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THE FIRST WORLD WAR FROM A BRITISH PERSPECTIVE A PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT

Great Britain was one of the powers that fought on the victorious side in the First World War. At Compiègne on 11 November 1918, British military leaders, accompanied by representatives of other Allied and Associated armies, received Germany's acceptance of the dictated armistice terms. This article compares the British war aims, as announced during the conflict, with the results finally achieved by way of the treaties signed at the Paris Peace Conference. A significant question concerns the price that was paid for the successes achieved by military and diplomatic efforts. How did the fighting, carried on from August 1914 onwards, affect the world's largest empire? How were British interests understood in the international arena during and after the war? Did Britain and its colonies enjoy optimistic prospects for economic development? What impact did the war have on British society, which was fortunate enough not to have direct contact with military activities? How did the public perceive their participation in politics, their own authorities, and the goals of British foreign policy? The answers to these questions will make it possible to identify not only the effects that the First World War exerted on Great Britain, but also its impact on the country's future attitude towards what were known in London as "overseas countries".

His Majesty's Government did not intend to go into battle in 1914, and certainly not to start a war, since the country's own security was not threatened. The lack of enthusiasm was attributed primarily to the differences between the politicians of the ruling Liberal Party, in both the government and the House of Commons. For this reason the steps taken by Britain on the international arena in late July and early August 1914 necessarily appeared ambiguous and belated. Supporters of British neutrality were unmoved by the fact that it was in London's interests to maintain balance of power in Europe that would certainly be destroyed by the very probable victory of Germany and Austria-Hungary over France and Russia. Similarly, the guarantee of Belgian neutrality given by the British government was regarded by that political group as a matter of secondary importance. The London City also opposed war, but for entirely different reasons, namely the fear that it would lose its role as the world's financial centre. The pound was then the conversion currency

for all other currencies, and the gold standard gave the City a dominant position in international trade and in worldwide investment. Part of the opposition Labour Party similarly favoured a peaceful solution. In the end the argument prevailed that Germany's potential domination in Europe would be harmful to Britain. The immediate reason for the sending of an ultimatum to Germany, as stated by Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey in a parliamentary speech to Parliament in the afternoon of 3 August 1914, was the violation of the neutrality of Belgium. He said that London must keep with the international agreements to which it had signed up, including that of 1839 which guaranteed the recognition of Belgian neutrality by the European powers. A secret understanding with France on army and navy cooperation that had been negotiated in the preceding years was described by Grey in such a manner as not to cause MPs to suspect that the government had allowed itself to be drawn into war by concluding unreasonable agreements. Entry into the war was presented as a necessity from which there was no escape, but at the same time emphasis was placed on the autonomy in decision-making which the British political class held so dear. In this matter Grey's words were correct. However, this did not protect the Liberal majority from the resignation of two ministers directly following Britain's entry into the war, or subsequently in 1915 from a more serious reconstruction of the government and the formation of a coalition with the Conservatives.¹

The maintenance of Belgian independence was seen by Great Britain as a value in itself. Memories of the Continental Blockade established by Napoleonic times, which had shattered the foundations of British industrial domination remained very vivid in London. Hence one of the country's principal foreign policy goals was to maintain the existing division of the coast on the other side of the Channel.² In spite of the lack of unanimity among the British political and economic elites, the government declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914, when no response had been received to its ultimatum.³ Eight days later it made a similar declaration against Austria-Hungary.⁴

Between 7 August and 9 November 1914, Prime Minister Herbert Asquith attempted to explain to the public why military action had been undertaken. He initially set out the following goals that Britain intended to achieve:

¹ See B. Tuchman, *Sierpniowe salwy*, Warsaw 1995, pp. 85-88, 125, 129-136, 155-161; J. de Launay, *Wielkie spory współczesności 1914-1945*, Kraków 1978, pp. 52-54; J. Pajewski, *Pierwsza wojna światowa. 1914-1918*, Warsaw 2004, pp. 187-189; A. G. V. Simmonds, *Britain and World War One*, London-New York 2012, pp. 8-9, 25-27, 97-98; <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1914/aug/03/statement-by-sir-edward-grey>.

² M. L. Dockrill & J. Douglas Godd, *Peace without Promise. Britain and the Peace Conferences, 1919-1923*, Hamden 1981, pp. 23-34.

³ M. Gilbert, *The First World War* [Polish edition: *Pierwsza wojna światowa*, Poznań 2003, p. 58]; J. Pajewski, *op. cit.*, pp. 190-191. For more on the declaration of war on Germany and London's resulting dilemmas see S. J. Valone, *There Must Be Some Misunderstanding: Sir Edward Grey's Diplomacy of August 1st, 1914*, *Journal of British Studies* Vol. XXVII, 1988, pp. 405-424.

⁴ For detail see F. R. Bridge, *The British Declaration of War on Austria-Hungary in 1914*, *Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. XLVII, 1969, No. 2, pp. 401-422.

- to guarantee the independence of small countries, including in particular to ensure the restoration of Belgium;
- to support France in the face of German aggression;
- to eliminate “Prussian militarism.”⁵

These points contained practically the entire programme of London’s involvement in the course of the ongoing armed struggle. They implied that the Germans were Britain’s chief enemy, since it was they who had attacked France, crossing through Belgium. The blame for all of this was placed on the “spirit of militarism” rooted in the Prussian mentality. This way of presenting matters could come as no surprise. Since Germany had begun developing its navy, London had felt threatened, as was openly admitted by British journalists, politicians and military leaders. The Reich had begun a naval arms race, over which it had no wish to negotiate with London. At the same time, relations between the two countries became more tense owing to Germany’s support for the Boers against the British in the Boer War, and to the building of the Berlin–Baghdad railway, which was planned to be extended as far as the Persian Gulf. Finally, of course, there was the economic rivalry between the two powers, with Germany’s economy enjoying the faster development.⁶

In the first two years of fighting, London was in practice unconcerned with formulating detailed war objectives. It was only the preliminary peace soundings from Germany and the subsequent attempts at mediation, undertaken at the end of 1916 by United States President Thomas Woodrow Wilson and separately by Pope Benedict XV,⁷ that caused the British to begin considering the conditions on which peace might be concluded. The proposals put forward by the military, politicians and diplomats were somewhat diverse. The first issue was the weakening of Germany. General Sir William Robertson, then Chief of the General Staff, proposed depriving the Reich of its colonies, and also of its navy, which would no longer be needed following the loss of German possessions in Africa and the Far East. To ensure that German sea power could not be rebuilt, Robertson suggested taking away Berlin’s control of the Kiel Canal together with Kiel, Heligoland and the Frisian Islands. His aim was undoubtedly to eliminate a dangerous rival on the seas. The First Sea Lord, Admiral Henry Jackson, shared this point of view. In turn, Ralph Paget and William Tyrrell, assistant undersecretaries at the Foreign Office, preferred to deprive Germany of Alsace and Lorraine (which would go to France) and Schleswig (to be awarded to Denmark). This idea also had the approval of Arthur J. Balfour, then First Lord of the Admiralty (the political head of the Royal Navy). All three agreed that Germany was to be weakened only slightly

⁵ P. Kraszewski, *Polityka Wielkiej Brytanii wobec Niemiec w latach 1919–1925*, Poznań 1982, p. 32.

⁶ M. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, pp. 28, 31–32; Z. S. Steiner, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War*, London–Basingstoke 1977, pp. 48–67; S. McMeekin, *The Berlin–Baghdad Express* [Polish edition: *Ekspres Berlin–Bagdad. Kajzer, islam i imperium osmańskie 1898–1918*, Kraków 2012, pp. 43–44]; A. G. V. Simmonds, *op. cit.*, pp. 21–22.

⁷ The Pope made appeals for peace immediately after his election, and later repeated them – see Z. Zieliński, *Papięstwo i papieżę dwóch ostatnich wieków 1775–1978*, Warsaw 1983, pp. 381–386.

in the east, by the loss to Poland of the Grand Duchy of Posen. The Polish state would be created chiefly out of the lands of the Russian and Austrian partitions, and would be tied to Russia, as both diplomats wished. General Robertson, on the other hand, did not wish to weaken Germany in the east at all. According to these plans, Poland was not to be made strong, so as not to draw Russia away from European issues. The aim was to maintain the balance of power in Europe and to discourage the Russians from becoming more active in Central Asia, which from a British point of view would always represent a danger to India. In neither of the recommendations was it planned to maintain Austria-Hungary as a whole, the intention being to incorporate Austria into the Reich. The purpose of the territorial strengthening of that country would be to balance Prussian Protestantism with Austrian Catholicism. Lord Balfour was the least enthusiastic about strengthening the German nation, but he saw no real possibilities of halting the Germans' striving for unification. This was not the last word in the matter of Austria-Hungary, however – discussions on the future of the Habsburg monarchy would continue in Britain practically until the end of the war. In each memorandum the need to restore Belgium was emphasised, but there were different proposals for doing this. Robertson suggested strengthening that country by giving it Luxembourg, and even the Dutch-held Zeeland, but Paget and Tyrrell warned against enlarging the German element in Belgium in view of the nationalist mood prevalent at the time. After all, the criterion of nationality was their main guideline in formulating other territorial proposals. While, for example, Robertson rejected the drawing of a Franco-German border on the Rhine (Paris was demanding such a strategic border), on the grounds of wishing to maintain the balance of power, the Foreign Office officials emphasised more strongly the nationalist sentiments in the Rhineland, which they believed should not be provoked by pro-French territorial adjustments.⁸

Although by the end of 1916 both belligerents were exhausted by the conflict lasting more than two years, they were not able to begin peace negotiations. The British government (from 5 December 1916 under David Lloyd George), in its official response to the German soundings, repeated the demands made at the start of the war. These were highly unrealistic, given that the Central Powers at that time occupied large territories in France, Belgium, the Balkans, Russia and Romania. There was also the British demand for the payment of reparations for the damage done by their enemies' aggressive actions during the past two years. For the first time, the possibility of setting up an international organisation to defend world peace was mentioned.⁹ Clearly, the Central Powers saw these demands as unfeasible, and hence the war continued for another two years, bringing significant losses to both sides.

⁸ P. Kraszewski, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-38; D. Jeziorny, *Co dalej z Europą Środkową? Miejsce Austro-Węgier wśród brytyjskich celów wojennych w latach 1914–1918*, *Acta Universitatis Lodzianensis* 2003, *Folia Historica* No. 76, pp. 74-85.

⁹ P. Kraszewski, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40.

Further work on preparing the conditions for a future peace was directed by Lord Charles Hardinge, Permanent Undersecretary at the Foreign Office. At his initiative, an interdepartmental subcommittee chaired by Louis Mallet, one of the assistant undersecretaries was set up to consider matters of territorial adjustments. Its meetings were attended by representatives of the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office, the India Office, the War Office, the Board of Trade and the Admiralty. There were few matters on which all were able to agree – one of the exceptions was the desire to deprive Germany of all of her colonies.¹⁰

Because of that discussions concerning proposed future measures were transferred to a higher level. At the initiative of Lloyd George, who aimed to reduce the Foreign Office's influence on future decisions,¹¹ two committees were set up, chaired by members of the War Cabinet¹² – Lord George Curzon (for the committee preparing territorial conditions for peace) and Lord Alfred Milner (focusing on economic matters). They met between February and April 1917. In territorial matters only five points were agreed: the restoration of Belgium, withdrawal of German troops from France, the return to France of Alsace and Lorraine, the creation of an independent Poland, and the maintenance of Austria-Hungary under a changed system of government which would eliminate German and Hungarian dominance. In this way the Habsburg monarchy could be used as a barrier to further expansion by Germany into the Middle East. In non-European matters, Curzon's committee repeated the proposals of Mallet's subcommittee. Meanwhile, the committee chaired by Milner drew up a short report in which it was demanded that Berlin give up its entire fleet and pay reparations for the ships lost by Great Britain in the course of military action.¹³ This would have been a substantial sum, because in February 1917 unlimited submarine warfare had begun, causing huge losses to the British side in the initial months. The Milner report, however, was not adopted by the government.

Further discussions carried on within governmental departments did not bring any detailed progress, apart from the agreement reached by the Imperial War Cabinet¹⁴ on 1 May 1917 on the following three points:

¹⁰ E. Goldstein, *Winning the Peace. British Diplomatic Strategy, Peace Planning and the Paris Peace Conference, 1916–1920*, Oxford 1991, pp. 14–15.

¹¹ R. M. Warman, *The Erosion of Foreign Office Influence in the Making of Foreign Policy, 1916–1918*, *Historical Journal* Vol. XV, 1972, pp. 135–138.

¹² Apart from the Prime Minister David Lloyd George, the War Cabinet included Andrew Bonar Law (Conservative leader in the Commons and Chancellor of the Exchequer), Lord George Curzon (Conservative leader of the Lords, holding the post of Lord President of the Council), Lord Alfred Milner (a Conservative) and Arthur Henderson (Labour), the last two without a government portfolio.

¹³ E. Goldstein, *op. cit.*, pp. 15–18; V. H. Rothwell, *British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy. 1914–1918*, Oxford 1971, p. 159; H. I. Nelson, *Land and Power. British and Allied Policy on Germany's Frontiers. 1916–1919*, London–Toronto 1965, pp. 19–21.

¹⁴ The Imperial War Cabinet was a new body set up in London by Lloyd George in March 1917. It aimed to ensure cooperation between the British and dominion governments in matters concerning the conduct of the war. The British Prime Minister aimed to exert an influence on the decisions of the dominions, but his actions were limited, since the executive authorities in the dominions were accountable

- elimination of all threats to British overseas possessions and to trading with them;
- recognition of the independence of the Low Countries (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg);
- striving to create a stable configuration of countries on the European continent.¹⁵

The first two points implied the need to defeat Germany, to remove her from the positions captured during the war in Western Europe, and to deprive her of her navy. The third, on the other hand, was the product of wishful thinking due to the revolutionary events taking place in Russia and the military successes of the Central Powers. The ambiguity of its wording enabled it to be interpreted in various ways; for example, as a reference to freeing Italy and Russia from the previous commercial dominance of Germany, as some participants of the discussion wanted. This would mean British firms' taking over markets for German goods, and the economic self-sufficiency of Great Britain within her Empire. In 1918 the idea was raised again by the Economic Defence and Development Committee, chaired by Sir Austen Chamberlain.¹⁶

Information about the ongoing work did not become public knowledge. Only the publication by Vladimir Lenin's government of documents from the archives of the Tsar's Foreign Ministry, beginning in November 1917, compelled London to present its views to the British public, who were bearing the hardships of war ever more heavily. In the face of the Bolsheviks' propaganda offensive, which had the aim of undermining European governments and taking a step towards worldwide revolution, it was no longer sufficient simply to reiterate the democratic nature of the war being conducted by Great Britain against a "Prussian militarism" that was suppressing freedom in its own country. Aware of the upcoming New Year's address by President Wilson (whose country had by that time joined the war), David Lloyd George decided a few days earlier to make a statement of his government's war aims. It was no accident that he chose to deliver his speech on 5 January 1918 at the headquarters of the Trades Union Congress. The unions were seen as a potential threat to Britain's internal order, due to fascination with the events in Russia and to increasing pacifist sentiment. The statement was dominated by democratic-sounding slogans which hid the true objectives of war. The most significant point in the programme was considered to be the elimination of "Prussian militarism" and its attempts to achieve military domination over Europe. This included the desire to deprive the

to their own legislatures – see T. Lloyd, *Empire: A History of the British Empire* [Polish edition: *Dzieje Imperium Brytyjskiego*, Warszawa 2001, pp. 215-216]; N. Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* [Polish edition: *Imperium. Jak Wielka Brytania zbudowała nowoczesny świat*, Kraków 2013, pp. 356-357]; K. Robbins, *The Eclipse of a Great Power: Modern Britain 1870-1992* [Polish edition: *Zmierzch wielkiego mocarstwa. Wielka Brytania w latach 1870-1992*, p. 131].

¹⁵ P. Kraszewski, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-44.

¹⁶ A. Orde, *British Policy and European Reconstruction after the First World War*, Cambridge 1990, pp. 13,17-19.

Reich of its navy. A proposal was raised to replace Germany's autocratic system of government with a democratic one. It is not hard to conclude from the aims presented that their realisation would require Germany's defeat. The attainment of such goals as the evacuation of Belgium and the occupied part of France, and the payment of reparations to both countries for their losses resulting from aggression, would also have been possible only following victory over the Reich. Moreover, Lloyd George demanded that Paris regain sovereignty over Alsace and Lorraine, which it had lost in 1871. In fairly general terms, though with democratic overtones, the Prime Minister raised the question of the German colonies. He said that they ought to be put at the disposal of a future peace conference, and that measures should be adopted to prepare the indigenous populations to take responsibility for government. This was a repetition of the well-known demand to deprive Berlin of its overseas territories, but cased in words which might find favour with activists in the labour movement, who opposed human exploitation. Points other than those directed against Germany were very much of secondary importance. A vague proposal was made to create an independent Poland, inhabited by a natively Polish population, and thus not covering too extensive a territory. In the mouth of the British Prime Minister, however, the statement on the rebirth of Poland sounded extremely decisive; he described it as an "urgent necessity". In view of the unknowns concerning the future destiny of Russia, Lloyd George made very unclear statements concerning that country's war aims and internal situation. His purpose here was simply to make some response to the publication of the secret diplomatic files, so as to reduce anti-government sentiment on the left of the political stage. At the same time, however, it was important not to close the doors to an agreement with any Russian government – it was still hoped that the Bolsheviks could be dissuaded from signing a separate peace treaty with the Central Powers, and the Brest negotiations were in progress at that time. Lloyd George also referred to the possible setting up of a post-war international organisation to deal with matters of disarmament, which would reduce the risk of the outbreak of another war. This proposal would be put forward by London many times during the upcoming international discussions. In early 1918, however, the aim was to satisfy those active in the labour movement, seduced by Lenin's slogans of "peace treaty without annexations or contributions", that Britain was fighting only for the most noble of causes.¹⁷

In the subsequent months, London did not issue any new statements of the government's war aims. It is therefore interesting to compare the British proposals with the armistice terms that were actually signed by the German side on 11 November 1918.¹⁸ Given that London's official pronouncements consisted chiefly of proposals concerning Germany, it is the Compiègne document that is the main subject of analysis. The terms of the armistice on the Western front included:

¹⁷ M. L. Dockrill & J. Douglas Godd, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-20; V. H. Rothwell, *op. cit.*, p. 149; M. Baumgart, *Wielka Brytania a odrodzona Polska (1918–1932)*, Szczecin 1985, p. 47.

¹⁸ For details on the discussions between the allies see P. Kraszewski, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-75.

- the need to evacuate German troops from all territories west of the Rhine, where those lands which were not intended to be awarded to Germany were to be evacuated within 15 days (Belgium, north-east France, Alsace and Lorraine), and the remainder within 30 days;
- the obligation of the Germans to allow the Entente troops to occupy bridge-heads on the Rhine together with land within a radius of 30 kilometres, and to withdraw to at least 10 kilometres from the right bank of that river;
- the giving up by the Germans of large quantities of armament, in particular tanks, machine guns (25,000 weapons), flamethrowers (3,000), heavy artillery (5,000), aircraft (1,700), and all submarines and most other warships (six battleships, ten cruisers, eight light cruisers and 50 torpedo boats);
- the delivery to the Entente of 5,000 locomotives, 5,000 lorries and 150,000 railway wagons;
- the maintenance of the continental blockade of the defeated states¹⁹.

All of these measures served to prevent Germany from renewing military action. It should also be noted that the ceasefire terms fulfilled practically all of the British war aims. The giving up of German arms, and in particular its fleet, which was interned at Scapa Flow (the main base of the Royal Navy), would mean the breakdown of German military power, although not necessarily of the Germans' warlike and expansionist nature, identified with the "spirit of Prussian militarism". Moreover, the deprivation of the main wartime opponent of the means to conduct military activity might be seen as a prelude to the general disarmament that had been promised to the British trade unionists. The evacuation of the Kaiser's army from occupied parts of France and Belgium was also one of London's stated conditions for ending the war, and the rapid evacuation of Alsace and Lorraine indicated the intention of detaching those lands from Germany and restoring French sovereignty over them. This was hoped to restore a balance of power between Paris and Berlin. Hope for a change in the German political system was provided by the ongoing revolution, in which the Social Democrats, with their democratic slogans, had the upper hand.

In this context, one might take a different view of the entirely unprofessional British preparations for the Paris Peace Conference. Lloyd George, wishing to curtail the influence of the Foreign Office in shaping British foreign policy, appointed two men from his closest circles to conduct them: Sir Maurice Hankey²⁰ and the South African general Jan Smuts.²¹ Both were already heavily burdened with duties, but it was Smuts, responsible for establishing the position of the peace delegation before negotiations, who clearly had the harder task. Through lack of time, he did not even look through the documents that he received from various governmental departments, managing only to have them signed with his own name or that of his closest

¹⁹ J. Pajewski, *op. cit.*, pp. 760-761; M. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 504.

²⁰ Secretary to the War Cabinet and the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID).

²¹ Member of the Imperial War Cabinet and of the Demobilisation Committee, which was responsible for reducing the size of the British army as quickly as possible.

assistant²² and carry them to Paris as materials for the British Peace Delegation. The documents sometimes lacked coherence, and there were cases where the measures suggested by different departments were mutually inconsistent; for example, in the matter of reparations.²³ The memoranda sent to Paris in no way served the Delegation due to the working style of Lloyd George, who seemed to have an “allergic reaction” to reading any documents.²⁴ The Peace Conference was organised in such a way that all decisions lay in the hands of the chiefs of the delegations of the five great Allied and Associated powers, and in fact everything depended on their personal views what proposals they would support.²⁵ In this situation, Lloyd George enjoyed a great deal of freedom in formulating positions. It was not this that was most important, however, but the fact that there was really nothing for the British Prime Minister to argue about. Most of his country’s war aims concerned the defeat of Germany, and had already been secured by the armistice terms. For the final confiscation of the German colonies and confirmation of territorial changes – which in the west of Germany had in reality already taken place – all that was needed was decisions by the future Peace Conference, and this was not difficult, since the measures of interest to London had already been put into effect.

There remained only the proposal to compel Germany to pay reparations for war losses, one of the promises with which the governing Liberal–Conservative coalition had gone to the polls on 14 December 1918.²⁶ To achieve this, the British delegation had to reconcile France, which was making exorbitant demands, with the United States, which had quite opposite intentions. Most significantly, the British themselves went to the conference seriously divided on this issue. While Lord John Sumner of Ibstone²⁷ and Lord Walter Cunliffe,²⁸ as well as Australian Prime Minister Morris Hughes, representing London on the Reparations Commission, supported the ideas put forward during the December election campaign, the renowned economist Sir John Maynard Keynes, representing the Treasury, together with General Jan Smuts, saw no sense in placing excessive burdens on the defeated nations, since this might cause economic ruin to Germany and other former enemies, which would also

²² Sir Erle Richards from the India Office.

²³ For details see D. Jeziorny, *Londyn a spuścizna po monarchii Habsburgów. Sprawa Austrii w koncepcjach i praktyce dyplomatycznej Wielkiej Brytanii (1918–1919)*, Toruń 2002, pp. 26–36.

²⁴ M. L. Dockrill & Z. S. Steiner, *The Foreign Office at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919*, *International History Review* Vol. II, 1980, No. 1, pp. 85–86. Every day, Philip Kerr wrote a short summary of events at the Peace Conference for the Prime Minister (2–5 typewritten pages), giving separate headers for different topics. A complete set of this correspondence can be found in the Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh, Lord Lothian Papers GD 40/17/1214–1285.

²⁵ M. L. Dockrill & Z. S. Steiner, *op. cit.*, pp. 61–62, 64–65; E. J. Dillon, *The Inside Story of the Peace Conference*, New York 1920 [Polish edition: *Konferencja Pokojowa w Paryżu 1919*, Warsaw 1921, pp. 84–85].

²⁶ The most popular slogans in those elections were “Hang the Kaiser” and “Germany will pay to the last penny.”

²⁷ A leading British judge of the time.

²⁸ Former head of the Bank of England.

have an effect on the economies of Britain and the other victors. Keynes even left Paris in protest in June 1919, when he was unable to win acceptance for his viewpoint. With time, just such a plan came to be favoured by the Prime Minister and most of the Foreign Office, on the grounds that excessive punishment of Germany would threaten the European balance of power and open that country to Bolshevism.²⁹ Hence the lack of final decisions on reparations at the conference can hardly be considered a British failure, since even the country's own political and economic elites had not been able to agree on a united concept.

The terms of the Versailles Treaty reflected the fact that Great Britain had ended the war victorious. Germany was deprived of its colonies, its sea power was broken, and its land armies were reduced to a form in which they could pose no threat to Britain, in terms of both numbers and armaments. Belgium was restored, and France strengthened sufficiently to keep Germany in check. Nor was the European balance of power seriously violated, although for more than a decade after the war there was a fear of French domination over the continent. Suspicion of France was increased by its alliances with countries in East Central Europe. For this reason, the Foreign Office returned to the old formula of seeking to maintain the balance of power in Europe. Following the break up of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires, in East Central Europe this was not feasible, and hence London's interest in that part of the continent declined sharply. It was only possible to guarantee a balance of power between France and Germany.³⁰ Hence, while in their official pronouncements following the war, British politicians distanced themselves from the idea that had dominated foreign policy thinking throughout the nineteenth century, on the grounds that it had failed to prevent the outbreak of the bloody conflict, it was an idea to which the majority of diplomats quickly returned.

It should be noted, however, that some in the Foreign Office were won over by the ideas of President Wilson. Admittedly their role very quickly declined, and some even left the Foreign Office. According to the ideas put forward across the ocean, it was necessary to put an end to Eurocentrism, secret diplomacy and the domination of the largest players in the international arena. In exchange, the American leader demanded that proceedings at international conferences be conducted openly, so that the ordinary citizen might engage in a country's politics, given that he had

²⁹ J. M. Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, London 1920, pp. 3-6; *Selection from the Smuts Papers*, Vol. IV, Cambridge 1966, pp. 252-253, Smuts to C. P. Scott (editor of the *Manchester Guardian*) on 26 June 1919; British Library, London, Department of Manuscripts, Additional Papers 50905/195-196, conversations between Smuts and Scott on 25 May and 5 July 1919; H. Elcock, *J. M. Keynes at the Paris Peace Conference*, [in:] M. Keynes, *Essays on John Maynard Keynes*, Cambridge 1975, pp. 162-165, 172-173; E. Goldstein, *op. cit.*, pp. 196-200; A. Orde, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34.

³⁰ B. J. C. McKercher, *Old Diplomacy and New: The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy 1919-1939*, [in:] *Diplomacy and World Power. Studies in British Foreign Policy. 1890-1950*, M. Dockrill & B. J. C. McKercher (eds.), Cambridge 1996, pp. 82-108; M. L. Roi, *Alternative to Appeasement. Sir Robert Vansittart and Alliance Diplomacy, 1934-1937*, Westport-London 1997, pp. 17-18, 44-45.

been willing to risk his life fighting on the front. This would make it impossible for the governments of the powers to act in their own interests against the will of their people – that is, against the principle of national self-determination. Instead of competing, countries would have to begin cooperating with one another, so as to resolve problems while avoiding the wars that were so unwanted by ordinary citizens. This way of thinking was also found among the British political elites, where it took root much more firmly than it did among diplomats. The use of popular phraseology undoubtedly helped to ensure electoral success throughout several years after the end of the war.³¹

The absence of a single dominant vision of the post-war order, not only in the Foreign Office, but among the elite generally, quickly led to criticism of the Versailles Treaty on various grounds. Many politicians spoke out against the harsh treatment of Germany, which was expected to desire revenge, and was even seen as justifying German revisionism. Not without cause were those views combined with resentment towards France and its assumed desire to dominate Europe. Moreover, the creation of a number of smaller states in East Central Europe, unable to defend themselves against the designs of the larger powers, increased the pessimism of many senior politicians in London and in the Dominions' governments. All of this caused questions to be asked about the lasting viability of the system worked out during the Paris Peace Conference.³²

This debate called into question the sense of the huge sacrifices made during more than four years of war. Even though Great Britain had been fortunate in that fighting had not taken place on her territory, the scale of her losses was shocking. For the first time in history, in 1916, the British army had become a conscripted force, with numbers corresponding to the strength of the other powers. However, before conscription was introduced for men aged 18-41 (it was applied to all bachelors in January 1916, and additionally to married men in May of the same year), recruits had been gained through a variety of propaganda campaigns, sometimes highly sophisticated and emotionally fuelled. Many kinds of rallying cry were used; there were appeals to the conscience, information was collected on possibilities for the mobilisation of men aged 18-35, those avoiding military service were condemned or ridiculed, and indeed the unemployed were rounded up while wandering the streets.

³¹ H. Nicolson, *Transition from the Old to the New Diplomacy*, [in:] *Modern Diplomacy. The Art and the Artisans*, E. Plischke (ed.), Washington 1979, pp. 44-48; J. Connell, "The Office". *A Study of British Foreign Policy and its Makers, 1919-1951*, London 1958, pp. 22-23; H. Hanak, *A Lost Cause: The English Radicals and the Habsburg Empire. 1914-1918*, *Journal of Central European Affairs*, Vol. XXIII, 1963, No. 2, pp. 176-177; W. Fest, *Peace or Partition. The Habsburg Monarchy and British Policy. 1914-1918*, London 1978, pp. 100-109, 224-232; D. Jeziorny, *Co dalej ...*, pp. 85-87.

³² G. Martel, *The Prehistory of Appeasement: Headlam-Morley, the Peace Settlement and Revisionism*, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. IX, 1998, Issue 3, pp. 243-262; J. E. Wrench, *Alfred Lord Milner. The Man of No Illusion, 1854-1925*, London 1958, p. 357; B. J. C. McKercher, *National Security and Imperial Defence: British Grand Strategy and Appeasement, 1930-1939*, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. XVIII, 2008, Issue 3, pp. 398-399.

Since such a large army was mobilised, the losses were proportionally high, and thus made a significant impression on the public. Counting only troops from the British Isles, more than 600,000 men were lost on the fronts of the Great War. When those from overseas territories were included, the number of casualties rose by at least another 150,000.³³ According to other serious statistical calculations, it has been suggested that the total number of Britons who died either on the battlefield or from injuries was as high as 908,000. British soldiers serving in the trenches on the Western front expected death as a more probable outcome than survival. Statistically, 12% of those called up to military service lost their lives. This had a huge psychological effect on the public. During the Battle of the Somme (between 1 August and 18 November 1916) the losses on both sides exceeded 450,000, while the lines of the front moved by only a few hundred metres. The extent of suffering in both camps (losses on the Entente side were 150% greater than those of the Germans) was so huge that people began to say of war: “never again”. The territorial method of constructing units in the British army caused the impression made by the losses to seem overwhelming. In certain towns and villages, 70-80% of the men sent to the front did not return.³⁴

The experience of “slaughter” or the “factory of death” was exacerbated by the enormous suffering of those invalidated by injury during the war. Statistics for Great Britain indicate that around 1.5 to 1.7 million soldiers and officers suffered permanent physical disability, often making normal life impossible. Their condition left no doubt that war, given the weapons now available, was a nightmare for the men involved. Death could come at any time and from any direction. Additionally there were the psychological illnesses suffered by soldiers – in Britain such cases were numbered at around 80,000 (in other countries the figures were much greater; for example, 270,000 in Germany and 159,000 in the United States). It was not uncommon for such people to be treated as traitors for not being prepared to climb out of the trenches and attack across the minefields and barbed wire; the harsh punishments imposed on them did not help. After the war they exhibited constant nervousness,

³³ More than two millions Africans fought in the First World War. They were usually responsible for transporting supplies, arms and injured soldiers. Some of them served in Europe. Although they did not fight on the front lines, they found themselves in extremely difficult conditions, hence the large number of victims of disease among them. In fighting in Africa itself, according to various estimates, between 100 and 250 thousand soldiers conscripted from native populations were killed, most from the British colonies. The war revealed the hypocrisy of the plan to “bring civilisation closer to the Africans”.

³⁴ J. Kędzierski, *Dzieje Anglii*, Vol. II: 1830–1939, Wrocław 1986, p. 458; A. G. V. Simmonds, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-53; W. Mazurczak, *Kolonializm i wojna. Brytyjskie imperium kolonialne w czasie II wojny światowej*, Poznań 1999, pp. 55-56; N. Davies, *The Isles. A History* [Polish edition: *Wyspy. Historia*, Kraków 2003, pp. 779-780]; N. Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p. 355; M. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 509; J. Winter, *Großbritannien*, [in:] G. Hirschfeld, G. Krumeich, & I. Renz, *Enzyklopädie Erster Weltkrieg*, 2 Aufl., Paderborn 2004, p. 52; *The Routledge Companion to World History since 1914*, C. Cook & J. Stevenson (eds.), London–New York 2005, p. 8; D. Jeziorny, *Dyplomacja brytyjska wobec koncepcji paktu wschodniego (1933–1935). Analizy, projekty, działania*, Łódź 2011, pp. 23-24.

aggression, apathy, paralysis, amnesia, and inability to control bodily functions. One must also not overlook the issue of sexually transmitted diseases. Soldiers frequently visited brothels in the vicinities where they were stationed, and commanders accepted such pleasures as a means of combating stress. In 1916 more than 19% of patients in British field hospitals were suffering from venereal disease. Some recruits even became infected deliberately to avoid being sent to the front, ignoring the medical warnings (the price could even be the loss of one's sight).³⁵

In considering the losses suffered in the ranks of the British army, it is important also to consider the question of the effectiveness of that army. The British were found to fight just as hard in the trenches as troops from other involved countries. Soon after war was declared, six divisions were sent to the Continent to prevent Germany from taking the whole of Belgium. The manoeuvre was successful – about 10% of Belgian territory never fell into German hands. The enemy also failed to drive a wedge between British and French units in France. An invaluable contribution was made by the Royal Navy, which blocked the German coast with great effectiveness, leading to starvation of the enemy over the four years that the war lasted. The Navy also played an important role in transporting the British expeditionary corps to the continent (most intensively between 15 and 17 August 1914). The failure to win a decisive result at Jutland, and the losses resulting from the German tactic of unlimited submarine warfare (in all 6394 vessels, with a total displacement of 11.9 million tonnes, were sunk) in no way diminished the huge importance of what was then the largest navy in the world.³⁶

The matter of war invalids brought not only social problems. Most significantly, their care was partly financed by the state. After all, it was the government that had compelled citizens to serve on fronts, and was therefore obliged to support the wounded. This was undoubtedly a watershed in British thinking about military service, but also in thinking about the need for the government to increase its financial commitment. The costs of supporting invalids were just one of the elements in the wartime, and later peacetime, budget. Great Britain spent more on the war than any other belligerent country: a total of more than £10 billion, a horrendous sum in those times. The money went on pay and equipment for all categories of troops. An arms race also ensued – success in battle depended on the invention of new, more effective tools of offence and defence. In Britain's case, money also went on financing her allies. The government in London lent almost 3.8 billion dollars to her allies in the

³⁵ J. Winter, *Shell Shock*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, Vol. III, J. Winter (ed.), Cambridge 2014, pp. 310-315, 318-321; J. Kędzierski, *op. cit.*, p. 458; A. Chwalba, *Samobójstwo Europy. Wielka Wojna 1914–1918*, Kraków 2014, pp. 442-452.

³⁶ J. Gozdawa-Gołębiowski & T. Wywerka-Prekurat, *I wojna światowa na morzu*, Gdańsk 1973, pp. 28-30, 52-55, 313-330; I. F. W. Beckett, *The Great War: 1914–1918* [Polish edition: *Pierwsza wojna światowa 1914–1918*, Warsaw 2009, p. 244]. M. Gilbert (*op. cit.*, pp. 62, 67, 80-84, 87-93, 98-99, 104-109, 114-120) gives examples of the courage of British soldiers in the first months of the war, which at times caused amazement on the part of the Germans.

first two years of the war, but later it had to take out loans itself. It should be noted that 2.5 billion dollars went to Russia, from which there was little chance of repayment. At the end of 1916 the European powers were fully aware that they could not afford, financially, to continue the war. The only possible source of money was private American banks, which expected large profits. Up to March 1917 the American government did not wish to provide credit, citing its neutrality, but the countries of the Entente had already managed to borrow 2.3 billion dollars from across the Atlantic, and subsequently their level of indebtedness increased. Great Britain was faced with a bill of 4 billion dollars, out of a total 9.5 billion lent by American banks to European countries up to the time of the Paris Peace Conference. On three occasions the British government engaged in internal borrowing; this placed an even greater burden on the national budget after the end of the war.³⁷

In this situation, even calculating the government's revenue and expenditure was no easy task. Chancellor of the Exchequer Sir Austen Chamberlain was forced to produce a budget based on many unknowns. In 1918 the total size of the budget was £842 million, compared with less than £150 million in the last year before the outbreak of war. In the 1919/1920 financial year Chamberlain estimated expenditure at £1,690,280,000, with a deficit of more than £233 million. While most Britons expected a certain loosening of budgetary rigour after the end of the conflict, matters took a quite different course. The government had tried not to increase taxation during the war (the only exception being a tax on luxury goods). After it ended, the Chancellor decided to increase the duty on spirits and beer, and introduced a special death duty, with a rate depending on the income of the deceased (the wealthiest could be taxed of up to 40% of their assets). This increased collection of revenue proved necessary simply in order to service the country's debts. Management of those debts and the payment of interest alone accounted for one half of budgetary revenue.³⁸ As a result, the Treasury began to play a leading role in government. Moreover, financial and economic matters were among the most important in international relations. For this reason, the Foreign Office had to take on additional staff to deal with such matters. This was another consequence of the First World War for Britain: the official apparatus in every government department, including the Foreign Office, grew larger, and this made the State more expensive.³⁹

³⁷ N. Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p. 370; A. Chwalba, *op. cit.*, pp. 526-529; A. Harasimowicz, *Dyplomacja brytyjska wobec zagadnienia rozbrojenia 1921-1937*, pp. 20-21; J. Kędzierski, *op. cit.*, p. 459. Details on the quantities and types of war materials produced by Britain and other belligerent countries can be found in J. Ciepiewski, I. Kostrowicka, Z. Landau & J. Tomaszewski, *Historia gospodarcza świata w XIX i XX wieku*, Warsaw 1970, pp. 302-309.

³⁸ C. Petrie, *The Life and Letters of Sir Austen Chamberlain*, Vol. II, London 1939, pp. 140-144.

³⁹ D. C. Watt, *The Nature of the Foreign Policy-Making Élite in Britain*, [in:] Idem, *Personalities and Politics. Studies in the Formation of British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century*, London 1965, p. 4; *The Organization of British Central Government 1914-1956. A Survey by a Study Group*, D. N. Chester (ed.), London 1957, p. 24; Z. Steiner & M. L. Dockrill, *The Foreign Office Reforms, 1919-1921*, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. XVII, 1974, No. 1, pp. 134, 141-142.

Some relief for Britain's national finances came with the post-war economic boom. This was caused by the destruction in Europe and limitations on the production of important goods which the British economy happened to be able to supply. On European markets there was a shortage of practically everything that was needed for life in peacetime, particularly coal. Orders placed with British firms led to an increase in production, which was achievable because fighting had not taken place on British soil, and because output could be rapidly increased following the return of demobilised soldiers. This prosperity temporarily removed the problem of unemployment, but it also led to large price rises; in accordance with the laws of supply and demand, the market initially absorbed practically everything. This led to an increase in the costs of living of ordinary citizens, with prices reaching a peak in mid-1920. After that summer the country's economy began to fall into a post-war recession, as Europe no longer required such large quantities of goods from Britain. The sudden rise in prices, which for the public meant severe limitations on what they could afford to buy, nonetheless proved a salvation for the budget, with revenue now exceeding expenditure, partly as a result of receipts from indirect taxation. This also undoubtedly provided hope that the debts overwhelming the Treasury could be repaid. However, the success proved to be short-lived.⁴⁰

The course of events at the start of the interwar period led, as has already been mentioned, to a significant increase in the Treasury's role in government. One of London's priorities was to come out of debt, and other aims were subordinated to this. There were two consequences: firstly, everything possible was done to limit inflation, which would necessarily lead to a weakening of the pound against the dollar, causing the debt to increase further. In fact this did happen, with the pound sliding from \$4.76 in March 1919 to just \$3.40 in February 1920. It was necessary to reduce all dollar spending – that is, purchases from the United States – so as not to increase the level of debt still further. This meant that Britain was not able to give material assistance to European countries. After all, goods could be obtained in the necessary quantities only from across the Atlantic. Secondly, the British government limited foreign lending and the guaranteeing of loans made by British private banks. In the highly uncertain post-war economic situation, few were willing to invest in Europe without government guarantees. Potential lenders were discouraged by the existing debts of allies, which none intended to repay even to the British. It proved impossible to persuade the United States government to participate in the economic reconstruction of Europe, and without American involvement London could hardly imagine its own. Only American credit granted on preferential terms could move matters forward, but American banks were not willing to do that. Moreover, American law forbade the lending of money to countries that could not meet their obligations towards their own financial institutions. This led to the blocking of all pos-

⁴⁰ A. T. K. Grant, *A Study of the Capital Market in Britain from 1919–1936*, 2nd ed., London 1967, pp. 55-58, 68-7; A. Orde, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-66; L. J. Williams, *Britain and the World Economy, 1919-1970*, London 1971, pp. 23-25.

sibilities for the economic reconstruction of war-torn Europe. In the first years of peace London attempted to change the American position, but was unsuccessful.⁴¹ Hence, in spite of the ambitious plans of the Board of Trade, it was not possible to bring about Britain's commercial expansion in Europe. Britain intended to protect its market from foreign goods. Exports were also not helped by the value of the pound, which was maintained at the highest possible level. All European currencies were dropping in value, and this led to a growth of exports from those countries, including to Britain. Figures for 1918 show that the value of imports exceeded that of exports by £789,910,000. The government had to deal with these dilemmas in the summer of 1919.⁴²

This situation delayed the City's hopes for recovery of the war debts, which after all represented large amounts that could have been invested in the rebuilding of the country. The City had in fact been suffering since day one of the war, due to the slowdown in stock exchange trading and the withdrawal of deposits by citizens. This was followed by the virtual suspension of foreign trade, which had no-one to finance it; moreover the merchant fleet was afraid to leave port due to the risk of sinking. All of these obstacles weakened the role of the City in the world of international finance. In turn, a proposal to make the repayment of the Entente countries' debt to American banks dependent on the payment of German reparations to Britain and its allies was rejected by Washington, not wishing to allow the creation of a united front of debtors. In effect, the British government had to begin repaying money to the Americans while not receiving anything from Europe. Its negotiating position was also much weaker than that of the United States, since Washington could offer the promise of additional loans if the debtor began to pay the amounts overdue from wartime. London was not in a position to offer to its debtors.⁴³ In this way, the United States' economic advantage over Britain, already visible in the pre-war period,⁴⁴ continued to grow further.

British commercial expansion, and consequently growth in the country's share in the world economy, certainly could not be accelerated by developments in the internal political situation. The Labour Party represented an ever greater force. Before the war, although the trade unions and other workers' organisations had numbered more than four million members, this had not been reflected in election results. In the election of 14 December 1918, however, Labour won 59 parliamentary seats and began to develop into a serious opposition. Their manifesto included the nationalisa-

⁴¹ A. T. K. Grant, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70, 101, 171-172; A. Orde, *op. cit.*, pp. 51, 66, 77, 86-87.

⁴² The National Archives, London, Cabinet Papers (CAB) 24/58-70, 97-105, Board of Trade memorandum of 16 June 1919; *ibidem*, CAB 23/15/206-239, 261-266, government meetings of 8 and 14 August 1919; L. J. Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.

⁴³ A. Orde, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30, 32-33, 39-53, 62-63, 86-87; A. G. V. Simmonds, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37; V. N. Bandera, *Foreign Capital as an Instrument of National Economic Policy*, The Hague 1964, pp. 20-21; J. Kiwerska, *Między izolacjonizmem a zaangażowaniem. Europa w polityce Stanów Zjednoczonych od Wilsona do Roosevelta*, Poznań 1995, pp. 159-166.

⁴⁴ A. G. V. Simmonds, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

tion of means of production and the desire to improve living and working conditions for workers, all of which could be achieved by the taking of power. In the summer of 1919 a wave of strikes began which hit British firms hard, and whose extent worried the government. The British left wing also demonstrated strong sympathies towards the Soviet Russia. These were extremely noticeable at the time of the Polish–Bolshevik war, and led to such actions as the holding back of ships carrying assistance to Poland. Moreover, a Communist Party of Great Britain was formed, asserting the need for revolution (it was not clear whether this referred to mass proletarian riots, or rather a takeover of power in the style of Lenin). To begin with its numbers were not great, but in the first few post-war years it had close relations with the broad workers' movement in Britain, influencing its actions and even gaining widespread support for its own initiatives (in particular the National Minority Movement⁴⁵ and the National Unemployed Workers' Movement⁴⁶). Consequently the government, wishing to quell in advance any potential sources of social conflict, introduced a range of social reforms. These included an eight-hour working day, compulsory national insurance against unemployment, sickness and accident, and old-age pension contributions. It became more and more common for workers to have a voice in matters of pay and working conditions within their firm. All of these elements undoubtedly made production more expensive and placed burdens on the budget.⁴⁷ These were war-related costs, since it was in the course of the war that the Bolsheviks took power in Russia, and the public's disillusionment and mistrust of its own government grew due to the sacrifices being made.

Among the social consequences of the First World War, particular mention must be made of the question of women and their role in society. The contribution of women to the British economy increased markedly during the war, especially in the arms industry, trade, transport and office work. There were 5.9 million women professionally employed in 1914; after more than four years of conflict, the number had risen to 7.3 million. They were motivated by patriotism, as well as a desire for a new life and greater freedom. This caused some social conflicts – for example, the Trade Unions did not want women to take jobs from men,

⁴⁵ A movement operating as a fraction within the Trades Union Congress. Its founders intended it to influence the actions of the British Trade Unions from within.

⁴⁶ A movement known especially for holding mass marches in the streets of major British cities, the largest taking place in the capital. It gained particular momentum during the years of the Great Depression.

⁴⁷ J. Kędzierski, *op. cit.*, pp. 466, 480-484; A. G. V. Simmonds, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14, 81-90; K. Young, *Arthur James Balfour. The Happy Life of the Politician, Prime Minister, Statesman and Philosopher, 1848-1930*, London 1963, p. 405; K. Morgan & T. Saarela, *Northern Underground Revisited: Finnish Reds and the origins of British Communism*, *European History Quarterly* Vol. XXIX, 1999, No. 2, pp. 182-209; J. Ciepiewski, I. Kostrowicka, Z. Landau & J. Tomaszewski, *op. cit.*, pp. 339; K. Morgan, *Harry Pollitt*, Manchester–New York 1993, pp. 31-33, 47-49; R. Hayburn, *The National Unemployed Workers' Movement, 1921-1936*, *International Review of Social History*, Vol. XXVIII, 1983, No. 3, pp. 279-286.

and thus proposed that they should not be allowed to do “typically male” work. Nonetheless, the government made very pragmatic agreements in matters of employment with the Trade Unions, which effectively controlled employment policy at local level. The need to maintain adequate levels of production, particularly of armaments, gave the government powerful arguments in favour of the employment of women in metallurgical plants. In turn, the Trade Unions were able to prevent the authorities from calling up qualified workers for military service and replacing them with unqualified ones. Another manifestation of the disputes was the demands for pay increases and improvements in working conditions, which at that time reaped no small number of victims (for example, an explosion at an ammunitions factory in Silverstone, East London, on 19 January 1917 killed 69 people and injured more than a thousand). British government statistics show that workers were effective in fighting for increased pay, although living costs were rising at the same time, and so it is hard to determine whether wages in fact rose in real terms. The number of strikes grew significantly in the course of the war, and the government was fearful of them. Some professions became increasingly feminised, for instance: secretaries, sales assistants, teachers and nurses. Working conditions often necessitated a change of clothing. Women abandoned their corsets in favour of looser clothing, more masculine hairstyles, and so on. The social revolution was also manifested by the presence of women in places that had previously been the preserve of men – such as pubs, where women were drinking beer. Undoubtedly many women felt pride at being treated equally with men to an increasing degree.⁴⁸ From today’s point of view, it is hard to regard these phenomena as negative effects of the war. However, in the first years of peacetime, they brought about social tensions, of which there were already many.

Another source of such tensions was the presence in the British Isles of people from the colonies. They were brought there to work, out of necessity – somebody had to do the jobs left behind by the men who had gone to fight. This led to tense relations with local populations, and not only as a result of charges of taking the jobs that were awaited by demobilised soldiers. Indignation arose when Africans and Asians appeared in public areas in their free time, attempting to live as the white population did. Particular consternation was caused when, for example, blacks or Indians visited brothels. Their presence caused serious dilemmas for the government. Usually, in spite of their low wages, they did not wish to return to their own countries, which were relatively underdeveloped. This marked the start of the multicultural society in Britain. On the other hand, sending the immigrants back to the African or Asian colonies might cause problems with maintaining control there. Those who had seen

⁴⁸ A. Prost, *Workers*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, Vol. II, J. Winter (ed.), Cambridge 2014, pp. 329-331, 333-335, 339-342, 350-352; L. Lee Downs, *At Work*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, Vol. III, J. Winter (ed.), Cambridge 2014, pp. 72-85; A. Chwalba, *op. cit.*, pp. 530-533, 568-569; A. G. V. Simmonds, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-144.

the world, and were often educated, could rapidly turn into a local elite that would oppose white domination.⁴⁹

The British colonies were in any case not short of problems. Rule was exercised there based on the authority of the “white man”. Nobody in Britain was under any illusion that liberation movements could be suppressed militarily if they occurred in several places at once. During the war, inhabitants of the colonies had had their first opportunity to see British troops defeated, with common soldiers dying alongside their local comrades. They were not, therefore, in any way superior. It is true that Great Britain succeeded in retaining, and even expanding, her Empire after World War I. She took control of oil fields in Iraq, as well as former German colonies in Africa and the Pacific. However, immediately after the war ended, independence movements sprang up in India, Egypt and Ireland, all of which were of particular importance for the Empire as a whole. While in India pacification proved successful for the moment, in the cases of Egypt and Ireland the London government had to make significant concessions, which in time led to those countries’ freedom.⁵⁰ Fearing that other colonies might follow this pattern, the government did everything to avoid being drawn into another war, which would probably lead to the downfall of the Empire. Indeed, the experiences of the Union of South Africa, where an anti-British rebellion had broken out in the early days of the Great War, had already demonstrated the weakness and the need for reconstruction of the vast Empire. The uprising had to be suppressed by the Boers themselves, without the assistance of British troops.⁵¹

Fears as to the future behaviour of the Dominions – the most important of the British possessions – were well justified. The Indians wanted their own parliament, and a 1917 declaration by London had promised the formation of a representative government there. This was the price paid for the participation of Indian soldiers in the war, which was highly valued by Britain. Australia, Canada and India recorded a positive balance of trade in the war years, their goods being bought primarily in the United States. American exports to the Dominions also rose, causing closer ties to be formed between them and the US. They maintained the gold standard, which greatly facilitated trade with the Americans. London was able to return to that standard only in May 1925, a step that came at great cost, although the government feared that failure to back the pound with gold might cause the Dominions to switch from the sterling zone to the dollar zone.⁵²

⁴⁹ P. Panayi, *Minorities*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, Vol. III, J. Winter (ed.), Cambridge 2014, pp. 235-237; A. Chwalba, *op. cit.*, p. 534.

⁵⁰ For details see W. Mazurczak, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-100, 117-118; A. Bartnicki, *Egipt i Sudan w polityce Wielkiej Brytanii 1882–1936*, Warsaw 1974, pp. 213-233; J. Kieniewicz, *Historia Indii*, 3rd ed., Wrocław–Warsaw–Kraków 2003, pp. 588-590, 595-602; S. Grzybowski, *Historia Irlandii*, Wrocław 1977, pp. 333-336; N. Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p. 370.

⁵¹ M. Leśniewski, *Powstanie burskie 1914 r. i jego znaczenie w procesie kształtowania się nowoczesnego nacjonalizmu afrykanerskiego*, *Dzieje Najnowsze*, Vol. XXV, 1993, No. 2, pp. 1-15.

⁵² T. Lloyd, *op. cit.*, pp. 217, 220; J. Ciepiewski, I. Kostrowicka, Z. Landau & J. Tomaszewski, *op. cit.*, p. 325; J. Kiwerska, *op. cit.*, pp. 210-212.

To sum up, then, it should be reiterated that the British government achieved all of the main aims which it expected from its participation in the First World War. London viewed Germany as the main enemy, and she had been defeated. Berlin was deprived of all of its colonies; and in that situation there was no longer any justification for Germany's retaining a strong navy. London therefore demanded that the German fleet be handed over, and ordered it to sail to Scapa Flow, where in June 1919 its commanders were permitted to scuttle the fleet, against the intentions of France, which desired to increase its own strength at Germany's cost. The peace treaty weakened Germany territorially, in favour of France, Poland and Denmark, but did not carve her up as Paris would have liked. In this way London prevented French domination in Europe. The only unrealised goal of the British government was to force Berlin to pay reparations for war losses. In this case, however, the British themselves were not convinced that they genuinely wished to subject Germany to such a weighty financial burden.

When the question of the price of victory is considered, however, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that it was extremely high. The deaths of more than 750,000 soldiers and officers came as a shock, as did the often horrific injuries of the war wounded. Because of these high costs of victory, the aim of avoiding another war became more and more widely supported, which would become one of the factors behind the policy of Appeasement adopted in the 1930s. Apart from the sacrifice of human life and health, the victory also had a measurable financial price. The huge costs of the war, for which funds had run out by the end of 1916, the debts owed to American banks and the country's own citizens, the inability to recover the loans made to allies, the post-war recession that began in the second half of 1920, the decline in the status of the City of London as the world's financial centre, the inability to support the economic rebuilding of Europe, the drastic fall in living standards, and the closure of Britain's trade within its own empire – these were all additional costs of victory. Very soon after the war ended, leading politicians began expressing dissatisfaction that victory had been followed by the conclusion of an unsustainable peace. Such statements further undermined the public's trust in the State, which demanded sacrifices and gave in return only an unsuccessful peace treaty. Both at home and throughout the Empire, it was clear that Britain had lost the status of a leading power, able to influence effectively the course of events in various parts of the world. The country's importance declined, although the war victory meant that not everyone realised it at first. Undoubtedly, the fall in Britain's importance on the international stage forced it to scale back its active foreign and economic policies, in spite of the fact that Germany had lost the important Italian and Russian markets. In any case, the economic prospects for the Empire were far from rosy. The huge level of debt meant that savings had to be made, in order to satisfy debtors both at home and abroad. This made British expansion, or even economic development, impossible. Finally, it should be recalled that the war influenced social relations in Britain. Prevailing disappointment at its results, a lowering of living standards, as

well as tensions resulting from the increased role of women and immigrants from the colonies, complemented the image created by the presence of the country's own soldiers on the fronts of the Great War. The price that London paid was very high, even though no fighting took place on British territory directly.

It is hard to answer questions about what would have resulted had Britain not entered the war, since this would involve counterfactual historical analysis. It would appear, however, that from London's point of view a decisive victory by Germany and its allies over France and Russia would have posed a grave threat, since it would have led to German domination in Europe, and London would have been forced either to go to war with Germany anyway, or to negotiate in even less favourable circumstances.

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Keywords: Great Britain, World War I

ABSTRACT

Great Britain, renowned for her balance of power policy during the nineteenth century, entered the Great War because the growth in Germany's strength threatened the European balance of power. The German aggression against Belgium demanded concrete steps on the part of London, where the events of Napoleonic times were still remembered. After fighting for four years, chiefly against Germany, Britain emerged on the victorious side. Nonetheless, World War I had no winner. Although Britain achieved her basic political, colonial, military and economic goals, the losses were overwhelming, and British power was seriously weakened. Without any doubt this influenced the government's internal and foreign policy in the interwar period. It was felt in London that participation in any further conflict on such a huge scale would result in the destruction of the country's power; a prediction which was fulfilled after World War II.

