liberal capitalism, having seen off its ideological foes, meant that there were no more big issues to fight about. Ralf Dahrendorf, more cautiously, suggests that 'the great conflicts of the twentieth century have certainly run their course'.[38] While I disagree with the former proposition and am sceptical about the latter, it is certainly the case that since 1914 liberal capitalist democracy has endured the assaults of three powerful foes – autocratic and then Nazi Germany, and Soviet Communism – and emerged victorious.

Moreover, the record of the twentieth century would suggest that democracy plus welfare capitalism is a good, although imperfect, recipe for stability and prosperity.

From this perspective, the victory of 1918 is more important than ever. Looking back from the year 2000, we know that the twentieth century ended more positively than anyone might have dared hope in 1917 or 1941, or during the Great Depression of the early 1930s, or in the two most dangerous years of the Cold War, 1962 and 1983. We can see that the Allied victory in the First World War was a vital element in the relative peace and prosperity enjoyed by the West at the end of the century. To claim that the First World War was 'futile' because it was succeeded within twenty years by an even worse conflict is akin to proclaiming the Second World War futile because dissension among the victors led to the Cold War. In both cases, the victories over Germany produced 'negative gains': in other words, they prevented something from happening. To argue that the world in 1919 would have been a better place if the Great War had not taken place, or more parochially, if Britain had not become involved, misses the point. A German victory in the First World War would have produced a situation significantly worse than the imperfect 'real' world of 1919. The First World War was a just and necessary war fought against a militarist, aggressive autocracy. In Britain and the United States it is a forgotten victory. It has remained forgotten for too long.

NOTES

Introduction

1 J. Laffin, *British Butchers and Bunglers of World War One* (Stroud, Sutton, 1988).

2 A.A. Gill, *Sunday Times*, 7 July 1996.

3 John Keegan, *The First World War* (London, Hutchinson, 1998) p.315.

4 Stephen Badsey, unpublished paper, 1998. I am indebted to Dr Badsey for allowing me to consult and quote from this piece, and also for discussing the whole subject with me, over many years.

5 For a definition of the scientific method of writing history, see John McManners, 'Introduction' to *The Oxford History of Christianity* (ed. J. McManners) (Oxford, Oxford UP, 1993) p.5.

Chapter 1

1 *Guardian:* 'The Season: supporters guide to the 1999–2000 English football season, August 1999' p.4.