

LSE'S WAR

1914-18

LSE WAS NOT YET 20 YEARS OLD WHEN THE FIRST WORLD WAR BEGAN AND IT FOUND ITSELF DEALING WITH THE REALITIES OF WAR. AS THE WORLD MARKS THE CONFLICT'S CENTENNIAL, DAVID STEVENSON LOOKS BACK AT HOW EVENTS OF THE TIME HAVE SHAPED THE SCHOOL AND ITS MEMBERS.

The School's founding characteristics helped shape its first world war experience. Though established by socialists (and with money from a socialist bequest), its mission was educational. On this point, Sidney Webb, the nearest the School had to a founding father, was emphatic. His models were the *Ecole libre des sciences politiques*, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Columbia University, the Charlottenburg Technische Hochschule and Toynbee Hall. His anti-model (at least implicitly) was Oxbridge. LSE would be research-intensive, committed to the metropolis and vocational in emphasis.

Despite becoming a University of London college and offering an undergraduate programme centred on the BSc (Econ) degree, in 1914 it retained these features. Its library was second only to the British Museum, but much of its teaching was pre-degree and delivered after 6pm. Of its 1,681 students in 1913-14, 142 came from overseas and 583 were women. Over 300 were railway administrators, paid for by the railway companies, while between 1907 and 1914 over 250 army officers attended. According to Lord Haldane, the founder of this programme, "people did not realise that the London School of Economics had been a great war school".

In 1914 preparation became reality. Special lecture courses addressed the conflict's background; Belgian refugees took classes; the School community paid

for a catering van to serve the Front; and dozens of its members did military or civilian war work. When Zeppelins raided London, students watched the searchlight display; later, a bomber attack smashed a skylight. Although a semblance of normality persisted, with dances and Epping Forest picnics, student numbers almost halved and a Treasury subsidy was needed. Teaching cover grew difficult. The Director, William Pember Reeves, was a New Zealand academic and politician, whose wife, Maud, had published a classic study of Lambeth housewives, *Round About a Pound a Week*. But both were harried by anxiety about their son, who in 1917 was killed while flying over France. Reeves became a recluse and Maud turned to spiritualism, while the School's management devolved onto its Secretary, Christine MacTaggart.

Over 200 staff and students did military service and 70 lost their lives, 42 of them killed in action. Hugh Dalton, a postgraduate student who would become a Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, served in the heavy artillery. Richard Henry (R H) Tawney, who was administering a research fund, joined the army as a private and published a searing narrative of going over the top. The experience sharpened his socialist commitment, on which his writings would become an inspiration to politicians as disparate as Roy Hattersley and Tony Benn. Like Tawney, Clement Attlee, who had beaten Dalton to a lectureship in social policy, volunteered despite being over the maximum

enlistment age. The last soldier but one to evacuate the Gallipoli beachhead, he rose to the rank of major. The war underlined to him how state power could redress social evils, and also deepened, in a reticent man, a surprisingly emotional English patriotism.

According to the *Clare Market Review*, the conflict created an opportunity "to rebuild our social system along new and better lines". The School had been designed to train an administrative elite. Among its members, A L Bowley compiled munitions statistics; Mary Stocks monitored enemy newspapers; and Ella Winter assisted Felix Frankfurter at the Paris Peace Conference, where Paul Mantoux served as translator. As for the Webbs, they had previously thought little about war and peace, and at first were uncertain of their stance. But Beatrice joined the Lloyd George government's Reconstruction Committee, while Sidney commissioned a pioneering Fabian Society report on the League of Nations and was at the centre of the Labour Party's leftward shift in 1917-18, helping draft its foreign and domestic programmes and new constitution, including the public ownership "Clause IV" (actually 3d) that survived until the 1990s.

By 1918-19 student numbers and fee income were recovering, aided by some 200 American officers who attended while awaiting demobilisation. Sidney Webb persuaded Reeves to resign, and William Beveridge (a successful wartime civil servant) to replace him. The 1920s would be a decade of expansion. When

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G V Ormsby, who had joined up in 1914, came back in 1919, he feared the dead had been forgotten. He launched an appeal for a memorial, which was unveiled in 1923 but consigned to a back corridor and replaced by the present memorial 30 years later. The School had moved on, and men such as Tawney and Attlee, while not regretting their military service, were ambivalent. "I suppose it's worth it", Tawney had mused. Perhaps it would have been if British society had been reconstructed, although that outcome would await another war and another generation. Nonetheless, through its contribution to the Labour Party's transformation at a critical point, the School's 1914-18 story had repercussions far beyond Clare Market. ■



David Stevenson is Professor of International History at LSE. This article was compiled with the support of LSE Archives staff.

A GLOBAL WAR

The first world war was the first truly global war in world history: a conflict which can be viewed as a worldwide economic war in which numerous non-European states participated, and for which the European powers mobilised the resources of their colonial empires.

Dr Heather Jones, a specialist in first world war studies at LSE, is one of the editors of *1914-1918 Online: international encyclopedia of the first world war*. The online resource, which launched in October after three years of work, is the largest open-access encyclopedia on the war, linking over 1,000 first world war researchers from 54 countries. Aiming to give a global context to the conflict, it provides

access to the latest research and articles by renowned historians and can be viewed at www.1914-1918-online.net

Dr Jones has also been involved in the Imperial War Museum's *Lives of the First World War*. The museum is in the process of building a permanent digital memorial of the war to tell the stories of the 8m men and women across Britain and the Commonwealth who contributed to the first world war. Heather Jones sits on the Academic Advisory Group convened to advise the museum on its digital centenary projects. Members of the public are encouraged to share their families' stories at <https://livesofthefirstworldwar.org>

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