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Domestic Conflict and the Origins of the First World War: The British and the German Cases

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For those interested in the First World War, two recent debates loom especially large. The first, inspired by Fritz Fischer, concerns the degree of German responsibility for the war's outbreak and course. The second, which has in part been thrashed out in this *Journal* between Arno Mayer and Peter Loewenberg, concerns the proper way to study international conflict—wars in particular. The present paper joins both debates and tries to show how they interrelate.

I

More than thirteen years have gone by since Fischer first startled the German historical profession with *Griff nach der Weltmacht*, and just about five since his follow-up work, *Krieg der Illusionen*.¹ Of his numerous challenges to orthodoxy, not the least provocative lies in the books' methodology. Both, but especially the second, have broken cleanly with the traditional explanatory model (or logic) of diplomatic history.

Briefly, the key assumption underlying this model is about the "primacy of foreign policy." From it three or four postulates follow. The model distinguishes rigorously between domestic and foreign politics; it tends to treat the state as a unified, monolithic actor operating within an external environment of competition and imperatives; and it lays down that these actors are primarily motivated by rational power considerations—by the cold rules of statecraft. The controlling concepts for describing these rules are national interest and national security, power, prestige, and perhaps reasons of state. The explanatory power of the model derives from a pattern of inferences about the relationship between specific situations and the state's adherence to these rules: the state—as a rational, unitary

¹ Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht: Die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland 1914/1918* (Dusseldorf, 1961); *Krieg der Illusionen: Die deutsche Politik von 1911 bis 1914* (Dusseldorf, 1969).

decision maker uninfluenced by domestic politics—will presumably choose the one alternative in the situation that best promises to maximize its security, its power, its prestige, and other interests. The state may turn out to have miscalculated, of course; nevertheless, the grounds for its actions are largely reducible to these considerations. It follows that the crucial evidence for a foreign-policy move will be located in the “minutes of bilateral or multilateral negotiations or the texts of foreign office dispatches”; and for the scholarly investigator, the problem is then to reconstruct the motives and other causes behind the move through careful textual analysis.²

In the renewed debate over the origins of the First World War, this traditional model has proved diminishingly fruitful. Even some of Fischer’s most hostile critics have come to scrap it.³ Its main drawback is its inability to explain why the same foreign office document can serve to underpin two totally opposed interpretations.⁴ Such ambiguity can be overcome, or at any rate delimited, only if the traditional postulates are dropped or relaxed in favor of a wider perspective. On the Fischer side of the debate, for instance, he and his sympathizers have tried to uncover the degree to which German foreign policy was prompted by the logic of domestic bargaining maneuvers—by concern for the social status quo, for the prestige of the imperial regime, for the needs of the economic elites. In Fischer’s second book, this domestic impact even becomes decisive. Its argument—stripped to the bone—amounts to a thesis of aggressive war, launched by the principal German policy makers in 1914 to preserve an expansionary future in the belief that expansion alone could preserve the threatened status quo at home. Not for nothing has a younger generation of German historians come to turn Ranke on his head and to speak of the “primacy of domestic policy.”⁵

² Arno J. Mayer, “Internal Causes and Purposes of War in Europe, 1870–1956: A Research Assignment,” *Journal of Modern History* 41 (September 1969): 302. Admittedly, owing to the brevity of formulation, a pretty sharp and simplified picture of the traditional model has been sketched in. Nonetheless, I do not think that it is a caricature. On the contrary, even though many diplomatic historians had come to modify the key postulates long before Fischer was heard of, most have probably continued to use a variant of the traditional model until quite recently.

³ For instance, Egmont Zechlin, “Bethmann Hollweg, Kriegsrisiko und SPD” and “Motive und Taktik der Reichsleitung 1914,” in *Erster Weltkrieg: Ursachen, Entstehung und Kriegsziele*, ed. Wolfgang Schieder (Cologne and Berlin, 1969), pp. 165–204.

⁴ James Joll, *1914: The Unspoken Assumptions* (London, 1968), p. 7.

⁵ See Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “Einleitung,” in Eckart Kehr, *Der Primat der Innenpolitik*, ed. Hans-Ulrich Wehler (Berlin, 1970), pp. 1–30; Michael Stuermer, ed., *Das kaiserliche Deutschland: Politik und Gesellschaft 1870–1918* (Dusseldorf, 1970).

All this is extremely thoughtful and stimulating, a major scholarly accomplishment. Nonetheless, two important problems remain.

First, for all his clearing away of old and unfruitful assumptions, Fischer has not been so explicit about the methods and assumptions that he has put in their place. As things stand now, he has clearly effected a productive shift in perspective; whether this perspective adds up to a consistent and realistic pattern of explanatory logic is, however, not too clear. His second book, for instance, uses a mixture of categories and concepts from Marxist theories of imperialism, from elitist theorists like Robert Michels, from standard liberal critiques of German militarism and equally standard conservative critiques of mass society; and therefore, although the resulting argument is massively documented and his findings possibly sound, the criteria governing his choice of materials remain ambiguous—and so does the logical status of his inferences. It is hard to be categorical here, and I wish to stress my uncertainty. But that is also precisely the problem; a greater degree of explicitness seems desirable.⁶ And second, as well as being insufficiently explicit, Fischer's work is also inadequately comparative. As a result, he has left himself exposed to the charge that he and his sympathizers have unfairly singled out Germany as the culprit in the war controversy.

It is at this point that the second debate between Mayer and Loewenberg joins the first. Like Fischer, both have broken with the traditional model and argued for an alternative framework of analysis. Mayer, in a series of theoretically bold writings, has developed a completely explicit and comparative model of domestic violence, counterrevolutionary reaction, and precautionary or diversionary war.⁷ To Loewenberg, Mayer's model is too structural and macroscopic; he believes that a more psychological approach—especially depth-psychological—would be better.⁸ But for reasons

⁶ In other words, to paraphrase a general argument of Richard Hofstadter: Fischer's analysis does a better job of accounting for "what" happened and "how" it happened than "why" it did so; yet until the "why" of things emerges more clearly, one cannot be fully confident about the "what" and the "how" (see "History and Sociology in the United States," in *Sociology and History: Methods*, ed. Seymour Martin Lipset and Richard Hofstadter [New York, 1968], pp. 8–18).

⁷ In addition to the article in n. 2 above, see Arno J. Mayer, "Domestic Causes of the First World War," in *The Responsibility of Power: Historical Essays in Honor of Hajo Holborn*, ed. Leonard Krieger and Fritz Stern (New York, 1967), pp. 286–300; *Dynamics of Counterrevolution in Europe, 1870–1956: An Analytic Framework* (New York, 1971).

⁸ Peter Loewenberg, "Arno Mayer's 'Internal Causes and Purposes of War in Europe, 1870–1956'—an Inadequate Model of Human Behavior, National Conflict, and Historical Change," *Journal of Modern History* 42 (December 1970): 628–36.

that will emerge later, I take exception to both alternatives. Loewenberg seems wrong in regarding psychological and structural explanations as incompatible: handled properly, the two are complementary to one another, not contradictory. As for Mayer, his model—theoretically provocative though it is—strikes me as one-sided and to apply, at most, to one of the two nations under study here.

The model used here is taken from theories of economic development and political modernization. Intended to uncover more of the “why” of things in the Fischer debate, it compares the domestic impact on foreign policy in Britain as well as Germany before and during the July crisis, 1914. The postulates, concepts, and patterns of reasoning that comprise the model are set forth and applied in Section IV below. First, however, two preliminary tasks need attention.

II

The first task is briefly to describe British and German foreign policies before 1914.

As far as German policy is concerned, its readiness to risk war for its own ends—either a local Balkan war fought by its ally in Vienna or a larger, continental-sized war in which it, France, and Russia participated—now seems unshakably established.⁹ Albertini, Schmitt, Renouvin, and Taylor had already argued this point persuasively before 1961, and the debate sparked by Fischer has underpinned it with different sources of evidence and methods of argument. By either one of these two wars the German government thought its interests would be served: at a minimum, a successful localized war—kept limited by Russia’s backing off in fear—would in the German view probably break up the Franco-Russian alliance, shore up the tottering Austro-Hungarian empire, and clear the way in Central Europe for an eventual German breakthrough to successful *Weltpolitik*. On a more ambitious level, the German government was convinced it could also secure these aims even more emphatically in a triumphant continental war. As for the world war that happened, German leaders did not consciously aim at it, not at any rate in 1914, and for that matter not even Fischer has claimed this. What they hoped was that Britain would remain neutral or at least a

⁹ F. Fischer, *Krieg der Illusionen*, pp. 663–682; Konrad H. Jarausch, “The Illusion of Limited War: Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg’s Calculated Risk, July 1914,” *Central European History* 2 (March 1969): 48–77; Fritz Stern, “Bethmann Hollweg and the War: The Limits of Responsibility,” in *The Responsibility of Power*, p. 268.

nonbelligerent at the outset. Nonetheless, the possibility of British intervention was appreciated at the very outset, even by Bethmann himself; and by risking its occurrence, the German government bore the responsibility for the ensuing worldwide struggle in at least the sense of "conditional intent."¹⁰ To this extent the work of Fischer and his sympathizers seems to be unchallengeable. Fischer himself is probably justified, therefore, when he claims that the debate has now moved irretrievably away from any thesis of coequal responsibility or international anarchy, let alone of German innocence, and toward convergence on a thesis of "preventive war."¹¹

What remains controversial is the precise meaning of a "preventive German war policy" and especially the motives behind it. Fischer started out in his first book with an argument that the motives were coolheaded, deliberate instances of outright expansionist goals. Some of his pupils, however, came to lay less emphasis on such goals and more on "the German mood of 1914, that strange mixture of ideological despair, political bankruptcy and overwhelming economic and military power" as the propellant behind the plunge into war.¹² Most scholars of the subject, it is fair to say, hew closer to the latter interpretation—without, however, necessarily buying the argument that the motives were therefore "defensive." Fischer himself, though willing in his latest book to allow for an explosive bundle of German ambitions and complexes, has persisted in imparting to the motives as "aggressive" a cast as possible. This article will itself have something to say later on about these motives.

As for British foreign policy, it was something much different in the period before and right through the July crisis. Except for prevailing opinion in interwar Germany and some revisionist historians elsewhere, nobody has made a charge of bellicosity stick. On the contrary, if any charge can be levelled at Sir Edward Grey, the foreign secretary, it is that he did not pursue as effective and energetic a policy as he might have during the crisis—that, instead, he wavered between two inconsistent courses, backing France and, to a lesser extent, Russia in order to deter Germany on the one hand, and on the other hand playing the role of the disinterested mediator; that, in addition, he never clarified his policy one way or

¹⁰ See Hermann Kantorowicz, *Gutachten zur Kriegsschuldfrage 1914: Aus dem Nachlass*, ed. Imanuel Geiss (Frankfurt, 1967), for the meaning of the term.

¹¹ Fischer, *Krieg der Illusionen*, pp. 663–64.

¹² Imanuel Geiss, ed., *July 1914: The Outbreak of the First World War: Selected Documents* (New York, 1967), pp. 367–68.

another until the very end, by which point German policy makers had already decided to risk even a world war; and that, consequently, British influence during the crisis fell far short of what British power in the international system warranted at the time.¹³

Judged strictly in terms of the traditional model—that is, from the viewpoint of external pressures and national interests—the ineffectuality of British policy remains an impenetrable puzzle. After all, neither Grey nor Asquith the prime minister had overlooked the multitudinous danger signs hinting at German aims over the years. Just the reverse; the major premise of Grey's diplomacy ever since coming to office, in 1906, had been to avoid a situation in which Britain might face a German menace without any allies.¹⁴ Hence the ententes with France and Russia; hence, too, the reinforcement of ties, especially to France, including recurring staff talks since late 1905 and the important naval arrangements of 1912.¹⁵ These were weighty moves, which nudged Britain away from isolation and toward alliance relationships. Why, accordingly, did the Liberal government not pursue more rigorously the logic behind the effort to reorient British policy? Why settle for a dangerous half-way adjustment, which went far enough to entail uncertain commitments and so a limitation on British freedom, but which stopped short of a full-fledged alliance that might have created both an effective control over French policy and an effective deterrent to German belligerence?¹⁶

The answer is to be found, of course, in places outside the scope of the traditional model—in domestic politics, especially the resistance to a reoriented policy on the part of the radical wing within the Liberal party and cabinet. A courageous campaign of reeducation might have reduced the ranks of the resisters; the Foreign Office, for one, had long thought so and advised accordingly.¹⁷ Yet Grey and Asquith, far from undertaking to lead such a campaign, shied away from spelling out the implications of their new policy to even the

¹³ Herbert Butterfield, "Sir Edward Grey in July 1914," *Historical Studies* 5 (1965): 20.

¹⁴ George Monger, *The End of Isolation: British Foreign Policy 1900–1907* (London, 1963), pp. 329–31.

¹⁵ Samuel R. Williamson, Jr., *The Politics of Grand Strategy: Britain and France Prepare for War, 1900–1914* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), especially pp. 284–85.

¹⁶ Pierre Renouvin, "Britain and the Continent: The Lessons of History," *Foreign Affairs* 17 (October 1938): 111–27.

¹⁷ A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848–1918* (London, 1954), pp. 525–26; Zara S. Steiner, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy 1898–1914* (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 131–39.

cabinet. It was largely for this reason that British diplomacy remained stuck, when the July crisis erupted, with an "unsatisfactory compromise" as a guide—with a "policy of partisan and unforeseen commitment."¹⁸ The result was widespread confusion on the cabinet level, and also no little self-delusion.¹⁹

As this last line of argument suggests, British policy cannot be fully accounted for in terms of the traditional model.²⁰ The same can be said (and will be argued) about German policy. Those scholars who work with a traditional explanatory logic balk at recognizing this; they persist in trying to explain German and British behavior by reference to unified decision makers, objective and perceived threats, and the rules of statecraft.²¹ The fact is, however, that international situations of the two countries did not differ enough to justify such contradictory responses to the July crisis—British policy hesitant and wavering, German policy rash and aggressive. If anything, Germany's future prospects in the international system looked brighter by far than Britain's. In industrial productivity, economic growth, and foreign commerce—in literate population, technology, and military weight—Germany had a decisive advantage not only over Britain but over all its European rivals.²² It is true that Germany's ability to achieve a breakthrough in *Weltpolitik* seemed temporarily hemmed in by several factors in 1914. But it is equally true that Britain's preeminent position was under assault, both from within and from without, at almost every point on the globe.²³ Moreover, these strains soon colored British psychology in several quarters. A spiral of apprehension shook British life in repeated waves after 1900; invasion scares, scares about imperial disintegration, scares even about the quality of the British "race," abounded.²⁴ Nor were fears about encirclement a German monopoly. Recurringly, after 1880,

¹⁸ J. A. S. Grenville, *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy: The Close of the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1964), p. 436.

¹⁹ Monger, p. 330.

²⁰ Cameron Hazlehurst, *Politicians at War: July 1914–May 1915* (New York, 1971), pp. 88–91.

²¹ See, for instance, Joachim Remak, "1914—the Third Balkan War: Origins Reconsidered," *Journal of Modern History* 43 (September 1971): 353–66.

²² Derek H. Aldcroft and Harry W. Richardson, *The British Economy 1870–1939* (London, 1969), pp. 101–68; David Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus* (London, 1969), pp. 326–58. More generally, Ross Hoffman, *Great Britain and the German Trade Rivalry* (New York, 1964).

²³ Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians: The Climax of Imperialism* (New York, 1968), pp. 287–89; Max Beloff, *Imperial Sunset* (London, 1969), pp. 5–24.

²⁴ Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (Princeton, N.J., 1968), pp. 15–54.

British policy makers were haunted by the specter of a hostile coalition.²⁵

Given these trends, might not the traditional logic of statecraft point to a reversal of policies? Should it not have been British policy makers who were rash and desperate, determined to stave off decline in a bold showdown struggle, and German policy makers who were increasingly buoyant, increasingly confident that their nation was riding a glorious wave of history?

III

If, then, the gap between British and German foreign policy is too great to be explained fully by their international situations, the next task is to inquire whether their domestic situations differed enough to account for it.

At first glance this does not seem a promising undertaking. What immediately strikes one is the apparent parallel between the two domestic scenes before 1914. Each nation experienced an alarming wave of unsettling events, resulting in social strife, economic dislocation, and left-right polarization. In both a constitutional crisis was emerging and with it the prospect of large-scale violence.

In Germany, the situation heated up in proportion as the enemies of the existing system (*Reichsfeinde* as Bismarck had branded them) advanced in numbers and organizational strength. At one time the Catholic center figured among these enemies; by the turn of the century the term referred almost exclusively to Social Democrats (SPD) and the trade unions. Their advance seemed irresistible. In fact, the more the nation industrialized and modernized, the more the social structure that underpinned the Reich at its founding, in 1871, inevitably altered in their favor. The SPD's revisionism did little to assuage the fears of the *staatserhaltende Kraefte*—the forces of order. On the contrary, the most moderate proposals for electoral and fiscal reforms were denounced as though tantamount to revolution. And, indeed, in a sense they were: for the Bismarckian system, fabricated for a traditional social order, could hardly accommodate strong bourgeois participation—let alone that of the working class.²⁶ Following the SPD advances in the 1912 Reichstag elections, a precarious situation, latent for years, was thus pushing to the sur-

²⁵ Lord William Strang, *Britain in World Affairs* (New York, 1961), p. 222.

²⁶ Guenther Roth, *The Social Democrats in Imperial Germany: A Study in Working-Class Isolation and National Integration* (Totowa, 1963), p. 59.

face. The more the forces of change pressed for reforms, the more the forces of order took fright. Hence the alarming wave of fanatical chauvinism, mass demagoguery, and crude racism that enveloped the nation from the right in the years before the war.²⁷ Hence, too, the revised interest in coup d'état schemes.²⁸ The whole interrelated but untenable system of power and privilege was moving toward crisis and probably breakdown.²⁹

As for Britain, classic home of political stability, it too was undergoing a cycle of internal unrest and tensions. Class conflict was spiraling, unions were growing militant, women suffragettes resorted to violence. Worse, with segments of the army dabbling in mutiny and the Conservative-Unionist party toying with sedition, the prospect of civil war loomed ever likelier in Ireland.³⁰ Culturally, a jittery mood of unease and dislocation pervaded much of Edwardian England; "decay, decline, fall, and decadence were the language of the time and not of party."³¹ Neither inherited political habits nor tested mechanisms of adjustment could readily cope with the sudden upsurge in strife. The English Constitution was based largely on tacit gentlemanly agreements—implicit rules of the game. On the Tory side, however, these rules were no longer being observed, in fact were being openly flouted, as the ancient props of patrician Britain (land, paternalism, the House of Lords, the Church) came under repeated blows.³² Even Liberals suffered from the distempers of the time. Divided between Whigs and Radicals over domestic affairs, and between Imperialists and Internationalists over foreign policy—faced also with an emerging Labour party on its left—the Liberal party could not spawn a coherent vision of a new society to replace the one currently under attack. Amidst these circumstances,

²⁷ Fischer, *Krieg der Illusionen*, pp. 117–45; Dirk Stegmann, *Die Erben Bismarcks: Parteien und Verbände in der Spätphase des Wilhelminischen Deutschlands: Sammlungspolitik 1897–1918* (Cologne and Berlin, 1970), pp. 262–63; Klaus Wernecke, *Der Wille zur Weltgeltung: Aussenpolitik und Öffentlichkeit im Kaiserreich am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Düsseldorf, 1970), pp. 288–314.

²⁸ Hartmut Pogge-v. Strandmann, "Staatsstreichpläne. Alldutsche und Bethmann Hollweg," in *Die Erforderlichkeit des Unmöglichen*, ed. Hartmut Pogge-v. Strandmann and Imanuel Geiss (Frankfurt, 1965), pp. 11–45.

²⁹ Hans-Juergen Puhle, "Parlament, Parteien und Interessenverbände 1890–1914," in *Das kaiserliche Deutschland*, pp. 361–64.

³⁰ The classic study is George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (New York, 1961).

³¹ Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind*, p. 45.

³² Robert Blake, *The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill* (New York, 1970), p. 190.

the cabinet itself tended more and more to postpone and to wobble—Asquith, indeed, something of a master at inaction. By July 1914 a sense of national disaster lurked in the air.

In many respects, then, the German and the British situations overlapped. But the parallel between them goes only so far. Dig deeper, and certain crucial differences are found that still separated the two nations—not least, in the strength (or really lack thereof) of the British extreme right as compared with its German counterpart. The fact is that the social base for powerful reactionary or counter-revolutionary mass movements was built into the very structures of Imperial Germany; in Britain, by contrast, it was almost wholly lacking. Again, a strong state but a weak regime reinforced the prospects for such extremist activity in Germany; in Britain no such state apparatus existed. The importance of this contrast cannot be overestimated. Because of it, the quality of politics in the two nations diverged in essential ways.

For decades, and not just after 1912, the elites in Wilhelmine Germany lived in an ambivalent and anxiety-ridden condition regarding modernism. On the one hand the inexorable industrial advance was welcomed by them as a means to national aggrandizement, a step toward successful *Weltpolitik*. On the other hand, few were optimistic about the future of an industrial society, and the social and political changes it created.³³ At the same time the existing ruling groups lacked a political system with built-in mechanisms of political adjustment—indeed, they steadfastly opposed changes that might create such mechanisms; even a moderate like Bethmann Hollweg was no major exception.³⁴ Finally, Germany was still, for all its advanced industry, predominantly preindustrial in social structure; this meant that millions of threatened peasants in the countryside and more millions of old *Mittelstaende* within the cities were available for political mobilization from extremists on the right against the working class or the pitifully small progressive middle class.³⁵ Edwardian England, by contrast, was simply not fertile

³³ Kenneth D. Barkin, *The Controversy over German Industrialization 1890–1902* (Chicago, 1970), pp. 1–15, 131–32; Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (New York, 1967), pp. 9–10; Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the German Ideology* (Berkeley, Calif., 1961).

³⁴ See Klaus Hildebrand, *Bethmann Hollweg, der Kanzler ohne Eigenschaften? Urteile der Geschichtsschreibung: Eine kritische Bibliographie* (Dusseldorf, 1970), pp. 50–64.

³⁵ As late as 1895, more than half of the German work force was still employed in preindustrial occupations—36 percent in agriculture alone (see Juergen Kocka, “Vorindustrielle Faktoren in der deutschen Industrialisierung, Industriebuerokratie und ‘neuer Mittelstand,’ ” in *Das kaiserliche Deutschland*, pp. 279–80).

ground for right-wing extremism of a mass sort, any more than was depression-laden England in the 1930s. By then there were no peasants to mobilize, and no militaristic aristocrats to lead them.³⁶ By then, too, the commercial and industrial middle classes were numerous, articulate, and independent minded, putting a liberal stamp on British politics. As for the lower-middle classes, they were, it is true, growing in number, but unlike those caught up in the turmoil of Germany's rapid industrialization, they had long been assimilated to modern life and took it for granted.³⁷ Moreover, there was no standing army, no powerful state bureaucracy, no large state role in the economy—in fact, despite recent changes, hardly a state in any modern sense at all.³⁸ Least of all was there, for all the jitters of the time, a potent antimodernist tradition on which an embattled right could draw in order to rally mass support. The contrary was the case: thus, whereas Bethmann was a fatalist and full of forebodings for the future, Asquith remained certain that something good would turn up even over Ireland.³⁹ For all these reasons, accordingly, even to speak of an extreme right-wing movement is to speak at best of what might have happened, and not what did in fact happen, as a noted left-wing historian concedes.⁴⁰ Indeed, Unionist flirtation with extraconstitutional methods, far from mobilizing mass enthusiasm, did not even command widespread support within the Unionist party itself.⁴¹

The reasons for these contrasting situations remain to be set forth. What is important to note here, before leaving this section, is the hookup with foreign policy. Owing to the divergent political conditions, not only were the domestic crises in the two nations approached in contrary ways by the British and the German governments, but so, too, were the problems of foreign policy that faced each. German political elites (as will be seen) had an overwhelming incentive to use foreign policy as a method of domestic control; in fact, they had been doing so for years. No similar temptation offered

³⁶ In 1911, only 8.6 percent of the British work force was still on the land, and only an additional 6.0 percent still in other preindustrial occupations (see Aldcroft and Richardson, *The British Economy*, p. 14; also F. M. L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* [London, 1963], pp. 9–24, 269–70).

³⁷ S. G. Checkland, *The Rise of Industrial Society in England 1815–1885* (London, 1964), pp. 301–14.

³⁸ A. J. P. Taylor, *English History 1914–1945* (New York, 1965), p. 1.

³⁹ Stern, "Bethmann Hollweg," p. 262; R. C. K. Ensor, *England 1870–1914* (London, 1960), p. 452.

⁴⁰ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire* (New York, 1968), p. 163.

⁴¹ Alfred Gollin, *Proconsul in Politics: A Study of Lord Milner in Opposition and in Power* (London, 1964), pp. 220–21; Blake, *The Conservative Party*, p. 192.

itself to British elites, nor is there evidence that they ever used foreign policy to that end. It follows that any effort to explain British and German decisions to wage war in equivalent terms, as comparable cases of diversionary war, seems misplaced.⁴²

IV

So far the analysis has been largely descriptive. The remaining task is explanatory, and much the most important: why, for all the internal conflict besetting each, did the British and the German political situations continue to contrast so markedly, and why by extension were their foreign policies influenced in no less contrasting ways?

An answer requires a look at German and British economic and political development over the long haul. Specifically, on the economic level, both the rates and the structural forms of their industrialization need to be probed. In like manner, the various ways each grappled with the three critical problems of political modernity—national identity, authoritative and effective government, and popular participation—need to be dissected. Together, these categories permit the British and the German routes to the modern world, at any rate down to 1914, to be traced in comparable terms and the consequences for foreign policy, in turn, to be isolated and analyzed.

Economic Development

Economists continue to debate among themselves, and with others, about the key mechanisms of economic modernization.⁴³ From the recent literature, nevertheless, two pivotal concepts can be extracted and made use of here.

1. *Rate of industrialization.*—The contrast between Germany and Britain in this respect is pronounced. Britain pioneered the industrial revolution; nonetheless, by international standards, the modernization of its economic structure proceeded at a fairly modest, if steady, pace. "Compared with countries which have industrialized since . . . the British rate of growth was a slow process."⁴⁴ Germany, on the

⁴² It is precisely for this reason that Mayer's thesis of counterrevolution—diversionary war—illuminating though it is in the German case, goes astray in the British.

⁴³ R. M. Hartwell, ed., *The Causes of the Industrial Revolution in England* (London, 1967), pp. 6–7.

⁴⁴ Phyllis Deane, *The First Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge, 1965), p. 271.

other hand, was largely agrarian even in 1871. Thereafter, however, industrial growth exploded, and by the turn of the century Germany had been propelled to the rank of the second industrial power in the world.⁴⁵ The process was anything but a slow-motion exercise.

The unsettling effects of rapid economic growth are well known.⁴⁶ For this reason the slower British growth enabled British society to absorb the inevitable dislocations and turmoil much more effectively than was possible in the German case.⁴⁷ The compressed pressure of German urbanization—rural dwellers declined from 57 percent to 45 percent during the one decade of the 1890s alone—explains in large part the social and political tensions of the period: the rapid upsurge in agrarian agitation, the growth of right-wing radicalism among peasants and *petits bourgeois*, the cultural gloom among German elites, the enormous advances of the Social Democrats, the *Staatsfeinde* par excellence.⁴⁸ As the latter point suggests, these rapid social changes had direct political implications for the stability of the political system. Universal male suffrage was established by Bismarck, back in 1871, as a means of winning the allegiance of the German people to his new Reich and at a time when the working classes were only 20 percent of the total population. By 1882, however, they had swelled to 25 percent, and by 1907 to 33 percent of the total. Not only would they grow in size the faster Germany industrialized; what was more, the franchise seemed more and more rigged against them as time passed and as the Reich's leadership refused to contemplate changes in the electoral districts. By 1907, for instance, it has been estimated that each Conservative deputy required an average of only 18,000 votes for election but a Socialist required about 70,000.⁴⁹

2. *Forms of industrialization.*—The second theoretical concept is a

⁴⁵ David S. Landes, "Japan and Europe: Contrasts in Industrialization," in *The State and Economic Enterprise in Japan*, ed. William Lockwood (Princeton, N.J., 1965), pp. 133–75.

⁴⁶ Mancur Olson, "Rapid Growth as a Destabilizing Force," *Journal of Economic History* 23 (December 1963): 529–58.

⁴⁷ Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780–1880* (London, 1969).

⁴⁸ Hans Rosenberg, *Grosse Depression und Bismarckzeit: Wirtschaftsablauf, Gesellschaft und Politik in Mitteleuropa* (Berlin, 1967), pp. 76–117, 202–27, 256–57; see, too, Hans-Juergen Puhle, *Agrarische Interessenpolitik und preussischer Konservatismus im Wilhelminischen Reich, 1893–1914* (Hannover, 1966), especially pp. 141, 280–81.

⁴⁹ Karl Erich Born, "Deutschland als Kaiserreich (1871–1918)," in *Handbuch der Europaischen Geschichte*, ed. Theodor Schieder (Stuttgart, 1968), 6:201.

tendency to reject the idea of uniform prerequisites of industrial development.⁵⁰ In particular, backward countries that industrialize at later points often substitute in ways that offset their deficiencies vis-à-vis more advanced economies. According to Gerschenkron, the more economically backward a nation is when it begins to experience accelerated growth: (1) the faster its rate of industrial advance; (2) the greater its stress on big plants and enterprise; (3) the more it favors heavy over light industry; (4) the more it borrows technology and finance from abroad; (5) the greater the pressure on consumption standards; (6) the more passive the agricultural sector; (7) the greater the role of banks and State budgets; (8) the more virulent the ideological conflicts that ensue.⁵¹

With one exception—the sixth factor—the list accounts for the enormous differences between the forms of British and German industrialization. British development started early; was pioneered by a vigorous, self-confident, ever-larger middle class; was mainly “stateless,” at any rate after the eighteenth century; and showed a preference for small plants and enterprises.⁵² German development, by way of contrast, started late; was pioneered by the state, beginning with the Stein reforms, largely for reasons of state aggrandizement; showed a preference for large plants and enterprises that easily lent themselves to monopolies, cartels, trusts, and syndicates; and led the state, which was also the largest single property owner, onto a course of state socialism as a means of coping with the resulting ideological conflicts.⁵³ This state, it must be remembered, was authoritarian, bent on preserving the privileges of Junkers, the military, the bureaucratic elites, and—eventually, once the coalition between Junkers and industrial barons was forged by Bismarck in 1879—the industrial barons in the west.⁵⁴

It is this latter point that explains why Gerschenkron's sixth factor

⁵⁰ Alexander Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), chap. 2.

⁵¹ Alexander Gerschenkron, *Europe in the Russian Mirror: Four Lectures in Economic History* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 99.

⁵² Checkland, *The Rise of Industrial Society in England*, pp. 290–91.

⁵³ Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany*, pp. 38–48; see, too, Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston, 1966), pp. 440–52.

⁵⁴ Barkin, *Controversy over German Industrialization*, pp. 35–36, 211–12; Helmut Boehme, *Deutschlands Weg zur Grossmacht: Studien zum Verhaeltnis von Wirtschaft und Staat waehrend der Reichsgruendungszeit, 1848–1881* (Cologne and Berlin, 1966), pp. 579–86; Stegmann, *Die Erben Bismarcks*, pp. 13–19, 59–60, 176–77, 219–36, 352–53.

does not apply to Germany. Once American and East European grain began undermining the competitiveness of German grain in the late 1870s, Bismarck and the Junkers—free traders until then—swung round in favor of protection and instituted a series of tariffs favoring heavy industry and Junker estates but at the expense of the urbanized middle and working classes. Only in the 1890s did the economic interests of these two elite groups diverge and a “new course” ensue. But the course was short lived, high tariffs were reinstituted in 1902, and an otherwise heavily industrialized nation saw its state pursuing a largely agrarian policy that enabled a “semifeudal” class to maintain its economic basis, its social status, and its political privileges. In the process, the bourgeoisie was itself “feudalized”—abandoning its own values, taking on those of the aristocracy, and in effect becoming the pillars of an authoritarian state.⁵⁵ In Britain, it is true, a superficially similar process of aristocratic cooption took place in the late nineteenth century. But only superficially: if the British entrepreneurial classes also grew more conservative, also adopted bit by bit gentry values, also sloughed off their former progressive political ideology, at the same time the aristocrats embracing them had themselves over the generations become in large part “embourgeoisized”—something de Tocqueville had appreciated a generation earlier.⁵⁶ It was largely entrepreneurial and liberal ideals that prevailed in mid-Victorian England, not aristocratic ideals, as the collapse of agrarian resistance and the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 made clear; and whatever political changes ensued amounted to a genuine compromise of values and privileges, not a sellout of the middle classes to the crown and to the Junkers as in Prussia (and later in the Reich).

3. *International implications.*—The social and economic implications of these two different industrial routes inevitably influenced the foreign policy of each, but in contrary ways.

In Germany the tariff policies, by cutting off the national economy from international competition, hastened the growth of monopolies and cartels, strengthened the impulse to economic expansion abroad, and added to the frictions and tensions shooting up within the

⁵⁵ Wolfgang Zorn, “Wirtschafts- und sozialgeschichtliche Zusammenhaenge der deutschen Reichsgruendungszeit 1850–1879,” in *Moderne deutsche Sozialgeschichte*, ed. Hans-Ulrich Wehler (Cologne and Berlin, 1966), pp. 264–70; Friedrich Zunkel, “Industriebuergertum in Westdeutschland,” in *ibid.*, pp. 314–41.

⁵⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville, *L'Ancien Régime* (Oxford, 1952), p. 105; see, too, Perkin, *Origins of Modern English Society*, pp. 63–107, 271–72.

international system at the time.⁵⁷ Lenin, it is true, later argued that this had happened in all the capitalist nations, but in fact he was wrong. British industry remained overwhelmingly wedded to small-sized firms and avoided monopolistic tendencies throughout the prewar period; what is more, the powerful movement for protection failed, and again throughout the prewar period free trade prevailed.⁵⁸ In terms of Schumpeter's imperialist thesis, accordingly, the German economy must be said to have raised international tensions and the British economy—with London the center of a multilateral payments system—to have offset or dampened them.⁵⁹

Nor was this the only serious international spillover of German tariff policies, themselves the outcome of a political deal among the state, heavy industry, and Junkers. Another consequence was built-in hostility both to Britain and to Russia. Concerning Britain, as Eckart Kehr first noted, the complex of cultural pessimism and agrarian antipathy to industrialism led to hatred of that nation among both parties to the protectionist cartel. To the Junkers, England loomed with its weak agricultural sector and antimilitarism as "the advanced capitalist model of Germany's own industrial development." To the feudalized industrialists, it loomed as a painful reminder of how they had betrayed their own earlier liberalism. Concerning Russia, as Kehr also shrewdly detected, the accelerating conflicts that overtook the two nations in the last decade before war did not arise from irreconcilable interests in foreign policy or from antagonistic political ideologies, but rather from the economic policies of the protectionist cartel after its restoration in 1902. On the one hand, the Junkers were determined to keep out cheaper Russian grain at any price, and on the other, the industrialists were determined to penetrate the Russian market at almost any price. Since the Russians would not lower their own industrial tariffs without the Germans lowering their grain tariffs, the two goals were irreconcilable, and the only way for the German government to try squaring them was by applying ever greater dosages of political pressure on Saint Petersburg.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus* (Cologne and Berlin, 1969), pp. 95–96, 194–95.

⁵⁸ Michael Barratt Brown, *After Imperialism* (London, 1970), pp. 97–107.

⁵⁹ Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes* (Cambridge, Mass., 1951), especially pp. 117–29; see, too, Albert H. Imlah, *Economic Elements in the Pax Britannica* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), pp. 195–98.

⁶⁰ Eckart Kehr, *Der Primat der Innenpolitik*, pp. 149–75; see, too, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Krisenherde des Kaiserreichs 1871–1918: Studien zur deutschen Sozial und Verfassungsgeschichte* (Goettingen, 1970), pp. 163–81.

Bismarck himself, it is true, endeavored to seal off his diplomacy from these domestic pressures—but in vain. As with imperialist agitation that he himself helped to call into being, so with powerful economic impulses toward Central Europe, the Balkans, and Russia: he discovered, much to his surprise, that he could not turn these forces on or off at will.⁶¹ Toward the end of his reign, he could not even divert them; his options abroad were too constrained by uncontrollable domestic developments. Already in 1887, at the very moment he was renewing his Reinsurance Treaty with the Russians, the latter were excluded from the German financial markets. From there it was not such a terribly big step, let alone a surprising one, for his successors to cold-shoulder the treaty and then to follow this with a tariff war against Russia in 1893. Thus, domestic pressures, and not just a lapse from Bismarckian principles by the German foreign office, explain in large measure the collision course on which Russia and Germany were placed. At its end, the course issued in the dual Junker-industrialist scheme for a German-dominated *Mitteleuropa* as a prelude to *Weltgeltung*. What economic impulses required, but economic leverage alone could not achieve, the “good German sword” would.⁶²

For Britain, by contrast, there was nothing inherent in either its pattern of economic development or its pattern of related pressure-group activities that generated similar basic antagonisms toward outsiders. On the contrary, their very absence facilitated the colonial deals behind the ententes with France and with Russia, hitherto Britain's major imperial rivals. As far as Germany was concerned, British resentment of economic competition from that quarter was no doubt strong in the late 1880s and 1890s, but it was a passing phenomenon, and right down to the war the City of London was in fact regarded as a fount of pro-German sympathy.⁶³

Finally, it is worth reemphasizing the role of the state in German industrialization. Whereas in Western Europe generally the industrial revolution was either preceded or accompanied by political revolution, this was not true of Germany.⁶⁴ The only political revolution that took place in Germany, to the extent it can be called that, was the “emancipation” of the Prussian bureaucracy, especially during

⁶¹ Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann, “Domestic Origins of Germany's Colonial Expansion under Bismarck,” *Past and Present* 42 (1969): 152–53.

⁶² Something emphasized by Fischer, *Krieg der Illusionen*, pp. 23–39, 65–84, 289–324, 368–84, 636–62, 752–74.

⁶³ Beloff, *Imperial Sunset*, p. 173.

⁶⁴ E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution 1789–1848* (New York, 1962), p. xv.

the brief reform era after 1807, when it emerged as the most powerful force in Prussian life next to the monarchy and the army.⁶⁵ The reform era itself, a prerequisite to economic modernization, was undertaken in response to military collapse at Jena in 1806 and for the express purpose of creating a more powerful nation. Economic development and political reform were not ends in themselves; they were valued mainly to the extent that they would enable Prussia, first to defend itself more effectively, then to attain a position of leadership in Germany and later Europe.⁶⁶ Not surprisingly, the political and military considerations of the economy therefore always took precedence in the last analysis; and what was more, the most powerful German businessmen seemed generally happy to acquiesce in their role as quasi state officials.⁶⁷

The international implications of this pattern are easy enough to isolate. A semifeudal, militarist aristocracy survived economic modernization; managed to maintain a privileged role for the military; joined with the heavy industrialists and other middle classes to tame not only liberal internationalist sentiments but the labor force; and—whenever its economic privileges were threatened (as they briefly were during the Caprivi era after 1890)—resorted to mass demagogic, racist agitation among the peasants and lower-middle classes.⁶⁸ Not only did such a system require a heavy armaments industry, later expanded to a large naval build-up, both of which created untold frictions with other powers,⁶⁹ but in addition, precisely by stimulating racist and aggressive attitudes among the wider middle classes,⁷⁰ it gave a powerful impetus to that explosive psychological complex of power yearnings, overweening ambitions, antagonisms, fears, and neuroses that lay behind the disaster of an

⁶⁵ Hans Rosenberg, *Bureaucracy, Aristocracy, and Autocracy: The Prussian Experience 1660–1815* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), pp. 175–229; Wolfgang Sauer, “Das Problem des deutschen Nationalstaates,” in *Moderne deutsche Sozialgeschichte*, pp. 418–19.

⁶⁶ Landes, “Japan and Europe,” pp. 133–34, 151, 174–82.

⁶⁷ Alexander Gerschenkron, *Bread and Democracy in Germany* (New York, 1966), p. 59; Wolfgang Zorn, “Typen und Entwicklungskräfte deutschen Unternehmertums,” in *Moderne deutsche Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, ed. Karl Erich Born (Cologne and Berlin: 1966), pp. 37–41.

⁶⁸ Rosenberg, *Grosse Depression*, pp. 260–61.

⁶⁹ Barkin, *Controversy over German Industrialization*, pp. 183, 204; Volker R. Berghahn, “Zu den Zielen des Deutschen Flottenbaus unter Wilhelm II.,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 210 (February 1970): 81, 95–100.

⁷⁰ Between the business classes in general and Pan-Germans, there was “no fundamental, profound difference in political philosophy” (Hans Jaeger, *Unternehmer in der deutschen Politik 1890–1918* [Bonn, 1967], pp. 114, 173).

erratic, bullying *Weltpolitik* and eventually a desperate bid in 1914 to wage preventive war against overwhelmingly self-created menaces.⁷¹

In Britain there was nothing comparable: no large military machine, no outmoded and apprehensive upper class manipulating public opinion, no powerful state subsidies for the economy. Indeed, until the war the state hardly penetrated the consciousness of the average British subject. Even the truculent jingoism of the 1880s and 1890s had exhausted itself with the fiasco of the Boer War, as Grey noted shortly after becoming foreign secretary.⁷² There was, of course, an armaments industry relating to the navy, but it was not a very powerful component of total industrial output, and neither was it in the least indispensable to the economy's health or to group interests bound up with an untenable economic status quo.⁷³

To be sure, the differences between Britain and Germany in these respects were not due wholly to the circumstances of their modernization. Geopolitical factors also mattered. Britain, as an insular power, did not need a large army; Germany, in the heart of Europe, did. But if geopolitical factors should not be slighted, neither should they be exaggerated. The minuscule size of the British army depended just as much, and perhaps more so, on the traditional antimilitarism of the aristocracy—on its fear, rooted in the struggles against the crown, that a large military establishment would invariably come under the control of its rival. As late as 1830–32, despite the tumult of the time, the governing Whigs rejected the repeated urgings by the king to beef up the army; they remained less frightened of rioting mobs than of the prospect of creating a huge coercive state apparatus.⁷⁴ If it is impossible to imagine the Junker aristocracy behaving similarly, the reasons are to be found less in geopolitics than in the modernization peculiar to that nation.

National Identity

All modern national societies are plural, comprised of different economic classes and communal groups. For a national government to function effectively, a strong sense of common national identity

⁷¹ J. C. G. Roehl, *Germany without Bismarck: The Crisis of Government in the Second Reich 1890–1900* (Berkeley, 1967), pp. 10, 251–58, 276–77.

⁷² See Arthur J. Marder, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power: A History of British Naval Policy in the Pre-Dreadnought Era 1880–1905* (Hamden, Conn., 1964), p. 20.

⁷³ Clive Trebilcock, "Legends of the British Armaments Industry 1890–1914: A Review," *Journal of Contemporary History* 5 (December 1970): 3–21.

⁷⁴ Allan Silver, "Social and Ideological Bases of British Elite Reactions to Domestic Crisis in 1829–1832," *Politics and Society* 1 (February 1971): 183–84.

and shared political community is therefore needed to bind classes and groups together and offset their parochial loyalties. The stronger this sense of subjective identity, the better from the standpoint of long-run governmental authority and stability. With it, the government's ability to cope with conflicts and to weather crises is enhanced. Without it, not only is governmental authority liable to be questioned or rejected in crises, but governmental leaders—precisely because they cannot always count on the attachments of large numbers of people—may be tempted to fall back on demagoguery or repression as tactics for handling major political problems.

In particular, if repression proves unsuccessful, then demagoguery may come to include the manipulation of foreign policy for domestic purposes.

With one exception—Ireland—Britain is a classic case of a nation which early developed a sense of common nationhood and experienced a gradual and successful extension of political community among all groups and classes. Citizenship, which can be regarded as an objective sign of this subjective process, spread in the sense of civil rights in the eighteenth century, political rights in the nineteenth, and social rights in the twentieth.⁷⁵ As one result, a set of inclusive loyalties already existed among groups and (proto-) classes by the time an industrial breakthrough was achieved.⁷⁶ As another result, even during the turmoil between 1815 and 1850, when both the emerging working classes and economically powerful middle class agitated for political change, the politically powerful aristocracy eventually responded to appeals for sharing their prerogatives in the interest of the nation.⁷⁷ A pattern of conciliation and compromise was thus institutionalized, setting precedents for the future that helped to reconcile the working class with the existing political system, undercut Marxist and other radical notions of class warfare, and enabled the upper classes to weather political crises without fear that concessions might send the system crashing down at any moment. In the upshot, temptations to repression or demagoguery were seldom alluring and even less seldom succumbed to.

Imperial Germany, on the other hand, was almost a classic case

⁷⁵ T. H. Marshall, *Class, Citizenship and Social Development* (New York, 1965), pp. 71–135.

⁷⁶ Reinhard Bendix, *Nation-building and Citizenship: Studies of our Changing Social Order* (New York, 1964), pp. 56–101.

⁷⁷ W. L. Guttsman, *The British Political Elite* (New York, 1967), pp. 75–109, 133–34.

of the opposite sort—a nation internally fragmented among a host of competing antagonisms.

Not only did no common political system unite the Germans for hundreds of years before the Reich was established in 1871; what was more, there was no large mass basis for the nation-state that emerged. Except for the fairly small entrepreneurial and business middle class and the equally small if vociferous professional class (*Bildungsbuerger*), other groups and classes were either divided in their loyalties or lacked enthusiasm.⁷⁸ Aristocrats, despite Bismarck's policies on their behalf, remained suspicious for years. Particularist sentiments remained strong, especially among the masses of the south. They were also intense among the large national groups that found themselves within the borders of the new nation-state: 2.2 million Poles (5.2 percent of the population), more than 80,000 Danes, 60,000 Lithuanians, and 1.5 million inhabitants of Alsace-Lorraine who were treated as second-class citizens. Catholics, too, soon had reasons for dissatisfaction, when they became branded *Reichsfeindlich* during the *Kulturkampf*—to say nothing of the working classes who supported the socialist party. In fact, the *Kulturkampf* and the subsequent antisocialist laws must be understood largely as Bismarck's efforts to deal with the centrifugal forces contained within the nation-state that he created by war.⁷⁹ So, too, must the other strong-arm tactics—the “war-in-sight” rhetoric, the heated attacks on the Reich's enemies (at home and abroad), the threatened coups d'état, etc.—with which Bismarck fought every Reichstag election down until his dismissal in 1890.⁸⁰ Though the maneuvers of his successors were less muscle ridden, they were no less essentially demagogic—Bethmann Hollweg, for all his moral regrets, no noticeable exception.⁸¹

The international implications were enormous in the German case. Two sorts can be distinguished. On the one hand were spillovers resulting from deliberate policies. German governments, in struggling

⁷⁸ Theodore S. Hamerow, *The Social Foundations of German Unification 1858–1871: Ideas and Institutions* (Princeton, N.J.: 1969), pp. 380–88.

⁷⁹ George C. Windell, “The Bismarckian Empire as a Federal State, 1866–1880: A Chronicle of Failure,” *Central European History* 1 (December 1969): 300.

⁸⁰ Roehl, *Germany without Bismarck*, pp. 10, 16–17, 276–77; Michael Stuermer, “Staatsstreichgedanken im Bismarckreich,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 209 (December 1969): 566–617.

⁸¹ Jonathan Steinberg, *Yesterday's Deterrent: Tirpitz and the Birth of the German Battle Fleet* (New York, 1966), pp. 31–60; Fritz Stern, “Bethmann Hollweg and the War,” pp. 255–63.

with the terrific centrifugal forces at home, were constantly tempted to fall back on their ultimate stratagem—the diversion of the conflict outward, the manipulation of foreign and colonial policy as a means of domestic control. This pivotal point will be refined below. For the moment it is enough to note that German Marxists were not the only contemporaries who speculated about this temptation. “Reactionary governments”—as no one less than Friedrich von Holstein observed from behind-the-scenes at the Foreign Office—always try “to divert the internal struggle to the *foreign sphere*.” Johannes von Miquel, Prussian minister of finance and the key figure in engineering a new coalition of industrialists and aristocrats in 1897–98 (*Sammlungspolitik*), put the sentiment more verbosely but also more candidly: “national questions,” “questions of foreign policy” had to be introduced into the Reichstag to “turn our attention outwards . . . for in foreign affairs the sentiments of the nation could usually be united.”⁸² On the other hand was a critical spillover that arose quite irrespective of demagogic calculation, out of the inherent national situation of the Reich. For there was nothing basically solid or enduring about the Reich’s boundaries of 1871—the “Small Germany” that Bismarck had created. Millions of German-speaking peoples continued to live outside them, in the Austrian Empire, Switzerland, the rest of Central and Eastern Europe. At the same time millions of non-German peoples (or, in the case of Alsace-Lorraine, German-speaking but French-influenced in custom and politics) lived inside them. The result was an inherently uncertain situation in Central Europe—and not only uncertain but also dangerous.⁸³ In effect Germany’s elites and masses were confronted with the choice, over time, of trying: (1) to preserve the Small Germany, which Prussia dominated and millions of whose inhabitants, German-speaking or otherwise, were branded as enemies—in short, a basically unstable German situation; (2) to escape from that instability by creating a Great Germany, with Austria and parts of its empire absorbed; (3) to go further and seek a German-dominated *Mitteuropa* running from the North Sea to the French Alps, from Alsace-Lorraine into Western Russia, and including as at least economic satellites the former members of not only the Austro-Hungarian but the Turkish empires as well. As Fischer has persua-

⁸² Both quoted in Roehl, *Germany without Bismarck*, pp. 234, 251, 252.

⁸³ Theodor Schieder, “Das Deutsche Reich in seinen nationalen und universalen Beziehungen 1871 bis 1945,” in *Reichsgruendung 1871/72*, ed. Theodor Schieder and Ernst Deuerlein (Stuttgart, 1970), pp. 439–40.

sively argued, *Mitteleuropa* was the choice that most of the elites for converging reasons came to embrace shortly before 1914.

There were no similar spillovers from the British national situation, with the exception of Ireland—itself on the verge of civil war by 1914. But the analogy between Ireland and Germany's national difficulties and borders is incomplete. For the situations to be very comparable in international terms, it would be necessary to imagine Britain no longer an island off Europe but in Europe's heart, surrounded by other powers—all of them uneasy about the rapid growth of British power, its internal stability, its erratic and provocative foreign policy once the British Bismarck had gone. As it was, Britain could keep the Irish problem isolated from its European policies, and the only international implication of the Irish problem for European affairs in 1914 was that it so preoccupied the cabinet during the July crisis, that it was not until July 27 that the cabinet as a whole gave events in Central Europe its attention.⁸⁴

Governmental Institutions

This is a vast subject and only two major aspects of the developmental processes in the two nations will be tackled here.

Britain in this period was a successful unitary state (Ireland always excepted); Germany, a mainly unsuccessful federal experiment. The British state had evolved early; its major problems of executive-legislative relations had been largely, though not entirely, settled by 1725 through an elaborate system of patronage and in the aftermath of the revolution of 1688—that is, even before the industrial revolution multiplied class conflicts; and the principle of ministerial responsibility was then anchored in 1835. The result was a complex of effective and flexible governmental institutions, which could dampen the struggle for power by diverting it toward the parliamentary arena.⁸⁵ The power struggle was dampened at the same time for another, loosely related reason: though government in the sense just mentioned was flexible and adaptable, the “political domain” itself was comparatively narrow.⁸⁶ The British never had a statist tradition in the French or the Prussian sense, not even during

⁸⁴ Williamson, *Politics of Grand Strategy*, pp. 345–47. Hazlehurst, *Politicians at War*, hints on pp. 25, 31–32, that Ireland did influence the Asquith cabinet's decision in favor of war—only to deny explicitly on p. 33 that it did.

⁸⁵ J. H. Plumb, *The Origins of Political Stability: England 1675–1725* (Boston, 1967), pp. 179–80.

⁸⁶ See Sigmund Neumann, *Modern Political Parties* (Chicago, 1956), p. 404, for the meaning of the term.

the era of mercantilism. After 1815 the state played but a minor role in the economy. It had no standing army establishment, no centrally controlled police forces, and hardly the makings of a modern bureaucracy.⁸⁷ This dual combination—effective and flexible government but a weak state—produced a situation that enormously influenced the resolution of socioeconomic conflict that industrialization heaped up without respite. In effect, even during the turbulent period between 1815 and 1850, that conflict was diverted into political channels, where it took the form of contending over the franchise and the nature of parliamentary rule.⁸⁸

On the one hand the forces of challenge, first the new middle class and later the equally new working class, went along with this diversion because they knew that the parliamentary system was not a fraud, however corrupt the electoral base itself happened to be. Whoever controlled Parliament would be able to control the executive and, by extension, pass laws favorable to their interests. The challengers thus accepted the existing system; they played the parliamentary game precisely because it did not strike them as hopelessly rigged. On the other hand, the existing elites continued to play the game, rather than turn to repression or to demagoguery as an answer to the challenges, first because the “stakes of political competition” were limited and second because they confidently calculated that they could exploit the rules so as to survive. Their calculation manifestly paid off. The landed aristocracy dominated local government until the end of the 1880s, and cabinet politics until 1906. The House of Lords itself might not have had its powers curbed in 1911 had it not flouted the rules of the game so blatantly at the time. In short, British policy makers never succumbed to any temptations to manipulate foreign policy for domestic purposes. They had no compelling reasons to do so.

German policy makers, by contrast, did. The enormous, irrepensible inducements here arose from a situation that was the diametric opposite of the British. The German state was powerful, but German government weak and inflexible.

On the one hand Bismarck's Reich inherited the autocratic legacy of the Prussian state and all that this meant. It intermixed bureaucratic absolutism, militarism, and aristocratic privilege; its leader-

⁸⁷ G. R. S. Kitson Clark, *An Expanding Society: Britain 1830–1900* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 126–30, 162–83.

⁸⁸ Perkin, *Origins of Modern English Society*, pp. 365–80, 401–2, is the best recent study.

ship, from the lowest official to the King Emperor, clung to the Prussian ideology of romantic and reactionary conservatism.⁸⁹ At the same time, particularly as compared with Britain, the political domain of the German state was ambitious and wide ranging. The state commanded huge military and police establishments, the former of which, moreover, eluded effective legislative accountability and set the tone for social values.⁹⁰ The state also played a dominant role in German industrialization, indeed was the single largest property holder in society, and it also came to erect an ambitious system of social welfare.⁹¹ The result of all this was "high stakes of political competition": whoever controlled the government, and through it the state machine, controlled an enormously powerful, coercive political instrument. Yet, on the other hand, the institutional arrangements and policy patterns of the Reich did little, if anything, to dampen the fierce struggle for power. On the contrary, these arrangements and patterns were unsuited for the politics of a complex, fast-industrializing society, and they became more obsolete each year. Instead of making for effective means of political accommodation, either through normative procedures that were regarded by all politicized forces as basically fair or through logrolling and other techniques of satisfying competing interests by compromise, they made for fragile political authority, tenuous and uncertain modes of conflict resolution, and almost total rigidity in the face of demands for sharing power with new groups.

This was especially noticeable in the case of the Reichstag. In Britain, Parliament helped to modulate the struggle for power; new groups, first the middle classes and later the working classes, did not see the parliamentary game as hopelessly fraudulent. Their equivalents in Germany, especially middle-class Progressives and Social Democrats, faced an entirely different situation. Since the Reichstag never came to control the executive, let alone the mammoth civilian and military bureaucracies that the executive administered, what were the incentives for the Socialists to accept the political system as legitimate and play the parliamentary game without reservation? Suppose, for instance, they did win an outright Reichstag majority;

⁸⁹ Elisabeth Fehrenbach, *Wandlungen des deutschen Kaisergedankens 1871-1918* (Munich and Vienna, 1969), pp. 52-53, 89-90, 116-17.

⁹⁰ Gerald D. Feldman, *Army, Industry, and Labor in Germany 1914-1918* (Princeton, N.J., 1966), pp. 36-38.

⁹¹ Gustav Stolper, Karl Haueser, and Knut Borchardt, *The German Economy 1870 to the Present* (New York, 1967), p. 43.

would this really signal a change of the guard? Far from it, the likely result would either be continued impotence vis-à-vis the executive or a coup d'état, followed probably by a new wave of repression and perhaps an extension of the three-class system of Prussian suffrage to the federal level.⁹²

The effect on the quality of politics was inevitable. Because the political system lacked inherent means of accommodation and adjustment, the governing elites resorted to various mixtures of repression and demagoguery as the only means of internal control. Moreover, the recurring temptation to use such tactics was reinforced by the stakes of political conflict: the elites, full of cultural despair anyway, were doubly fearful of making concessions to new and clamorous political forces that might eventually capture the powerful state machine and turn it against their former masters. Bismarck himself tried to control these forces through various measures, including the diversion of the conflict outward: hence his colonial policies as a crucial complement to his welfare programs—the whole policy an exercise in “social imperialism.”⁹³ The demagogic pattern here was set by Bismarck even before the Reich was established, during the period of his wars for unification. “The domestic situation does not make a war necessary,” he said in 1866 right before the war with Austria, “but it is an additional factor making one seem desirable.”⁹⁴ The difference between 1866 and 1886 was that the domestic situation now made such tactics necessary, not just desirable; there was no other way to contend with the cyclonic pressures being unleashed by fast industrialization and by equally fast urbanization that were bursting the premises of the political system apart. Bismarck himself was the first to appreciate this. The colonial question, the manipulation of foreign policy, remained for him as much a swindle as ever; nonetheless, they were “needed,” he confessed, for the forthcoming Reichstag election of 1887.⁹⁵ As before, the ruse paid off—this time with a new war scare; a “cartel” majority resulted. It soon began to fall apart, however; and more and more Bismarck was driven back onto increasingly drastic measures until, in the end, he abandoned all hope of salvaging the system

⁹² Carl E. Schorske, *German Social Democracy 1905–1917: The Development of the Great Schism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), pp. 168, 226–41, 257–58; Puhle, “Parlament, Parteien und Interessenverbaende,” pp. 361–64.

⁹³ Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*, pp. 112–13.

⁹⁴ Quoted in Boehme, *Deutschlands Weg zur Grossmacht*, p. 198.

⁹⁵ Quoted in Stegmann, *Die Erben Bismarcks*, p. 106.

and contemplated an outright coup d'état.⁹⁶ This was too much for the new Kaiser, William II, solicitous of popularity at the start of his reign. The autocratic chancellor was dismissed.

Thereafter, the same tactics were refined and elaborated. Gone, however, were the explicit antisocialist measures, the repression of the Reich's "enemies"; gone, too—or at least shuttled into the background—were new schemes of coup d'état. In their place was put increasing reliance on the rigging of foreign policy. "Only a successful foreign policy," according to Buelow, foreign secretary in 1897, "can help to reconcile, pacify, rally, unify."⁹⁷ Buelow ought to have known. The elaborate program contrived in the following years for pursuing this course—*Weltpolitik*, a rapid naval build-up, the reformation of the old "cartel" groups, mass agitation, extreme nationalism, and tariff wars—was completed in 1902, and Chancellor Buelow was the man entrusted with its implementation. It was a devious program, a perilous course. "The threat of war in our time lies . . . in the internal politics of those countries in which a weak government is confronted by a strong nationalist movement," noted Kurt Riezler, Bethmann Hollweg's longtime political confidant and secretary.⁹⁸ Precisely so. The Buelow strategy, with its roots in the Bismarckian era, was pursued no less faithfully by Bethmann himself, his successor—though no doubt with greater moral qualms. It was a strategy, it is now clear, that led to: (1) an erratic, bullying diplomacy and eventual diplomatic isolation, (2) fanatical chauvinism, (3) preventive war, and (4) subsequent defeat and the collapse of the Reich that it was intended through demagogic means to prop up.

This is not simply a retrospective indictment. Many German contemporaries appreciated the risks, and in fact the best assessment was made by no one less than Bethmann Hollweg during a particularly anxious moment in the July crisis. Why, he asked himself, was Germany in its current predicament: "The earlier errors: simultaneously Turkish policy against Russia, Morocco against France, the navy against England—challenge everybody, put yourself in everybody's path, and actually weaken no one in this fashion. Reason: aimlessness, the need for little prestige successes and solicitude for every current of public opinion. The 'national' parties

⁹⁶ Roehl, *Germany without Bismarck*, pp. 45–64.

⁹⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 252.

⁹⁸ Kurt Riezler [J. J. Roedorffer], *Grundzuege der Weltpolitik in der Gegenwart* (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1914), p. 222.

which with their racket about foreign policy want to preserve and strengthen their party position."⁹⁹

Political Participation

Imperial Germany, as already argued, was an inherently unstable nation-state, which was faced from the outset with an insoluble dilemma: trying to industrialize as fast as possible, but also trying to offset the social changes of industrialization and their inevitable impact on politics. The political system itself was founded in a relatively nonindustrialized society, with the masses given the vote on the calculated Bonapartist assumption that they were still integrated into a premodern, hierarchical social structure and would therefore be a conservative force—a brake on middle-class liberalism and parliamentarianism.¹⁰⁰ It was this assumption, and it alone, that permitted the marriage between German nationalism and Prussian autocracy.¹⁰¹ Rapid industrialization, however, threatened to blow the assumption to smithereens. To this new, turbulent society the political system did not readily adapt; at any rate, its controlling elites refused such adaptation. Instead of accommodating new groups, and sharing power with them, Bismarck and his successors resorted to those extraparliamentary methods of offsetting their demands already discussed here. Repression, threatened coups d'état, inflamed conflicts between certain groups designated as loyal and others designated as traitors, *Sammlungen*, social imperialism, above all the manipulation of foreign and colonial policies—all of these tactics, initiated by Bismarck and refined, elaborated, and applied by later political leaders, constituted the style of politics in Imperial Germany. The thread running through them was the continual refusal by the elites to compromise their position of dominance. Such tactics were alternatives to political and social accommodation, that is, democratization.

The point to note here is how well they succeeded. In the case of the middle classes, success was well-nigh total. Imperialism—*Weltpolitik* and the naval build-up, its most blatant symbol—proved an especially effective means of solidifying the allegiance of this section of the German population. "That the new distribution of power still reflected society in 1867 did not disturb the

⁹⁹ Quoted in Stern, "Bethmann Hollweg and the War," p. 265.

¹⁰⁰ Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*, pp. 455–74.

¹⁰¹ Schieder, "Das Deutsche Reich," pp. 425–26.

industrialists" or for that matter other members of the middle classes. Not only did they find consolation in the vicarious thrills of watching German power expand, but in addition, they had the reassurance that "alliance with the authoritarian monarchy offered security against the traditionally exaggerated socialist menace."¹⁰²

In the case of the organizing working classes, success was not so glittering. The legacy of the Bismarckian era, and its repressive policies, was a widespread socialist suspicion of the existing political system, which was still in evidence as late as 1914.¹⁰³ All the same, suspicion was not the same as total and irreconcilable estrangement, let alone permanent alienation. Bit by bit the revolutionary fervor of the original socialist movement drained away. Bit by bit both the Social Democratic party and the trade unions were won away from active hostility to the system and over to a general, if not full-hearted, acceptance of the Reich, its institutions, and its dynamic quest for power and prestige abroad.¹⁰⁴ The pattern of acceptance may not have been enough to overcome right-wing apprehension of red revolution, especially after the 1912 Reichstag elections. Nonetheless, it was enough to weld them to the Reich through a process of "negative integration," nationalizing them to the point that artful maneuvering, during the July crisis of 1914, led to an overwhelming Socialist decision in support of German entry into the war.¹⁰⁵

Of course these tactics, successful though they were in the immediate sense, entailed a price—a very high one, in fact. To the extent that *Weltpolitik*, the naval buildup, and a prestige-hungry diplomacy produced German isolation, and to the extent that the foreign policy elite was willing to run the risk it did during the July crisis of 1914 in no small measure for internal reasons, then the war itself—with its consequent destruction of the Reich—must be reckoned as the overall cost.

The British political system was equally hard pressed to accommodate new claimant groups, first the forward-thrusting middle class and later the more numerous and restless working class. This process of accommodation has often misled subsequent observers, British and foreign alike. All too frequently they have overlooked, or

¹⁰² Barkin, *Controversy over German Industrialization*, pp. 275–76.

¹⁰³ Vernon L. Lidtke, *The Outlawed Party: Social Democracy in Germany 1878–1890* (Princeton, N.J., 1966), pp. 321–32.

¹⁰⁴ Roth, *The Social Democrats in Imperial Germany*, p. 101.

¹⁰⁵ Hans-Christoph Schroeder, *Sozialismus und Imperialismus* (Hannover, 1968), 1: 15–16, 117–25, 183–84.

at any rate minimized, the turbulence, conflict, and even violence that accompanied the clamors of these classes for sharing power, especially between 1815 and 1850—between, that is, Waterloo and Chartism in its last gasping days. If anything, the political turmoil outstripped any that Imperial Germany itself ever underwent. “The threat of violence,” as one historian has recently and rightly emphasized, “was an inevitable stage in the institutionalization of the middle class.”¹⁰⁶ Its threatened use—and, what is more, its actual employment—was even more noticeable in Chartism, the most radical of working-class movements in the nineteenth century—in fact, the prototype for the Marxist theory that capitalism invariably bred proletarian class consciousness and revolutionary action.¹⁰⁷ Yet, despite the tumult and agitation of this period, the British elites behaved the opposite of the way their German counterparts did. Cautiously conceded democratization, not repression or demagoguery, was their response.

The success of the British pattern, and its superiority to the German, can be most effectively illustrated by noting the contrasting impact on the working classes in the two national societies. Why did German workers end up supporting a party that contested the legitimacy of the existing system, in theory at any rate, and British workers a party that took such legitimacy for granted? An answer requires a simple explanatory device. On this view, the behavior of a working class—once it decides to organize itself politically—depends on the interaction among four historical variables.

The first is the rapidity of industrialization, and how prepared the society experiencing its social dislocations has been by its preindustrial evolution. As Thorstein Veblen first noted, Germany was far more retarded both socially and politically than Britain at the time of industrialization; and, as was noted above, the breakthrough came with much greater force and dynamism, and with much greater suddenness, in Germany.¹⁰⁸ Nothing more need be added here beyond noting that Marxism, as a radical protest against industrial dislocations, appeals most directly to a society of precisely this sort, when a backward social structure is overwhelmed by the multiple shock of the factory system, rapid urban growth, and the breakdown

¹⁰⁶ Perkin, *Origins of Modern English Society*, p. 369.

¹⁰⁷ Adam B. Ulam, *The Unfinished Revolution: An Essay on the Sources of Influence of Marxism and Communism* (New York, 1960), pp. 86–87.

¹⁰⁸ Thorstein Veblen, *Imperial Germany and the Industrial Revolution* (New York, 1954), pp. 230–31.

of traditional mores.¹⁰⁹ The second variable is the flexibility of political institutions themselves, especially the existence or absence of a parliamentary mode of accommodation; and again nothing need be added here other than to observe that even at the height of working-class radicalism in Britain, during the era of Chartism, the "People's Charter" contained but six major principles, all of them political in nature and all aimed at widening the franchise and making Parliament a more responsive institution. In short, working-class MPs, elected frequently enough, could be counted on to right the social and economic ills from which British workers were currently suffering. It is inconceivable that the Reichstag, with its malproportioned electoral districts even in 1914 and its demonstrable weakness vis-à-vis the executive—to say nothing of the three-class system of Prussian suffrage—would ever have elicited a similar response from German workers.

The third variable is no less important than the second: are workers free to organize into trade unions for collective industrial protection? The contrast between the British and the German situations in this respect was striking. By 1825, British workers were freed from most legal restrictions against combination; by 1875, after a generation of mushrooming growth, they were freed from all such restrictions; and later legal encumbrances, such as the 1902 Taff Vale decision, were on the books but only temporarily, repealed by the Liberal government in 1906.¹¹⁰ The legal position of German trade unions was much bleaker. In the 1850s—the era of reaction—their right to combine was legally denied, despite the British model that certain farsighted German conservatives at the time hoped to introduce at home.¹¹¹ In the 1880s they suffered from police harassment and provocation, and right down until 1908 they were regulated according to restrictions on their right to associate as a political grouping; thereafter, they were freed from most such obstacles, but not all, and in fact certain important legal restrictions did not disappear until the Reich itself did, in 1918.¹¹² One result was a marked delay in their ability to pull in members. Not until after 1900, more than a generation after the industrial take-off, did

¹⁰⁹ Ulam, *Unfinished Revolution*, pp. 63–64.

¹¹⁰ E. H. Phelps-Brown, *The Growth of British Industrial Relations* (London, 1959), pp. 294–311.

¹¹¹ Frolinde Balser, "Sozial-Demokratie 1848–49 bis 1863," in *Moderne deutsche Sozialgeschichte*, pp. 171–72.

¹¹² Karl Erich Born, "Der soziale und wirtschaftliche Strukturwandel Deutschlands am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts," in *ibid.*, pp. 276, 283–84.

the German trade unionism (in its three movements) pull in a membership of 1 million. Moreover, it was these restrictions with their implication of second-class citizenship that most pronouncedly influenced working-class outlook, and not Bismarck's social legislation.¹¹³

The fourth variable is closely bound up with the third: the degree of dignity that an industrial worker finds is accorded to him by his bosses. In Britain, for all the harshness of laissez-faire economics, employers were generally willing to concede their workers' right to organize and generally ready to negotiate with them over wages.¹¹⁴ The industrial barons of the Rhineland, patriarchal through and through, acted as though they were themselves Junker aristocrats and their workers dependent peasants. Far from willing to grant their dependents a right to form trade unions, industrialists like Krupp, Stumm, and Kirdorf were determined to remain "masters in their own houses" and regarded independent working-class action as not only a personal insult, but a threat to the very social order itself. Workers were *Untergebene* and were going to remain that way.¹¹⁵ Nor is this all. Related to this pattern of industrial give and take is the wider pattern of political activity between bosses and workers, between middle-class politicians and working-class politicians. The critical aspect here is whether cooperation between the two will take place with regard to reforms of common interest. In Britain, such cooperation occurred on a frequent basis, not only after 1867 between the Liberal party and the newly enfranchised working-class voters, but earlier as well during the struggles over the first Reform Bill, over the Corn Laws, and even within Chartism in its initial phase.¹¹⁶ In Germany, save for the fairly small and fairly unimportant Progressive party and perhaps for a few bold iconoclasts in the National Liberal party, the rest of the middle class shied instantly and irreversibly away from any such collaboration with Social Democrats. Even Progressives would collaborate only within strict limits.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Hajo Holborn, *A History of Modern Germany 1840-1945* (New York, 1969), pp. 292-93.

¹¹⁴ Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus*, pp. 189-92.

¹¹⁵ Zunkel, "Industriebuergertum in Westdeutschland," pp. 330-31.

¹¹⁶ Asa Briggs, *Chartist Studies* (London, 1959), p. 365.

¹¹⁷ Fischer, *Krieg der Illusionen*, p. 47; see, too, Ludwig Elm, *Zwischen Fortschritt und Reaktion: Geschichte der Parteien der liberalen Bourgeoisie in Deutschland 1893-1918* (Berlin, 1968), pp. 223-24.

The upshot of these four variables, and the way they intersected, was the contrast between the British Labour party and German Social Democracy in 1914. The first evolved at a late date in British parliamentary politics; was non-Marxist in outlook—in fact, espoused a doctrine of class cooperation, not class conflict; and was led by politicians who accepted the existing system as a legitimate vehicle for remedying wrongs. The second emerged at an early date in the German struggle over parliamentarianism; saw the system as essentially rigged; and, despite the degree to which it adapted to the Reich, never fully stopped seeing that system as unjust at bottom. A second upshot, moreover, was the impact on elite attitudes in the two countries. In Germany, socialist estrangement from the system—itsself caused initially by elite intransigence—reinforced the elites' determination not to yield to "traitors and criminals," and hence reinforced at the same time their need to fall back on demagogic means of control, including the artful exploitation of foreign policy. In Britain, because the working class was not similarly alienated, even in a theoretical sense, the elites experienced far less temptation to behave in this way. What need, indeed, had they for such stratagems? If the working class got the vote in two rounds of reform, in 1867 and in 1884, a separate working-class party did not form until 1900, did not become a major opposition party until 1922, and did not get undisputed control of the Commons until 1945—more than three-quarters of a century after the initial concessions to democracy.

For these reasons, a third upshot can also be mentioned: the impact on foreign policy. In Germany social imperialism was a way of life, part and parcel of contemporary politics. In Britain, despite the mighty efforts of certain groups advocating a similar program after 1900—tariff reform, imperial unity, paternalistic welfarism, hostility to liberal parliamentarianism, a large standing army, and, not least, a bold foreign policy—social imperialism remained unable to win over even the Conservative party, let alone the Liberal. Not even the role of leadership taken by a dynamic and prominent politician like Joseph Chamberlain aided the cause very much, and right down until 1914, the tariff reform movement was confined to the political fringes. Yet conditions seemed ripe for a social imperialist enthusiasm: imperialist feeling itself ran high, gloom about the economy was widespread, Britain's world position was being besieged on almost every front. On top of all this, the popular mood

was shot through with uneasiness and anxiety. If social imperialism could not flourish amidst these conditions, it could never flourish. Plainly, English society was too liberal, the elites too internationalist, the economy too interdependent with others—and above all its working class too integrated into the system—for political leadership to try “exporting the social problem.”¹¹⁸

V

If the various strings of the argument are now drawn together, the following conclusion emerges.

Domestic conflict had a contrary impact in the two nations. In Britain, for all the turmoil that erupted before 1914, foreign policy remained moderate and largely defensive; and this was so even though the nation's world position was itself on the decline and under challenge at almost every point on the globe. Nonetheless, internal conflict did take its toll. It added to the defensiveness of Britain's posture, indeed its increasing reactivity, by inhibiting Grey's efforts to reorient foreign policy and leaving the nation stuck, therefore, at a dangerous point halfway between isolation and full-fledged alliances. The result was the ambivalent policy “of partial and unforeseen commitment” with which the Liberal cabinet approached the July crisis, uncertain whether it should try to act as a mediator in the old “free hand” sense of Salisbury's days or to act as an ally of France and Russia so as to deter Berlin. In the event, Grey's cautious zigzagging as the crisis unfolded only “reinforced the German hope that England would stand aside.”¹¹⁹

Grey's advisers at the Foreign Office saw that his policy revisions added up to an unsatisfactory compromise, with consequent confusion both at home and abroad. Again and again, accordingly, they pressed him to clarify his actions and carry his campaign for reorientation through to its logical end; yet again and again Grey balked, well knowing that the Liberal party, and hence the cabinet itself, was too divided to permit such clarification. “I do not know,” Arthur Nicolson, the permanent under-secretary, wrote in April 1914, “how much longer we shall be able to follow our present policy of dancing on a high rope and not be compelled to take up some definite line or other.”¹²⁰ But the high-rope act went on; what else

¹¹⁸ Bernard Semmel, *Imperialism and Social Reform: English Social-Imperial Thought 1895–1914* (New York, 1968), pp. 226–31.

¹¹⁹ Williamson, *Politics of Grand Strategy*, p. 345.

¹²⁰ Quoted in Steiner, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy*, p. 138.

could Grey do in view of the political situation? Mayer argues that he and Asquith could move toward the right, toward the hawkish Unionist party—that, in fact, they did precisely this during the July crisis, overcoming the waverers and the noninterventionists in the cabinet with a threat to create a Liberal-Unionist coalition.¹²¹ There are some scattered indications that Asquith toyed with such a threat.¹²² Yet it does not appear to have had nearly the effect that Mayer maintains it did.¹²³ On the contrary, Asquith himself thoroughly feared the reactionary consequences that would follow from any such coalition.¹²⁴ In short, as before 1914, so throughout the July crisis itself: partisan conflict and internal Liberal discord continued to obstruct a clarification of foreign policy one way or another.¹²⁵

In Germany, even though domestic conflict appeared to be more latent than in Britain, it was in fact even more politically far reaching, and its repercussions on foreign policy were pronouncedly of an aggressive sort. Three such repercussions have been distinguished here. First of all, quite apart from deliberate foreign-policy decisions, there was a set of spillovers that arose from the very national situation of the Reich in 1871 and after. Among the most prominent of these were the unsolved problem of national identity, doubts about the viability of the Reich's borders, and the unforeseen consequences of tariff policies that arose out of the bargains struck between industrialists and Junkers. There was a second set of spillovers, on the other hand, that did derive directly from calculated political maneuvers. These maneuvers aimed at trying to control an increasingly impossible domestic situation by ever-greater efforts of social imperialism, mass propaganda, *Weltpolitik*, armaments programs, and diversionary quests for prestige of the quickest and cheapest sorts—in short, the whole complex of foreign adventures and aggressive diplomacy that embittered relations with other great powers and created diplomatic isolation. Finally, somewhere in between there was a third pattern of repercussions, a psychological pattern, by which the fears and grudges that German elites nurtured in domestic politics were turned outward and led them to detect international spectres all over Europe. Bismarck, who had unified the

¹²¹ Mayer, "Domestic Causes of the First World War," pp. 288–89, 298–300.

¹²² Hazlehurst, *Politicians at War*, pp. 103, 112–13.

¹²³ Williamson, *Politics of Grand Strategy*, pp. 345–60; Steiner, *Foreign Office and Foreign Policy*, pp. 153–64.

¹²⁴ Hazlehurst, *Politicians at War*, p. 136.

¹²⁵ Taylor, *Struggle for Mastery in Europe*, p. 525.

nation, had spoken ominously of his "nightmare of hostile coalitions." By 1914 the whole nation, at any rate to the right of the Social Democrats, was tormented by such nightmares, even if they were overwhelmingly self-induced. The upshot of all three kinds of repercussions was the calculated gamble in favor of war that was taken in July 1914. With one sudden desperate charge, the Reich's leadership hoped to achieve that ultimate breakthrough in *Weltpolitik* that would safeguard the nation's expansionist future and its conservative order at home. By 1917, to take a date that was uppermost in German thinking at the time, it would be too late. By then, Russian and French military reforms would be completed and the chances of a successful breakthrough, therefore, that much less.

Bethmann Hollweg himself, it has been argued, had doubts that a war would actually strengthen the conservative order.¹²⁶ He seemed in fact to fear that it might hasten its decline and lead through mass mobilization to democratic concessions or worse. But one should not make too much of these qualms. For one thing, as Fischer notes, Bethmann's warnings in this respect "only confirm how widespread the contrary view was."¹²⁷ For another thing, he clearly embraced the "curious blend of contradictory beliefs—social Darwinism, misunderstood romanticism, and cultural pessimism—all pointing to German expansion as the only alternative to stagnation."¹²⁸ In this respect, as Stern also hastens to add, there was really no fundamental divergence of political aims between Bethmann and the other leaders of Imperial Germany; "the general consensus about Germany's national destiny was too broad and the Kaiser's tolerance for dissent too narrow" to permit anyone who dissented too much from continuing in office.¹²⁹ For a third thing, finally—as Riezler's diary makes clear—he unequivocally hoped that "if war comes and the veils fall, the whole nation will follow, driven by necessity and peril."¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Jarausch, "The Illusion of a Limited War," p. 58; Stern, "Bethmann Hollweg and the War," p. 263.

¹²⁷ Fritz Fischer, *Krieg der Illusionen*, pp. 13, 693.

¹²⁸ Fritz Stern, "Bethmann Hollweg and the War," p. 257.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 259–60; see, too, Fritz Fischer, *Krieg der Illusionen*, p. 158; Imanuel Geiss, *July 1914*, p. 47.

¹³⁰ Quoted in Jarausch, "Illusion of Limited War," p. 58.