

Anti-Colonial Resistance in Africa

The European partition of Africa had been more or less completed by the end of the nineteenth century, except for some parts of North Africa, which were acquired by the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century. The actual occupation of the African territories, however, took the European colonial powers much longer because of the resistance and revolts that they had to face. Some of these revolts took the colonial powers a long time to suppress. There was, for example, the Maji-Maji revolt in German East Africa in 1905–7. Unlike in many other countries of Asia, modern nationalist movements in Africa emerged only after the First World War. When they arose, they had a long tradition of resistance and revolt behind them.

Developments in Latin America

In Latin America, twenty independent states had emerged with the collapse of the Spanish and Portuguese empires. Till the end of the nineteenth century, most of them had backward economies, based mainly on agriculture. Most of them were also ruled by corrupt oligarchies, and strong governments did not emerge, which could resist the economic domination by other countries. The rich resources of these countries, instead of being used for development and welfare of the people, were bartered away to European companies and, later, increasingly, to US corporations. With foreign investments in mines, plantations, railways, shipping, electricity, and almost all important sectors of the economy, Latin America had become what has been called an ‘informal empire’. Almost all the states of Latin America were dominated by the US.

Most Latin American countries had social systems which were marked by gross inequalities. In some countries, slavery had been abolished as a result of the French Revolution. In some others, however, it persisted even after it had been abolished in USA. In Brazil, for example, slavery was abolished only in 1888. However, in spite of the long persistence of slavery in some of the Latin American countries, the kind of racism, racial discrimination and segregation which marked life in USA even in the twentieth century, was absent in Latin America.

Except for later Asian immigrants, the population of Latin American countries comprised American Indians, people of European descent, and Blacks, who were descendants of slaves brought from Africa, and their admixtures. More than half of the population of Latin America was of mixed blood. However, in most countries which had a large American Indian population—such as Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia, Venezuela—all powers were concentrated in the hands of White ruling cliques. Large estates were owned by mainly absentee landlords while the American Indians were forced to live in conditions of extreme poverty. Only in Mexico—a country with a large American Indian population—did united popular movements grow with American Indian participation on a massive scale to put an end to social inequalities, to bring about equitable distribution of land, and to build a state system based on the support of the common people. Mexico, however, underwent a long period of political turmoil, including intervention by USA before the aims of the Mexican Revolution could, to some extent, be realised. Argentina made some progress in building up her economy and democratic institutions. The city of Buenos Aires was regarded as the Paris of Latin America.

By the time the First World War broke out, there were democratic stirrings in many parts of Latin America. Even though Latin American countries had been independent for about a century, they “lingered on the margin of international life”, with no independent role to play. With little industrialisation, they were reduced to the position of suppliers of raw materials. Some of them were transformed into single crop economies for the benefit of their powerful neighbour. This made them further dependent. The contrast between North America and Latin America was too glaring to be missed by the people of Latin America. There was a rise in the aspirations of the Latin American people and a growing sense of hostility to USA.

THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The inter-imperialist rivalries, the growing chauvinism, antagonism and conflicts within Europe, the formation of opposing alliance

systems, and the growing militarisation and feverish preparations for war, were some of the marked features that characterised the history of Europe since the last decade of the nineteenth century. There had been a number of crises which had been at least temporarily resolved. The tensions in Europe, however, had created a situation in which war had begun to be considered inevitable. Every state was ready with its war plans and strategies. It had also become increasingly clear that once the war broke out, it would not be possible to localise it and that it would become a general war and every country would get drawn into it.

The Immediate Occasion

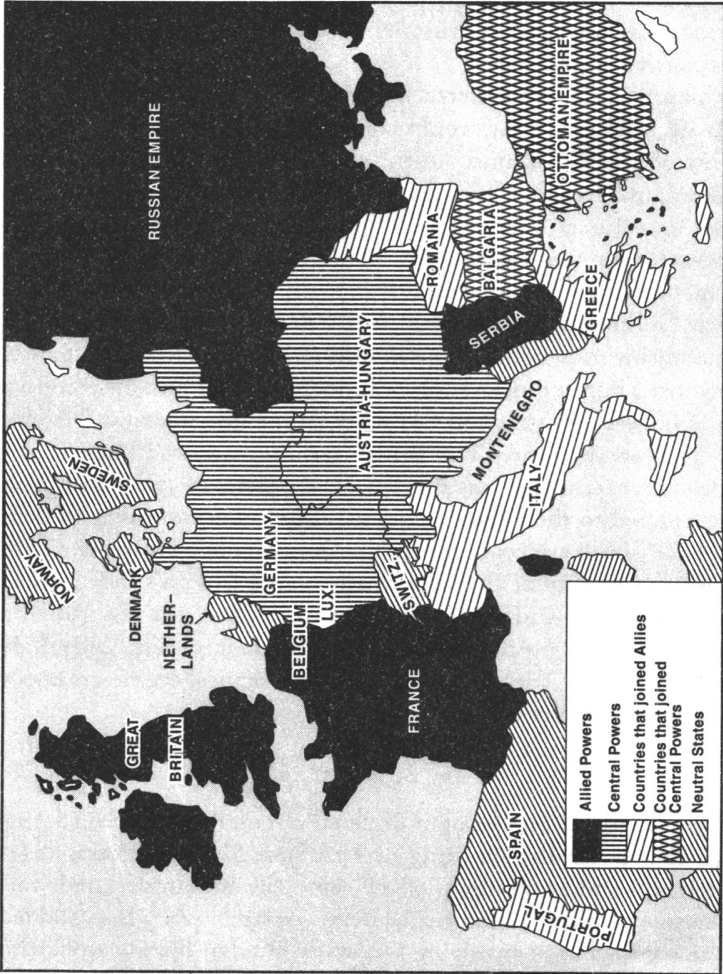
The assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne, and his wife in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914 provided the immediate occasion for the outbreak of the war. Sarajevo, where the assassination took place, was the capital of Bosnia which had been annexed by Austria-Hungary a few years earlier. The organiser of the assassination was a secret society, called the “Black Hand” or “Union of Death”. They were a group of extremist Serbian nationalists whose aim was to unite all Serbians into a single Serbian state. Historians are generally agreed that the Serbian government, or at least the Serbian prime minister, was aware of the conspiracy to assassinate the Archduke but did nothing to stop it. Convinced of Serbia’s complicity in the assassination, Austria (short for Austria-Hungary) served an ultimatum on 23 July making eleven demands on Serbia. Austria did not expect these demands to be accepted and hence fixed a time-limit of forty- eight hours for unconditional compliance. Serbia accepted most of the demands, but not all. Total acceptance of all the demands would have meant total loss of sovereignty by Serbia. Serbia’s reply of 25 July did not conciliate Austria, and Serbia, knowing that it would not, had already ordered mobilisation of her troops. Austria rejected Serbia’s reply and immediately ordered the mobilisation of her army for an attack on Serbia. She was determined to put an end to this “permanent danger to my House and my territories”, as the Austrian emperor called it in a letter to the German emperor. On 28 July Austria declared war on Serbia. On 29 July, the Austrian army bombarded Belgrade, Serbia’s capital.

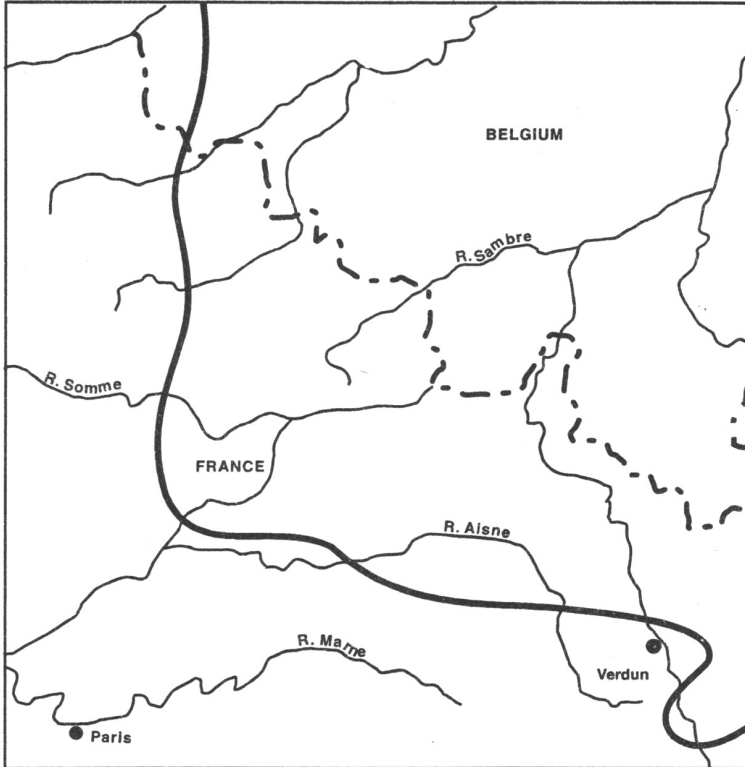
The outbreak of war between Serbia and Austria was soon followed by wars between countries that were militarily linked together. These wars led to the general war or the First World War. In order to pressurise Austria to abandon the war against Serbia, Russia ordered mobilisation against Austria. She could not permit Austrian expansion in the Balkans. Russia had her own ambitions in Serbia which would have suffered if Serbia gets defeated at the hands of Austria. As Germany would come to the aid of Austria, if Russia entered the war against Austria, Russia also prepared for war with Germany. Germany was convinced that in the event of a war between her and Russia, France would join Russia against Germany. This would mean that Germany would have to fight on two fronts, with France in the west and with Russia in the east. To be successful in the war, Germany had made plans to first defeat France in a quick war by mobilising most of her troops for this purpose and then turn to Russia against whom a quick victory was not possible. Thus, the second war was between Austria and Germany on the one side and Russia and France on the other. The British position was still unclear as the British government was divided on the issue of going to war. She responded to the French request for help by promising to defend France's northern coast against the German navy. However, German invasion of neutral Belgium finally ended Britain's indecisiveness, and Germany and Britain were at war. Thus, the rival alliances, formed in the preceding years, had come into play. Only Italy, a member of the Triple Alliance, remained neutral on the ground that Germany was not fighting a defensive war.

The Scope of the War

On 1 August 1914, Germany declared war on Russia and on 3 August on France. In the morning of 4 August, German troops entered Belgium and at midnight of the same day Britain declared war on Germany. In the meantime the Serbo-Austrian war which had led to the conflagration involving Germany, Russia, France and Britain, appeared to have become secondary. Till 6 August Austria was not at war with Russia and till 12 August she was not at war with Britain and France. Soon others joined in as a result of efforts by both sides to win allies by promising them territorial gains. In August, Japan

EUROPE DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR



THE TRENCH LINE

declared war on Germany. She had entered into an alliance with Britain but her main aim was to seize German territories in China and in the Pacific. Portugal, often referred to by Britain as her oldest ally, also entered the war. In May 1915, Italy declared war on Austria. Britain and France had promised her Austrian and Turkish territories. Later, Romania and Greece also joined Britain, France and Russia, and these countries along with their allies came to be known as the Allied Powers. Germany and Austria were joined by Bulgaria in October 1915, having been promised territories in Serbia and Greece. Bulgaria was also given some Turkish territories. Turkey declared war on Russia in November and joined the war on the side of Germany and Austria. These countries—Germany and Austria and their allies—came to be known as the Central Powers. Various other

countries in other parts of the world also joined the war. USA entered the war in April 1917 on the side of the Allied Powers. In all, the number of belligerent countries rose to twenty-seven. These comprised countries from all continents. Thus, the scope of the conflict was widened. About 65 million men (soldiers) were mobilised for the war. Of them over 42 million were mobilised by the Allied Powers and over 22 million by the Central Powers.

The Course of the War

The War in Europe

The battles of what has rightly come to be called as the First World War were fought in different parts of the world. In terms of the intensity of fighting and killings, the battles in Europe overshadowed the battles in other parts of the world. On the Western Front in Europe, the war began when the German armies, sweeping across Belgium, entered southern France and by early September had reached in the close vicinity of Paris. The French army, in the meantime, had moved to the France-German frontier to march into Alsace-Lorraine. The German army hoped to encircle the French army and achieve a quick victory. The French offensive into Alsace-Lorraine was repulsed but the retreating French forces along with the British forces met the German forces in a battle known as the Battle of the Marne (named after the river Marne near which the battle was fought). The German forces had to retreat and they entrenched themselves along the river Aisne. There were desperate fights, but by the end of November the war entered a period of a long stalemate on the western front when neither side could dislodge the other for about four years.

Behind a long unbroken chain of opposing trenches and barbed wire extending over hundreds of kilometres from France's southern border with Switzerland to the northern seacoast of France, the opposing armies dug themselves in. Protected from the machine gun and rifle fire behind the trenches, neither side could break through the other's line of trenches. Each side conducted raids on the other in the pre-dawn hours with little success, only steadily adding to the number of the dead on both sides. Germany, in 1915, started the use of poison gas to achieve a breakthrough, and Britain, in 1916, introduced the use of tanks, devised recently, for the same

purpose. Neither made much difference. The losses suffered by each side were made up for by bringing in more troops.

On the Eastern Front, Russia achieved some initial successes against Germany and Austria but these were short-lived. In 1915, the Russian armies suffered heavy defeats and the forces of the Central Powers entered many territories of the Russian empire. In 1916, Russia launched another offensive but it was repulsed. After the October Revolution, Russia withdrew from the war. On 2 March 1918, she signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany and ceded many of her territories as the price of peace. Out of a total of 12 million men mobilised by Russia, 1.7 million had been killed, about 5 million wounded and about 2.5 million were either missing or had been taken prisoner. In the meantime, Serbia and Romania had capitulated.

Spread of the War Outside Europe

Outside Europe, some major battles were fought in North Africa and West Asia. Germany and Turkey united to threaten the Allied possessions and influence in North Africa and West Asia. Britain and France fought these attempts and tried to seize the Arab territories of the Ottoman Empire. They also established contacts with Arab nationalists and others and fomented anti-Turkish Arab risings. While pretending to espouse the cause of Arab countries freedom from Turkish rule, Britain and France entered into a secret agreement, known as the Sykes-Picot agreement, in 1916. This agreement provided for the division of Arab countries between Britain and France. In 1917, the British government also pledged itself "to the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people". This 'pledge' by Britain about another country, which was not considered fit to be consulted, was to have serious consequences for peace and stability in West Asia.

During the course of the war, German colonial possessions in Asia and Africa were seized by the Allied Powers. Japan made colonial gains in China by acquiring control over the German sphere of influence and forcing China to make further concessions to her. German South-West Africa was occupied by South African troops, Togoland by British and French troops and Cameroons by British, French and Belgian troops. The fighting between British and German troops in German East Africa continued till the end of the war.

The Stalemate in Europe

In the meantime, what has come to be known as the “war of attrition”, continued in Europe. It meant each side trying to wear out the other side by mobilising more and more men and using enormous amounts of artillery and other weapons. Two catastrophic battles were fought as a part of this “war of attrition”. In February 1916, Germany launched a massive attack on the French fortress of Verdun. The French in turn poured hundreds of thousands of their soldiers into the battle. This battle, which did nothing to end the stalemate, resulted in about 700,000 soldiers killed or wounded, more or less equally divided between the two sides. The other was the battle of Somme (named after the river Somme along which the battle was fought). Here the Allied troops involved were mainly British who launched the attack. On the very first day of the battle, the British dead or wounded totalled about 60,000.

The Policy of Blockade

The war had become a total war. It was no longer confined to battles between armies. It required total mobilisation of all the resources of the main belligerent countries. An increasing amount of munitions and other war materials were required to be produced. This meant changing the production pattern. Every economic activity had to be subordinated to the needs of the war. It also required that no goods—food, raw materials, war materials, anything and everything—should be allowed to enter the enemy’s country from anywhere. This implies a regime of economic blockade, where each side thought that the other would be starved into submission. Britain imposed a naval blockade on Germany and though the naval fleets of the two countries fought only one major battle, and that too indecisive, the British succeeded in their blockade of Germany. To prevent food and other supplies from reaching Britain, Germany started using submarines (U-boat, in German *Unterseeboot*) which it had developed to sink any ship, including those of the neutral countries, heading for Britain. This, among other things, led to the United States entering the war on the side of the Allied Powers.

The use of aircrafts in warfare also started and though cities were bombed from the air and German and Allied aircraft had dog fights, air warfare played little role in deciding the outcome of the war.

End of the War

Russia had withdrawn from the war after the October Revolution and had been forced to accept a humiliating treaty by Germany. However, the war between the Central and the Allied powers was to be decided elsewhere and not on the Eastern Front. The loss of Russia by the Allies was more than made up for by the entry of USA into the war. USA had been supplying goods, including munitions and food, to the Allies from the time of the outbreak of the war and, as a result, the US economy had prospered. Now the armies and the vast economic resources of USA were to be directly used to defeat the Central Powers.

In the meantime, discontent had been rising in the civilian population and among the soldiers of all the major belligerent countries. There were demonstrations and mutinies. The autocratic Russian empire had already fallen. The discontent was much more widespread in the countries of the Central Powers. There was a wave of strikes in Germany and Austria-Hungary and a succession of mutinies in their armies and navies. In Austria-Hungary, there were desertions on a large scale among the soldiers of the “subject nationalities” and many of them were fighting on the side of the Allies. By about the middle of July 1918, the tide of the war was beginning to turn against Germany. Germany had launched a series of offensives on the western front, inflicting heavy casualties on the Allies. But by July, the German offensive was contained and the Allies launched counter-offensives. In the meantime, the Allied forces had started their military intervention in Russia. In the east, thousands of Japanese troops poured into Siberia. While the Allied intervention in Russia was to outlast the end of the First World War, the collapse of the Central Powers had begun.

By the end of August 1918 only Germany remained a major central power to be completely defeated and final Allied offensives against Germany were launched in September. On 29 September 1918, Bulgaria surrendered. By the end of October the Ottoman Empire had ceased to exist. On 12 November, the Habsburg emperor abdicated. Most people of the Austro-Hungarian empire—the Czechs, the Poles, the Yugoslavs and the Hungarians—had already declared their independence. On 3 November, revolution broke out in Germany; on 9 November, the German emperor abdicated and fled to Holland, and on 10 November Germany was proclaimed a republic. On 11 November 1918, the new government of Germany

signed the armistice and, at 11 o'clock in the morning of 11 November, the First World War came to an end.

The destruction caused by the war in terms of human lives was terrible. Out of about 65 million soldiers mobilised by both the powers, about nine million were killed and about 22 million wounded. To understand the true nature of this catastrophe and its impact on European societies, it should be remembered that most of the dead and the survivors, “scarred physically and mentally”, were the “flower of Europe”, young people between the ages of 18 and 35. Erich Maria Remarque, who had been forced to join the German army, published a novel which in the English translation is entitled *All Quiet on the Western Front*. The dedication page of the novel carries the following statement:

This book is to be neither an accusation nor a confession, and least of all an adventure, for death is not an adventure to those who stand face to face with it. It will try simply to tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped its shells, were destroyed by the war.

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

Revolutionary Movement in Russia

During the war years, the Russian Revolution, an event of great historical significance took place. Certain aspects and events of Russian history—Russian colonial empire, the autocratic nature of her political system, the backwardness of her economy, her defeat at the hands of Japan, the role played by her in the European conflicts, particularly in the Balkans, and her entry into the war have already been mentioned. In the nineteenth century, there were various reform and revolutionary movements expressing discontent among the Russian peasantry who continued to live in misery even after serfdom was abolished in 1861. Vast estates were owned by the Russian nobility and the Church, and there were millions of peasants without any landholdings of their own. The industrial workers, a new class that had emerged with the beginning of industrialisation, also lived in conditions of misery. While the common people were obviously opposed to the existing system in Russia, the middle classes and the