



## “Romanticism and War”: Contextualising a Theory of Interpretation. Jacques Pauwels’ Book on World War I

Jacques Pauwels: The Great Class War 1914 - 1918

Par [Dr. T. P. Wilkinson](#)

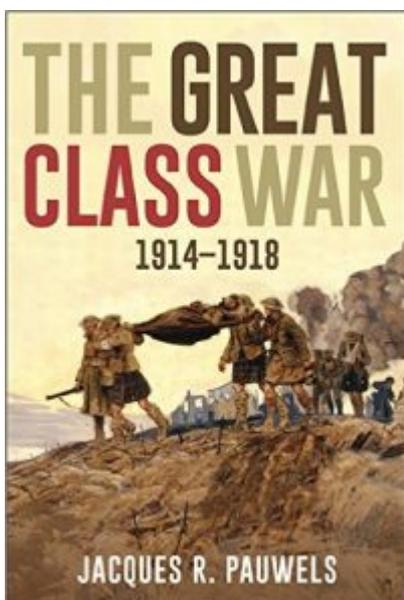
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*In 2014 I reviewed what was promoted as a significant revision in the interpretation of what in Britain and continental Europe is called “The Great War” and since 1945 has been popularly called the “First World War”.<sup>1</sup>*

*The revisionary aspect was the author’s contention — expressed in his title *The Sleepwalkers* — that the cause of the great slaughter between 1914 and 1918 was far less the intentions of the belligerents than their general incapacity to grasp the full consequences of their actions. The argument is explicitly a challenge to the narrative still taught in most school history books, as far as I can tell, that the assassination of the Austrian heir apparent in Sarajevo triggered a chain reaction culminating in the German invasion of France via Belgium (the pretext by which Britain joined France in battle against the German Empire). This chain reaction is usually attributed to the quasi-automatic operation of overt and covert diplomatic agreements—in commercial terms, the unfortunate mechanisms of “fine print”. As I argued in my review *The Sleepwalkers* promised far more than it could have fulfilled since the author’s relatively sympathetic treatment of Germany almost entirely omits the role of the British Empire, then certainly the world’s supreme economic and military power.*



Jacques Pauwels new book [The Great Class War 1914-1918](#) on

the other hand is genuinely revisionary. Like his earlier book, [The Myth of the Good War](#), this book examines the prevailing stories as to why and how the First World War started.<sup>2</sup> However, unlike *The Sleepwalkers*, *The Great Class War* actually offers an explanation for the common—yet rarely analysed in mainstream scholarship—assertion that the war was foremost an imperialist war—a war between empires and also a war for empire. The fundamental problem with the common assertion is that generally no serious discussion of imperialism is offered. The obvious reason for this omission is that to discuss imperialism would undermine the entire narrative by which it is maintained that imperialism essentially collapsed in 1918—with the exception of a brief, if exceedingly bloody interlude between 1939 and 1945.<sup>3</sup> The collapse of the German Empire, Austria-Hungary, the Russian Empire, the Ottoman Empire and the impending collapse of the remaining European world powers which resulted from the great catastrophe of August 1914, obscured the triumph of the American Empire which by 1945 had become the Anglo-American Empire, an ostensibly new form of power projection rebranded since 1989 as “globalisation”.

Of course, there was a serious analysis of the causes of World War I written by Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*,<sup>4</sup> but this essay receives scant attention in mainstream historical writing, especially in the genuinely important segment—popular history. This is Dr Pauwels’ forte. In *The Myth of the Good War*, Dr Pauwels presents a concise examination of the central myth of the American Empire, namely, that to the extent it even exists it was disinterested and in that sense also “exceptional”—as all things American are generally considered “exceptional” (especially by Americans themselves). In his earlier book Dr Pauwels reviews the extant writing and documentation on US involvement in World War II and shows that it is entirely possible to interpret the official stories and record in such a way that one is compelled to see the second world war as a war against the Soviet Union waged by the US and its overt as well as covert allies. In this way he follows an argument made by the American historian Carroll Quigley.<sup>5</sup> Quigley concluded from his study of the Anglo-American elite (focusing on the legacy of Cecil Rhodes) that the British ruling class and their US cousins pursued policies, which were, in fact, consistent with the British understanding of imperial domination and the manipulation of continental European politics to further the ends of the British Empire. This view coincides largely with the concept of the “vertical” and “horizontal” wars that form the centre of Jacques Pauwels’ study of the Great War.

*The Great Class War* ought to be read first and hopefully will receive broad attention so that his earlier book will be read too. Unlike the massive work of popular history produced by Eric Hobsbawm, *The Great Class War* and *The Myth of the Good War* provide a concise challenge to the Anglo-American narrative, which Hobsbawm, despite his Marxist orientation, never quite abandons. This may be because such books cannot be published by people who are employed at the pinnacle of elite academic institutions—without at least jeopardising one’s career. It also might be because while Hobsbawm’s work is comprehensive and certainly critical, the preoccupation with the defeat of Nazism (as opposed to fascism) made the triumph of Britain and the US seem quite benign—especially since the Soviet Union survived the Second World War, if at the cost of over 20 million dead and the demolition of most of its economy.

Hobsbawm’s treatment of the period from 1914 until 1991 is tellingly called *The Age of Extremes*.<sup>6</sup> This nicely encapsulates the still prevailing notion that 1989 was a return to an age of normality, an end to the extremes in politics, economics or violence.

To understand the term “extremes” one has to locate something called “normality” (or to borrow an American political term “normalcy”). Perhaps the “age of extremes” is best understood by reference to what has been called “the long 19th century”—the period between 1789 and 1914. That is the time between the French Revolution and the start of World War I. Hobsbawm divides this long century into three thick volumes. It is an odyssey from the overthrow of Bourbon absolutism to the outbreak of world war in Europe. If one assumes that Hobsbawm saw the victory of the Soviet Union over the forces of Nazi Germany as the victory of the October Revolution, then one can forgive Hobsbawm’s less critical view of the US triumph. He could not have anticipated the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989-90, although he did live to see it. His explanation for its collapse is surprising—that no one believed in it, not even those who governed the country. It is hard to see the determination with which the people of the Soviet Union fought their revolution and defended their country against the largest massed armies in history, armed to the teeth and bent on annihilation and say that “no one believed in it.” This platitude begs the question—what “it” was? But that is a question that cannot be addressed here. This is where the stories diverge.

The Great Class War is divided into three parts. The first part “The Long Nineteenth Century: ‘Mother’ of the Great War” describes in detail what can be called the “causes” of the war. Roughly these are democratisation (and opposition to it), nationalism/imperialism, and escalating class conflict. The second part “The Great Class War 1914 - 1918” discusses the war itself and how it was fought both as a “vertical” war and a “horizontal war”. Pauwels combines the record of the war as a military engagement with the variety of documents, including literary sources that depict its social (class) character. In part three, Pauwels describes “The Long Shadow of the Great War”—that is to say the consequences of the war. He agrees with other historians that World War II was essentially a continuation of World War I but in contrast rejects the argument that fascism was a response to the end of World War I. Pauwels also rejects therefore the assertion that fascism was a response to the Russian Revolution and the Bolshevik victory.

Unlike conventional historical narrative, Pauwels maintains that the conflicts that led to the Great War were not resolved with the end of World War II. He does not share the benevolent view of World War II as the brutal, bloody but nonetheless final disposition of the questions left unsolved in 1918 or the subsequent peace agreements. The United Nations does not constitute the maturity of the naïve League. The Great Class War fundamentally changed the nature of politics and society. In other words, we are still suffering the consequences of those four years of previously unparalleled mass murder.<sup>7</sup> Class wars continued after 1945 and are being waged today.

If the long 19th century was the century of progress implied in official narratives and the defeat of Nazi Germany the pinnacle of that process, then we are still left with an interpretive dilemma. Did the French Revolution ultimately succeed? Or more generally from a world historical perspective did the ideology of that Revolution prevail? The answer to those questions depends very much on how one defines the essence of the French Revolution and what ideology one ascribes to it.

This is where Pauwels’ account begins. It is certainly the most provocative portion of the book and yet the most problematic, too. While it is uncontroversial to point out that the French Revolution failed no later than when Napoleon Bonaparte seized power and established the First Empire and equally uncontroversial to recognise the Congress of

Vienna as the central event in the restoration of monarchy in Europe, it is a substantial departure from received interpretation to say that the European ruling class was driven all the way to 1914 by the desire to reverse the political, social and economic developments of the 19th century, especially its democratising features. Such an assertion requires a concept of interpretation that is explicitly denied in popular history and orthodox scholarship.

Quigley's contention that the Milner Group, a relatively small clique in the British imperial elite who gathered under the auspices of Cecil Rhodes and were supported by his legacy; e.g., the Rhodes Trust, is relegated to the margins of so-called theories of "conspiracy". For instance, Quigley claims that the infamous "appeasement" by Neville Chamberlain in Munich was not a weak faith placed by the British prime minister in a duplicitous Hitler but the occasion for a tactical agreement not to act against Germany in Czechoslovakia (or later in Poland) in order to make a Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union as easy as possible. He then argues that the reversal of this policy—which resulted in Churchill replacing him—was due *inter alia* to dissent and power struggles within the British ruling class which aimed to displace the Milner Group from its privileged position in British imperial policy.

The objection to this description of events relies primarily on the apparent absence of evidence deemed legitimate but more importantly on the defence of the official narrative that aside from the wayward Prince of Wales (Edward VIII) and the visible British fascists (e.g. Mosely)<sup>8</sup> there could not have been any official policy that would have supported Hitler's occupation of countries with whom Britain had mutual defence or assistance pacts. In other words, it is not the plausibility of such an interpretation, given widespread ruling class support for Hitler and Mussolini (the latter being generously funded by British SIS from the time Italy joined the Entente against Germany in the First World War),<sup>9</sup> that is at issue but the acceptability or better said the coherence of the interpretation with the entire World War II narrative.

Quigley certainly demonstrates the plausibility—not only on the basis of his history of the Milner Group to which Chamberlain was at least connected. He offers his interpretation—although neither a communist nor a supporter of the Soviet Union—based on the actual course of events. In fact, this interpretation was implicitly shared by Joseph Davies, while serving as US Ambassador to the Soviet Union.<sup>10</sup> Davies explicitly observed that right-wing interests prevailing in the British and French governments of the day were adamantly opposed to the Soviet Union and were just as adamant in their hopes that Germany would solve the "problem" of Bolshevism in Europe. However, the interpretation of World War II—at least in the West—focuses, almost counterfactually, upon the opposition to Nazi Germany and at least until 1945 the view of the Soviet Union as an ally against Nazism. I say counterfactually because until 1944 the only country waging serious war against Nazism in Europe was the Soviet Union.<sup>11</sup>

If it is virtually impossible to establish either in scholarship or popular history that the actions of the Allies until 1944 were primarily directed against the Soviet Union (as they had been since 1917) and not against Nazi Germany—that is to say popularise an interpretation of a period spanning approximately twenty years, then Pauwels' attempt to show that one of the major aims of the Great War was to reverse the French Revolution must meet even more resistance.

This brings us to the central issue of the first part of Pauwels' book: the function of

interpretation. In other words, why does an interpretation of the First World War make a difference? In fact, Pauwels gives some very good reasons for taking his interpretation seriously in the third part of his study but I prefer to postpone discussing those for now.

As in Quigley's book and to a certain extent in *The Myth of the Good War*, it is not alone the objective evidence that is persuasive. The arguments are only persuasive if one is first of all prepared to recognise that the narratives they challenge are somehow incoherent or, to put it another way, simply do not provide an adequate explanation for phenomena the reader is interested in explaining, that is interpreting. Here it is useful to recall Thomas Kuhn's proposition that scientific theories are not disproven, they are simply abandoned.<sup>12</sup> The circumstances under which they are abandoned according to Kuhn involve a preponderance of data, which the prevailing theory cannot adequately subsume. Kuhn's proposition has meanwhile been normalised so that his term "paradigm shift" has become a cliché. However, it is not the preponderance of data that forces the observer—in Kuhn's book the scientific investigator—to abandon a given theory. There is always more data than any theory can subsume. Rather it is a change in the interests of the observer—which may be random but may also become conventionalised—such that the data to which it is deemed appropriate to respond changes or the response to that data itself changes (e.g., by the introduction of a new instrument). Scientific theories are formula for controlling scientific behaviour. They are means by which scientists decide what to do—how to be scientists, so to speak.

The re-interpretation of the Great War as at least in part—I would agree a fundamental part—a war of restoration, of counter-revolution becomes possible once one is willing to re-examine the data of the past two centuries from the perspective innovated by Romanticism.

This is where Pauwels' first part becomes problematic. He rightly locates the intense reactionary force cultivated and maintained in Europe's ruling class since the French Revolution. However, he is mistaken in his interpretation of Romanticism. Thus he places Romanticism in the dock as a cultural phenomenon that helped to undermine the ideology of the French Revolution and thus nurtured the reactionary forces in European culture. This error arises because the ideology of the French Revolution is identified with the Enlightenment. While the Enlightenment certainly provided an ideological basis for the French Revolution and republicanism, it just as easily supplied a foundation for monarchy. The term "enlightened despotism" should not be understood cynically or as an oxymoron. Rather it needs to be recognised that what is called the Enlightenment was a secularisation of the prevailing ideology of Christendom. The terms "god" and "Church" were replaced by "nature" and "State" (and through the Revolution: "nation" or "people"). Nonetheless the ideology was one of hierarchical coherence between given order (whether from nature or the state) and human value (the idea that life is worth living). Its universality was a secularisation of the "city of god" and the universal church—that is to say it substituted Catholic-feudal order for a redemptive explanation in which the Church (and god) was no longer the apex.

Romanticism emerged because of the perception—by admittedly very few people—that the mere secularisation of Christendom could not solve the problem of human value, formulated, for instance, in such material questions as why does a system of universal equality fail to provide for the basic needs of all equal humans? The conflict of Romanticism was not with the universal value of humans, *per se*, but with the failure of the Enlightenment (secularised Christianity) to provide adequate answers to the questions Christianity

obviously could not answer.<sup>13</sup>

The great insight of Romanticism was that all explanations are inadequate because language—the substance of explanations—is not, nor can it be, isomorphic with the world. The pessimism attributed to many of the Romantics was not based on the renunciation of human value or the desire for a sentimental restoration (although there were Romantics who did take this position) but due to the discrepancy between the human condition, as an organism, and the semiotic transformation upon which human survival depends. It was not that the Enlightenment was inadequate or that the French Revolution failed but that all redemptive—that is to say final solutions must fail—or end in death. The promise that all mankind would be redeemed, whether by Christ or the ultimate revolutionary triumph, was necessarily an illusion. There would always be work to do and there was no guarantee that those efforts would be successful. A revolution could fail and did. That was not necessarily an argument against revolutions—although for many people it was or and has become one.

While the French Revolution did fail in many ways, it is also true that a complete restoration of the *ancien régime* also failed. That is, in fact, the point of departure for Pauwels. The ruling class recognised—as a class—that even the Congress of Vienna did not eliminate all the damage done by the French Revolution. In fact, as one scholar of pre-Marxian socialism once said to me, based on the state of working class organisation after the utter defeat of the 1848 revolutions, one could hardly anticipate the Paris Commune or its tenacity.<sup>14</sup> So if one of the narratives of the 19th century is the development of working class consciousness—despite interruptions and serious setbacks—then it is entirely plausible to find ruling-class consciousness developing throughout the century. In fact, one ought to expect this given the far smaller and more closely knit groups involved: with common family and educational backgrounds as well as intense conventional interaction, especially the “interbreeding” of bourgeois and aristocratic families within realms and across borders.

Furthermore, there is little dispute that by the end of the 19th century the organisation of economic power—despite national boundaries—had become enormously concentrated. The indoctrination of the European elite may have differed in terms of religious confession or national identity but industrialisation led to standardisation in the forms of business and economic organisation throughout Western Europe. Hence the horizontal conflict in the Great War can only be ignored by wilful disregard of the prevailing class structures at the time. Such ideological uniformity is best seen in the stalemate to which the war ground—a symptom of the inability of either side to conceive of any other means of pursuing the conflict.

The “sleepwalking” theory of the Great War begins and ends with this ideological uniformity. All the belligerents think essentially the same and therefore act almost identically. The technical or tactical innovations are additive but in no way reflect critical insight. Slaughter continues because this is all the theory can explain or prescribe. The war only ends because both parties are exhausted and incapable of punching any more. It has become irrational. The boxers are both “punch drunk”. They collapse and the referee—in this case the US—drags the worn out antagonists into their respective corners and declares the match a draw. The purpose of this interpretation is to say “it’s over now, let’s move along”. I would also call it the psycho-pharmaceutical model of historical interpretation. The US put the somnambulists to bed after waking them from their sleep. The interpretation is somewhat more generous to the Germans because after losing two world wars, one still needs them at least to finance their share of the imperial wars since 1989.

Romanticism is important for understanding the conflicts that culminated in the Great War—but not for the reasons Pauwels gives. Romanticism resulted from the failure of the Enlightenment but it was certainly not the cause, nor was it even a popular response to that failure. On the other hand World War I was a response to a failure but a failure just barely perceived by the ruling classes. Romanticism taken as a whole was the recognition that neither the Enlightenment (in despotic or republican forms) nor a restoration to Christendom could resolve the problem for the ruling classes—namely, that their explanations for society and human value had collapsed.

Individualism, a genuine innovation, was one Romantic response to the failure of both Christendom and its secular form, the Enlightenment, to provide coherent instructions for maintaining human value. The Romantic, faced with the destructiveness of the society, sought the capacity for valuation (for finding life worth living) in self-consciousness, in the awareness that the human organism, forced as it is to innovate, is capable of validating itself through initially artistic or creative activity. The Romantic did not invent the creative, it being an unavoidable consequence of human action, but asserted that the creative act itself—the ability of the individual to create was a source of value. In 1914 one could hardly suppose that Romanticism, understood as a response to explanatory collapse, was a mass phenomenon.

The fact that so many soldiers could be mustered for the first year or two of the war was evidence that, in fact, the Enlightenment values—albeit with varying degrees of insight and complexity—had been largely internalised by 1914. The moral compulsion to stay with one's mates, not to let them die alone, was not governed by medieval consciousness. This was the result of a notion of brotherhood that certainly conformed to Enlightenment ideals as they had been transmitted through the labour movement. These ideals were incoherent with the hierarchical system into which the ruling class, whether or not in the military, had been born and which their institutions sought to maintain. Some of this incoherence became obvious within the military itself; e.g., the “temporary gentleman” and the cultural obsession with cavalry. It might be argued that it was the military, as the most heavily indoctrinated organisation, that gave the critical impetus to the subsequent revolutions. Radicalised soldiers were essential for the initial successes of the revolutions. Hence one of the best reasons for the ruling class to promote mass slaughter would have been to prevent the accumulation of armed, organised and disciplined masses capable of combating the Establishment. Winning the war at all costs—especially of manpower—was a sensible option, especially on the main fronts in Europe.

Pauwels' argument that the ruling classes hoped to stop or roll back the successive waves of democratisation in European society and that this attempt was both partially successful and at least in Russia a dismal failure can also be phrased in terms of cultural history: namely, the contradictions between the compromised Enlightenment that emerged from the French Revolution and the widening range of responses to that ideology. The implicit conclusion that war would discipline the masses—another way of saying stabilise their response to the Enlightenment order that the ruling classes sought to impose—is by no means extreme. The mass organisation necessary to wage the war would intensify the industrial production of goods, not only weapons. It also gave birth to new technologies of mass propaganda. At the same time this mass culture further undermined the structures that had hitherto separated the ruling elite from the “dangerous classes”.

Not unlike the Haitian Revolution's impact on the slaveholding class—the spectre of a Black nation capable of waging war against whites—only the crass physical separation of officers

from ordinary soldiers could—and only barely—maintain the fiction that the officer class was composed of superior humans and superior soldiers.<sup>15</sup> In other words, although the war was also seen as a means of rolling back democratic aspirations, the very conditions of mass “democratic” violence meant that officers had to be sacrificed to machine guns along with private soldiers or risk that those soldiers would no longer fight. Thus the superiority of the mounted officer class was undermined by the very conditions of warfare that should have confirmed it. The increasing violence and the insane slaughter persisted with each further attempt to stabilise the ideological situation. In that sense the later justification, popularised by American propagandists, that the Great War was “a war to end war” is highly ambiguous.<sup>16</sup> Does an end to war mean the exhaustion of the belligerents’ capacity to wage war or the pacification of the dangerous classes so that further war against them becomes unnecessary?

In any event the Great War was a product of the explanatory collapse that rendered both the pre-Enlightenment and Enlightenment redemptive strategies of the ruling classes insufficient to preserve the order that had emerged in the late-19th century, let alone restore the feudal-clerical order desired by their most reactionary elements. The Romantics merely recognised the impending collapse. They did not aid or abet it. Nietzsche and Hegel are wrongly maligned for supporting a rejection of Enlightenment humanism. Nietzsche is treated as nothing other than an enemy of mass democracy and hence also a prophet of the reaction. Nietzsche’s personal problems, cursed both by bad health and a viciously anti-Semitic sister, who increasingly controlled access to him and his work, make it advisable to distinguish Nietzsche’s insights as to the ideological incoherence of the Enlightenment (and its Judeo-Christian foundations) and the public image his sister was determined to maintain—undoubtedly fascist and anti-Semitic as her own biography demonstrates.

The Enlightenment was a rebranding of the redemptive strategy enforced by Christendom—in which human value lay solely in salvation and salvation was attainable solely through the Church. Since the Romantics recognised that this salvation was based upon a worship of death, they rejected it. Furthermore the attempt to maintain the same salvific model but substitute “nature” for “god” was rejected too—at least by the most radical Romantics. The rejection of “science” arose from the recognition that there were no “laws of nature” to be discovered. In other words, it was not scientific investigation and discovery that was challenged but the idea that the purpose of science was to exemplify the natural order. In fact, until the mid-19th century “science” was generally understood as a discrete body of self-contained knowledge and not the process of discovering (i.e. innovating) new responses to the data found in the world. The Romantics were not anti-science but anti-theology. Enlightenment science—including the opportunistic work of people like the clerical grain speculator Thomas Malthus—was a polemic for principles. Adam Smith was writing “moral philosophy”—which is all economics is even today. Malthus was a charlatan on a par with Milton Friedman. These writers were neither scientists in the modern sense nor were they significant for Romanticism. They were polemicists for the emergent bourgeoisie but not the Romantics or the late Enlightenment. While it is true that there were Romantics whose response to the collapse of the Enlightenment was reactionary, it was the recognition of this collapse and not any particular response to it that continues to characterise Romanticism.

Pauwels draws heavily on the historian Arno Meyer who rightly pointed out that the Russian Revolution had the character of a plan, to fulfil what the French Revolution had failed to

deliver.<sup>17</sup> In this sense the Russian Revolution was the first conscious attempt to realise the secular redemption of which there was only a hint in 1789. The World War aggravated the conditions under which the Russian Revolution, unlike its French predecessor, could not become an “international” revolution, despite the ambitions of its leaders. As Rudi Dutschke once said, there was the “idea” of world revolutionary solidarity in 1917 but the historical conditions were lacking its realisation.<sup>18</sup> In 1789 the prevailing dynastic system in Europe forced the French to define the revolution nationally (as opposed to the *Glorious Revolution* in Britain which was dynastic).<sup>19</sup> Britain and Austria then waged war not just against regicide but also to preserve the dynastic principle itself and oppose the very concept of “citoyen”. Nonetheless, by 1914 the notion of citizen was firmly anchored in those states that called themselves “constitutional monarchies” (even if the term “subject” was still in use) and republics.

Pauwels then explores the relevance of imperialism. On one hand the major European powers were competing for control over the world’s population, territory, resources and markets. Britain and France were the dominant imperial powers. Spain had lost nearly all its remaining empire either to wars of independence or to the US. Portugal had been an insignificant satellite of Britain since the Napoleonic Wars. Belgium owned the Congo—a territory as large as Western Europe. Germany was the leading industrialised country after Britain but almost entirely devoid of colonies and access to the cheap raw materials to make it competitive against Britain. The ambitions of Germany’s industrial elite were necessarily opposed to the maintenance of Britain’s position as hegemonic world power.

So we have the triggers in Austria-Hungary but the explosives and combustibles for the Great War are spread throughout the West.

At this point it is perhaps useful to draw attention to another work, published in 2014. Markus Osterrieder’s *Welt im Umbruch* (World in Upheaval) will probably never make it into English, not only because of its size but also because of its ostensible concern with the reaction of Rudolf Steiner and the Anthroposophy movement to the war.<sup>20</sup> Osterrieder is a German historian. He takes Quigley’s description of the Anglo-American elite seriously and also argues that the British role in the Great War has been grossly understated and distorted. Osterrieder devotes enormous attention to the development of the “national question” in Europe and above all the collapse of the multi-ethnic Austro-Hungarian Empire. One of Osterrieder’s arguments—especially given the current knowledge about so-called “colour revolutions”—is that the British Empire maintained an extensive clandestine network which infiltrated nationalist organisations throughout Europe, especially in Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire. In other words, the British Empire was engaged in the same deep covert political manipulation of internal political and cultural movements in Europe before 1914 that became the specialty of the US Central Intelligence Agency after 1945.

To this day the precise circumstances surrounding the assassination of the Austrian heir to the throne are shrouded in ambiguity. The ostensible trigger for the Great War is about as certain as the cause of the USS Maine. Yet schoolbooks—and these are important—continue to report that the sinking of the USS Maine in Havana harbour caused the US war against Spain (called the Spanish-American War in the US) and that an irate Serbian caused the Great War.

So the first and most important contribution of a Dr Pauwels’ book is to redefine the “cause”

of the war and to remove it from the comic book narrative that dominates school and university depictions of this epic catastrophe.

Dr Pauwels' second and theoretically as well as didactically most important argument is the substantive elaboration of two axioms (usually reduced to platitudes): firstly that of Clausewitz that "war is the pursuit of politics by other means" and secondly that "imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism". The poverty of political science and history especially since people like Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski and the fortunately late Samuel Huntington became the sacred cardinals of those disciplines has meant that these two insights have been reduced to imperial jargon.

*The Great Class War* shows precisely which politics were to be pursued by the war begun in 1914. He also shows precisely what imperialism meant in practice—not only for capitalists but for the co-optation of social classes without whose support neither empire nor the war could have been pursued. Dr Pauwels also performs a service to those who still believe in humanism and positive social change. He demonstrates that the apology for fascism—that it was a reaction to the Russian Revolution—is utter nonsense. Fascism is inherent in the ideological structure of clerico-capitalism. The fascism of Mussolini and Hitler was nurtured by the Roman Catholic Church and the emerging multinational corporate class well before the Great War and the certainly before Bolshevism appeared as the "great whale" for the capitalist Ahab to kill. Thus *The Great Class War* is also a powerful rebuttal to all the nonsense that has been published *ad nauseam* since 1989—implying the end of history. In fact, *The Great Class War* demonstrates that for an alert generation today, it is necessary to return a century to discover the reasons for the war against the "99%" being waged today.

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## Notes

1. T.P. Wilkinson. "[Peculiar Omission in Award Winning Book](#)," *Dissident Voice*, July 21, 2014. []
2. Jacques Pauwels, *The Myth of the Good War*, 2002. []
3. In fact, the Second World War is almost never discussed in terms of imperialism but only in terms of an exceedingly superficial and misleading contest between "democracy and dictatorship" or occasionally "democracy and fascism". []
4. Vladimir Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, 1917. []
5. Carroll Quigley, *The Anglo-American Establishment*, 1981. []
6. See Eric Hobsbawm, his trilogy on the "long 19th century": *The Age of Revolution* (1962), *The Age of Capital* (1972) *The Age of Empire* (1987) and of "the short 20th century": *The Age of Extremes*(1994). Although a Marxist historian, Hobsbawm ended his academic career as a Companion of Honour (1998), having also served in prestigious academic posts. []
7. The machine gun had been refined for use against "natives" in the colonial wars as a means of compensating for their numerical superiority. The fact that such weaponry was routinely used against non-whites with devastating effect could only have escaped the notice of field commanders because of the inherent racism governing the use of military force against non-whites. []
8. Sir Oswald Mosley (1896-1980), founder and leader of the British Union of Fascists. []

9. Mussolini was [receiving GBP](#) 100 per week (approx. GBP 6,000 today) from the British secret service starting in 1917. []
10. Joseph E. Davies, *Mission to Moscow*, 1941. []
11. It is commonly believed that the US war aims were directed against the Axis powers as a whole. This is mistaken. The US war in the Pacific was a logical extension of its Manifest Destiny and territorial ambitions enhanced by its conquest of Spain's Pacific colony, The Philippines. Tokyo was seen by Washington as a serious obstacle to US expansion. On the other hand, the US only became a belligerent in Europe when Hitler declared war on the US after the attack on Pearl Harbor. The promised "second front" against Hitler was only opened once it became clear to the US regime that the Soviet Union would defeat Germany. For a discussion of US imperialism in the Pacific, see Bruce Cumings, *Dominion from Sea to Sea*, 2010. []
12. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 1962. []
13. The validity of any claims that the ideology of Christianity supports human value is dubious at best. "Christian humanism" is for all intents and purposes a genuine oxymoron. []
14. Waltraud Seidel-Höppner. Her main work has been on the German revolutionary Wilhelm Weitling. Waldtraud Seidel-Höppner: *Wilhelm Weitling (1808-1871). Eine politische Biographie*. Parts 1 and 2 [Peter Lang Verlag](#) (Frankfurt am Main/Berlin/Bern/Brussels/New York/Oxford/Vienna) 2014. She made this observation in a private conversation with the author. []
15. See C L R James, *The Black Jacobins* (1938) and the work of Gerald Horne, esp. *Confronting Black Jacobins* and *The Counter-Revolution of 1776*. []
16. Originally attributed to H.G. Wells, *The War That Will End War* (1914) and subsequently popularised by US President Woodrow Wilson. []
17. Arno J Meyer, *The Furies: Violence and Terror in the Russian Revolutions*, 2002. []
18. Alfred Willi Rudolf ("Rudi") Dutschke, German student radical and sociologist (1940-1979), speaking in a TV interview with Günter Gaus on *Zur Protokoll* (3 December 1967). In April 1968 he was shot in the head while riding his bicycle in Berlin. He died in an epileptic fit, the consequence of the brain damage incurred by the assassination attempt. []
19. The so-called Glorious Revolution (1688-1689) replaced James II with William III of Orange and Mary II of England. In 1689 the *Bill of Rights* was promulgated, deemed one of the cornerstones of Britain's constitutional monarchy. For a discussion of other wide-reaching implications of the Glorious Revolution see Gerald Horne's *The Counter-Revolution of 1776* also reviewed by this author. []
20. Markus Osterrieder, *Welt im Umbruch: Nationalitätenfrage, Ordnungspläne und Rudolf Steiners Haltung im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Stuttgart 2014. []

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