

'The lamps are going out all over Europe'

by Stuart Rosenblatt

Dreadnought: Britain, Germany, and the Coming of the Great War

by Robert K. Massie

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As the world plunges toward another Dark Age, it is critical to examine the root causes of today's crisis, which can be traced efficiently to the period from the U.S. Civil War to the outbreak of World War I. Unfortunately the United States has never understood the lessons of the Civil War, i.e., the resurgence of British-inspired Confederate policy in the late 19th century, as a result of which the United States entered World War I on the side of our historic enemies! (See *EIR*, Nov. 6, "LaRouche Broadcast: 'We Wrestle against Principalities and Powers.'") Unless we unravel the wrongheadedness that led into the First World War, and extirpate all vestiges of Anglo-inspired foreign and domestic policy, the U.S. as a nation is doomed, and a third world war our future.

Robert Massie's *Dreadnought* allows us to study the events leading into World War I from the vantage point of an American who is pro-British, and we can therefore use it to draw the opposite conclusions from Massie, as to the causes and culprits for the war.

From the outset, Massie tries to legitimize British actions according to the Alfred J. Mahan interpretation of the 1850-1914 period: "In 1890, an American naval officer, more scholar than sea dog, codified the Briton's intuitive sense of the relationship between sea power, prosperity, and national greatness. In *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, Alfred Thayer Mahan traced the rise and fall of maritime powers

in the past and demonstrated that the state which controlled the seas controlled its own fate; those which lacked naval mastery, were doomed to defeat or the second rank. . . . From the metaphor arose an imperative: to patrol the common, a policeman was needed; to protect shipping and trade routes, maritime powers required navies."

Massie introduces his three-pronged thesis in the introduction: 1) British sea power was the guardian of the empire and implicitly the world and this global policing was necessary. 2) When Germany, in particular, began to catch up to England in naval power, balance-of-power theory dictated the necessity of an alliance of Britain, France, and Russia against it. 3) Germany should have realized that violation of this scheme would lead to war. Despite Massie's attempts to force events to conform to his thesis, his ample historiography allows the careful reader to gain tremendous insight into the real turn of events.

Sunset on the empire

Britain created and maintained its empire throughout the 19th century at the point of a gun—its Navy—and through the spread of anti-industry "free trade" policies to halt the growth of rival nations. However, this policy began to fail by the second half of the century as Germany, France, Russia, and the United States made remarkable strides toward industrialization by their application of American System programs of rapid scientific and technological progress, coupled with protectionist trade policies. This growing threat to British global domination caused the empire to jettison its time-honored "Splendid Isolation" from affairs on the European continent, and to launch a full-blown encirclement of its major rival, Germany. This gambit was accomplished by the successful manipulation of bitter enemies France, Russia, Japan and the United States into an anti-German, anti-Austro-Hungarian entente.

Massie details quite well what Britain looked like from the inside and highlights the little-acknowledged French surrender at Fashoda in Sudan in 1898 as crucial to the process. He also provides excellent quotes from the treacherous French Foreign Minister Théophile Delcassé on his surrender to British superiority. When Delcassé took over as foreign minister at Quai d'Orsay, Massie reports, "he had a personal goal. 'I do not wish to leave this desk,' he told a friend, 'without having established an entente with England.' "

Following the Fashoda surrender, France—Britain's enemy for centuries—became an ally. Massie then documents the manipulation of another British rival—Russia—into the British camp. In the process, he also exposes the fact that England had deep-seated fears that Russia and China would come together around Russian Foreign Minister Count Sergei Witte's ambitious rail and infrastructure program, and that Russia's eastward expansion might sever England's link to India, the "Jewel in the Crown." "In private, Queen Victoria described Tsar Alexander III as 'barbaric, Asiatic, and tyrannical.' Conservatives feared Russia thrusting towards the Dardanelles, into the Far East, against the frontiers of India, through Persia towards the Gulf. Liberals rejected the Russian autocracy as anti-democratic. Britain's first step away from Splendid Isolation had been the alliance with Japan, a treaty specifically aimed at containing Imperial Russia."

The entente with Russia that was consolidated was hardly a "community of principle."

Massie also depicts events and personalities inside the degenerate court of Kaiser Wilhelm II that facilitated the British encirclement. He unmasks key advisers such as First Counselor Friedrich von Holstein, Count Paul Wolff Metternich and Prince Karl Lichnowsky as likely agents or at least pawns in the British Great Game. For example, Massie describes Holstein's maneuverings, which led Germany away from renewing its Reinsurance Treaty alliance with Russia in the late 1880s. This stratagem paved the way for Russia's unlikely embrace of previous enemies France and England, a move that would have been inconceivable for Holstein's previous master, Otto von Bismarck.

Jacky Fisher and the 'Dreadnought'

Once the encirclement of Germany is completed, and the United States and Japan are towed into the new alignment, Massie proceeds to document the rise of mercurial Jacky Fisher and the new Royal Navy in the 20th century, and its pivotal role in events leading toward war. Fisher was the architect of the new Dreadnought battleship, whose oil-powered turbine engine allowed it to carry very big guns that could fire from over the horizon. His name was synonymous with rebuilding the British fleet and with war against Germany. Massie provides quote after quote from Fisher on the deliberate targeting of Germany as England's only adversary from 1902 onward, such as the following scenario of Fisher's:

"Fisher was convinced throughout his term as First Sea

Lord of the inevitability of war with Germany. . . . Fisher thought that the Germans would choose a weekend, probably a weekend with a bank holiday. He had no difficulty pinpointing the date, the name of the British admiral, and the name of the battle in which Britain's future would be decided. 'Jellicoe to be Admiralissimo on Oct. 21, 1914 when the Battle of Armageddon comes along,' he wrote in 1911. Fisher's premise and most of the details of his prediction were correct. He picked the date because it corresponded with the probable completion of the deepening of the Kiel Canal, which would permit the passage of German dreadnoughts from the Baltic to the North Sea. War did come on a bank holiday weekend, although it was in August, not October, 1914. (The Kiel Canal had been completed in July.) At the Battle of Armageddon, which was the Battle of Jutland, when the whole strength of the German High Seas Fleet was hurled against the Royal Navy, the Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet was Sir John Jellicoe. Jellicoe was in command because, over the years, Fisher had guided his career and insisted that no one else would do."

As war became inevitable, Massie details, the British ruling class stepped up its preparation of cultural and psychological warfare against the British people to prepare them. He systematically goes through the contrived "media events" of 1908-12 that paved the way for combat. An example, among the numerous pulp novels that appeared in those years, was the "futuristic" *The Invasion of 1910* by William Le Queux.

" . . . On both sides, the war was fought with ferocity.

"The Germans are monsters who bayonet women and children, force terrified citizens to dig their own graves, and, in retaliation for the ambush of a German supply party, slaughter the entire population of an English town. The Kaiser is not a 'splendid chap,' but a bloodthirsty barbarian who craves the bombardment and sacking of London.

" 'The pride of these English must be broken,' commands the All Highest. The English are almost as brutal: Any German who falls into their hands is shot, stabbed, hanged, or garrotted."

Massie's final chapters reveal many of the machinations of Foreign Secretary Edward Lord Grey, who transformed the Serbian-authored assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand into the detonation of European genocide. While the crisis around the murder was crescendoing, Massie writes, Grey failed to brief the British cabinet, despite the fact that he was monitoring all European communiqués. The British government was not advised about the situation until one week prior to the German declaration of war. In Grey's mind, the trap of war against Germany, carefully plotted for over 15 years, had been sprung. Massie concludes his book with Grey's lament on the inevitability of it all: After delivering his ultimatum to Germany to halt its mobilization, Grey "uttered the lines which memorably signaled the coming of the First World War. 'The lamps are going out all over Europe. We shall not see them lit again in our lifetime.' "