World War 1 and its Effects

Wallace G. Mills Hist. 317 2 World War 1 and effects

- World War 1 brought a great deal of disruption and heavy impacts for many areas and peoples of Africa.

Warfare

- one of the most important motives for the ‘new’ imperialism of the late 19th C (see the notes for History 316 lecture 19 The Scramble and Motivations) was to gain additional resources, both human and material, to advance to the next level of ‘world power’ in the social darwinist international arena of the late 19th C.

• for France in the period following the Franco-Prussian War in 1870-71, the growing preponderance of Imperial Germany, both in industrial might and a population that was larger and growing more quickly, was a source of concern, almost panic. The new colonies were seen as additional reservoirs of manpower to close the gap in numbers; in fact, the French raised and used several hundred thousand men from West Africa and Algeria; many fought in the trenches while others provided labour and support roles.

• the British were more constrained. There was especially strong, racist opposition from white South Africans against using Africans as combatants. [However, racism was sufficiently strong in Canada that Black Canadians too were not used in combat units, but only in one single, segregated, labour battalion!] Nevertheless, several thousand African volunteers from South Africa were brought to France as a labour brigade and suffered over 625 lives lost when their ship, the Mende, was sunk.

- thus, substantial numbers of Africans participated in the war in Europe.

- the war extended to Africa as well:

  • **German South West Africa** was captured by South African troops (mostly whites, but substantial numbers of Africans as support labour); there were only a few German troops so the fighting was over quickly.

  • **Kamerun** and **Togo** were occupied quickly and easily. There were few settlers and only small numbers of troops.

  • **German East Africa** was much more difficult. Some Indian troops on their way to Suez and Egypt were diverted to East Africa in an attempt to invade from the
coast; this attempt ended in disaster. As a result, the invasion had to be mounted overland from Nairobi (up the railroad from Mombasa). Because of diseases which affected horses, transportation was difficult; movement of supplies had to rely on human porterage.

- again because of S. African objections (Gen. Jan Smuts was in command of all British forces in East Africa for a time and some of the white troops were from S. Africa), Africans were not used as combatants, but the British forces required masses of labour to maintain supply lines; much of this labour was not voluntary but forced.

- although Africans used by the British were non-combatants, losses of life were high as diseases and epidemics ravaged populations in the area as well as those pressed into service.

- German forces in East Africa were askaris (African troops with German officers); they were in fact much like mercenaries. Also, they were allowed to push their weight around with African peoples (their primary purpose had been to hold the African peoples under subjection), but they were loyal to those who paid their wages.

- the East African campaign dragged on and in fact the German forces never surrendered, although by the end of the war, they had been sharply reduced in numbers and driven into Mozambique; they used guerrilla type tactics of avoiding direct confrontations and keeping on the move.

**Indirect effects**

- indirect effects were even more pervasive and widespread than the direct effects; especially significant were the economic effects:

  - many African areas had become more involved in international trade over the preceding 2-3 decades; during the war, trade with Europe was disrupted and that produced sharp effects on the economic well-being of many Africans.

  - another obvious example was rising inflation; while this gave some opportunities for increasing incomes as African commodities rose in price, the cost of goods and cost of living went up much faster than incomes of most people. As a result, most were worse off.

  - also, in trying to squeeze more resources to fight the war, colonial gov’ts raised taxes significantly and these added to the burdens on Africans. Vast numbers of Africans were still primarily in subsistence economies so where do they get
money to pay taxes

- the end of the war brought further blows:
  
  • the influenza pandemic also affected large areas of Africa, especially devastating effects in South Africa. In fact the war exacerbated the disease problem which had come with colonialism and intrusion by outsiders; the isolation which had helped to reduce the spread of disease was reduced as more people began to move around (going to war or going to ports etc. to work).

  • the development policies, which were introduced in the inter-war period, continued this same effect by encouraging (or forcing) substantial migrations. As a result, the public health and medical programmes, which were also being introduced during the period, were, to some extent at least, merely counteracting some of the worsening health because of increased migration.

  • the end of the war brought post-war depression.
    
    o prices fell and markets dried up, so commodity producers suffered;
    
    o employment fell, and in Fr. West Africa, thousands of troops were returned home and demobilised;
    
    o the extra work in transportation and ports disappeared and created more unemployment.

- by the end of the war, a couple of trends that had long term and increasing importance in the 20th C—urbanisation and migration—were already emerging.

- people migrate, especially to port cities, for jobs and opportunities; in the cities, they are separated from kin and the social and economic supports that kin provide. Their economic situation is more vulnerable to unemployment or illnesses; they are subject to the variations and vicissitudes of world markets and conditions. People are changed from subsistence farmers to urban workers and often have few supports to replace the ones they have lost.

- disturbances & reactions occurred in a number of places:
  
  • in Dahomey in the port of Cotonou, there were strikes which were suppressed; some short-lived trade unions and newspapers were eliminated.

  • in Kenya too, especially in the port of Mombasa, strikes and protest organisations sprang up—especially Harry Thuku and the Young Kikuyu Association. Thuku
was arrested and exiled to a remote area for number of years—very important in the origins of the independence movement in Kenya (we shall discuss these later in the term).

- the resulting unrest raised some critical questions about colonial policies and practices.

- as was noted in the overview lecture, by the end of WW1 the ideological climate and context was changed; the war, which in Allied propaganda had been fought for democracy against militarism and autocracy, had produced much discussion about rights—both individual and collective (e.g., political and civil rights for individuals and self-determination for groups and peoples).

- on the African side, some had begun to get western education (especially after the turn of the century, a few Africans had begun to go abroad for higher education, but mission education had produced larger numbers—teachers and preachers—who were literate and interested in world events); as a result (in British colonies), this western-educated elite was beginning to ask for (it was initially very polite so ‘demand’ may be a bit strong) greater opportunity to participate in governing and political decision-making. They also started newspapers which could be sharply critical of colonial governments and officials (these were only tolerated in British colonies and not always happily there either; British traditions of free speech and free press eventually gave some latitude). The point to note is that this minority elite was already dissatisfied and articulate.

- all such requests were rejected either outright or declared to be greatly premature (the rationale: only a few—a tiny minority—were able to understand or participate properly and it would be wrong to give them special privileges; in fact, many of the officials involved in the colonial policy debate even rejected the idea that the western-educated minority was ‘ready’. Racism was still at very high levels in western societies from the high points reached just before 1914). Nevertheless, especially in Britain where the Labour Party was strongly critical of colonial policies, this was part of the background against which debate about and creation of colonial policies took place.

- on the other side of the colonial equation, the imperial powers of Europe were significantly poorer than they had been before 1914. Thus, there was more emphasis on making colonies pay their own way and even get them to add to the wealth and well-being of the imperial country. In any case, there was a large interest in policies that would develop the economic resources of the colonies.

- the new imperatives and moral issues introduced during W.W. 1 (self determination, a war for liberty and democracy, etc.) made some of the cruder social darwinism less acceptable; crude exploitation had to be avoided or at least not expressed. Instead, new theories were put forward:
• **The Dual Mandate** articulated by Lord Lugard became the ostensible objective for British colonies.

  - Africa should be developed for the benefit of both Africans (improving their standards of living, education etc.) and the rest of the world (by making Africa’s resources available for trade).

• **La Mise en Valeur** (Enhancing the Value) was the comparable idea and slogan in France; the value of the colonies was to be increased by development; the idea of ‘trusteeship’ was not prominent in this formulation, except perhaps indirectly.

• as we shall see, the Belgians were even more systematic in their development policies and intentions.

  - this background was very important in the 1920s as the search for and debate about the best colonial policies took place.