

TRAILS OF THE GREAT WAR – 1914 TO 2014

One-day conference at the LSE on Friday 3rd October 2014

The centenary year of the outbreak of the Great War began with a serious debate over the war guilt question. Historians such as Christopher Clark, David Reynolds and Niall Ferguson engaged a wide public audience with their respective arguments. Since then, the focus has been very much on the nature of war itself. In the media, in theatres and concert halls, in stately homes and village halls, the British commemoration of the Great War is strikingly visceral. History, it seems, is less about rationalising past events than it is about accessing the emotional experience of those who lived in it.

Yet, 1914 marked the beginning of a conflict that was much more than a ‘national catastrophe’ for Britain. In the words of the American diplomat and historian George F Kennan this was ‘*the great seminal catastrophe of the twentieth century*’, the big bang that determined the course of history and continues to define the political reality in Britain, Europe and America to this day. The aim of this conference is to move beyond the parochial and broaden the view of the British debate.

Chair: Professor Craig Calhoun, Director of the LSE, former Director of the Social Research Council

Dr John F Jungclaussen, UK Correspondent DIE ZEIT newspaper, historian and author.

09.00 Welcome and opening remarks from Professor Craig Calhoun

09.15 Session One

Grand Illusion

Jean Renoir’s 1937 *La Grande Illusion* tells the story of a group of French officers in a German prison camp, plotting their escape. David Stevenson, Professor of International History at the LSE introduces a film that is a parable for the futility of war and sets the scene for the day’s debate.

11.30 Session Two

Total War and Terrorism

The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo can be seen as the most successful terrorist act in history. Political violence in its most immediate form unleashed a disproportionate response, which, in turn, led to total war on a global scale. In the end, the assassins got what they wanted: Yugoslavia, a Serbian-dominated state was created. Along the way, they redefined the notion of political violence in terms of its scale and its magnitude, which begs the question: what did future generations of terrorist learn from the events of Sarajevo?

Robert Gerwarth, Professor of Modern History, Director of the Centre for War Studies, University College Dublin.

John Horne, Professor of Modern European History, Trinity College Dublin.
Chair: John F Jungclaussen

13.00 Break for lunch

14.00 Session Three

War and the American Century

World War I made the United States begin to think of Europe as part of its sphere of influence. Some flattered themselves 'to have won the war for Britain and France', others worried about how this sphere of influence could be made legitimate, according to a globally- applicable standard; hence the efforts of Woodrow Wilson to create the League of Nations. The same mixture of jingoism and internationalism was roused in World War II, which cemented America's trans-Atlantic leadership and stamped her ideals on the United Nations.

Have we Americans finally emerged, post-Iraq, post-Afghanistan, from this shadow? Is Europe no longer seen as part of our sphere of influence? Have we lost the jingoistic belief that America can set other people's affairs in order? Less innocent, no longer believing in the country's power to do the right thing, have we also become more amoral? No longer subscribing to international norms of justice, nor supportive of institutions which would attempt to speak truth to power?

Philip Bobbitt, Herbert Wechsler Professor of Jurisprudence at Columbia University. Director of Centre for National Security, Columbia University.

Richard Sennett, Professor of Sociology at the LSE, Co-Chair of the New Urban Charter Programme for UN Habitat.

Chair: Craig Calhoun

15.30 Session Four

Forever at War with Europe – Politics and Memory

For Britain, 2014 is as much about remembering the past as it is about deciding her future. Then as now the vexed question is what to do with Europe. Thus far, rational arguments for or against continued membership of the EU have failed to make a real impact. The public debate about Britain's role in Europe remains emotionally charged. It begs the question to what extent it is informed by the visceral memory of the War. Politics needs memory but at what point is history getting in the way of sensible political decisions? Is Britain's ongoing identity debate a symptom of a national crisis or prove that she is more ready to adapt to a changing world than other countries?

Lord Glasman, Senior Lecturer in Political Theory, Director of the Faith and Citizenship Programme, London Metropolitan University.

Jesse Norman MP

Chair: John F Jungclaussen

17.00 Coffee break

17.30 Session Five

Reflections on the moral fallout of '*the* great seminal catastrophe of the twentieth century'.

Zygmunt Bauman, Emeritus Professor of Sociology, University of Leeds

Chair: Craig Calhoun

18.30 Closing remarks from Craig Calhoun