

West must share blame

Tomorrow, as we hardly need be reminded, is the 50th anniversary of the start of World War II. Half a century later, it's almost impossible to turn on one's TV without seeing war footage or Nazi villains filling the screen.

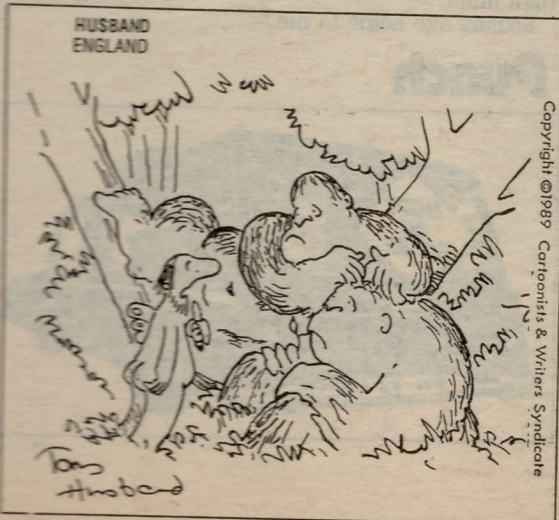
For the next few days, the media will revel in nostalgia and self-congratulation over the well-deserved defeat of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan.

Unfortunately, one of the most important points about the conflict will be totally ignored—that World War II was merely the continuation of World War I. The victors of the Great War of 1914-18 must bear a very heavy responsibility for the rise of Nazi Germany.

Imperial Germany, though hardly an innocent victim, did not start World War I, contrary to popular mythology. It began in the Balkans when the rickety Austro-Hungarian Empire clashed with expansionist Serbia. The mighty Russian Empire mobilized to support its ally, Serbia. Germany, confronted by an impossible two-front threat from Russia and a mobilizing France, mobilized in turn. Like modern Israel today, Germany, surrounded by enemies, could not afford to allow its foes to concentrate overwhelming forces in a two-front war—and so it struck first at France through Belgium.

Behind the awful inevitability of all these mobilizations and counter-mobilizations was the hidden hand of the British Empire. Imperial Britain was determined to crush Germany because of the increasing threat the Germans posed to British exports and to Britain's naval supremacy. A detailed study of the two years before 1914 shows a clear pattern of British intriguing to draw Russia and France into a war against Germany.

Up until the eve of the war, Britain was assuring Germany of its neutrality and desire for peace while secretly planning for war. Looking back on the Great War, what we discern is a titanic clash between empires vying for domination of Europe and world trade. It was, in the purest sense of the



Adopted? Mom, Dad, what are you saying?

ERIC MARGOLIS



word, an imperial war fought by imperialists.

Britain's subjects, like Canada and Australia, sent their men off to fight what they were told was a war against the beastly Huns who were bayoneting Belgian babies. British propaganda convinced the colonies and, eventually, the U.S., that the Kaiser was bent on world domination and had to be stopped. So the colonial troops went off to die in a war that was really to save Britain's commercial empire from German economic challenge.

When Germany was defeated, the victorious allies, led by France and Britain, imposed a peace at gunpoint on Germany that was worthy of the Mongols. Both nations were determined to forever destroy Germany as a commercial and military power. A third of Germany's territory was taken away. German industry was gutted. Impossible reparations bankrupted what was left of Germany's ruined economy, bringing about hyperinflation, food shortages, internal unrest and untold misery. In short, the Germans had their faces ground into the dirt by the rapacious, merciless victors.

I was recently reading a book by England's greatest spy of World War I, Sidney Reilly—who, in spite of his name, was a Polish Jew. Reilly, writing in early 1918 from the hell of Moscow under Lenin's Red Terror says: 'Will people in England never understand. The Germans are human beings; we can afford to even be beaten by them. Here in Moscow there is growing to maturity the archenemy of the human race.'

Reilly's words were grimly prophetic. Imperial Britain and France destroyed decent, humane Imperial Germany. From its shattered ruins arose the monster of Nazism. Breaking Germany on the wheel of the Versailles Treaty awoke a nightmare side of the Teutonic soul. Out of it came the incarnation of Germany's lust for revenge, Adolf Hitler.

Ironically, a few years later, the western powers allied themselves to Stalin's Russia to fight Nazi Germany—under the banner of saving western democracy. A Russia that, as Sidney Reilly predicted, was an empire even more murderous and cruel than Hitler's Germany, one that killed 30 million of its own people. Such was the "crusade for democracy."

If Germany had been afforded a just and decent peace in 1918, World War II would likely not have happened—at least not in Europe. That, in my view, is the greatest tragedy of the 20th century. By showing no mercy to Germany, Britain and France planted the seeds for the next war and the loss of half of Europe to Russia. Flag-waving and nostalgia are fine. Destroying Hitler was a boon to humanity. But we should never forget the West's role in creating him. Time for some glasnost in our own myth-filled history.

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