EDITED BY
MAARTJE ABBENHUIS,
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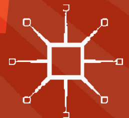
THE MYRIAD LEGACIES OF 1917

A YEAR OF WAR AND REVOLUTION



The Myriad Legacies of 1917

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Kingsley Baird • Gail Romano
Editors

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Finally, the editors are indebted to the authors who contributed to this volume. We are honoured to have contributions from some of the leading scholars of the First World War. We wish to acknowledge the expertise, generosity, and diligence of Maartje Abbenhuis, Annette Becker, Piet Chielens, Glyn Harper, Michael Neiberg, Gorch Pieken, Jock Phillips, Galina Rylkova, Thomas Schmutz, Radhika Singha, Monty Soutar, Peter Stanley, and Jay Winter.

—Maartje Abbenhuis, Neill Atkinson, Kingsley Baird, and Gail Romano.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Death's Carnival: The Myriad Legacies of 1917

Maartje Abbenhuis

Early in 1917, the poet Yvan Goll opened his most recent publication with the following lines:

> Let me lament the exodus of so many men from their time;
> Let me lament the women whose warbling hearts now scream;
> Every lament let me note and add to the list, …
> In every garden lilies grow, as though there's a grave to prepare;
> In every street the cars move more slowly, as though to a funeral;
> In every city of every land you can hear the passing bell;
> In every heart there's a single plaint,
> I hear it more clearly every day.[1]

Goll's book of poetry, entitled *Requiem for the Dead of Europe*, consisted of a series of recitatives, laments, choirs, and hymns, all despairing the war, that 'carnival of death', as it encircled the continent and then the world with its 'fiery breath', crossing oceans, islands, and mountain peaks, paving roads, invading ports, and embracing the very fibre of humanity: its devastation inescapable. Goll used the poems in his collection to narrate

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how Europe had failed and faltered; how the war reduced the continent to a hell of eternal battle and its people to fearful and hateful beings.

Goll published his *Requiem* in neutral Switzerland, one of only a few countries left in Europe where such treasonous thoughts could be propagated. Goll himself fled France in 1914 to avoid conscription and survived the war as a student at Lausanne University. While there, he met with other exiled émigré artists and intellectuals. These included the Russian expressionist artist Marianne von Werefkin, who designed the collection's cover (Illustration 1.1), and the French pacifist Romain Rolland, author of the 1915 anti-war manifesto *Above the Battle*, to whom Goll dedicated his poems.[2] Goll himself was a French-German artist born in the contested borderlands of Alsace-Lorraine. His exile in Switzerland was essential to him, to preserve his complex and, as he saw it, 'European' self-identity.[3] He could not serve in a national army, for he would be fighting against his kin and against his vision of Europe. His conscientious objection was thus deeply tied to the political values at play in the war.

While Switzerland may have offered Goll a reprieve from becoming involved in a war he could not bring himself to fight, this neutral country could not offer him, or any of his *émigré* friends, a true escape. For much like the Dutch author Louis Couperus, who denounced this woeful conflict and despised his own pitiful neutrality in it, Goll's artistry between 1914 and 1918 also reflected the war.[4] To historians, Goll's 1917 *Requiem*

Illustration 1.1 Yvan Goll, *Requiem for the Dead of Europe*, front cover (1917). Marianne von Werefkin (illustrator 1860–1938), cover image: Yvan Goll, Requiem für die Gefallenen von Europa. Zürich, Rascher, 1917. Source: Yvan Goll, *Requiem für die Gefallenen von Europa* (Zürich: Rascher, 1917)

evokes the high emotions of the time along with the hopes and fears for the future held by this exiled polyglot author.

It is, then, entirely fitting that in the final pages of his 42-page publication Goll issued forth a glorious 'Peace Festival', filled with buoyant refrains rejoicing in exultations of 'REQUIEM, REQUIEM'.[5] The juxtaposition to the despair permeating through his previous 'Hymn to the dead' could not be greater. In the Roman Catholic tradition a requiem mass offers mourners time to reflect, to grieve, to mourn, but also to rejoice. A requiem must include a jubilation, for the dear departed have reached the exulted realm. Similarly, Goll's *Requiem* both decried the war and exulted at a peace to come.

The timing of the publication of Goll's *Requiem* could not have been more apt, for in 1917 the strain of total war reached a disastrous crescendo. The publication of his work in a neutral country was also fitting. By 1917, no neutral could escape the impact of the First World War regardless how far removed it was from a military theatre. Switzerland was particularly precariously situated, surrounded by four warring powers: Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy, and France. Nor could anyone in Switzerland (or elsewhere) fail to consider the monumental importance of two events that year: the Russian revolutions that effectively ended Russia's involvement in the war and would bring into being the Soviet Union, and the entry of the world's only remaining neutral great power, the United States of America, as an associated ally of the *Entente Cordiale*.

For many contemporaries, the year 1917 proved terrifying. Yet, much like Goll's *Requiem*, this year of despair also underwrote a year of expectation. As the French historian Jean-Yves Le Naour explains, 1917 witnessed the 'veritable birth of the twentieth century'.[6] It was in this year that the age-old, multi-ethnic Romanov, Habsburg, and Ottoman empires crumbled, that warring and neutral societies alike had to confront the uncertainties of a post-war future. After 1917, the world could not go back. However longingly some yearned for their idealised visions of the pre-war past, that past had become a place of no return. As Goll put it, 'Like apples falling from a tree, the world is separated from its past'.[7] For Goll, this was a call to action to reclaim the earth, to join hands, and to rise above the din of war. In reality, as 1917 unfolded only a few had faith in that same hopeful vision.

Yet the events of 1917 made questions about the future urgent: What would a post-war world look like? How would the map of the world be redrawn? What ideas and ideologies would shape its contours? How would

this Great War redefine the international system and who or what would rule supreme? How might balance and stability be restored? No government and no people could escape these questions, even if many of them focused on domestic concerns first and foremost. For 1917 was also a year of revolution and political upheaval. The war, which began as a war of nations and empires fought in defence of amorphous and competing ideas of 'civilisation', was now a battleground for the legitimacy of a wide range of antagonistic political ideologies: communism, self-determination, nationalism, democracy, fascism, collective security, racial equality.[8]

1917 was a fundamental year in shaping the course and contour of the future. It ended the nineteenth-century world order for good. The world of landed empires, aristocracies, and even nineteenth-century conceptions of liberalism was collapsing. It would be replaced by a new world order dominated (even in their isolationism) by the United States and the Soviet Union and by the rise of powerful political concepts that precipitated change and upheaval, economic uncertainty, and the collapse of empires.

This volume brings together scholars from a range of disciplines and explores the complex and multi-dimensional impacts of the year 1917. It does so at every level of analysis: from the personal to the global, from the intimate to the economic, from the political to the cultural. Goll's *Requiem* offers one perspective on the power of the war to alter international realities and personal priorities: the poet lamented how the conflict, pitting soldier against soldier, worker against worker, spelled the end of what he considered to be a nineteenth-century European brotherhood and necessitated a rethink of internationalist ideals.[9] However, Goll's is only one 1917 perspective. The chapters in this collection—all drawn from a stimulating symposium held on the subject at Museum of New Zealand/Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington in April 2017—offer many more.

Many historians focus on 1917 as the year that catapulted the world into the twentieth century.[10] This collection adds to that historiography. It does so by focusing not only on what changed in 1917, how the events and developments of this year of war and revolution created a myriad of legacies, but also on what was lost. Above all, it draws on a range of multidisciplinary approaches to reflect on the importance of this year of war and revolution to shape the commemorative landscape. Recently, Akira Iriye referred to the First World War as 'ancient history', as if its impact is of little importance today.[11] The contributions in this collection reject Iriye's claim. If the First World War is a 'foreign place' and a place of 'no

return' for most of us, we remain the inheritors of so much that was shaped and framed during that war and during the year 1917 in particular. The First World War remains very much 'living history'.

Even the life of Yvan Goll, who survived the Great War thanks to the neutrality of the Swiss, was shaped in fundamental ways by the war. Goll's fears for the future of Europe and the world were not mitigated or constrained by the fact he lived in a neutral society. He recognised that the war transcended Europe's borders and that the fate of the world lay in the outcome of the conflict. In many ways, Goll was not that different from another exiled intellectual, the Bolshevik revolutionary Vladimir Lenin, who also survived the war in Switzerland, where he composed his own treatise on the conflict entitled *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*.[12] Lenin's infamous train journey to Russia in April 1917 (which coincided with the United States' entry into the war and should be seen as the German government's most effective military operation that year) fostered the Bolshevik revolution and with it changed the fate of the world.

The collection opens with an insightful chapter by Jay Winter, who analyses the issue of social anxiety in 1917. Winter posits 1917 as the year in which the war shifted gears and moved from an imperial axis—a war of nations, governments, and empires—to a revolutionary axis—a war of societies, communities, and competing political values. By highlighting the interconnections between the two axes, which Winter describes as the imperial and revolutionary cultures of war, the chapter brings out the worries contemporaries had about the war, the values it instilled, and the destruction it wrought. After the Russian revolutions, American entry into the war, and the social and economic collapse of most warring (and some neutral) countries, the world at war changed irrevocably. The political truces that dominated domestic politics in many countries strained and often overwhelmed governments. Political polarisation resulted, bringing new ambitions and extraordinary anxieties to the fore. Winter also highlights how the choices made in 1917 by the political authorities on all sides determined the ongoing nature of the culture of revolt and anxiety. The choice for peace and reason could have been made that year. Ultimately, Winter depicts the First World War as a tragedy, and the year 1917 as the year in which the social fissures of the pre-war era brought forth a culture of anxiety and resentment that transcended the post-war period and continues to influence our present.

In Chap. 3, Michael Neiberg picks up the idea of the First World War as a global tragedy and asks questions of how the United States fits into the historiography of this 'war to end all wars'. His answers highlight how rarely American neutrality is considered as a context in which to read the origins of the war and even less as a contributing factor in the conduct and course of the conflict between 1914 and 1917. American entry into the war in 1917 is often simplified as a product of Wilsonian opportunism, economic vagary, or as an instinctual response to the sinking of the *Lusitania* or the reception of the Zimmerman telegram. Neiberg problematises the United States' wartime position both as a neutral and a belligerent. He argues for the importance of studying the perspectives of ordinary Americans in the years of neutrality to answer the question as to why the United States was willing to go to war with Germany and the Central Powers in 1917. In so doing, Neiberg makes a valuable contribution to understanding the First World War as a totalising and radicalising conflict in which the stakes were considered fundamental to all. The United States would not have gone to war in 1917 if Americans did not consider their nation and their political and moral values at risk. It was not Wilson that took the United States to war, but the American people.

Monty Soutar's chapter on Maori contributions to the British imperial war effort offers another powerful reminder of the global reach of the 1914–18 conflict. By explaining how Maori communities in Aotearoa New Zealand responded to Britain's declaration of war, Soutar highlights some of the complexities of Britain's imperial politics at war. Above all, Soutar shows how the mobilisation of Maori communities for war in the year 1917 in particular, had an extraordinary impact on those communities, their servicemen, and the political values at play around race and citizenship in New Zealand. The mobilisation of Maori at 'home' and 'abroad' influenced the political ideas Maori and Pakeha (European New Zealanders) embraced during and following the conflict.

Radhika Singha's chapter also emphasises the global reach of the First World War. The conflict may have started in Europe, but it soon transcended that continent to envelop the non-European world. Like Soutar, Singha's chapter reminds us of the key importance of the non-European face of the war and considers how the conflict infiltrated the Asian subcontinent. Singha's chapter focuses on war finance, on the gift of 100 million pounds to Britain's war expenses, which was raised by means of two war loans (issued in 1917 and 1918). She emphasises the anxiety felt by the colonial regime in asking the Indian population to support the war

in such a direct way. She also highlights how the needs of Britain's total war economy in 1917—stretched as it was to the limits—necessitated the economic mobilisation of India and Indians. In so doing, the British government and metropole became indebted to their colonial subjects, a reality that had a decisive influence on post-war political agendas in India. Singha's chapter weaves together the multifaceted and often ingenious ways in which ordinary Indians were sold on war loan subscriptions: much of the propaganda was self-serving and focused on the economic prudence of the loans, while other messages stressed the wider political values at play in the global conflict. In that propaganda, Indians were as much at war as their imperial masters.

In a provocative think piece, Annette Becker takes us from the lived reality of war to its artistic representations in Chap. 6. Beginning with Isak Dinesen's idea that 'all sorrows can be borne if you tell a story about them' and Karl Kraus's claim that the First World War was the artistic 'crucible of the end of the world', Becker unpicks the culture of grief and trauma that inspired artists during and after the war to represent the violence and tragedy of the conflict in certain ways. Using examples from 1917 and beyond, Becker takes us on a journey through the meaning and commemoration of the First World War in art, reflecting on ten key themes: tragedy, fracture, camouflage, wounds, trauma, race, gender, grief, sacredness, and commemoration. In her quintessential style, Becker accentuates the humanity of the war's destructive power and in so doing reminds us that 'mourning never ends', a theme Ivan Goll would have understood and supported.

In Chap. 7, Galina Rylkova also focuses on the destructive power of the year 1917 to define experience and meaning. She does so by analysing the work of Russian author Ivan Bunin and his 'autobiographical' reflections on the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and its aftermath. Bunin, a Russian intellectual who was extremely critical of the Bolshevik cause, used propaganda imagery of his time to describe the revolutionary violence that swept through Russia from 1917. He employed the same imagery to ascribe meaning to the violence, often revelling in his own literary ideals in doing so. Rylkova reminds us of the need to contextualise Bunin as an authentic source to reflect on the period. But above all, she brings out the phenomenal impact the Russian revolutions of 1917 had on redefining social values in Russia and around the world. Certainly, the revolutions helped to shape, define, and solidify Bunin's own sense of intellectual identity as a Russian who lived his life in exile in Paris during the 1920s.

Peter Stanley too concentrates on the theme of dislocation to investigate the little studied movement of British Territorial troops (or 'Terriers') from the United Kingdom to British India during the war. These volunteer Terriers replaced India's Regulars, who were responsible for policing the colonial population. While the Regulars went to war in Europe, the Terriers took over their predecessors' imperial policing duties. In the process, these men who had volunteered to serve the empire at war became agents of a different kind of state violence: policing local disturbances and riots and adopting the values of their predecessors. For Terriers, the year 1917 finally brought the reality of the war into sharp relief as some were sent to man Britain's Indian war fronts, while others suppressed riots and rebellions in this year of upheaval and crisis.

For Thomas Schmutz, the key theatre of war in 1917 was the Caucasus. In Chap. 9, Schmutz acknowledges the central importance of the Russian revolutions in changing the fate of the Turkish rulers of the Ottoman empire. With the revolutions, Russia retreated from its Ottoman fronts, opening up an attractive vacuum which the Ottoman leadership looked to fill. They did so by forgoing the Ottoman empire's commitments to its Middle Eastern fronts, not least in Palestine where British forces were making serious inroads, and focusing on acquiring a grand Turkish empire that stretched into the geo-strategically vital Caucasus region. That ambition brought the Ottomans into conflict and tension with their German allies. The German leadership never expected Russia to give up the Caucasus and was unprepared for a Turkish renaissance there. It was also confronted by the extreme violence and genocidal policies of the Turkish rulers against the Armenian peoples in the trans-Caucasian region. In the end, only defeat in the war brought Turkish ambitions to rest, although the reverberations of these 1917 developments continue to influence regional politics today. Altogether, Schmutz reminds us of the numerous unlooked for and unexpected implications of the collapse of the Romanov dynasty in 1917.

In Chap. 10, Glyn Harper uses the military history of 1917 to address the key importance of this year of war for New Zealand. He does so by explaining how New Zealand's military campaigns on the western European and Palestinian fronts impacted on soldiers and New Zealand society. For the global military history of the war, the year 1917 was crucial: it made and broke militaries on all fronts. The Russian revolutions evaporated numerous war fronts in south-eastern Europe and in the Caucasus, while the Battle for Caporetto effectively removed Italy from

the war. Even though the entry of the United States in the war offered much-needed material support and the prospect of future military assistance, only the western front and Middle East offered hope for victory for the *Entente* powers. Yet even on the western front, all was not well. French troops mutinied in May, leaving the front weakened and uncertain. It is in this context that New Zealand's contributions to the third battle of Ypres and Britain's Middle East expeditions were so crucial. The battle for Passchendaele was a major military disaster and is remembered as such in Britain and beyond. The failed attack of 12 October, which cost almost one thousand New Zealand soldiers their lives, was the most deadly single-day battle in New Zealand's twentieth-century history. As Harper reminds us, it was Passchendaele that ensured 1917 was a 'catastrophic year' for New Zealanders, who would mourn these losses for generations to come.

Piet Chielens takes up New Zealand's 'in Flanders fields' story in Chap. 11. He does so by explaining the central importance of the 85 kilometres of Belgian frontline to the way in which the world considers and ascribes meaning to the First World War. For Chielens, who is director of In Flanders Fields Museum in Ieper/Ypres, the Belgian portion of the western front offers the quintessential message of the war: of tragedy, needless loss of life, and ultimate destruction. Chielens narrates the importance of the West-Flanders region to commemorative cultures and stories around the world. He identifies the year 1917, and the battle of third Ypres/Passchendaele, as central to that commemorative story. His key contribution is in assigning ongoing relevance, a global *genius loci*, to the West-Flanders region and does so by singling out key stories to make his case for seeing Flanders as a space for 'foundational identity'.

In Chap. 12, Jock Phillips also revisits New Zealand's 1917 Passchendaele experience and asks why the third battle of Ypres does not have the same meaning and relevance in New Zealand commemorative culture as Gallipoli and the ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps). Phillips charts the ways in which New Zealand newspapers reported on the battle in 1917 and on subsequent commemorations of the battle's anniversaries to explain why Passchendaele could disappear from New Zealanders' historical consciousness, only to be recovered in the 1990s. He reminds us how the ebb and flow of public memory affects people's understanding of war and its meaning. Yet he, like many of the other contributors to the collection, also reflects on the longevity of grief as a durable legacy of the war and of the year 1917.

Gorch Pieken brings the collection to a close by asking some searching questions about German war culture and its memorialisation after 1917. Pieken pays particular attention to 1917 as the year which German historians consider marks the start of the 'modern era' and of 'contemporary history'. In so doing, he charts the relationship between the highly politicised writing of German history across two world wars and the Cold War division of Germany, and the ways in which the First World War is (and was) represented in public across that time. From 'war' and 'peace' museums in the 1920s and 1930s, through the glorification of war in the Nazi era, to the erasure of the wars from museum exhibitions in the Cold War years, Germans have had a problematic relationship to the First World War and the idea of war more generally. That complex relationship has a direct bearing on how Germans consider the war today and how they participate in the culture of collective commemoration that has defined the centenary project in the years 2014 to 2017.

Altogether, this collection bears witness to what Jay Winter calls the 'climacteric' nature of 1917: this key year that witnessed and inspired so much change at home and abroad. In 1917, the cataclysm that was the First World War came to a head. Its violence echoed around the world in a complex tangle. Its calls to arms altered and inspired revolutions and reshaped the world's political, social, economic, and cultural landscapes. These reverberations remain with us today: we witness their impact in our collective mourning, in our private rituals, in our family history. We witness their impact in the ongoing wars, revolutions, and conflicts that criss-cross the Middle East, and in the shape of our international system. The First World War is not the 'ancient past'. The year 1917 helped to create our present. We are its heirs, products both of Goll's 1917 laments and his exultations.

Notes

1. Yvan Goll, *Requiem für die Gefallenen von Europa* (Zürich: Rascher, 1917). Translation used here by PoetryHunter.com, accessed September 2017, https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/requiem-for-the-dead-of-europe/.
2. Romain Rolland, *Above the Battle* (Chicago: Open Court, 1916).
3. Andreas Kramer, 'Europa minor. Yvan and Claire Goll's Europe,' in *Europa! Europa? The Avant-Garde, Modernism, and the Fate of a Continent*, eds. Sacha Bru et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 126–37.
4. Louis Couperus, *Brieven van een Nutteloozen Toeschouwer* (Amsterdam: Veen, 1918).

5. Goll, *Requiem.*
6. Jean-Yves Le Naour, *1917: La Paix Impossible* (Paris: Perrin, 2011).
7. Goll, *Requiem,* 38.
8. Cf Peter Jackson, *Beyond the Balance of Power: France and the Politics of National Security in the Era of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 83.
9. Cf William Mulligan, *The Great War for Peace* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2014).
10. For a recent reflection on the importance of 1917 to the United States: *Beyond 1917: The United States and the Global Legacies of the Great War,* eds. Thomas W. Zeiler, David E. Ekbladh, and Benjamin C. Montoya (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
11. Akira Iriye, 'The Historiographic Impact of the Great War,' in *Beyond 1917*, 34.
12. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism: A Popular Outline,* Second edition (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1934).

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CHAPTER 2

War and Anxiety in 1917

Jay Winter

The Culture of War Anxiety

The overthrow of the Russian Tsar Nicholas II on 15 March 1917 transformed the war and the world. It led directly to the victory of the Central powers on the eastern front and the withdrawal of Russia from the war. The resulting fracture of the Allied powers was repaired by the arrival three weeks later of the United States, not as an ally but as an associated power of the *Entente*. The full force of American military strength, though, would take at least a year to prepare and longer to arrive on the western front. After April 1917 it was American potential that mattered, and all understood that that was a prospect for the future.[1] In sum, in 1917, the 'ides of March' did not augur well either for the Allies or for the Central powers. Part of the reason was that there were disturbing signs among all the belligerents not only of domestic political divisions, but also of dangerous social polarisation in this, the third year of the war.

After three years of industrial mobilisation, the first stage of a series of strike-waves spread through Europe. They lasted until roughly 1923. The phenomenon was both war-related in the way it reflected wartime inflation and inequality of sacrifice, and secular. Since the 1880s, moments of

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major trade union growth were often followed by strike activity. The year 1917 presented no exception. Significantly, the intensity of the strikes in 1917 suggested that the postponement of workers' demands on wages and conditions of labour, which had occurred in all belligerent countries and some neutral ones since 1914, acted like the lid of a pressure cooker. Inflation fuelled the fire, and trade unions and other social groups, in particular women protesting shortages and outrageous food and fuel prices, took to the streets or downed tools. They did so despite understanding the desperate needs of the war machine.[2] Indeed, the March revolution in Russia was triggered by a women's protest over bread prices.

In 1917, the domestic political truce of the first half of the war came to an end. The German Social Democratic party split in early 1917. Those wanting an end to the war met at Gotha on 6 April and founded the USPD, the Independent Social Democratic party. Once again, women's groups were prominent in this radicalisation of the political left. The British Liberal party split, in part over personalities, in part over conscription and the suppression of the 1916 rising in Ireland. In France, Georges Clemenceau, who became prime minister in November, was a divisive leader. He had his Radical colleague Joseph Caillaux arrested for advocating peace negotiations: Caillaux was convicted of treason in 1918.[3]

In 1917, bloody race riots broke out in the United States in East St Louis, Illinois, and even more ominously in Houston, Texas, where 156 black soldiers mutinied. Sixteen civilians and four soldiers died during the riots. Subsequently, 19 soldiers were hanged and over 40 imprisoned for long terms.[4] In 1918, American socialist leader Eugene Debs went to prison for violating the Espionage Act by urging men to resist the draft.[5] One opponent of the war, Robert Prager, a German national and trade unionist, was lynched in Maryville, Illinois. His killers were acquitted.[6] The gloves were off in domestic as well as in global politics.

Polarisation marked the advent of the increasingly strident political right as well. When the German *Reichstag* issued its peace resolution in July 1917, disgruntled deputies and their supporters set up the *Vaterlandspartei* (Fatherland party), with the notable support of Admiral von Tirpitz and the industrialist Alfred Hugenberg.[7] By then, the German war effort was almost entirely in the hands of a military industrial group that gave the army whatever it needed, but at the price of creating massive bottlenecks and shortages on the home front. Thus, social protest intensified at the same time as economic difficulties proliferated.

For the French, the war crisis of early 1917 antedated the Chemin des Dames offensive with its subsequent mutinies. There is no evidence that social agitation on France's home front influenced these mutinous soldiers, who refused to continue the futile and bloody offensive launched by General Nivelle on 16 April.[8] Instead both the mutiny and the existence of widespread unrest on the home front reflected the exhaustion and anger felt by most French citizens. To them, as to many around the world, the war appeared to be endless. The global conflict—the war of 1914–16—had produced a massive stalemate. Neither side had a sufficient advantage to bring the warring parties to the conference table. And in 30 months of war, the two sides had lost perhaps seven million men killed in action or dead of wounds, and another 15 million wounded or prisoners of war. The giant campaigns of 1916, which we today call the battles of Verdun and the Somme, had not changed the strategic balance on the western front one iota. Fatigue and social friction were evident everywhere.

One way to configure this period is to suggest that the war be divided in two, there and then, in March 1917 with the onset of the first Russian revolution. That is the turning point, the moment that the political character of the war changed. I call it the 'climacteric' of 1917, both internationally and domestically.[9] Russia's withdrawal from and American entry into the war presented a massive change. So did the reappearance, widening, and reconfiguration of the fault lines of pre-war social conflict that had been largely frozen or kept in check since 1914. Material hardships and the toll taken by war losses and war work intensified anger on most home fronts (including in many neutral countries) over profiteering and conspicuous consumption by the privileged few.[10] In addition, with eight million men in uniform in France alone, families had been divided for too long, and doubts appeared as to whether older forms of family life were actually under threat. The year 1917 augmented popular wartime anxiety and bitterness. Although these feelings were not directly politicised before 1917, they had explosive potential, which underwrote much of the social unrest and upheaval during and after 1917.

In 1917, the old order on both sides was well aware of a new menace: the prospect of social unrest leading to revolution and the potential of civil war concerned Europe's ruling elite. The spectre of domestic conflict justifies our sense of rupture in the midst of the Great War and of the importance of the simultaneous fragmentation and recombination of alliances. After March 1917, then, the conflict sustained two war cultures. One way to configure the difference between these two war cultures is to speak of