

The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914

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London: Allen Lane, 2012, £30 (h/b); Penguin, 2013, £10.99
(p/b)

There are many things that can be done while one is asleep. Bellini wrote a delightful opera about somnambulism. However it is difficult to share the same sense of fascination or repose even a century after the outbreak of the Great War. Somehow it defies any standard of human sensitivity to allude to the acts and omissions leading to the millions of slaughtered men and boys at the hands of the greediest financial and industrial elites known to recorded history as the result of 'sleepwalking'.

Consider the most peculiar omission in this prize-winning story written by a young man from the Dominions: that the author has managed to write over five hundred pages about the Great War with scarcely more than ten pages about the British Empire – then the undisputed world power (not unlike its North American cousin today). All the attention is focussed on Sir Edward Grey, HM Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs from 1905 until 1916.

Strangely enough the name 'Grey group' is used as attribution for Britain's foreign policy. Although many of the British sources cited in *The Sleepwalkers* should more appropriately be attributed to the Milner Group – for those uninitiated this is the closely-knit group of primarily Oxonians who initially joined Cecil Rhodes, led by Alfred Milner (Secretary of State for War under Lloyd George) – and who, together with the Lord Salisbury, were the most powerful force in British imperial politics at least until the end of World War I:

'Grey was not the puppet-master; the men of the new policy – Bertie, Hardinge, Mallet, Tyrrell and so on – were not manipulated or controlled by him, but worked alongside him as the members of a loose coalition driven by shared sentiments. Indeed, Grey was quite dependent on some of these collaborators – many of his decisions and memoranda, for example, were modelled

closely on reports from Hardinge.’ (p. 202)

Who these collaborators were has already been explained by Carroll Quigley in his 1981 (posthumous) study of the Anglo-American Establishment.¹ Quigley – far from a hostile scholar – objected that by means of entrenched control/influence of the principal academic institutions and publishers this group, concentrated in the Rhodes Trust and certain Oxford colleges, have been able to write their own history for the public and suppress any other views. *The Sleepwalkers* is another proof that Anglo-American historical scholarship regarding British imperial history is still tightly controlled.² People have claimed to previously have no grounds for supposing that their government leaders lie about the grounds and plans for wars. But since Mr Blair’s deceptions to promote the recent Gulf wars is a matter of record, then there can be no excuse for writing anything which gives *prima facie* credence to the public conduct of government officials, including their rationale for such conduct.

As Quigley noted – and anyone who has held genuinely nonconformist academic opinions will have experienced – the best way to suppress uncomfortable or disagreeable facts is to ignore them. *The Sleepwalkers* might be viewed as a naive piece of work from a young scholar from ‘down under’.

1 Now available free as a PDF at
<http://www.carrollquigley.net/pdf/The_Anglo-American_Establishment.pdf>.

2 By ‘controlled’ I mean what counts as ‘history’ in the academic and professional sense. Disinclination arises, among other things, from academic ‘discipline’. If one strays outside the boundaries set by official academic discourse one can risk losing any claims to credibility (professional employment may even be at risk). Then there is the difference between what people publish as academic work and what they publish in the non-academic field. Established historians and other scholars do not get their books reviewed and promoted if they seriously violate the canons of the discipline. In Anglo-American history very little scholarship challenges the idea that the British Empire was anything but a great civilising force and promoter of democratic values and that the American Empire is the same. The assertion is that they have made mistakes or deviated from grand ideals, as if the reason for conquering India or the West Indies had been originally to bring everyone the dubious values of parliamentary democracy – unsolicited of course.

However such naiveté or careless omission of the world's great power in 1914 has been amply rewarded – the author recently received a royal (Regius) chair in history at Cambridge – as have been most of the official historians of the Milner Group.

However a more important issue than the scholarly neglect of the most important power in the world at that time and the most important group of collaborators with Sir Edward Grey is why this book appears now and why has it been so thoroughly promoted in Germany. It is true that the author, who spent several years at the Free University of Berlin and wrote several books about Prussia, has spent enough time on his subject to warrant writing about the end of Prussia as a polity. However just as no one seriously doubts that Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was written as an imperial textbook and that the Classics were developed as a discipline in England and Göttingen to supply scholarship to defend European colonialism,³ it is worth asking what policy purpose *The Sleepwalkers* is intended to defend.

Great Britain has pursued two consistent foreign policy principles since the French Revolution. The first is to control the seas and the access to cheap (or free) raw materials (including labour) throughout the world. The second has been to keep Europe divided against itself both to assure access to its markets and to weaken potential imperial competitors. This was a policy understood even in those ancient days before NATO or the European Union. It was one of the main reasons that England was called 'perfidious Albion' on the Continent. This meant that the British Empire governed by playing its European competitors against each other.

In Germany *The Sleepwalkers* has been received either as a welcome relief or a naive attempt to make German militarism seem innocuous or unintentional in the months leading up to July and August 1914. How does the author attempt to relieve Germany of its historical war 'guilt'? The answer is rather simple and therein lies the ground for suspicion. The author explains that in essence Germany's leaders did not

³ See here Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* (London: Vintage, 1991).

understand the gravity of the Serbian 'threat'.

This is a serious shift in the World War I narrative that is by no means accidental. 1991 was the year in which German foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher unleashed what became a vicious aerial bombardment of Serbia and the destruction of Yugoslavia, commencing with his recognition of Croatia's independence. By the time NATO bombs ceased to fall on Serbia, there was no Yugoslavia and the way was cleared for one of Europe's biggest contraband trafficking hubs under NATO management: Kosovo. Back then the media was full of reports about how horrid Serbs were and the danger that Russia would feel obliged to defend the Serbian state. It didn't and everyone was relieved. Today in the Ukraine NATO is engaged in overt and covert operations to separate the country from what the West would call 'Russia's sphere of influence'. There is every indication among the mass of Germans that they disapprove of this indirect attack on Russia. Nonetheless the German mass media has been entirely on the side of NATO, condemning everyone who dissents as a '*Putin-Versteher*' (someone who 'understands' Putin).

After some ten years of virtually silent deployment of German armed forces in Afghanistan to provide support to the CIA's war there, it now appears as if European NATO units may be necessary to support the right-wing usurpers that have ruled in Kiev since last year. There are two ways to justify this short of an outright attack by Russian forces – still unlikely since Putin has resisted every provocation to date. One involves absolving the remaining guilty consciences among Germany's elite and the middle class that supports it, thus making outright war seem civilised again. The other complementary approach is to reiterate that it is not Germany (or any other NATO power) that is escalating the crisis but Slavs – Ukrainians who sympathise with Russia or even consider themselves to be Russian (like so many West Germans seem to think they are Americans). By reminding the educated German that World War I was caused by Serbs and Russians, it is not far-fetched to adopt the position that Russia still protects those Slavs who are essentially the cause of the

Great War (and, if we wait long enough, also caused World War II).

The Sleepwalkers is written like a plenary indulgence granted by the unnamed Anglo-American elite that has profited from every major European war in the 20th century to those whom it would recruit again in its 'association of helpers' – witting and unwitting instruments of neo-imperialism (a.k.a. globalisation).

By ignoring any serious discussion of the British Empire, its ruling elite, or the global economic and psychological warfare that was waged by it against its European competitors in the years between 1871 and 1914, this book shows that it is the author who was probably sleepwalking, not the European imperialists who, together with Great Britain, wantonly slaughtered more than four million people on the Western front and up to twenty million overall for profit and power. For the record, World War I was fought by six empires: the British Empire, the American Empire, the French Empire, the German Empire, the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire. Three were destroyed and two became vassals of the USA. It is a good time for all of us to wake up.

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