

Introduction

Since the publication of the first edition of this volume the debate about the origins of the First World War and Germany's war aims has, until very recently, calmed down. The temper and the tone in which the debate was conducted, so it seemed, were back to normal again. This, however, does not mean that a generally accepted consensus has been established. Optimistic historians like Joachim Remak concluded that: 'Fritz Fischer's decade has ended. It began, neatly enough, in 1961 with *Griff nach der Weltmacht*, and drew to a close, in 1969, with *Krieg der Illusionen*. In between, there has been more discussion, scholarly and otherwise, than has been caused by any other single historian in our lifetime.' That this conclusion was somewhat premature, the publications between 1970 and 1983 have shown. Hence in the light of these publications it has been considered necessary to revise this volume in order to include new material, unfortunately at the expense of some of the earlier contributions which, though intrinsically important, have had to be omitted.

But first we have to pose the question why Fritz Fischer's theses should have caused the furor they did? Any answer to this question is bound to be complex. For one thing we have to look at the roots of modern German historiography and here we are immediately confronted by the massive and impressive work of Leopold von Ranke whom Lord Acton once described as 'the Columbus of modern history'. He taught history to be critical and applied to the best of his ability the regulative idea of objectivity, for which he was seriously criticised even by his contemporaries such as Droysen. But his primary concern was *the state, the power of the state* and the relations between the states. To avoid any misunderstanding at the outset, Ranke's concept of power was contained by moral restraints and was never an end in itself – as it was to become to his successors in an environment strongly influenced by Social Darwinian notions.

He would have rejected outright the claim 'all power to the state, and to one state all the power!'

The main emphasis of his work lay on 'the state' and on the primacy of foreign policy. Some members of the present generation of German historians, such as Hans-Ulrich Wehler, claim to write, in contrast to Ranke, 'problem-orientated structural analyses'. Methodologically the contrast is purely artificial but for Ranke the problem was 'the state', and the structure of international relations. But why should this be so? Given that Germany was in the front rank in the development of modern 'scientific' historical scholarship nourished by the rich traditions of classical humanism, one is bound to ask how that scholarship could focus itself so narrowly. Any answer is bound to include the simple fact that during the nineteenth century and before, Britons and Frenchmen, for instance, could take their state for granted while Germans could not. It was hardly comfortable for them to be a loose federation surrounded by strongly centralised nation states, for whom the fragmentation of Central Europe ensured 'the balance of power' in Europe. Moreover, and this is often forgotten these days, throughout most of modern history Germans were more often the victims than the aggressors. Hence the necessity for a reunited strong German national state. Hence also *der Primat der Aussenpolitik*, the primacy of foreign policy, or to quote Ranke: 'It is the degree of independence which determines the position and status of a state in this world. It imposes upon it the obligation to arrange domestic conditions in such a manner that it can maintain itself.' Germany's national unity was achieved belatedly and only partially. Germany was and remained on the international scene as Helmuth Plessner put it, 'die verspätete Nation', the belated nation. The re-establishment of a strong and consolidated nation state in the heartland of Europe was bound to inconvenience those powers already saturated or deeply involved in further aggrandisement because with the German Empire a new competitor had emerged: the balance of power in Europe, as it had existed since the Treaties of Westphalia in 1648, was completely destroyed. But from the very outset of unification it was, as Bismarck rightly felt, fragile within and without. Hence, as is argued by the historian K.-D. Bracher and the sociologist Ralf Dahren-

dorf, the maintenance of an archaic but apparently stable social order, harnessed to modern industrial techniques. Therefore, also, the readiness of all sectors of German society, ultimately including even the Social Democrats, to subject their interests to those of 'the state' and to allow it to become both the preserver of the social and political *status quo*, and the initiator of all change. Thus began allegedly 'der deutsche Sonderweg', Germany's own peculiar path that was to lead into catastrophe not only in 1918 but also in 1945. This thesis has now come under strong challenge, notably from two British historians, Geoff Eley and David Blackbourn, as well as from the American historian David Calleo, who reject the *Sonderweg*, pointing to the truism that each nation developed in its own peculiar way. Calleo, for instance, argues that the German Problem is too often treated as an isolated case, 'a country with broad characteristics presumed not to exist elsewhere'. He indicts present-day German historians of taking 'a certain perverse relish in claiming for their society a unique wickedness among humankind'. After all, every national society is many respects unique. But Germany was and it is not the only society with closely knit families, authoritarian traditions and an emphasis on private rather than public virtues. Neither was Germany the only nation that has ever hoped to play a major role in bringing the world to order or to take great pride in military prowess. 'Nor indeed have such traits and ambitions been conspicuously absent from the international arena since Germany's defeat in 1945.' Lenin for once was right with his observation that Imperial Germany's international problems sprang less from its peculiar domestic characteristics than from the timing of its development, which brings us back to the belated nation.

All this is by way of explaining why German historical scholarship was so preoccupied with 'the state', foreign policy, rather than for instance with social history, though there are quite a number of notable exceptions, such as Otto Hintze, to mention but one, who made a major contribution to German social history during the Wilhelmine period as well as during the Weimar Republic. However, it was the cataclysm of the First World War, the end of the Hohenzollern Empire and the birth of the Weimar Republic that seemed to bring forth a new

beginning. One of the first pathbreakers of a 'new school' was the brilliant young historian Eckhart Kehr, but he killed the impact of his work with his own polemical and extreme formulations. It was Kehr who, in opposition to traditional German historiography, formulated the primacy of domestic policy, meaning that in the German Empire domestic policy determined the course of Germany's foreign policy, blind to what should have been obvious even then, and certainly had been obvious to Ranke, that no such primacy exists, that domestic policy and foreign policy are interdependent, though there may be short periods in which either one or the other dominates. The endemic instability of the Weimar Republic and the advent of Hitler made sure that, at least within Germany, the works of Kehr, Veit Valentin, Alfred Vagts, Hans Rosenberg and others remained short-lived ventures. Hitler's rise put an end to them and after 1945 it took almost a decade and a half for new methodological approaches to emerge.

Inevitably, the emergence of a new school of historiography implies the revision of the traditional historical picture. Perhaps any such revision would have stirred few minds other than those of the specialists had the subject-matter been something more remote than the origins of the First World War. Indeed, if we are looking for the causes of the failure of a new German historiography to establish itself after the First World War, we should have to add to the reasons Article 231 of the Versailles Treaty which in effect saddled Germany with the 'sole guilt' for the outbreak of the First World War. This article was sufficient to ensure the continuance of the 'primacy of foreign policy' in German historiography and it incensed the German nation from Left to Right. After all, millions had fought in the war in the conviction of facing 'a world of enemies' who had 'encircled the Fatherland'. Since then, however, not only British and French but also German historians have dismissed 'encirclement' as a myth. Yet if 'encirclement' was really a myth how come that the British Ambassador in Berlin on 4 April 1935 wrote that Britain's choice was one between disinterest in Europe 'and a *renewed* policy of isolation and encirclement of Germany'. Through the eyes of the British

Foreign Office and its representative past 'encirclement' seems not to have been a myth after all.

Already during the first month of the war the German Foreign Office had indicated the 'guiding principles' of any future publication of official documents: German reaction towards the Allied policy of encirclement; grandiose German war aims were to be denied. After the collapse of the German Empire, the Weimar Republic found itself faced by two tasks. Firstly, it had to discredit the policies of the Imperial government as much as it could; secondly, it had to prove the Allied indictment of the German government and the German nation wrong. That this policy, if consistently pursued, amounted to squaring the circle appears not to have occurred to the Weimar politicians. But be that as it may, this essentially was the twofold objective of the first German official post-war publication, *Die deutschen Dokumente zum Kriegsausbruch*, edited by Count Max Montgelas and Walter Schücking.

However, the apologetic tone towards the victors which marks those five volumes soon disappeared in other official publications after the signature of the Versailles Treaty. The signature of Germany's plenipotentiaries was only the first dribble of ink of a veritable flood that was to be spent on the 'war guilt' question. Convinced of the righteousness of its own cause, the German Foreign Office financed a vast campaign against the 'war-guilt clause' by supporting various bodies who publicly tried to repudiate Article 231. The most prominent and prolific member of some of these was Alfred von Wegerer, himself – unknown to the German public – an employee of the German Foreign Office. In his vast number of publications Wegerer primarily indicted Russia and France for unleashing the war, maintaining a somewhat more reserved and 'benevolent' attitude towards Great Britain. Much of his supporting evidence came from Russian archives which the Bolsheviks, for a time at least, lavishly published and which were immediately translated into German. But the greatest documentary support for the vindication of German policy was derived from the publication, between 1922 and 1927, of large parts of the German diplomatic archives in *Die Grosse Politik der europäischen Kabinette 1871–1914*, edited by J. Lepsius, A. Mendelsohn-

Batholdy and F. Thimme. Some 15,889 documents were published in 40 volumes, arranged in 300 chapters. Like *Die deutschen Dokumente* the material published in this vast collection was almost exclusively diplomatic in nature, in the main ignoring military and economic aspects. Moreover, as in the case of similar publications by countries which emulated the German example, such as for instance Great Britain, France (which to this date keeps documents on its policy during the 1914 July Crisis under lock and key, inaccessible to the historian) and Austria, ample grounds exist for suspecting a tendentious procedure in the selection of the documents published.

The German attempt to revise Versailles historiographically also received considerable support from historians outside Germany, notably in the United States where S. B. Fay's *Origins of the World War* proved a bestseller, and although in many respects dated, this work has withstood the test of time, and to this day remains one of the most readable and balanced accounts. By comparison the conclusions of Bernadotte E. Schmitt (a compatriot of Fay's) were hardly noticed, at least not in Germany. The last man to analyse the origins of the First World War in the inter-war years in considerable detail was the Italian journalist and politician, the former editor of the Milan *Corriere della Sera*, Senator Luigi Albertini. At first Albertini's massive three volumes had little influence upon German historiography in particular and the historiography of other countries in general. To begin with, the work was not completed until 1942, by which time the world had other worries than the First World War. The first complete English translation was not available before 1957. Furthermore, however detailed and meticulous Albertini's work may be, it is not free from case-pleading. He himself had been a leading advocate of Italy's intervention on the Allied side and inevitably his work is marked by his political preferences. Still, whether 'revisionist' or 'anti-revisionist', most of the historiography is marked not only by its partisan nature (the exception is Fay) but also by its purely political frame of reference in which social, economic and institutional questions are hardly posed, let alone answered. By and large, within and without Germany, the 'consensus' was established, aptly summarised

by none other than Lloyd George himself (and he should know!), that all the nations of Europe had 'slithered over the brink into the boiling cauldron of war'. This meant that Germany was no longer the party carrying the sole guilt for the war, and that it had not unleashed the war premeditatedly. This 'consensus' even survived the Second World War and a Franco-German historians' conference in the 1950s concluded that the 'documents do not allow one to ascribe in 1914 to any one government or people the conscious desire for a European war', a conclusion endorsed in the late 1960s by the historian Jacques Droz. But carefully phrased as it is, the statement allows one to read it any way one wants.

By comparison with the 'war-guilt question' the question of German war aims appears to have been a secondary one, though it was discussed by historians during the Weimar Republic and found entry into pacifist novels of that time, such as Arnold Zweig's *Education before Verdun* and Theodor Plivier's *Der Kaiser ging, die Generäle blieben*. At any rate, for the more extreme demands the Pan-Germans, whose vociferousness had always been in inverse proportion to their membership, could be indicted, though it would be difficult to dispel the impression that in print this question was evaded by historians such as Hans Delbrück and Victor Brecht, whose conclusions culminated in charging wholesale the Third OHL, notably Ludendorff, with the responsibility for such traces of official annexationism as could be found. Historians seemed to have settled all the issues, so much so that one of them could conclude that 'the history of the period 1914 to 1918 has been researched as thoroughly as hardly any other epoch'.

Four years after this statement had been made, in 1959, the Hamburg historian Fritz Fischer published an article in the *Historische Zeitschrift* whose thesis was that German expansionist aims were pursued during the First World War not simply by fringe movements like the Pan-Germans or militarists like the army High Command under Ludendorff, but by sectors and personalities who had previously been classified as moderates, such as the Chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg. Already at this stage the implicit thesis of Fischer's argument existed – influenced perhaps by the more polemical writings of E. Vermeil, A. J. P. Taylor and Sir Lewis Namier –

namely, that there was a continuity of Germany's political and economic aims from Wilhelm II to Adolf Hitler, a thesis which more than a decade later led to the absurd and irresponsible assertion by H.-U. Wehler that Bismarckian and Wilhelmine Germany were no more than the antechamber of the Third Reich. At that early stage though, few but the initiated were aware of the potential challenge which this argument in Germany presented to established historiographical orthodoxy.

Fischer's article concerned itself with Germany's war aims in Eastern Europe, and his views corresponded closely to those of Hans W. Gatzke who in 1950 had published a brief study, *Germany's Drive to the West*, a study based mainly on printed materials, but new in the sense that it analysed the role of economic interest groups in the formulation of German war aims in the West. Gatzke's work was little noticed until Fritz Fischer's *Griff nach der Weltmacht*, published in 1961, drew attention to it.

Surprisingly enough, at first it was not the main body of Fischer's book, an exhaustive and exhausting study of German war aims, which caused havoc among the historical profession inside and outside Germany, but his assertion that Germany had accepted the risk of general European war during the July crisis. This was sufficient to upset current orthodoxy, and under the pressure of public controversy, instead of mellowing, Fischer's attitude hardened further, as we shall see, moving to somewhat extreme positions.

Fischer's views and those of his pupils, the most notable being Imanuel Geiss, were bound to be highly explosive in an atmosphere in which the problem of responsibility for the First World War was considered settled once and for all and in which the divided German nation to a greater or lesser extent was concerned in coming to terms with and explaining the recent phenomenon of National Socialism. Therefore much fuss was caused, especially outside Germany, when the Bonn Foreign Office refused to finance a lecture tour by Fischer in the United States, which was to have taken place under the auspices of the Goethe-Institute. Those American historians who publicly protested against the attitude adopted in Bonn all came from well-endowed institutions and could very well have financed

the invitation themselves. The Goethe-Institute, on the other hand, is a German public institution financed by the German taxpayer. And what interest could the German taxpayer have in financing a highly expensive lecture tour by a historian whose views were not only controversial but subject to considerable valid challenge, from historians whose reputations and integrity were beyond any doubt?

If in fact it was part of Fischer's intention to challenge his colleagues, the challenge was taken up. Although the late Gerhard Ritter, then the *Nestor* of the German historical profession, had long preached as well as practised a more critical approach to the history of Bismarckian and Wilhelmine Germany than had hitherto been customary, particularly in his four-volume main work, *The Sword and the Sceptre*, Fischer's assertions were too much for him. He was able to point out serious methodological and factual errors in Fischer's study of German war aims, such as the quotation of documents of which one page had been read but not the other, a criticism which this editor can support on the basis of his own research on German policy in the Baltic countries. Although as the author of the work Fischer must bear the responsibility for any error, the fault may not be entirely his own but inherent in the German university system where it is quite customary for a professor to send his assistants and/or PhD candidates into the archives to carry out the basic research for 'their professor's work'. This certainly is one way in which it is feasible that error slip in. Fischer would not be the first victim of this procedure – his opponent, Gerhard Ritter, suffered also.

Ritter died in 1967, but opinions are still sharply divided, not simply for and against Fischer but over a wide spectrum. Even East German historians, who felt themselves compelled to side with Fischer and his pupils generally, also point out that theirs is blinkered history because it not only ignores the fundamental readiness of the other European Powers to go to war but also their excessive war aims which made any form of negotiated peace impossible. What is missing is the comparative yardstick and method.

As far as Germany's war aims in the First World War were concerned it can be categorically stated that at all times they were negotiable, but Bethmann-Hollweg, his successors, and

the army always insisted that the representatives of the warring powers should come to the negotiating table first, a demand which the Allies adamantly rejected. Neither was the German OHL, then still under Falkenhayn, intractable. Thus the American ambassador in Berlin, James W. Gerard, on 6 March 1915 wrote to President Wilson's close adviser Colonel House that 'the people who were in favour of accepting reasonable peace proposals were, strange to say, the military general staff'.

One factor often forgotten when discussing German war aims, or for that matter German military strategy at the outbreak of war, is the factor of geography. It would be well to remember at all times G. P. Gooch's dictum that: 'Geography is the mother of history'. Germany's geographic position was, to say the least, highly vulnerable. And the historical memories of nations are not short. Most of the Germans who in 1914 marched to war were aware that in the centuries of Germany's weakness and fragmentation she had been the battleground of Europe. France's consolidation into a centralised nation state to a large extent had taken place at Germany's expense. Convinced that the country was encircled, that in the light of the massive Russian arms build-up and France's desire for revenge for 1871 war would come sooner or later, the craving for almost absolute security was, economic aspects apart, a major constituent force in the formulation of war aims. Both east and west should provide 'glacis' areas which would serve for the protection of the homeland, to ensure that no attack could be unexpectedly launched against Germany. And after two world wars which produced the self-emasculation of Europe, what is Europe today other than a divided 'glacis' for a potential confrontation between the United States and Soviet Russia? The factor of geography is one that not only Fischer but also his critics miss.

But irrespective of this, Fischer's study of German war aims has opened new methodological avenues for German historiography by abandoning the well-trodden paths of purely political history in favour of analysing sectional, economic and class interest and their bearing upon the formulation of German policy – whether one is prepared to accept his conclusions *in toto* is another matter. But German historians in the Federal Republic have discovered Karl Marx at last – with a vengeance

perhaps – and allowed him to enter, if only through the back door, very much in the same way as the American historian Charles Beard who had disguised his basically Marxist approach to American history by labelling it an ‘Economic Interpretation’.

Ritter’s death did not mean the end of the debate. Fischer had and still has to face the challenge of his former Hamburg colleague Egmont Zechlin and the Kiel historian Karl Dietrich Erdmann. In a number of brochures published by Fischer and his pupils they moved into increasingly extreme positions, sustained in their efforts rather less by a new consensus among their compatriots than by historians of other nations with whose image of German history, determined largely by the experience of Hitler’s Germany and the Second World War, Fischer’s interpretation ideally corresponded. His work was quickly translated into English, although both Great Britain and the United States are notorious for their disinclination to publish important historical monographs in any language, though it must be added that the French in this respect are even more insular than the British. It took five years to find a publisher for Ritter’s main work in the United States and only via that country did Ritter’s work reach the shores of Britain.

Fischer’s successive volume *Krieg der Illusionen* (*War of Illusions*) was translated equally fast. In it he distanced himself from his previous assertion that Germany had accepted the risk of a general European war during the July crisis, an assertion which had in the meantime been accepted by his opponents, and went one step further by claiming that the German government wanted this great war and prepared for it and provoked it accordingly.

The lynch-pin of his argument is the ‘War Council’ of 8 December 1912. In fact there was no War Council at all in Berlin. It was a sarcastic description by Bethmann-Hollweg when he heard that the Kaiser on that date had called together his closest military advisers, against the background of the Balkan crisis, and in response to a despatch by the German ambassador in London, Lichnowsky, according to which Haldane had declared to him that Great Britain’s interest lay in the maintenance of the balance of power in Europe and that it would under no circumstances tolerate an overthrow of France.

In other words, in any war involving France and Germany, Great Britain would march with France. That Poincaré earlier in the year had given Russia what amounted to a blank cheque by promising French support under *any* circumstances, thus transforming the Franco-Russian alliance of 1894 from a defensive into an offensive one, which made at least the first Balkan War possible, is a fact which Fischer ignores. The first Balkan war was a Russian war which Russia fought by proxy. The Kaiser was incensed by the contents of Lichnowsky's despatch and rallied his military advisers around him. They included Tirpitz, the Chief of the General Staff von Moltke, the chief of the naval cabinet Admiral von Müller and Vice-Admiral von Heeringen. Conspicuous by their absence were the politicians. Bethmann-Hollweg did not know what was going on. The Kaiser developed his view that in order to remain a great power Austria would have to act as one. Since Russia was supporting the Serbs, war for Germany was inevitable. Austria should direct all its strength against the East while Germany would turn to the West and naturally the German navy would have to be prepared for war against England. Moltke supported the Kaiser but first the war against Russia would have to be popularised in Germany. The navy was more reluctant. Tirpitz argued in favour of postponing any action for another eighteen months at least, though Moltke argued that the longer Germany waited, the more unfavourable would be the conditions for her successfully fighting a war. Irrespective of what was said at that meeting, once he heard of it Bethmann-Hollweg cancelled all the decisions made. The Balkan crisis which had been the cause of this gathering produced neither the propaganda campaign demanded by Moltke nor any economic mobilisation, and even the German army bill of 1913, resulting from a demand by the general staff for an increase of 300,000 men, demanded only less than half of that and was nothing more than an attempt to catch up with Russian and French armaments and manpower, for numerically the German as well as the Austrian armies were inferior to the combined total of the Russian and French armies.

Admiral von Müller kept a diary, which was published in 1965. In 1969 the Anglo-German historian J. C. Röhl pub-

lished an article in which he mentioned that the editor of the diaries had omitted two important paragraphs relating to the 'War Council', namely that the Chief of the General Staff had said the sooner there was war the better but had failed to carry out the natural consequence of this demand, which would be to confront Russia or France or both with an ultimatum: 'that right is on our side when war is unleashed'. But Röhl himself fails to quote the final summing up by Müller of the practical results of this so-called 'War Council': 'The result was rather Zero'. And so it was. But for Fischer this is the key document, explaining all subsequent events. 'The war in the summer of 1914 was spiritually, militarily, politically, diplomatically and economically well prepared. It needed only to be unleashed' (Fischer).

What Fischer means by the term *Weltmacht* remains as vague and nebulous as in his work on German war aims. In the minds of contemporaries, at home and abroad, Germany was a world power. Bethmann-Hollweg's biographer E. v. Vietsch describes an episode in which Tirpitz demanded that the Chancellor should direct the German people towards a great aim; 'What aim?' replied the Chancellor with a shrug. And against the background of the second Moroccan Crisis in 1911, when national passions ran high, Bethmann-Hollweg wrote to a friend that one could not conduct a war because no war aim existed. Bethmann-Hollweg's own aim was quietly and with patience to consolidate Germany's position in the world, a policy, so he hoped, which would bring Germany a few additional colonies here and a few trading advantages there. Fischer himself, apparently unaware that he was contradicting his own thesis, quotes a letter from Bethmann-Hollweg written as late as 1913: 'Hopefully the raising of the question of Asia Minor can still be postponed. But raised it will be, and probably earlier than we would like. It can be solved in a manner acceptable to us only with England.' This means nothing other than a solution *without* war.

Fischer's description of the second Moroccan Crisis is one-sided and distorted and an excellent corrective to this is Geoffrey Barraclough's recent study *From Agadir to Armageddon*, propounding that the power which escalated the crisis to the

threshold of war was Great Britain. Among the powers involved it was only in Great Britain where Grey alarmed the fleet for fear of a German naval pre-emptive strike.

The question why Bethmann-Hollweg accepted the risk of a general European war in July 1914 Fischer answers rather unconvincingly since his key document is the so-called 'War Council' of December 1912, already discussed. Why in 1914 and not at a time which would have been much more favourable to Germany, such as during the first Moroccan Crisis in 1905 when France was internally divided in the wake of the consequences of the Dreyfus affair and her ally Russia neutralised because of the defeat suffered at the hands of the Japanese? By early 1914 the Chancellor as well as the German general staff had become highly alarmed at the Russian arms build-up and the massive extension on Russia's western frontier of her strategic railway net, in the financing of which German banks were heavily involved, just as German heavy industry was in Russia's arms build-up. At the height of the Balkan crisis in 1913 Krupps still supplied heavy artillery to the Russians. Not only the Germans perceived this danger. As late as March 1914 Great Britain's ambassador to St Petersburg, Sir George Buchanan, summarised Germany's military dilemma with the words: 'Can Germany still afford to wait till Russia becomes the dominant factor in Europe or will she strike while victory is still within her grasp?' General Sir Henry Wilson, the director of military operations, after examining the Russian arms programme also commented that, 'it's easy to understand now why Germany is anxious about the future and why she may think that it is a case of now or never'.

As far as Bethmann-Hollweg was concerned the last link that convinced him of Germany's encirclement was the news that Great Britain and Russia were about to conclude a naval convention analagous to that concluded between Great Britain and France in 1912. It envisaged joint Anglo-Russian naval operations in the North Sea, and British naval support for a Russian landing on the coast of Pomerania. From 1909 until 1914 the German Foreign Office received documents relating to Anglo-Russian negotiations directly from the Russian embassy in London whose second secretary, Benno von Siebert, a Baltic-German by origin, leaked them steadily. The

matter was treated with such secrecy that besides the Chancellor only three members of the Foreign Office knew of it, not even the Kaiser was party to it. Bethmann-Hollweg felt a deep sense of betrayal by Grey, since after all his main endeavour was to bring about an Anglo-German rapprochement and both he, and even more so Lichnowsky, seemed to have been taken in by Grey's smooth tongue. In order not to provoke Great Britain Bethmann-Hollweg had the *Berliner Tageblatt* publish an article which referred to the envisaged Anglo-Russian naval convention 'as the next stage on the way to an alliance'. London took notice, the Foreign Office suspected a leak in Paris, 'a deplorable indiscretion' as Eyre Crowe put it. But officially it kept silent. Then the German press became more explicit, spelling out what the German Foreign Office knew. This led to questions being raised in the House of Commons. Grey replied that in the event of a European war no unpublished agreements existed which would deprive the government and parliament of the liberty to decide whether or not to participate in such a war – the only direct lie Grey ever told parliament, according to G. P. Gooch. Grey equally denied such plans to Lichnowsky, who actually believed him.

British historians have made light of this episode since, after all, such a convention was never concluded. The fact is that the Russians pressed for a speedy conclusion and signature of the convention while the British, partly in response to the German reaction, wanted to combine signing with a trip by the First Sea Lord, Prince Louis Alexander Battenberg, who was married to a Russian princess, to St Petersburg in August 1914 when the signature could take place without causing undue attention.

However one weighs these negotiations what cannot be ignored is that Grey's dishonesty broke Bethmann-Hollweg's confidence in him completely. Among German politicians he was still one of the very few left who had trusted Grey's assurances. Confronted by the stream of Russian documents about the Anglo-Russian negotiations and Grey's barefaced denial of them, that trust was shattered and this was to determine his attitude during the July crisis. Erwin Hölzle and Egmont Zechlin, two of Fischer's most trenchant critics, place great emphasis upon this episode.

When Fischer wrote his last work he had only very limited

access to the diaries kept by Bethmann-Hollweg's closest confidant and adviser, his *alter ego* Kurt Riezler, a Bavarian. And from this diary, or at least those parts they knew, Fischer and his students quoted very selectively, to substantiate their thesis. When in 1972 the complete diary was published, edited by the Kiel historian Karl Dietrich Erdmann, quite a different Chancellor emerged from it than Fischer and his school would have us believe in; a man not bellicose and set upon imperialist expansion at any price, but a man increasingly pessimistic, almost a fatalist, who viewed Germany's internal intellectual decline with deep sorrow and Germany's deteriorating external position with alarm. After Sarajevo, on 7 July 1914, Riezler noted:

The secret news of which he informs me, provide a shattering picture. He [Bethmann-Hollweg] considers the Anglo-Russian negotiations for a naval convention, landing in Pomerania, as very serious, the last link of the chain. . . . Our old dilemma as in any Austrian Balkan action. If we encourage them, then they say we had pushed them into it; if we advise against it, then it is said we have left them in the lurch. Then they approach the western powers whose arms are wide open, and we lose our last ally. This time it is worse than in 1912; because this time Austria stands in defence against the Serbo-Russian machinations. An action against Serbia can lead to a world war. The chancellor expects of the war, irrespective of the way it will end, the overthrow of all that exists. What exists has become obsolete, devoid of ideas 'everything has aged very much'.

Bethmann-Hollweg, according to Riezler, saw three alternatives in July 1914. Firstly a localised Austro-Serbian war, which practically would blast the entente but a pre-condition would be quick Austrian action. One ought to add here that, as Sir Herbert Butterfield has demonstrated, Sir Edward Grey's hopes initially went in the same direction. Secondly, a continental war with Russia and France but a pre-condition for that would be that Russia for the time being would remain neutral. Thirdly, a world war with England. The Chancellor preferred the first solution but Austria wasted time to an extent which

allowed other issues to crystallise compared with which Serbia became a minor item. Initially he put some hope on British co-operation as had been the case during the first Balkan war, but British neutrality in the event of conflict he ruled out. His hopes lay in being able by means of a threat of war to intimidate the other powers, while Austria would achieve a *fait accompli* in Serbia. If it were to come to war then it would be a preventive defensive war. Fischer argues it could not have been a preventive war because no-one wanted to attack Germany; this may have been the case as far as Great Britain was concerned, but certainly not, as the Russian documents conclusively prove, in Russia's case and it was Russian mobilisation which ensured German action. Moreover, if one were to accept Fischer's argument then one would also have to ignore the fears of the German politicians and the military, which as we have shown were certainly appreciated in Great Britain's diplomatic and military circles. They felt sure that from 1916 onwards a policy of calculated risk could no longer be pursued, that therefore they would be compelled to watch the disintegration of Austria-Hungary without being able to do anything about it, and as a consequence see German power rapidly decline. The fear of encirclement was genuine enough, and the last piece of evidence to substantiate it was the Anglo-Russian naval conversations.

German military planning was determined by this fear, as well as by Germany's geographic position, which allowed only a preventive defensive stroke. The Schlieffen plan was its ultimate expression. Gerhard Ritter, years ago, had subjected this to scathing criticism both from the military and the political point of view. It has been taken as evidence of the primacy of the military over the politicians, an untenable contention because both Bülow and Bethmann-Hollweg were completely informed about it. Neither was Ritter in a position to point to an alternative way of reacting to a war on two fronts. Obviously generals plan in order to win a conflict, not to lose it. Theoretically it could be argued that instead of fighting an offensive war of annihilation, the Germans should have fought a defensive war of attrition. Certainly Germany's advantage of having interior lines of communications would have favoured such a strategy, but that was about the only advantage

Germany enjoyed. The major pre-condition for fighting a war of attrition successfully is self-sufficiency of foodstuffs and vital raw materials. Contrary to Paul Kennedy's assertion, as far as foodstuffs were concerned, Germany by the outbreak of war imported almost a third of its requirements from overseas, in 1913 almost 3,000 million Marks worth. What effect the Allied blockade had upon German food supplies during the war is too well known to need any further elaboration. The only raw material which Germany possessed in abundance was coal, but it possessed hardly any iron ore, no oil or any of the other more precious raw materials. Such a situation did not allow a war of attrition. Hence the answer was a quick and decisive stroke against the opponent one thought could be defeated quickest, before turning to what was taken to be a long-drawn-out contest in the East, with the awareness that Russia's major ally was its geography. That this plan miscarried and why is a question the answer to which is beyond the scope of this volume.

With one exception, as yet no comparative study exists analogous to those which appeared in the inter-war years which examines the origins of the First World War and the question of war aims on a comparative basis using Fischer's approach. Zara S. Steiner's volume, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War*, claims, or at least does so on the cover, 'that, in the British case, the Fritz Fischer thesis does not hold'. This claim, in an otherwise highly perceptive and immensely readable study, is simply misleading because the author does not proceed from methodological and theoretical premises identical with those of Fischer. Economic, social and institutional analysis receive only very marginal attention whereas in Fischer's work they represent its very core. What remains is in essence traditional diplomatic history which does not reach the high level achieved in her other book, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy 1898-1914*. In that study Steiner, among other things, demonstrates the impact made upon the Foreign Office and British foreign policy by the change of a generation of personnel, when level-headed diplomats such as Thomas Sanderson, who still bore the imprint of Salisbury's conduct of foreign policy, had to make way to a younger generation of diplomats some of whom were almost paranoid and certainly

aggressive, like Eyre Crowe, himself half-German and married to a German, compensating his origins with an excessive Germanophobia, or Sir Arthur Nicolson who, during the Coronation festivities of 1911, at a dinner party loudly and emphatically declared that as long as *he* was at the head of the Foreign Office, 'England should never, never be friends with Germany!'

The exception referred to above is the late Erwin Hölzle and his work *Die Selbstentmachtung Europas*. Whereas most of Fischer's critics have expressed their detailed criticism in articles or in the footnotes of their work, Hölzle takes issue with him directly in the 593 pages of his work and manages to build up what amounts to a very substantial counter-argument to Fischer. Although of a rather higher literary quality than Fischer's tomes, Hölzle's work received only scant notices, one British literary journal refusing to have it reviewed on the advice of a historian who thought it was of little public interest. Hölzle also raises the question why it was not possible to come to a negotiated peace during the First World War. The answer to this question he sees in the agreement made between Great Britain, France and Russia on 5 September 1914 not to conclude a separate peace and not to discuss peace conditions without prior mutual consultations. Now at this point Hölzle may well be straining his evidence beyond the permissible limit, but Sir Edward Grey, more than once, was recorded as saying that there could be no peace until 'Prussianism', whatever that may mean, had been completely eradicated. War it was to be, to the bitter end. But when actually discussing peace feelers Hölzle's work finds considerable support from the former pupil of Gerhard Ritter, the historian Wolfgang Steglich, who in two monographs has examined the peace feelers. Needless to say, neither Hölzle's work nor that of Steglich is available in an English translation. This editor has met British and American experts on German history who can neither read nor speak a word of German. As one such expert put it in 1983 in a well-known historical 'affair', 'life is too short to learn a language like German'.

But the question of the responsibility for the outbreak of the First World War is still on the table. Neither Fischer's answer nor that of his critics is fully satisfactory. Perhaps because it

may be the wrong question. Why were the politicians in 1914 not prepared to pay the price which the preservation of peace may have cost? This question, excluding moral concepts, may provide an answer which while evading 'guilt' still would provide us with an insight into why decisions were taken the way they were. As far as *Austria-Hungary* is concerned the murder of Archduke Francis-Ferdinand was only the straw that broke the camel's back. Ever since the bloody massacre of the Obrenović dynasty in 1903 by Serbian army officers led by Captain Dragutin Dimitrijević – the very officer who instigated the murder of Francis-Ferdinand eleven years later – and the advent of the aged Peter Karageorgević, Austro-Serbian relations had been rapidly deteriorating. Serbia, the vanguard of Russia and Pan-Slavism in the Balkans, was likely further to inflame the nationalist fervour within the multinational empire and thus bring about its destruction. Within that context the *de jure* annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina was only of minor significance since *de facto*, with the agreement of the powers represented at the Congress of Berlin in 1878, it was already in their possession. In the Balkan wars of 1912 and 1913 Serbia more than doubled its territory. The Serbian danger could not be ignored. In 1914, viewed from the perspective of the Vienna *Hofburg*, it was not a question of prestige, but one of survival. To evade the Serbian challenge, so it seemed, would have been a further step towards the inevitable disintegration of the Hapsburg Empire.

For *Germany*, as already indicated, not to back Austria-Hungary would have implied the loss of her one remaining reliable ally and facing a potential conflagration with Russia, and therefore also with France, on her own, once the Russian arms build-up and her railway network had been completed, which was expected to be the case by 1916/17. And, as the Anglo-Russian naval conversation seemed to suggest, Great Britain was likely to side with France and Russia. Therefore if conflict there were to be, then 'rather sooner than later' while there was still a chance of victory. If Austria by a quick pre-emptive strike could localise and solve the conflict then there was no problem, but if it meant general war then Germany was also ready. Anything else would have led to isolation and her decline.

For *Russia* not to support Serbia would have meant a serious loss of prestige, with repercussions inside Russia of incalculable extent. It would also have meant renouncing her ambition to restore the Cross of the Orthodox Church over Constantinople, an aim which circumscribed Russia's ambition for her Black Sea Fleet to enter the eastern Mediterranean and establish bases at the Dardanelles. The throne of the Czar was shaky, the energies of the Pan-Slavist movement could direct themselves with equal fervour against the throne as they directed themselves against Austro-Hungary and Germany.

France was not directly involved in the dispute, but she had done her best to reinvigorate the Franco-Russian alliance and, as we have noted, converted it to an alliance of an offensive character, thus further stoking the fires that were to erupt in the Balkan wars. Even if Germany, in order to keep to the military timetable, had not declared war on her first, it is highly improbable that she would have stood aside and broken her alliance obligations. To do so would also have meant the renunciation of 'the lost territories' of Alsace-Lorraine. In addition, in the event of a German victory over Russia she would have confronted an enemy stronger than ever before.

Of all the powers involved *Great Britain*, besides Russia, had on the surface the widest range of options. Though not formally committed, the extent of her informal commitment was such that, as Grey readily admitted, for Great Britain not to join Russia and France would have meant, to say the least, Grey's own moral bankruptcy. In spite of attempts at mediation, Grey did not go far enough, to the extent of exerting serious pressure on Russia not to mobilise. This would have jeopardised the Anglo-Russian entente and would have been the end of friendship with Russia. As Buchanan wrote to Grey in April 1914, Russia was becoming powerful so fast 'that we must maintain her friendship at almost any price'. Great Britain had concluded her ententes with France and Russia primarily for imperial considerations. She had overextended herself beyond the limits of her resources. The Anglo-Russian entente in particular was to ensure security for India and Asia Minor. The fact that in spite of the entente the Russians still proved troublesome, especially in Persia, was uncomfortable, but therefore all the more reason to accommodate them even

further. The end of the ententes, their blasting by Germany, would have made the Empire, especially Britain's position in India and other parts of Asia, highly vulnerable again. War in Europe was preferable to imperial insecurity which might well lead to the collapse of the Empire altogether. Grey played a highly dangerous game, from which only Germany's invasion of Belgium saved him. 'Poor little Belgium' became the rallying cry, if one was needed, although the treaty guaranteeing Belgium's neutrality contained no provision calling for armed intervention in the event of violation, only a consultative clause. Three decades before, when the question of Belgian neutrality and of Britain's intervention was raised in the House of Commons, Salisbury had firmly declined such an obligation. But in the 1880s and 1890s there did not exist that which threatened in 1914: the German High Seas Fleet. Its potential domination of the Belgian coast put a different light on Britain's obligations. But 'poor little Belgium' was as much a good propaganda ploy as was Bethmann-Hollweg's alleged reference to the treaty guaranteeing Belgian neutrality as 'a scrap of paper', another propaganda move, as the recently published diaries of Great Britain's ambassador in Berlin, Sir William Edward Goschen, show.

There would be much to add and to enlarge upon, but the events of 1914 viewed along these lines take on a different and more varied picture from that provided by Fritz Fischer. In the past few years the Fischer debate had showed signs of simmering down until, in 1983, it once again burst forth into full flame. It was reignited by Fritz Fischer, who in 1983 published a thin paperback volume, *Juli 1914: Wir sind nicht hineingeschlittert. Das Staatsgeheimnis um die Riezler-Tagebücher (July 1914: We have not stumbled into it. The State Secret of the Riezler Diaries)*. Fischer believes that the debate has now returned to the point where it began over twenty years ago. His aim runs in two directions, primarily against his critics such as Zechlin, Erdmann and Andreas Hillgruber, the other target being the Riezler diaries themselves. When Erdmann published the diary in 1972 in his introduction he described in great detail the chequered history of the diary. Fischer repeats this history, spiced by critical and polemical comments which offer no insights except to raise doubts on the authenticity of the diary,

doubts based on letters written to him by a German émigré who in order to substantiate his charges refers to conversations conducted by him with a German historian now deceased and a third party whose name he does not reveal. Other historians have raised doubts, especially over the passages written during the July crisis, alleging that they have been manipulated, possibly by Riezler himself, or after his death in Munich in 1955 by his brother. Only hearsay evidence has it that originally Riezler had testified to Bethmann-Hollweg's willingness to go to war. Even the subtitle of Fischer's book is misleading. At no time were the diaries ever a 'state secret', they were not even in the hands of the state but in the possession of the Riezler family. Bethmann-Hollweg's willingness or readiness to go to war is an assertion that can neither be proved nor disproved.

However, doubts at any time are legitimate, but the creation of theories of conspiracy is quite another matter, as when Fischer writes 'important representatives of the historical profession had in accordance with the tradition of the German conservatives manipulated a historical document in order that the historical truth would remain hidden, in favour of an outdated morality of the "clean nest" '.

Fischer indeed contradicts himself, dismissing the diaries on the one hand as a doubtful and dubious source, but using them all the same when the entries correspond with his own frame of reference. His own thesis that German policy in July 1914 was calculated from the very beginning for a great war he tries to substantiate with a diary entry of 8 July 1914: '... if the war comes from the east so that we go to war for Austria-Hungary and not Austria-Hungary for us, then we have a chance of winning it. If war does not come, if the Czar does not want it or a startled France counsels peace, then we would still have the prospect of manoeuvring the entente apart over this action'. To use this entry as Fischer does in support of his thesis is, to put it mildly, stretching the evidence to the point of excess. At the same time he ignores Riezler's entries where they do not fit in with his picture.

However, Fischer's main motive is to have a final reckoning with his critics, for fear that the discussion and debate will return to the point where they had started. Back in 1965, at a historian's conference in Dijon, Fischer vainly pressed his

French colleagues, Pierre Renouvin, Jacques Droz and others, to dissociate themselves from the joint declaration by the Franco-German historians of the 1950s mentioned above. Far from complying, Erdmann and Renouvin agreed that war aims in France and in Germany were the product of war, not its cause, and Jacques Droz then stated that no document existed which would prove the thesis that the German statesmen had acted 'with a conscious and well thought out will to aggression'. The assertion that Bethmann-Hollweg and his advisers had reckoned at least with Great Britain's neutrality has been completely contradicted. After all, Fischer's key document, the so-called 'War Council' of December 1912, clearly shows that the gathering was caused by Haldane's blunt statement that if there were to be a war between France and Germany, Great Britain would have to side with France.

German calculation, however mistaken, had many levels ignored in Fischer's virtually monocausal explanation of a hegemonial war prepared long before and staged according to plan. Zechlin and Hillgruber especially, have provided subtle analyses in many of their articles which provide an insight into and an understanding of the peculiar mixture of defensive and aggressive elements which characterised Germany's risky policy, or as Kurt Riezler was to call it, 'the leap into the dark'.

In his criticism of the Riezler diaries in 1983 Fischer appeared to receive major support from the young historian Bernd Söseman in an article published in the *Historische Zeitschrift*. The arguments are too intricate, above all too technical to allow recapitulation here but in essence they culminate in three points: (i) Walter Riezler (Kurt Riezler's brother) who transcribed the diary entries of the July crisis has distorted and falsified what Kurt Riezler had actually written; (ii) Kurt Riezler himself, for personal as well as political reasons, rewrote his original diary after the war; and (iii) 'The shadow of the editor' (Erdmann) has obscured and blurred these facts. Söseman in the course of his argument changes both language and tone. What begins with 'editing', moves on to 'distorting' and ends up with 'falsifying'. In the same issue of the *Historische Zeitschrift*, Erdmann was given space to reply, and without much polemic refutes Söseman's artifice point by point, again an argument highly intricate and technical but

fully convincing, except of course for those who simply do not want to be convinced even by a highly objective and incisive analysis.

However, historical debate and controversy are fruitful and helpful, they shake the consensus and put an end to the stagnation which unfortunately characterises so much of the historiography for the period 1933–45. Fritz Fischer in his work has thrown out a challenge both in his approach and in his conclusions. Irrespective of whether one shares these conclusions, no-one will look at the origins of the First World War again in the same light as they were before 1961. No mean achievement for Fritz Fischer – or for his critics.

In the essays selected for this volume James Joll, who basically shares Fischer's viewpoint, outlines the debate as he saw it in the late 1960s. The first edition of the book contained a contribution by P. H. S. Hatton, which unfortunately now for reasons of space has to be omitted, showing just how closely Great Britain and Germany were collaborating on the colonial level shortly before the outbreak of war.

Immanuel Geiss adds his own interpretation to the origin of the First World War which, as has been rightly pointed out, because of his own pre-conceived and strongly held notions does not clarify the motivations of the other Great Powers and their readiness to accept war as an alternative to the political process. Geiss has frequently accused a previous generation of historians of selectivity and omission. True as this charge may be, L. C. F. Turner, in an article published in the *Journal of Contemporary History* entitled 'Russian mobilisation in 1914', supplies evidence that this charge holds true of Geiss as well, as he appears particularly blind towards Russian and French policy during the crisis. Moreover, Geiss has argued elsewhere that to ask Russia in 1914 to cease supporting Serb nationalism and France to cease supporting Russia in such action would have been tantamount to asking the 'impossible of the two Great Powers', given the historical situation. Quite apart from the questionability of the argument as such, there is nothing which could not make it fit Austria-Hungary or Germany. Nor does it occur to Geiss that had Russia taken no action, Austro-Hungary, indecisive as it was in the conduct of its policy during the July crisis, would have been likely to have

done nothing against the Serbs for lack of German support – unless, of course, Germany was prepared to unleash a war one way or the other and thus accept the onus of being the power to make the first move. However, this is a step which Bethmann-Hollweg was unlikely to have taken because of his need of the support of Germany's Social Democrats, since 1912 the largest party in the Reichstag. That support was only sure once Russia was fully mobilising. Recent evidence also shows that the Kaiser would not believe the news of Russian mobilisation until German military intelligence provided him with a Russian poster announcing mobilisation from Russia's western provinces. That German military intelligence had not been put on a war footing prior to the outbreak of war, and was caught by it completely off guard, thus putting another nail in the coffin of the thesis of German premeditated war, is demonstrated in Ulrich Trumpener's article, 'War Premeditated? German Intelligence Operations in July 1914', published in *Central European History*, 1976, an article which unfortunately for lack of space could not be included in this selection.

Geiss's reinterpretation of the background to the July Crisis is strongly supported by Fritz Fischer's contribution, 'World Policy, World Power and German War Aims'. Fischer interprets German policy during the July crisis as a product of its failure to expand politically and economically in south-eastern Europe during the preceding four years. He then goes on to argue his case of establishing a continuity between Germany's war aims and the pre-war aims of *Weltpolitik*, a continuity existing – within the frame of reference of the article – in the main in Germany's engagement in Austro-Hungary, the Balkans and Turkey.

Unfortunately, Gerhard Ritter has never criticised Fischer's work in its entirety but only isolated aspects of it, such as German pre-war policy, its policy during the war, or Fischer's treatment of the Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg. Ritter postulated a fundamental difference in aims between Bethmann-Hollweg and Ludendorff, between civil power and the army. Fischer has argued that such a difference is a purely artificial one which never existed. Both politicians and army were agreed on the ends, they only differed over the means. To

reprint Ritter's own interpretation would have required the reprinting of not only one but a whole series of them. This was clearly impossible; hence one of Ritter's ablest pupils, Karl-Heinz Janssen, provides a fair but also critical assessment of Ritter's position. Egmont Zechlin's contribution illustrates the point that one cannot simply speak of a for and against Fischer school in Germany. It would be an unwarranted oversimplification to place Zechlin halfway between Ritter and Fischer. After all in the final analysis, in spite of the bitter feud between them Ritter had found it necessary to adapt his own position as a result of Fischer's work. Zechlin, however, appears to agree in several respects with Fischer and attributes to German policy during the July crisis a more active role than German historians had been ready to allow before. He emphasises Germany's readiness to accept the risk of general war, but makes the very important distinction between readiness to accept what appears to be inevitable and desire to provoke war to further expansionist aims. The picture he presents is considerably more complex and varied than Fischer's and devoid of over-simplification. Unlike Fischer as well as Ritter, Zechlin, like Hölzele mentioned above, sees the documents as bearing out the impression on German policy-makers of being subjected to an encirclement policy by the Powers of the Entente. This policy Germany countered with a limited defensive offensive war. But once the traditional nineteenth-century pattern of limited Cabinet warfare had been replaced by total war, Germany, in Zechlin's view, had only one alternative, of wresting its allies on the European mainland from Great Britain by speedily defeating them and fusing them into an economic as well as a political unit. *Mitteleuropa* was the product of the breakdown of a Cabinet warfare with limited aims, and its degeneration into hegemonial warfare was conducted both by the Central and by the Entente Powers.

Joachim Remak's contribution looks at the First World War through the perspective of the 'Third Balkan War' and analyses the policies and the shortcomings of each of the belligerent countries while his American colleague, Paul W. Schroeder, in a reply to Remak affirms the former's criticism of an overtly determinist interpretation such as Fischer's. He

rejects any monocausal approach but analyses the multiplicity of factors that led to war. He looks for their interaction. One cause, one force operating in one direction would logically produce a non-event, it is the interaction of a variety of factors which causes an event. He does not ask 'Why World War I?' but in the light of the preceding crises, 'Why not?' He analyses the wide spectrum of European foreign affairs since the turn of the century, in order to focus sharply upon Austria-Hungary and to what extent it was affected by the ententes concluded by Great Britain, effects which in practice had a more serious effect upon the stability and security of the Hapsburg empire than upon Imperial Germany.

Karl-Dietrich Erdmann provides a summing up of the balance of new research on the question of 'war guilt', making extensive use of the Riezler diaries, while Egmont Zechlin provides a reply to Fritz Fischer's latest book discussed above, in which it is not so much the question of 'guilt' which stands to the fore, but rather the discussion of the configuration of forces that brought about war in 1914.

'Can we be certain that Bethmann-Hollweg and his colleagues were so different from other European statesmen in their almost unconscious assumption of the Darwinian necessity and empirical morality of war?' a reviewer once asked in the *Times Literary Supplement*, and goes on: 'The mood suggests . . . that the German attitude was not wholly isolated from a general European fever'. Actually, Imanuel Geiss has argued that a specifically German ideology of the permanent struggle of the peoples lay at the base of German *Weltpolitik* which tried to justify 'philosophically' Germany's bid for world power status. Indeed, not only Bethmann-Hollweg himself but also Kurt Riezler provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate the existence and general currency of Social Darwinian premises which caused Fritz Fischer implicitly to treat this phenomenon as though it were a German invention.

The editor's own contribution, from which since publication of the first edition of this volume a monograph has emerged, albeit in German, *Der Sozialdarwinismus: Seine Genese und Einfluss auf das imperialistische Denken*, questions the postulation of a specifically German ideology and looks at what James Joll has aptly called 'The Unspoken Assumptions' of the period in a

wider context, suggesting that Social Darwinism was part of the intellectual fabric of western and Central Europe as well as North America and pointing to the ultimate result of this ideology once both men and circumstances existed to carry it to its ultimate logical conclusion thirty years later.