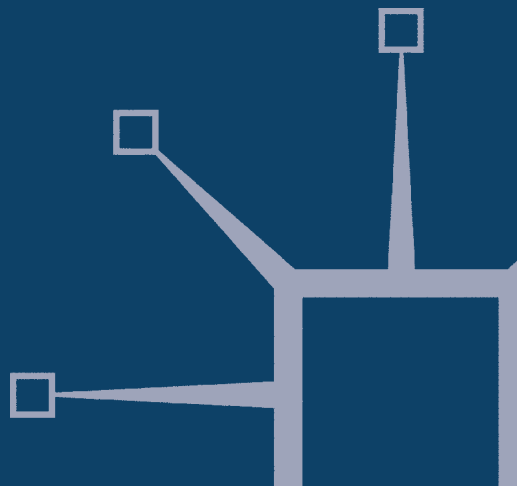


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Militarism and the British Left, 1902–1914

Matthew Johnson



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Matthew Johnson

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For my parents

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List of Abbreviations

Bod. Lib.	Bodleian Library, Oxford
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
HLRO	House of Lords Record Office
ILP	Independent Labour Party
IML	Imperial Maritime League
KCL	King's College London
LWC	Liberal War Committee
NAM	National Army Museum
NLS	National Library of Scotland
NLW	National Library of Wales
NSL	National Service League
SDF	Social Democratic Federation
TFNS	Territorial Force Nursing Service
TUC	Trades Union Congress
U. Glas. L.	University of Glasgow Library
VAD	Voluntary Aid Detachment
WSRO	West Sussex Record Office

Introduction

Militarism and the Left: Conceptual Problems and the Case of Britain

'Militarism', declared the radical MP Richard Cornthwaite Lambert in 1917, 'is the negation of Liberalism'.¹ These words reflected a commonplace of early twentieth-century British politics, and one which has persisted in historical writing, largely unchallenged, ever since. Militarism has traditionally been regarded as a phenomenon of the political right, associated with aggression in foreign policy and with reactionary politics and authoritarian government at home. It has been seen as alien – indeed, as antithetical – to the politics of 'progress'. Many on the left have regarded an opposition to militarism to be integral to their creed. This was true not only of Liberals like Lambert but also of progressives and radicals of other shades. The British Marxist Harry Quelch, editor of the Social Democratic Federation's weekly newspaper *Justice*, insisted that 'socialism and militarism ... are necessarily opposed to each other'.² The Labour Party conference held in Belfast in 1907 carried without debate a resolution 'recognizing militarism to be a thing inherently evil in itself, [and] an enemy to progress'.³ The potency of such ideas is reflected in the large number of historical studies of left-wing *anti*-militarism in Britain during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴ The incompatibility between militarism and progressive principles has been regarded as so fundamental and so profound that the militarization of British politics and society during the years of total war between 1914 and 1918 has often been regarded as a principal cause of the rapid collapse of the Liberal Party, and perhaps of the disintegration of British Liberalism itself.⁵

Such an interpretation will not be advanced here. This book challenges the narrow, simple equation of militarism with right-wing or anti-progressive politics. It argues that manifestations of militarism in Britain during the early twentieth century cut across the conventional

2 *Militarism and the British Left*

dividing lines of party politics far more than has typically been realized, and that militarism and the politics of 'the left' have not been as incompatible as has traditionally been assumed. This is not primarily a study of politics in wartime, although the ways in which the relationship between militarism and the left was affected by the outbreak of the First World War are considered in the concluding chapter. Instead, this work is concerned first and foremost with the distinct, and in many ways more interesting, problem of militarism in a liberal society in peacetime. It argues that, whatever the problems posed by the demands of waging total war after August 1914, the British left had been able (albeit, not without controversy) to accommodate and even to assimilate manifestations of militarism during the preceding years of peace.

'Left' and 'right' are potentially problematic concepts for political historians, and this is particularly true for a book such as this. Because militarism has so frequently been seen as a defining feature of 'the right' (or at least, of certain strands of 'the right'), any study positing a relationship between militarism and 'the left' more complex than one of simple antagonism risks descending into circular arguments. In fact, of course, the meaning and significance of the terms 'left' and 'right' in politics have evolved considerably over time. Through much of the nineteenth century, the left-right political spectrum in western Europe essentially reflected a debate about the balance between liberty and authority. The left sought to preserve and extend the liberty of the individual by limiting the arbitrary power of the state and expanding the scale of popular political participation; the right championed the interests of order and stability, typically by defending the privileges of monarchy, aristocracy, and the established Church. Complicating this debate, however, was the question of property. As popular participation in the political process expanded during the century, the socio-economic dimension of liberty, and questions about the ownership and distribution of property, became increasingly important. By the early twentieth century, powerful elements on 'the left' had come to advance an increasingly collectivist view of society, which legitimated a strong and economically redistributive state, while a growing section of 'the right' became increasingly suspicious of state authority.⁶

Complicating this picture further for the historian of British politics is the fact that the party-political system that had developed in Britain by the early twentieth century reflected concerns rather different from the polarization presumed by the classic liberal political spectrum. The great Victorian Liberal Party, which arguably had stood above all else for the liberty of the individual in political and religious matters,

had been fractured by William Ewart Gladstone's decision to pursue the cause of Irish 'Home Rule' in the 1880s. This initiative led to the permanent estrangement of a 'Liberal Unionist' faction containing individuals as diverse as the radical Joseph Chamberlain and the Whiggish marquess of Hartington. This grouping increasingly gravitated towards the Conservative Party, and leading Liberal Unionists were invited to serve in a coalition cabinet formed by Lord Salisbury in 1895.⁷ The result, by the end of the nineteenth century, was thus a party system that revolved not primarily around questions of 'liberty' or 'property', but around the question of Ireland.

The spread of socialist ideas in Britain, in various ethical, Marxist, and Fabian forms; the emergence of independent working-class representation in Parliament, with the formation of the Labour Party; and the development within the Liberal Party of a socially collectivist 'New Liberalism', championed by theorists such as J. A. Hobson and L. T. Hobhouse, reflected the increasing importance of a socio-economic dimension to high politics during the early twentieth century – one which attached considerable importance to the question of 'property' and placed a premium on the pursuit of greater equality in British society.⁸ In many respects, however, the party system before the First World War continued to be defined primarily by other questions and controversies. Joseph Chamberlain's attempt to convert the Unionist Party to a policy of Tariff Reform based on the principle of 'Imperial Preference' had the effect of alienating Free Traders within the party, some of whom, including Winston Churchill, subsequently defected to the Liberals.⁹ At the same time, the tariff question worked to draw the Liberal and Labour parties together in an 'instinctive and ideological' defence of Free Trade that would remain a central foundation of the 'progressive alliance' between the two parties over the following decade.¹⁰ Like Gladstone before him, Chamberlain had managed to polarize politics along lines quite distinct from the controversies of the traditional 'left-right' spectrum.

The British political 'left', as it existed by the general election of 1906, was thus effectively a Free Trade coalition, dominated by the Liberal Party but also including the new Labour Party and a majority within the trade union movement, and opposed by a Unionist Party which had for all practical purposes been captured by the Tariff Reform lobby. The 'fiscal question' remained the defining controversy of British politics at least until 1910, when the question of Irish Home Rule re-emerged into the political foreground. This study accordingly construes 'the left' in pre-war Britain in a broad, institutional sense. The focus is primarily

upon the Liberal Party, which before the Great War was still the most powerful and popular force in British progressive politics and the party of government for most of the decade before 1914. But other organizations and groupings are also examined, including the Labour Party, the Fabians, the trade union movement, and, on the Marxist fringe of the British left, the Social Democratic Federation. This diverse collection of groups and organizations was capable of accommodating a great variety of opinions on a great many political questions. For example, although much of the left adopted an internationalist and anti-imperial stance in foreign affairs, imperialist sentiment was well entrenched on one wing of the Liberal Party, while a potent strand of 'patriotism', rooted in a very particular conception of 'Englishness', ran through much of the Labour movement and even the socialist fringes of the left.¹¹ This book argues that militarism represented another controversy which did not neatly follow the conventional contours of British politics. Although militaristic sentiment and practice did not always sit comfortably alongside progressive principles, there was an intellectual and ideological space on the pre-war British left in which certain forms of militarism could take root. Indeed, as the following chapters will demonstrate, militarism itself could at times take on ostensibly 'progressive' forms that proved particularly appealing to elements on the left. Rather than simple antagonism, then, the relationship between militarism and progressive politics by 1914 was one of ambiguity and unresolved tension.

Militarism as a historical problem and its relevance to the British experience

One of the first obstacles confronting the historian of militarism is the vagueness and controversy which has surrounded the concept since it first entered common European usage in the second half of the nineteenth century. Like 'fascism' and 'imperialism' – concepts with which it has often been associated – the word 'militarism' has frequently been used simply as a term of political abuse, with little thought as to its actual meaning. Such negative connotations have been apparent since the first recorded usage of the term in English, in the 1860s, when the Italian patriot Giuseppe Garibaldi's disdainful reference to 'that disease of modern times, known under the sinister name of militarism' was widely reported in the British press.¹² Even in more scholarly circles,

the term has often been used imprecisely, and to describe a variety of ideological, institutional, social, political, and economic phenomena. Indeed, the debate about the meaning of the term 'militarism' now forms a subject of study in its own right.¹³ A new survey of this debate is not in the purview of this book. But some examination of militarism as a concept is an essential preliminary to the argument that follows. The remainder of this introduction will therefore examine the different theoretical forms of militarism, before considering the question of how far they are pertinent to a study of a society such as Britain in the early twentieth century. Subsequent chapters will then examine the relationship between different strands of militarism and progressive politics in a British context.

Militarism as a constitutional or institutional problem in politics

From the time the term 'militarism' entered political language during the later nineteenth century, it has often been defined as a problem of civil-military relations. Albert Lauterbach, for example, described an 'original form' of militarism, which advocated the political leadership of the military in the state.¹⁴ Stanislav Andreski later qualified this interpretation, arguing that such a tendency is only properly termed 'militarism' in societies which have developed a differentiation between civil and military spheres of authority and administration, and that it would be improper to apply the term to 'primitive states' where such differentiations are absent, even though military chiefs or warlords might hold supreme power.¹⁵ Militarism as a 'constitutional' problem may also refer more broadly to the excessive or disproportionate political influence of a military caste within societies nominally under civilian leadership, or to the freedom of the armed forces to act independently of civilian political oversight and control.

'Militarization'

Another strand of militarism, as Andreski noted, is concerned with 'the extensive control by the military over social life, coupled with the subservience of the whole society to the needs of the army'.¹⁶ This phenomenon may itself take several different forms. It might be manifest, as David Stevenson has argued, in military claims on the economic resources of a state or community.¹⁷ But it may also refer, more profoundly, to the organization of society itself. In addition to the 'original

form' already cited here, Lauterbach referred to a 'present-day' form of militarism, which 'attempts to make a soldier out of each civilian'.¹⁸ This 'present-day' form (which Lauterbach identified in the 1940s) echoed Herbert Spencer's categorization, some seven decades previously, of the 'militant type' of society. As distinct from states conforming to what he termed the 'industrial type' (which were characterized by individual freedom and voluntary cooperation), Spencer's 'militant' societies were those in which 'the army is the nation mobilized, while the nation is the quiescent army'. In such a state, each citizen is regarded primarily as a military unit, and the populace is often subject to authoritarian coercion along military lines.¹⁹ Andreski suggested that this form of militarism might more accurately be described as 'militarization'.²⁰ This latter term has also been used, in a similar sense, by Michael Geyer, who defines it as 'the contradictory and tense social process in which civil society organizes itself for the production of violence'.²¹ Not all commentators have employed the term so precisely, however, and the exact relationship between 'militarization' and other forms of 'militarism' has eluded scholarly consensus. David Stevenson has argued that, if 'militarism' is to be defined as a 'pretension by the military leadership to determine government policy', or in terms of military claims on a state's economic resources, then 'militarization' represents 'the measure of how far such aspirations have succeeded'.²² John Gillis, however, following Geyer's definition, has maintained that 'militarization ... does not imply the formal dominance of the military [over civilian authority]'.²³

It would in fact be useful to talk of two distinct forms of 'militarization'. Where the subordination of society to military needs takes the form of an acceptance of military claims on economic or material resources, and where the energies of the state are channelled accordingly into military priorities such as armaments production rather than being exerted in other social or civilian directions, we might talk of the *militarization of the state*. Where, on the other hand, we are dealing with military attempts to harness not merely the economic or industrial resources of a society but the civilian population itself – that is to say, where the state endeavours to 'make a soldier out of each civilian', where the nation is conceived as the 'quiescent army', and where the problem concerns nothing less than the transformation of civilian society – it is more helpful and accurate to talk of the *militarization of society*.

In practice, of course, these two phenomena are often closely related. But this is not necessarily or universally the case. Those interested in promoting military efficiency through the militarization of the state

might well view the militarization of civilian society, and the creation of a mass army, as an effective means to this end. Alternatively, however, they may regard a smaller but more professional army – or indeed a powerful navy, air force, or, more recently, nuclear weapons capability, in which mass direct popular participation is less feasible – as the basis of military power, in which case the militarization of civilian society might be unnecessary, or even counterproductive if it reduces the economic or material resources of a society which might then be available for military purposes.

Ideas, sentiments, and values

Not all observers have defined militarism in such institutional terms. The American jurist and scholar Edmund Munroe Smith, writing towards the end of the Great War, advanced a rather different interpretation:

A state is not necessarily militaristic because it prepares for war, [he claimed]. It is not necessarily militaristic because it holds all its able-bodied male citizens to military service ... nor because it has a powerful navy. ... Nor is a state militaristic because it has a large body of professional military officers whose duty it is to form plans for the conduct of war. ... In a nation, as in an individual, *militarism is a state of mind*.²⁴

Specifically, Smith argued, a society should be judged militaristic insofar as the ‘views and feelings natural and almost necessary in its army and navy are shared by its civilians’. A similar definition was to be found by this time in the Oxford *New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, which described militarism not simply in terms of ‘the predominance of the military class in government or administration’ or ‘the tendency to regard military efficiency as the paramount interest of the state’, but also as implying ‘the prevalence of military sentiment or ideals among a people’.²⁵

In this latter sense, ‘militarism’ is sometimes taken simply to mean bellicosity or aggressiveness in foreign relations, and a readiness to resort to war. As Martin Ceadel has noted, however, these tendencies are not unique to ‘militarism’ but are common to several distinct theories of war and peace, including what he terms ‘defencism’ (defined as an acceptance of the need to prepare for, and if necessary engage in, wars of a defensive nature) and, particularly, ‘crusading’ (described as a willingness to use aggressive war to promote ideological ends). What

distinguishes true 'militarism' from these other approaches is its belief that war is necessary to human development, since it is only through warfare that mankind's greatest virtues may find free expression. War is not simply a means to an end, therefore, but a positive good in its own right; it represents an ideal state for societies, offering an escape from the stagnation which is supposedly engendered by prolonged periods of peace. As the elder Moltke, chief of the German general staff, famously declared, 'permanent peace is a dream and not even a beautiful one'.²⁶ Militarism, unlike 'defencism' or 'crusading', holds that *all* wars are justified, aggressive as well as defensive, and regardless of the object in pursuit of which they are waged.²⁷

Ceadel's typology has been challenged by Anthony Coates, who rejects any distinction between 'militarism' and 'crusading', arguing that the ends and the means of warfare cannot so easily be divorced, and that Ceadel has defined 'militarism' too narrowly. For Coates, 'the hallmark of militarism is the lust for war'. The infusion of war with any higher moral purpose – including any ideological or moral objectives that might be secured through victory – serves only to remove the obstacles to its waging, and, ultimately, to increase both the likelihood and the ferocity of potential conflict.²⁸ The problem with this critique of Ceadel's typology, however, is that its refusal to acknowledge a distinction between the means and ends of warfare results in a failure to take account of the extent to which 'crusading' might be intended to promote ideals such as order or justice, and thereby help to prevent or *abolish* war in the longer term. More fundamentally, it fails to acknowledge that Ceadel's typology is deliberately framed as one consisting 'not of empirical or descriptive categories but of ideal types or paradigms'. Like all such typologies, it might appear to suggest that its categories are more rigidly differentiated than they in fact are, and Ceadel concedes that in reality these categories 'usually blur into each other at the margins, since each axis of the typology is normally a continuum'. In practice, therefore, individuals or groups in society who might conventionally be supposed to be 'militarists' are in fact revealed as straddling the dividing line between two (or more) different categories of thought – for example, militarist and extreme defencist.²⁹ In this sense, the narrowness of the terms in which Ceadel defines militarism is revealed as a strength of his typology, rather than a weakness, since it exposes the ambiguities that in fact cloud much thinking about the value of war in society.

The spread of 'military sentiment or ideals' among a civilian population does not, however, necessarily extend to a belief in the inherent virtues of war. As Cecil Delisle Burns argued, militaristic sentiments or

ideals might be construed more broadly as representing a particular moral code, reflecting and promoting a distinctly military set of values. These include the glorification of 'personal courage, the adventurous spirit, loyalty to a person or cause and bodily strength and endurance'.³⁰ Hebert Spencer identified a similar moral code underpinning his 'militant' type of society, in which 'goodness' becomes identified with 'bravery and [physical] strength', and loyalty and obedience to authority are lauded.³¹ These are, of course, precisely those virtues which are ostensibly promoted by Ceadel's 'militaristic' theory of war and peace. But the lauding of these virtues does not always lead to a preoccupation with questions of foreign policy and international relations, and, indeed, such value systems may find free expression in societies which are at peace, and in a purely domestic context.

Societies in which militaristic sentiment has taken root among the civilian population will tend to invest the army as an institution, and the soldiery collectively, with an inflated social prestige. 'Prestige' in this sense is distinct from 'power' (i.e., the political or constitutional predominance of the army in a state, as described above). As Andreski noted, armies which are institutionally weak may still enjoy enormous popular prestige (as, for example, in Weimar Germany), while conversely the political preponderance of the army is not necessarily attended by elevated social *status* for the soldiery (as demonstrated by the example of Cuba under Batista, where the soldiers ruled, but were despised rather than admired).³² Militaristic sentiment regards military service itself as ennobling, both to the individual who serves and to his community, and is generally disdainful of business activities and of those engaged in industry, trade, commerce, and other civilian professions such as politics, diplomacy, and the law.³³ Since military service is viewed as inherently honourable by militaristic societies, it potentially provides a route to circumvent the normal rules and constraints of social status relationships. As Delisle Burns observed, 'the bank clerk or grocer can be treated as a "hero" when he wears a military uniform'.³⁴ Militaristic sentiment accordingly places a heavy emphasis on military ceremony, symbolism, and paraphernalia including titles, ranks, decorations, and uniforms, and assumes what Alfred Vagts described as 'the qualities of caste and cult, authority and belief'. Vagts, indeed, went so far as to argue that militarism properly defined is characterized by an obsession with military drill, ceremony, and paraphernalia that *transcends* 'true military purposes', and may even be harmful from the point of view of military efficiency.³⁵ Andreski, however, argued that, since the tendency towards a shift of valuation from ends to means and from content to

form is 'a ubiquitous social phenomenon', to define militarism solely in terms of the militarily *inefficient* addiction to drill, ceremonies, and military trappings is to construe the phenomenon too narrowly.³⁶

Another, related, phenomenon which has also been the subject of some debate is the imitation of military demeanour and paraphernalia by civilians in walks of life apparently unconnected with war. Andreski, again, argued that it would be inappropriate to call this tendency 'militarism' since it 'can flourish even where militarism is not prominent'.³⁷ In practice, however, the blurring of the line distinguishing form from purpose in these ostensibly civilian groups means that the problem of whether or not such phenomena represent militaristic tendencies is often less than straightforward.

Militarism in Britain?

'Militarism', as we have seen, is not a simple phenomenon to define. It represents, at the very least, a multifaceted problem and quite possibly a collection of distinct or only loosely related phenomena. Attempts have occasionally been made at a definitional synthesis. Andreski proffered a general definition of militarism as 'the compound of militancy ["readiness to resort to war"], preponderance of the army in the state, adulation of military virtues, and militarization'. He went on to assert that 'where all four components are present to a high degree ... we have a clear case of militarism. Where only two or three are in evidence we might speak of partial militarism'.³⁸

Taken in its entirety, Andreski's militaristic 'compound' might not at first glance seem particularly pertinent to the modern British historical experience. Indeed, in many accounts of Britain's recent history, militarism has been seen essentially as a 'foreign' problem. From the later nineteenth century, militarism was regarded by most British (and many continental) observers as being synonymous with 'Prussianism'. Prussia, and from 1871 the German *Reich*, with its authoritarian government, politically powerful military caste, large standing army, and compulsory military service, appeared the paradigm of the militaristic state. That is not to say that militarism was not perceived to exist in other states. During the 1860s Pierre Proudhon had used the term to describe the military aspect of the centralized Belgian monarchy.³⁹ By the turn of the century the Italian historian Guglielmo Ferrero, while acknowledging Germany as the quintessential 'military' nation, was arguing that 'militarism' in the sense of the prevalence of 'military ideas' and 'military patriotism' was actually more pronounced in France.⁴⁰ Britain, however,

was regarded by most observers as a state in which militarism had put down only the weakest roots. With its long-established parliamentary tradition, its small and politically subordinate army, and its freedom from conscription, Britain was the archetype of the Spencerian 'industrial' society, and the apparent antithesis of the 'militant' or militaristic state.⁴¹ This was not only the conclusion of Whiggish Englishmen. The German constitutional historian Otto Hintze agreed that Britain was uniquely free from the 'absolutism and militarism' that characterized the continental powers. He attributed this exceptionalism to geopolitical factors; Britain's insular situation and comparative freedom from external threats negated the need for a vast standing army of the sort which in continental Europe had become 'the very backbone of the new centralized greater state'.⁴² The Italian liberal Ferrero, likewise, agreed that 'of all European countries, England is the one where militarism is reduced to a minimum'.⁴³

Not all observers, however, subscribed to this view of British exceptionalism. Imperial expansion over the course of the nineteenth century entailed a prolonged process of armed conquest and the forcible suppression of foreign peoples, and this process was to have profound implications for Britain, both domestically and internationally. Late-Victorian critics of imperialism came to regard militarism as one of the most worrying social and political ills fostered by a policy of overseas expansion. Positivists such as Edward Beesly, professor of history at University College, London, denounced colonialism as 'tending to prolong militarism, to imperil the peace of the world, and to retard the industrial, political, and moral progress of mankind'. Malcolm Quin agreed, warning of the dangerous effects of imperialism on the British character, and lamenting that 'the sagacious choice of peace as the highest of our country's interests has given place to a puerile delight in military display'.⁴⁴ During the 1890s a group of radical Liberal and pacifist politicians and journalists, led by Sir Wilfrid Lawson and George Herbert Perris, were moved to organize an Increased Armaments Protest Committee, intended to provide 'an effective antidote to the Jingo, militarist, and sham-patriotic sentiment which at present exerts an almost unrestrained influence upon the public mind'.⁴⁵

Unfortunately, the outbreak of the second Anglo-Boer War in 1899 appeared to demonstrate that such antidotes had been singularly ineffective. The war unleashed a wave of popular 'jingoism', defined by J. A. Hobson as a pathological form of hyper-patriotism, involving 'the glorification of brute force and an ignorant contempt for foreigners'.⁴⁶ Hobson believed that the rapid urbanization of Victorian British society

had lowered the physical vitality and weakened the moral character of a large section of the population, leaving them easy prey for sensationalist appeals to excitement and 'military passion' of the sort promulgated in the music halls of the nation's towns and cities.⁴⁷ He also worried that the financially driven imperialism of the later nineteenth century had forced Britain into an unnecessary and dangerous arms race against the other European colonial powers:

The patent admitted fact that, as a result of imperial competition, an ever larger proportion of the time, energy, and money of 'imperialist' nations is absorbed by naval and military armaments, and that no check upon further absorption is regarded as practicable by Imperialists, brings 'militarism' into the forefront of practical politics.⁴⁸

Similar concerns were voiced during the Boer War by the Fabian socialist George Bernard Shaw, who complained about the 'recent vogue of militarism' which had taken root in Britain and was characterized by a paranoid view of foreign affairs, 'bluster of the "who's afraid?" kind in the press', and reckless calls for military expansion.⁴⁹ These observations, and the agitation against increases in defence expenditure waged by committed anti-militarists during the years before the outbreak of the First World War, were in the tradition of what Volker Berghahn has described as the 'socialist' critique of militarism. This interpretation regarded international competition in armaments as forming, in the words of the German social democrat Wilhelm Liebknecht, the 'whole essence of militarism'. It held militarism to be a ubiquitous feature of all pre-socialist societies – rather than of all pre-industrial societies, as suggested by the Spencerian 'liberal' critique – and a problem to which liberal Britain was just as prone as any of the more authoritarian powers of continental Europe.⁵⁰ Opposition to 'bloated' armaments remained an important cause to many progressives, including radical Liberals as well as socialists, during the decade following the end of hostilities in South Africa. But the tendency in Britain to equate militarism with 'Prussianism' proved tenacious. Indeed, such assumptions were strongly reinforced during the Great War – a war regarded by many Liberals in particular as a struggle against 'Prussian militarism' – even as British society underwent an unprecedented degree of militarization in pursuit of victory.⁵¹

In the years following the end of Great War, voices were again raised in Britain suggesting that militarism had not been a uniquely Prussian

phenomenon. The moral acceptance of war and the obsession with military preparedness which had seemingly brought about the catastrophe of August 1914 was held to have been a problem in all European societies, including Britain herself. Perhaps the most trenchant proponent of this argument after 1918 was Caroline Playne, whose work *The Pre-War Mind in Britain* was published in 1928. Even Playne, however, maintained that militarism had not developed in Britain in the same way that it had elsewhere in Europe, and she appeared to concede that militarism was somehow less 'natural' or less inherent among the British than it was in other European societies:

The Briton [she declared] has little of the sense of the glory of fight and conquest, of the pure, simple military spirit ... which at times seizes a Frenchman, inspires a mystic faith and drives him forth to quixotic fighting filled with religious fervour. Neither does the Briton care for the order and method of Militarism, the fashion and show of Militarism, which appeal to the German. He has no need for conscious display of power, no conception of collective ordering of might.

Where militarism had developed in Britain, Playne argued, it had been acquired almost accidentally, as 'the product of imperialism'.⁵² Arguments such as this gained some ground in Britain during the interwar years. Yet the emergence of overtly militaristic and heavily militarized regimes in continental Europe and the Far East, and the outbreak of the Second World War against the Axis powers, meant that by the 1940s it remained easy to assert, as did the American Albert Lauterbach, that 'militarism in Great Britain, France, and the United States, has on the whole been less absolute than in Germany'.⁵³

Only in the last few decades has the question of militarism in Britain begun to receive serious scholarly attention. One of the most significant contributions to this field was made by Anne Summers, who pointed to the popularity of the Victorian Volunteer Force and the various Edwardian paramilitary youth movements such as the Boys' Brigade and Baden-Powell's Boy Scouts, as well as the existence of patriotic leagues agitating for military and naval expansion, as evidence of the development of militarism in Britain before 1914.⁵⁴ Many of these 'militaristic' organizations and movements have subsequently been subjected to detailed historical study in their own right.⁵⁵ Another notable contribution to the debate was made by Olive Anderson, who traced the growth of what she termed 'Christian militarism' in Victorian

Britain, in a study examining the interplay of religious and military ideals and changing British attitudes towards the army in the aftermath of the Crimean War.⁵⁶

Many of these works have been concerned, either explicitly or implicitly, with explaining the outbreak of war in 1914. Brian Bond, for example, pointed to the development of a 'militaristic mentality' across Europe during the decades before the Great War, manifesting itself in Britain in calls for greater military preparedness and for a militarization of civilian society.⁵⁷ Echoing the concerns of the late Victorian Positivists and interwar critics such as Playne, another important strand of recent scholarship has approached British militarism in its imperial context. According to John MacKenzie, militarism was a prominent element in the 'ideological cluster' of concepts which surrounded late-Victorian British imperialism – alongside 'a devotion to royalty, an identification and worship of national heroes, together with a contemporary cult of personality, and racial ideas associated with Social Darwinism' – and which came to 'infuse and be propagated by every organ of British life' during this era.⁵⁸ Other historians, however, have questioned the cultural penetration of the 'new type of patriotism' described by MacKenzie, and Bernard Porter in particular has argued that the Empire's impact on British society and culture was in fact extremely uneven and generally superficial.⁵⁹

Within this debate, the British tendency to define 'militarism' in 'Prussian' terms has proven remarkably tenacious. Thus, Michael Howard argued that

[a]lthough Edwardian Britain was conscious of the need for the martial values and spasmodic efforts were made to inculcate them, it cannot be called a militaristic society; indeed the lack of active interest in military matters and the low prestige enjoyed by the Army among the bulk of the population was a matter of repeated complaint.⁶⁰

Yet as John Gillis argues, 'judging one's own society against this "other", even if it is an ideal type, begs the question of whether militarism itself might mean different things in different societies'.⁶¹ Indeed, it seems clear that historians might profitably move away from Andreski's sociological references to 'clear militarism' and 'partial militarism', to acknowledge the influence of political, socio-economic, and cultural factors on the development of militarism in a variety of historical contexts – each deserving of analysis on its own terms. This point was made explicitly by Summers, who argued that 'there was such a phenomenon