

Lecture Notes

Europe in Crisis: Class 2--The prospect of war: buildup to WWI

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WWI started when the Archduke of Austria was assassinated. Why did such a minor event cause such a catastrophic war? This is the question we will try to answer in today's class.

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The Prospect of War:

- The last major war European powers had fought was the Franco-Prussian war in 1871, which killed about 300,000 people. That meant that by the time the 20th century started, many Europeans did not remember the horror of war, especially the young men who would be fighting the war.
- All other wars were imperial wars in places like India and Africa that were fought against technologically inferior enemies, who inflicted few casualties.

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- Some people argued that war was unlikely, or insignificant because
 - The European powers were all too interdependent economically, so that war would be mutually destructive to everyone involved.
 - The English imported binoculars from Germany. When WWI broke out, they had to get these binoculars from neutral Switzerland, because England did not make any binoculars herself.
 - Modern war was too expensive to be sustained for a long period of time.
 - It would crush a country's economy to outfit millions of men for war.
 - *The Great Illusion*, written by Norman Angell, argued that the great powers were too closely tied. Also argued that modern life had made man less warlike.
 - Socialists argued that workers should ignore the call to war, and show solidarity with their working class counterparts in other countries.
 - The royal families were all closely intermarried. The kings of Britain, Russia and Germany were all first cousins.
 - Pacifism: There was a strong pacifist movement in Europe at the time. The main fruits of their efforts had been establishing an international court at the Hague, in Belgium, which was designed to arbitrate over international disputes.
 - This movement was strongly supported by the Western democracies, particularly the United States. However, more autocratic and militaristic, less secure powers did not like the idea, because they did not want to spend their time debating small powers like Serbia or Spain, and realized that they would have more power if they just relied on brute military force.

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- Tensions that would lead to war.
 - **Militarism:** The Great Powers began preparing for a serious European war as early as the 1890s. European history told them that war was a reasonable, respectable and

expected way to settle their differences. Consequentially, the armies in all the major countries were built up, as their generals prepared strategic maneuvers.

- The great powers were very militaristic, and the common people tended to be very patriotic, and often blamed their troubles on other countries. For example, in England, the Germans were sometimes accused of hurting the English economy by stealing English business, and were often figured as villains in plays and novels. (Indeed, businessmen also often made the same claims).
 - Public opinion now mattered to politicians, and nationalism was a great way to stir up public favor.
- **Class tensions:** the aristocrats and the bourgeois were afraid that the industrial lower class might someday engage in a Marxist-style revolt. On some level, war was seen as a way to inflame patriotic fervor, and quell Marxists leanings. Indeed the success and failure of many nations during this era can be measured by their willingness to adjust to these class tensions.
 - Russia did not adjust well: she did not make any attempts to provide for the concerns of the proletariat – and her government fell under the strain of war. Patriotic fervor was not enough.
 - Germany also had very limited democracy, and did not listen to the demands of the lower class. Her government would also fall at the end of the war.
 - The British and French, however, had semi-democratic systems and made more attempts to adjust to the class tensions. They did not stir up *as much* patriotic fervor in their countries, and were less willing to go to war when the time came. Ultimately, their governments functioned smoother, and they emerged victorious from both world wars.
 - **Example of Nationalism among the common people: The Dreyfus Affair:** A Jewish French Army official was accused of spying for Germany, despite the fact there was little evidence. The conservative military and church backed the accusation, as did the *petite-bourgeoisies*, or the lower middle class. The *petite-bourgeoisies* were scared by the rapid social and economic change of the 1890s, and they saw the Jews as a scapegoat. The socialists, though they were supported by the lower class, supported Dreyfus, mainly because the church and the old conservative order were opposed to him. This is an example of how convoluted the logic of the era was.
 - Russian newspapers wrote accusatory articles about Austrian behavior towards the Serbs in the early part of 1914.
- **Chain of Alliances:** WWI was started when a chain reaction of alliances was set off. We will briefly go over these alliances, and then discuss, in detail, what made them come about
 - **The Central Powers:** Austria, Germany and the Ottoman Empire.
 - **The Allied Powers:** France, Britain and Russia.

To understand the run-up to WWI, we must understand the position each of these countries were in right before the war. We will study profiles of pre-war European countries.

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- Germany
 - Germany had emerged on the international scene quite recently. Because of this, they weren't always respected by the other great powers, and felt that their position was precarious.
 - Example: The Berlin-Baghdad Railway: The Germans planned on building a railway from Berlin to Baghdad to facilitate trade with the Middle East. This made the British feel threatened, even though such a railway would probably be ultimately beneficial for them. This was not just the government, the people of Britain felt threatened by this German assertion.
 - The Germans greatly admired the British, who they saw as another Germanic people. They were constantly seeking an alliance with them. When the British refused to form such an alliance, the Germans tried to impress the British by building up the German military and navy..
 - The Germans felt they were being pinned in. Russia, France and England had formed a strategic alliance. Germany felt like everyone, including their idol, Britain, was ganging up against them.
 - Germany was afraid of fighting a war on two fronts: against Russia in the East and France in the West.

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- France:
 - France had been embarrassed by the Franco-Prussian War. However, she still had a great empire, and had managed to keep her people from revolting since 1871. France was nominally a democracy, even though the upper middle class still exerted inordinate influence.
 - France needs to make a friend so they can be protected from the Germans and the British. The French are not sure who is the bigger threat, but they know that they will be in big trouble if they are forced to face one of these powers alone. France offers Russia a deal: if Russia will engage in an alliance with France, France will help Russia build up her economy.

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- Britain
 - Britain is threatened that the Germans keep building up their navy – they believe the Germans are preparing for war with Britain.
 - Britain is not as confident as she used to be.
 - The British economy is no longer an unquestioned powerhouse. Germany is nearly as strong, this makes the British insecure.
 - The powerful British Empire is faltering – the British army had embarrassing difficulty in the Boer Wars in South Africa.

- Britain traditionally tries to maintain a balance of power on the continent – Germany looked like she was getting too strong

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- Russia
 - Russia is recovering from two embarrassing military failures:
 - **Crimean War:** 1854-1856. Russia tried to expand her territory south to encompass the Dardanelles. Britain and France decided this would make Russia too powerful, and helped the decrepit Ottoman Empire defend the Dardanelles. Russia was crushed.
 - **Dardanelles:** a straight between Asia and Europe that would give Russia access to the Mediterranean Sea. Russia is large, and was landlocked for a large part of her history. She is constantly trying to gain ports that could improve her trade routes.
 - **Russo-Japanese War:** 1904-1905. Russia tried to capture some Japanese territory on the Asian continent. The Japanese fought back, and defeated the Russians. This was the first time in centuries that a non-European power had defeated a European power in war.
 - Russia has an unhappy population. The intellectuals have few job opportunities and are snubbed by the nobles. The rural poor live in medieval conditions, and the urban poor work long shifts for low pay.
 - **Failed Russian Revolution of 1905:** due to frustration with the Russo-Japanese War and frustration with Russian poverty, the Russian people revolted. The revolt was put down.

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- Austria
 - Lost face after the Seven-Weeks War. However, it soon becomes the new Germany's sidekick.
 - Austria's economy is underdeveloped, and has more in common with Russia's economy than with Germany's economy.
 - Austria is dealing with the concerns of almost a dozen ethnic groups that are clamoring for independence. This causes discord and distress for an already fragile government.
- Serbia
 - Serbia is a small state that gained independence from the teetering Ottoman Empire in 1815. They were one of the only small countries allowed in the Balkans by the Great Powers of Europe.
 - The Serbs are Slavs.

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Alliances:

- After the Franco-Prussian War, and the formation of Germany, Bismarck thought the greatest threat to Germany was a vengeful France. He aimed to isolate France diplomatically, and formed the **Triple Alliance** with Austria and Russia.
- The deal with Russia is allowed to expire in 1890. This is because the new king of Germany, Wilhelm II wants to pursue a more aggressive foreign policy, he does not like Bismarck's cautiousness. Bismarck is fired in 1890, and dies in 1898. On his tombstone, is written "Loyal servant of Wilhelm I."
 - The deal with Austria, however, is allowed to stay in place.
- **Dual Alliance:** In 1894, both Russia and France are diplomatically isolated. Russia offers to end France's diplomatic isolation if France gives Russia money and technology needed to build the Trans-Siberian railroad.
- Meanwhile, Britain is struggling, too. They're empire and economy isn't as strong as it used to be, and the Germans seem to be threatening them. They decide to play it safe and make friends on the continent. They form an alliance with France, and later Russia, called the **Entente Cordial**.

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Crisis:

Before the war, there were a few crises that nearly led to the breakout of war, and highlight the tensions between the great powers.

- **Moroccan Crisis:** Morocco was controlled by France. Germany decides to be annoying, and in 1906 goes to Morocco and stirs up trouble by agitating for Moroccan independence as a German protectorate. This nearly leads to war. In 1911, the French crackdown on rebellion in Morocco, and the Germans send a warship to the coast to threaten them. They exchange threats for a few weeks, and eventually the crisis is settled when Germany is given part of the French Congo.
- **Balkan Crisis:** Example: In 1908, the Ottoman Empire was struggling, and Austria and Russia agreed to split it up between themselves. Russia said it would relinquish its traditional ties with Bosnia, and give Bosnia to Austria, if Russia got the Dardenelles. However, Britain intervened and forced Austria to leave Russia hanging, so that Russia was left embarrassed, and felt obliged to go to war with Austria. The situation was only diffused when Germany said they would intervene on Austria's side, and Russia knew they couldn't win such a battle, because their military was in shambles.
 - Nicholas II vowed to never abandon the Slavs again.

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The Events Leading to the Breakout of World War I:

- On June 28, 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand was visiting Sarajevo, the capital of Serbia. Anyway, he was visiting , and he was shot in the street by Gavrilo Princip, a young Serbian nationalist who was part of the group, the Black Hand.
 - Archduke = crown prince
 - Why did he shoot? The Austrian monarchy was standing in the way of Pan Slavism. The Austrians were preventing Serbian minorities from joining up with Serbia.
- Austria is angry their crown prince was shot. They realize, though, that without German backing, they will not have the military might to fight off the inevitable Russian backlash. After corresponding with Germany, Germany gives them a "**blank check**," to respond however they saw fit.

- The reason they gave this blank check was because Wilhelm I thought it was unlikely for Russia to respond, because Russia's military was weak. Also, Wilhelm I and Nicholas II had a close personal relationship – they were childhood friends and cousins who referred to each other as “Willy” and “Nicky.”
- Austria issues an ultimatum on July 23. The ultimatum has ten points, but it basically demands that Austria have an extreme amount of control in Serbia. The ultimatum is designed to be unreasonable. Many theorize the Austrians hoped that the Serbians would refuse so Austria would have an excuse to conquer Serbia.
 - Naturally, Serbia does not accept these ridiculous demands, Austria promises War.
- Russia starts to mobilize its troops to protect the Slavic Serbs from Austrian interference.
 - Russia also hopes that they might be able to gain the Dardanelles if it comes to war.
- Germany is starting to worry. However, they are prepared and ready, and believe they can easily win a war.
 - Germany asks France what they will do if Russia and Austria go to war. France is vague, and says they will act in their best interest. Germany interprets this as meaning they will go to war, and decides to jump the gun by declaring war on France. They plan on using the Schlieffen Plan, and they ask Belgium for permission to march through on the way to France. Belgium refuses, and England intervenes to protect Belgium's right to neutrality.
 - **Schlieffen Plan:** One of the great military strategies that came out of the German Army. Involved marching around the fortified French-German border and instead going through Belgium to attack France.

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Military Maneuvers

- Western Front
 - Germany started off with an attack on Alsace Lorraine. However, the first meaningful encounter was on the French-Belgian border on August 23. The French and British were unable to compete with the full force of the German army and their shiny weapons. However, they managed to slow the Germans up for two weeks as they pushed towards Paris.
 - **Battle of the Marne:** At this point, the French and British had organized enough to send new troops to the banks of the Marne, a river outside Paris. Everyone pitched in: Parisian taxicab drivers even helped ferry soldiers to and from the front line!
 - On September 9, after four days of intense fighting, the Germans retreat 45 miles until they finally manage to hold a position along the Aisne River. This is where the Western Front will hover for the rest of the war.
 - At this point, both sides have stalemated. The war will be won by whichever side has the most guns and men. A war that is determined by resources is called a **war of attrition**.

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Total War:

- When WWI started, there was a general sense that the war wouldn't be that bad. People were saying that the “war would be over by Christmas.” Indeed, there was a romantic eagerness for the war: people were pumped up on nationalism and militarism. Young men rushed off to find glory on the front line. Most found death.
 - Experts looked at how expensive it would be to run modern war: to clothe soldiers and buy modern guns, to feed the large number of soldiers who would need to fight in a

battle in which machine guns were the weapons of choice. They reached the conclusion that war would be too expensive to be fought for long. However, European societies surprised themselves with their resilience. They found new ways of exploiting their countries resources to gain advantage, until they were engaged in **total war** – all their resources were devoted to winning the war.

- In 1914, Germany was still exporting grain.
 - In England, conscription was introduced in 1916, in France, and income tax was introduced around the same time.
 - This was the first time European societies were really introduced to socialism: the government began to intervene in every facet of their lives. Indeed, in Britain, the food ministry was actually suppressing free enterprise, to make sure that they could control food sources and get them to people who needed it.
- Europeans applied their talents to coming up with new and interesting ways to kill each other:
 - Machine guns
 - Poison Gas
 - Flame Throwers
 - Tanks
 - Airplanes
 - Also, learned how to fight with moral. Propaganda was easy to spread when most of the population was literate, and often frequented the cinema.

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