

German Historical Institute
London



BULLETIN

ISSN 0269-8552

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The Great War: No Defeat – No Victory. In Memory of Polish Pacifist and War Theorist Jean de Bloch

German Historical Institute London Bulletin, Vol 38, No. 1
(May 2016), pp20-39

**THE GREAT WAR: NO DEFEAT—NO VICTORY.
IN MEMORY OF POLISH PACIFIST AND
WAR THEORIST JEAN DE BLOCH**

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The Optimist:

The development of weapons, surely, can't lag behind the achievements of modern times.

The Complainer:

No, but the imagination of modern times has lagged behind humanity's technical achievements.

The Optimist:

What, do we wage war with the imagination?

The Complainer:

No, because if we still had an imagination, we would no longer wage war.

Karl Kraus, *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit* (1915 ff.),
Act 1, Scene 29

'War has become impossible, except at the price of suicide.'

Jean de Bloch (1836–1902)

In 1912 Wilhelm Lamszus (1881–1965), a teacher and pacifist from Hamburg, published a small, bestselling novel which immediately unleashed a political scandal in Wilhelmine Germany. While training with the military reserve, Lamszus observed a huge build-up of artillery and turned these impressions into a sinister visionary novel of the character of future wars which he entitled *The Human Slaughter-House*. In it he predicted the machine-like mass killing of soldiers:

How the experts have, day in, day out, been inventing and constructing new marvels of mechanism. The mechanical side of war has been raised to a high standard of genius and a fine art. Two hundred and forty bullets and more to the minute!

Trans. Angela Davies (GHIL).

THE GREAT WAR

What a marvel of mechanism one of those machine guns is. . . . It is as though Death had scrapped his scythe for old iron; as if nowadays he had graduated as expert mechanic. . . . I cannot get rid of this hideous thought. It is always cropping up again. We have passed on from retail to wholesale methods of business. . . . Once it was a knightly death, an honorable soldier's death; now it is a death by machinery. That is what is sticking in my gullet. We are being hustled from life to death by experts – by mechanics. . . . [T]hey are now turning out the crippled and the dead by by machinery.¹

Nothing was more realistic than this vision. It was seen as unrealistic only by those who thought that the future war would be like the Napoleonic wars, the Franco-German war of 1870–1, or the Boer wars: a war of movement with light arms, flying cavalry, and close combat, man-to-man (see ills. 1 and 2).

In the autumn of 1914, what had been predicted many years earlier came to pass: if millions of soldiers, their equipment, guns, ammunition, supply convoys, and horses (armies were not yet motorized) were to be transported to the front by a huge effort on the part of the railways,² (see ill. 3) then they would be stuck there. A war of movement with large mobile combat units making breakthroughs and gaining territory, or even decisive battles in the traditional sense, were no longer possible. Attackers had to dig in immediately and seek cover because modern weapons technology gave the defenders

¹ Wilhelm Lamszus, *The Human Slaughter-House: Scenes from the War that is Sure to Come*, trans. Oakley Williams (New York, 1913), 31–2; original version published as *Das Menschenschlachthaus: Bilder vom kommenden Krieg* (Hamburg, 1912; reprint Bremen, 2014), 32. On Lamszus see Wolfgang Emmerich, 'Wilhelm Lamszus', in Helmut Donat and Karl Holl (eds.), *Die Friedensbewegung: Organisierter Pazifismus in Deutschland, Österreich und in der Schweiz* (Düsseldorf, 1983), 246–7. On the new perception of the soldier as an 'industrial worker' see Klaus Latzel, 'Die Soldaten des industrialisierten Krieges: "Fabrikarbeiter der Zerstörung"?' in Rolf Spilker and Bernd Ulrich (eds.), *Der Tod als Maschinist: Der industrialisierte Krieg 1914–1918*, exhibition catalogue (Bramsche, 1998), 125–41.

² In a few days, around 3 million men and around 850,000 horses went west in 11,000 transports. 'Between 2 and 18 August alone, around 2,150 trains went west over Cologne's Hohenzollern Bridge, newly inaugurated in 1911;

Illustration 1: Der Sturm
(The Storm)



Source: *Altwandervogel: Monatschrift für deutsches Jugendwandern*, 10 (1915), 151.

Illustration 2: Sieger Tod
(A Victor's Death)



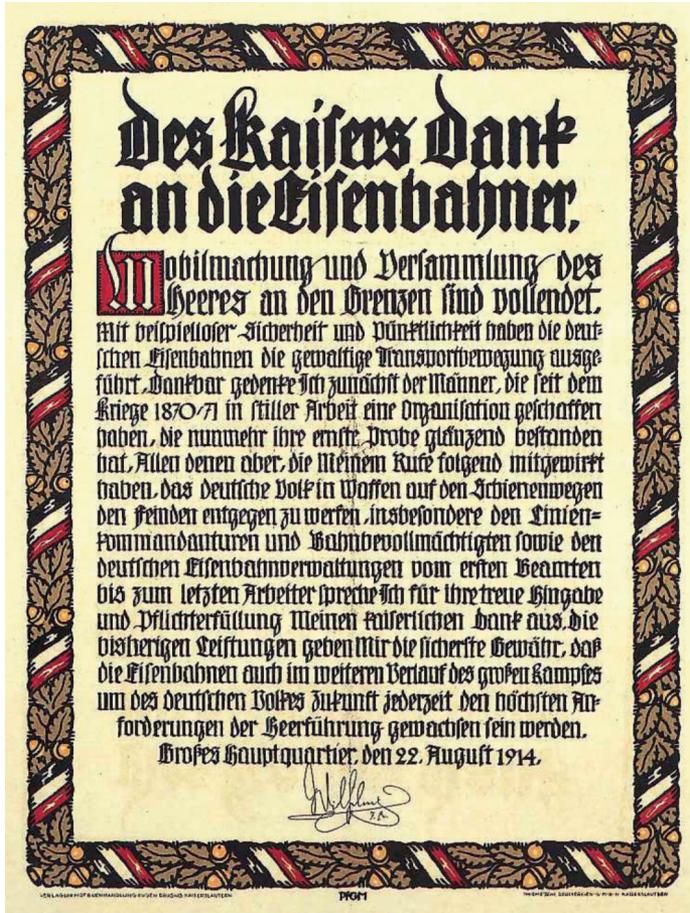
Source: *Der Wandervogel: Monatschrift für deutsches Jugendwandern*, 10 (1915), 104.

the advantage everywhere. The spade was as important as the gun. The proverbial gunpowder smoke no longer offered any protection; smokeless powder meant that targets were visible all the time, while the camouflaged artillery was almost invisible. Trench warfare as a war of attrition claimed unimaginable sacrifices.

Within a few weeks in the autumn and winter of 1914–15, this became the reality of the Western Front, from Hartmannsweilerkopf in the Vosges mountains to Ypres and Dixmuiden in Flanders and on to the English Channel. In 1916 the trench warfare around Verdun escalated to unimaginable proportions (more than 700,000 dead) with a terrible culmination on the Somme in the summer and autumn

on average, one every ten minutes.’ Jörn Leonhard, *Die Büchse der Pandora: Geschichte des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Munich, 2014), 163.

Illustration 3: The Kaiser's Thanks to the Railway Workers (22 August 1914). The mobilization and concentration of the armies on the borders has been completed. The German railways have carried out this huge transport movement with unprecedented safety and punctuality. I thankfully commemorate the men who, since the war of 1870-1, have quietly created an organization which has passed a serious test with flying colours . . .



Source: Deutsches Historisches Museum Berlin. Image reproduced from Rolf Spilker and Bernd Ulrich (eds.), *Der Tod als Maschinist: Der industrialisierter Krieg 1914-1918* (Bramsche, 1998), 66.

of 1916. In the five months of battles on the Somme, 420,000 British, 204,000 French, and 465,000 German soldiers were killed, missing, wounded, or taken prisoner.

All this could have been predicted even more precisely, as Lamszus did in his visionary novel, for in 1899, a six-volume work containing analysis and forecasts in military history, weapons technology, and social policy had been published as *Der zukünftige Krieg in seiner technischen, volkswirtschaftlichen und politischen Bedeutung*, first in Russian in St Petersburg, and later in the same year in German in Berlin.³ Unlike his fellow campaigner, Bertha von Suttner, its author has largely been forgotten as a pacifist by the general public. He is, however, well known among military historians and historians of the peace movement.⁴ At present, he is commemorated by a foundation in Warsaw that bears his name:⁵ Jan Bloch, Jan Gotlib in Polish, Ivan Stanislavovich in Russian, and known in Germany, France, and Britain under his Russian noble title as Johann von Bloch or Jean de Bloch (see ill. 4).

Bloch's message was that defenders, protected in their dugouts, in complex systems of deep trenches and barbed wire interspersed with machine guns and rapid-fire cannon, would always have the advantage. The war of the future would be decided by modern artillery techniques and sheer masses. Hostilities would come to an end when one side or the other ran out of ammunition or their supply lines collapsed. Given that there were huge numbers of troops, supplying

³ Johann von Bloch, *Der Krieg. Übersetzung des russischen Werkes des Autors: Der zukünftige Krieg in seiner technischen, volkswirtschaftlichen und politischen Bedeutung* (Berlin, 1899), vol. i: *Beschreibung des Kriegsmechanismus*; vol. ii: *Der Landkrieg*; vol. iii: *Der Seekrieg*; vol. iv: *Die ökonomischen Erschütterungen und materiellen Verluste des Zukunftskrieges*; vol. v: *Die Bestrebungen zur Beseitigung des Krieges: Die politischen Konflikts-Ursachen und die Folgen der Verluste*; vol. vi: *Der Mechanismus des Krieges und seine Wirkungen*; included in this volume: *Die Frage vom Internationalen Schiedsgericht*. For a summary by the author in one volume see id., *Die wahrscheinlichsten politischen und militärischen Folgen eines Krieges zwischen den Großmächten* (Berlin, 1901).

⁴ A good overview of Bloch's biography, his work, and its relevance for the international peace movement is provided by the essays in Walter Troxler, Daniela Walker, and Markus Furrer (eds.), *Jan Bloch und das internationale Kriegs- und Friedensmuseum in Luzern* (Vienna, 2010).

⁵ <http://www.bloch.org.pl/>, accessed 15 Jan. 2016.

THE GREAT WAR

Illustration 4: Jean de Bloch (1836-1902)



Source: The Schwadron Collection of the National Library of Israel.

them would be difficult. Horse-drawn vehicles and railways would be completely overstretched, medical care for the wounded was ruled out entirely (it was not even planned for), and soldiers at the front would not receive a hot meal for days on end. Supplies to the civilian population, too, could no longer be maintained; the labour force and working animals would be at the front and dying in large numbers, which meant that they would have to be constantly replaced by new recruits. Industry and the economy, converted to a war footing, could only be kept going by women's work (home front), until food supplies, as was to be expected, collapsed completely. It was not weapons that would end this war, but hunger.⁶ With no prospect of peace, tormented to the utmost and demoralized, the war-weary nations, in their desire for peace, would seek to get rid of their unrepentant governments, which were incapable of making peace and therefore criminal. Bloch was right. At the end of 1917 and in November 1918, the monarchies in St Petersburg, Berlin, and Vienna were swept away, and the Austrian and Ottoman empires disintegrated.

⁶ Gustavo Corni, 'Ernährung', in Gerhard Hirschfeld, Gerd Krumeich, and Irina Renz (eds.), *Enzyklopädie Erster Weltkrieg* (Paderborn, 2003), 461-4.

These predictions of ‘total war’⁷ were not the product of fantasy, but the result of many years of painstaking research by Bloch in publications about the development of the latest weapons technology in the 1880s and 1890s, and accounts and analyses of the history of war. He also talked to experienced soldiers and staff officers from several different countries, and carried out his own experiments with weapons technology on the shooting range. What was unusual was the way in which he embedded the projected course of the war and military planning in the economic, social, and political context: the huge cost of taking part in the European arms race was depleting national economies by draining them of capital and reducing productivity; a war would ruin them completely, while inflation, the consequence of escalating national debt and printing worthless money, would devalue savings and assets. Political upheaval would be the inevitable result. ‘What the Governments will all come to see more or less clearly is that if they persist in squandering the resources of their people in order to prepare for a war which has already become impossible without suicide, they will only be preparing the triumph of the socialist revolution.’ These words ended a conversation which the British journalist, social reformer, and peace activist William Thomas Stead (1849–1912), had conducted with Jean de Bloch. Stead used them to preface his selective edition of Bloch’s six-volume work, *The War of the Future in its Technical, Economic and Political Relations*.⁸

⁷ Stig Förster, ‘Totaler Krieg’, *ibid.* 924–6.

⁸ Jean de Bloch, *Is War Impossible?* trans. of *Der Krieg*, vol. vi, ed. William Thomas Stead (London, 1899); new edn. published as *Modern Weapons and Modern War: Being an Abridgement of The War of the Future in its Technical, Economic and Political Relations. With a Conversation with the Author by W. T. Stead* (London, 1900). Quotation taken from the the World Peace Foundation edition (Boston, 1914), p. lxii. On Bloch’s ‘anti-revolutionary pacifism’ see also Grant Dawson, ‘Preventing “A Great Moral Evil”: Jean de Bloch’s “The Future of War” as Anti-Revolutionary Pacifism’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 37/1 (2002), 5–19.

THE GREAT WAR

I. Jean de Bloch (1836–1902): Polish Entrepreneur, Banker, and Peace Activist

Who was Jean de Bloch? Born in 1836 in Radom into a Polish–Jewish family, at the age of 15 he converted to the Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland (at that time part of the Russian Empire), and five years later to the Catholic Church. (His origins explain many of his publications on the Jewish questions and on anti-Semitism in Imperial Russia.⁹) Space does not permit an account here of Bloch's biography, or of his wide-ranging work as a banker, railway entrepreneur, economic and social policy-maker, benefactor, and patriot of Poland.¹⁰ Instead, this article will concentrate on his main work, *Der Krieg* (1899), which secured his entry into the annals of the peace movement before the First World War, along with Frédéric Passy in France (who, with Henri Dunant, was the first winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1901, for which Bloch was also nominated by the University of Cracow),¹¹ Norman Angell in England (who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1933),¹² and Wilhelm Lamszus, quoted above, in Germany.

⁹ 'Bibliographie der Veröffentlichungen von und über Bloch unter Berücksichtigung der älteren Bibliographien', in Troxler, Walker, and Furrer (eds.), *Jan Bloch*, appendix, 221–56.

¹⁰ Herman Rosenthal, 'Blioch (Bloch), Ivan Stalislavovich', in <<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/>>, last accessed 29 Jan. 2016; Agnieszka Janiak-Jasińska, 'Bloch, Jan Gotlib', in <<http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net>>, last accessed 29 Jan. 2016; Andrzej Żor, *Jan Bloch (1836–1902): kapitalista, pacyfista, finantrop* (Warsaw, 2014; English trans. Warsaw, 2015); id., 'Jan Gottlieb Bloch (1826–1902): Biography Outline', online at <<http://www.bloch.org.pl/images/pliki/jgben.pdf>>, accessed 18 Jan. 2016, German trans. published in Troxler, Walker, and Furrer (eds.), *Jan Bloch*, 17–43; Manfred Sapper, 'Den Krieg überwinden: Jan Bloch. Unternehmer, Publizist, Pazifist', *Osteuropa*, 58 (2008), nos. 8–10: *Impulse für Europa: Tradition und Moderne der Juden Osteuropas*, 303–11; Jürgen Scheffran, 'Der unmögliche Krieg: Jan Bloch und die Mechanik des Ersten Weltkriegs', *Wissenschaft und Frieden*, 32/2 (2014), 38–42.

¹¹ Bloch fell ill and was not involved in the selection process. He died on 6 Jan. 1902, shortly after the first awards ceremony on 10 Dec. 1901. See Peter van den Dungen, 'Jan Bloch and the Inaugural Nobel Peace Prize (1901)', *Norwegian Nobel Institute Series*, 3/2 (Oslo, 2003), 4–27.

¹² Norman Angell, *The Great Illusion: A Study of the Relation of Military Power in Nations to their Economic and Social Advantage* (London, 1910; reprint, 2014),

ARTICLES

How did Bloch, a Polish–Russian banker and railway magnate, come to be interested in military problems? The first answer is that he had made his fortune in Russia by constructing military–strategic railway lines, which were part of contemporary plan for an arms race and war readiness. The second answer points to the civic responsibility of an entrepreneur who regarded armament and war as a great danger, threatening the destruction of prosperity. In military matters, too, he thought like a businessman who was used to solving problems on the basis of a cost–benefit analysis. For example, in his conversation with Stead,¹³ he pointed out, in relation to the American Civil War, that it would have been much more cost effective for the Northern states simply to have bought the slaves for an acceptable price from the Southern states and set them free, instead of spending many times more on a bloody military campaign. On the other hand, he also thought as a social reformer, patriot, and pacifist. Andrzej Żor wrote:

One can assume, that . . . the most famous of his works [*Der Krieg*] was inspired, like the previous books, by his sense of civic duty. Bloch was never concerned with military issues, although he had to consider military aspects during railway construction. . . . As the tension caused by the preparations to [*sic*] an imminent large-scale European military conflict was constantly growing, Bloch asked, on behalf of Warsaw merchants, for access to materials concerning the protection of the city of Warsaw and its citizens against possible results of military activity. To his surprise and dismay, he saw that strategic documents are dominated by purely military issues, while no attention is paid to such questions as provisions for the population, citizens evacuation in case of conflict escalation, medical care for inhabitants. The issue was not negligible.¹⁴

Bloch was worried by the arms race between the European great powers, and its economic and mental consequences: chauvinism and

published in German trans. as *Die große Täuschung: Eine Studie über das Verhältnis zwischen Militärmacht und Wohlstand der Völker* (Leipzig, 1910).

¹³ *The War of the Future*, p. liii.

¹⁴ Żor, 'Jan Gottlieb Bloch (1826–1902): Biography Outline', 11–12.

a growing readiness for war on the one hand, and the lack of any provision for disarmament, settling disputes, and peace on the other. One of the main internal sources of crisis in Imperial Germany was the dominant mentality that even domestic conflict could not be resolved by compromise and compensation.¹⁵ Given that this political culture was not limited to Germany, but was found all over Western Europe, Bloch was not taken seriously by the high-ranking generals,¹⁶ who still subscribed to highly conventional notions of warfare,¹⁷ for example, hand-to-hand fighting with bayonets (according to the Russian general Dragomirov).¹⁸ It was as if, Bloch remarked ironically, admirals still believed in sea battles with modern ships.¹⁹

Berlin historian of war Hans Delbrück closely examined Bloch's work as soon as it was published,²⁰ because he believed that it had 'given the modern peace movement new strength and life'.²¹ He also agreed with Bloch that war theorists lacked a coherent theory of war at the level of weapons development: 'Even our generals admit that they have no idea what a future battle will be like. One theory of how a battle can be brought about drives out the last. At the war acade-

¹⁵ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Krisenherde des Kaiserreichs 1871-1918* (Göttingen, 1970), 13-14; id., *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, 5 vols. (Munich, 1987-2008), iii. esp. 889 ff., 1000 ff., 1137 ff.; and iv. 198-205: 'Wie modernisierungsfähig war das Kaiserreich?'

¹⁶ Michael Welch, 'The Centenary of the British Publication of Jean de Bloch's *Is War Now Impossible?* (1899-1999)', *War in History*, 7/3 (2000), 273-94. Welch refers to the unfavourable opinions held by British high-ranking generals of Bloch's work, and the late recognition by military theoreticians and historians such as J. F. C. Fuller, *The Conduct of War: A Study of the Impact of the French, Industrial, and Russian Revolution on War and its Conduct* (London, 1961), 128-30, published in German trans. as *Die entartete Kunst Krieg zu führen 1789-1961* (Cologne, 1964), 139-41.

¹⁷ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, 'Der Verfall der deutschen Kriegstheorie: Vom "Absoluten" zum "Totalen" Krieg oder von Clausewitz zu Ludendorff', in id., *Krisenherde*, 85-112; Bloch, 103.

¹⁸ Bloch, *Der Krieg*, i. 667.

¹⁹ *The War of the Future*, p. xiv.

²⁰ Hans Delbrück, 'Zukunftskrieg und Zukunftsfriede', *Preußische Jahrbücher*, 96 (1899), 203-29, on Bloch 207 ff.

²¹ *Ibid.* 207.

mies, one professor teaches the opposite of the next.²² What could an outsider such as Jean de Bloch contribute here? Delbrück conceded that his descriptions were realistic. Bloch could, for example, point out that the usual manoeuvres conveyed a completely inadequate idea of the future combat situation. For, he said, it has to be admitted

that no small power of imagination is required to visualize the impact of a battalion shooting 10,000 bullets per minute, each of which, without being aimed, can hit 5 people at a distance of 600 metres; or the effect of exploding artillery shells which, in 1870, using saltpetre powder, released only 37 splinters, while now the figure is between 300 and 800; or the effect of huge, 37-kilo steel bombs which, using ordinary powder, explode into 42 pieces on impact, but now, with a load of pyroxilin, disintegrate into 1,204 pieces . . . and, finally, the impact of grenades and shrapnel, which pepper an area of 6,000 square metres with hundreds of splinters and bullets, like hail.²³

In the war of 1870, losses accounted for 9 per cent of the armies' strength. If we take the new weapons into account, which are 40 times more effective than the weapons of 1870, then we would have to multiply army losses by 40, and the comparison is reduced to absurdity, not because the calculations are wrong, but simply because means have been made available which are sufficient for the destruction of armies many times greater than what we can actually put into the field.²⁴

²² Ibid 208–9. On this see Bloch's cutting remarks, *Der Krieg*, i. pp. xxiv–xxv with a quotation from the French military: 'ordre, contreordre, désordre.' See Dieter Storz, *Kriegsbild und Rüstung vor 1914: Europäische Landstreitkräfte vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg* (Herford, 1992), esp. 25 ff., 42 ff., 320 ff.; Siegfried Fiedler, *Taktik und Strategie der Millionenheere 1871–1914* (Bechtermünz, 2002), esp. 146 ff.; Christoph Jahr and Stefan Kaufmann, 'Den Krieg führen: Organisation, Technik, Gewalt', in Niels Werber, Stefan Kaufmann, and Lars Koch (eds.), *Erster Weltkrieg: Kulturwissenschaftliches Handbuch* (Stuttgart, 2014), 164–231.

²³ Bloch, *Der Krieg*, vi. 206; also see v. 394 ff.

²⁴ Ibid. i. 667.

THE GREAT WAR

The inescapable conclusion reached by Bloch was that to carry on a war of aggression was possible only at the price of suicide. He intended to present the evidence in his book, and trusting to reason, intellect, and ethics, encourage a rethinking in line with the European peace movements.

II *The Future War: Industrialized Mass Murder*

Bloch began with two questions: (1) can the increasing burden of rearmament continue to be borne without provoking 'serious internal upheavals' in society? and (2) 'will the further perfection of weapons make it simply impossible to wage war, at least for the countries where a high culture has considerably increased the value of each citizen's life?';²⁵ that is, mainly in the European so-called 'civilized nations', but less so in the Ottoman and tsarist empires. The answers have already been suggested above; in both cases, a resounding 'no'. He provided the first answer as an economist;²⁶ the second as a weapons technician. According to his research and calculations, the effect of modern weapons, especially high-explosive artillery projectiles, was so devastating that any command to storm enemy positions would be tantamount to mass suicide. And that is how it was in the West: in Flanders, at Verdun, and on the Somme. The French Colonel Langlois and the German Artillery General Müller had long worked out, as Bloch reports, that on the basis of its

²⁵ Ibid. i. p. xvii.

²⁶ Detailed arguments can be found *ibid.* ii. 551–9. Bloch never tired of pointing out that a basic problem with regard to the ideas, course, and consequences of the 'war of the future' lay in the fact that the generals did not understand economics, and the economists understood nothing about the theory of war and weapons technology. Bloch discussed the catastrophic economic consequences of the war in volume 4 of his main work. In conversation with Stead (*The War of the Future*, p. xvii) he said: 'it is as a political economist that I discovered the open secret which he who runs may read. The soldier by natural evolution has so perfected the mechanism of slaughter that he has practically secured his own extinction. He has made himself so costly that mankind can no longer afford to pay for his maintenance, and he has therefore transferred the sceptre of the world from those who govern its camps to those who control its markets.'

firepower and the devastating effect of explosive projectiles, modern artillery 'can kill eight times more soldiers than can be sent to the battlefield'.²⁷

Finally the ammunition is depleted, millions of cartridges, many thousands of bullets and bombs cover the earth . . . But the firing continues and goes on for as long as a new box of ammunition arrives to replace each spent one. . . . There comes a moment when half [of the soldiers] are giving the death rattle; wounded and dead are lying in dense parallel mounds, which are, however, separated on both sides by the distance of 1,000 paces, which the bullets [of both sides] whistle through, the grapeshot transforming it into a sea of dust that no one can pass through alive. The bitter battle continues, but those 1,000 paces invariably separate the two armies. Who has won here? Nobody.²⁸

Bloch quite rightly assumed that armies comprising millions could not be transported and led in a conventional war of movement,²⁹ so that, given the number of French fortresses already built, trench warfare would become inevitable: 'A future war will therefore . . . be a struggle for fortified positions.' Behind their entrenchments, these positions could be made impregnable,³⁰ all the more so as defenders could exploit the advantages of the land for themselves while attackers had to show themselves openly in order to take shots. 'Everyone will dig themselves in during the next war. It will be a huge trench war. The spade will be as important to the soldier as his rifle.' 'Those on the defensive, when they have been forced out of their positions, will retreat on a prepared path, on which they will either find new trenches, which they had dug earlier, or dig new ones in suitable places, while constantly resisting attack and inflicting new losses on the enemy.'³¹ There could not be a more precise description

²⁷ Bloch, *Der Krieg*, vi. 176.

²⁸ *Ibid.* ii. 197; Bloch is here quoting a French military writer; see also *ibid.* 502-13.

²⁹ *Ibid.* ii. 212.

³⁰ *Ibid.* i. 665.

³¹ *Ibid.* 668-9.

of trench warfare in all its 'terrible design', its futility, its criminal conception of 'attrition' and 'bleeding out', as the German High Command described it in 1916 in relation to Verdun. Here Bloch found himself outdone by a degree of cynicism unimaginable for Germany as a 'civilized nation', something that he had not thought possible: millions of fathers, brothers, and sons were regarded as nothing but 'cannon fodder'. This is precisely what the 'battle' planners had anticipated and expressed in numbers: 'the attacker [will] suffer losses of 500 per cent of his original strength.'³² Lord Kitchener exclaimed: 'I don't know what is to be done – this isn't war.'³³ (See ills. 5 and 6.)

The following text about the war of the future secured Bloch's entry into the military historiography of the First World War:

At first there will be increased slaughter – increased slaughter on so terrible a scale as to render it impossible to get troops to push the battle to a decisive issue. They will try to, thinking that they are fighting under the old conditions, and they will learn such a lesson that they will abandon the attempt forever. Then, instead of a war fought out to the bitter end in a series of decisive battles, we shall have as a substitute a long period of continually increasing strain upon the resources of the combatants. The war, instead of being a hand-to-hand contest in which the combatants measure their physical and moral superiority, will become a kind of stalemate, in which neither army being able to get at the other, both armies will be maintained in opposition to each other, threatening each other, but never being able to deliver a final and decisive attack. It will be simply the natural evolution of the armed peace, on an aggravated scale. . . . accompanied by entire dislocation of all industry and severing of all the sources of supply by which alone the community is enabled to bear the crushing burden of that armed peace. It will be a multiplication of expenditure simultaneously accompanied by a diminution of the sources by which that expenditure can be met. That is the future of war – not fighting, but famine, not the slaying of men, but the bankruptcy of nations and the break-up of the whole social organization.³⁴

³² Ibid. v. 423.

³³ Fuller, *Conduct of War*, 160.

³⁴ *The War of the Future*, pp. xvi–xvii.

ARTICLES

Illustration 5: The Battlefield I (1914)



Source: *Der Wandervogel: Monatsschrift für deutsches Jugendwandern*, 9/11-12 (1914), 290.

Illustration 6: The Battlefield II (1916)



Source: *Der Wandervogel: Monatsschrift für deutsches Jugendwandern*, 11/11 (1916), 228.

THE GREAT WAR

Hans Delbrück, the military historian from Berlin cited above, discussed Bloch's findings at length in the context of his own research on the history of war. He considered Bloch's conclusions about supply problems during a war and his assessment of the economic consequences as, on the whole, unfounded or misguided. Above all, he argued, if an opponent disarmed, this would increase his readiness for war rather than lessen it.

Delbrück's judgment on the work as a whole was damning: 'From a scientific standpoint the work does not have much to recommend it. It is a rather uncritical and poorly arranged collection of material; and although it is embellished with illustrations, the treatment is amateurish with vast amounts of detail that have nothing to do with the actual problem.'³⁵ Delbrück also regarded the demand for international arbitration on questions of power, which Bloch advocated, as illusory. He finished by justifying Germany's continued rearmament on land and at sea by pointing out that as a continental great power, Germany would fall behind if it could not take part in dividing up the world, along with the colonial powers Britain, France, and Russia.

For Germany, which has practically no valuable possessions in other parts of the world . . . gaining possessions of equal value to those of the established colonial nations is a matter of life and death . . . if we want to remain a great nation. . . . Only to those who have power, power accrues. A profoundly moral law lies behind this precept. A people that has the self-control to limit its daily pleasures in favour of increasing its national power, that, to put it crudely, prefers to drink less beer and smoke fewer cigars and to buy cannons and ships instead, thereby acquires a claim to assert its individuality, and to leave as a lasting bequest to itself and humanity what it has achieved intellectually over centuries. . . . Without war if possible, but this is something of such value that any amount of blood is not too much to pay for it.³⁶

³⁵ Delbrück, 'Zukunftskrieg und Zukunftsfriede', 208. Translation quoted from Welch, 'The Centenary', 276. Welch discusses contemporary generals' opinions of Bloch's work.

³⁶ Delbrück, 'Zukunftskrieg und Zukunftsfriede', 228-9.

ARTICLES

Bloch and his work were powerless against so much cultural chauvinism, imperialism, and ignorance of weapons technology. Delbrück, who died in 1929, experienced the dreadful toll of blood claimed by the suicidal war, which had been unleashed and continued against better judgement. For him, it was worth it:

The generals will certainly wait and see whether the natural law of war, the violent destruction of the enemy fighting force, is really no longer valid today. The final decision on such questions is never made in theory, but always by experience. But even if we assume that Bloch really is right and has demonstrated that large battles are impossible or futile, the same has not been proven for war. We would first be pushed back to the level of strategy in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, to the time of Gustavus Adolphus, Eugene, Marlborough, Friedrich, and wage a war of small means. Only when the situation was especially favourable, or tensions were highest, would we attempt a defeat; at other times we would try to get by simply by gradually exhausting the opponent.³⁷

In fact, the German generals did wait and see about ending the war in autumn 1914 after the advance in Flanders stalled, without recognizable war aims and against the advice of General von Falkenhayn. The suicidal war became a mass grave, as had been calculated by an alleged utopian and non-expert: Jean de Bloch. 'Under present day conditions of war and life . . . it would be wantonly frivolous, almost a crime, to embark upon a war without being clear about the consequences of an international war in one's own country and in foreign ones.'³⁸ 'International war' is the key word. It was not just armies that took up positions against each other, but whole peoples and their economic and social structures: this was 'total' war. And this is why, if a victory could not be achieved, it became a 'struggle for existence'.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid. 215. In his multi-volume *Geschichte der Kriegskunst im Rahmen der politischen Geschichte* (Berlin, 1900 ff.), Delbrück differentiated between a strategy of complete defeat (*Niederwerfungsstrategie*) and a strategy of attrition (*Ermattungsstrategie*).

³⁸ Bloch, *Der Krieg*, i. p. xviii.

³⁹ According to the 'inventor' of the war of attrition at Verdun, General von Falkenhayn. See Leonhard, *Büchse der Pandora*, 551.

III. *Unsuccessful Peace Attempts: Jean de Bloch Falls into Oblivion*

Unlike Delbrück and the German high-ranking generals, Tsar Nicholas II, it seems, took Bloch's conclusions seriously. Nicholas's manifesto of August 1898 against rearmament and war, combined with his call to convene a peace conference, adopted the spirit of Bloch's basic idea.⁴⁰ The tsar elevated Bloch to the nobility, appointed him State Councillor, and initiated the first international peace conference, which was held from May to July 1899 in The Hague and was hosted by the queen of the Netherlands.⁴¹ Bloch took an active part in the conference, which passed a number of accords (including a ban on using poison gas in war,⁴² and concerning the peaceful settlement of international disputes), but failed to agree on the question of an international arbitration court in The Hague, largely because of Imperial Germany. An impression of the atmosphere inside the German delegation is provided by Count Münster, Germany's First Delegate, in a letter to Imperial Chancellor von Bülow:

The conference has attracted the worst political rabble from the whole world, journalists of the worst sort like Stead, baptized Jews like Bloch, women of peace like Frau von Suttner . . . Frau Salenko [*sic*],⁴³ etc. . . . This whole rabble (Young Turks and Armenians, and Socialists are also involved) openly operates under Russian protection. Stead, who I knew more than twenty

⁴⁰ Andrzej Żor, 'Der Gründer [des Luzerner Kriegs- und Friedensmuseums] Jan Gottlieb Bloch (1836-1902)', in Troxler, Walker, and Furrer (eds.), *Jan Bloch*, 17-43, at 38.

⁴¹ Peter van den Dungen, *The Making of Peace: Jean de Bloch und the First Hague Peace Conference* (Los Angeles, 1983); id., 'From St. Petersburg to The Hague: Bloch and the First Hague Peace Conference (1899)', in Gwyn Prins (ed.), *The Future of War: Foundation of War Studies* (The Hague, 2000), 69-83.

⁴² This was disregarded on both sides of the front. See Rolf-Dieter Müller, 'Gaskrieg', in Hirschfeld, Krumeich, and Renz (eds.), *Enzyklopädie Erster Weltkrieg*, 519-22.

⁴³ He is referring to Margarethe Lenore Selenka, German women's rights and peace activist.

ARTICLES

years ago as a well-known, paid Russian agent, leads the whole press campaign here, in Belgium, and especially in Britain.⁴⁴

An accord on disarmament was out of the question in any case. Nationalism, imperialism, the arms race on the Continent and especially in Germany and France, accompanied by a strongly stoked will for war produced a political narcotic that immunized even against a sober analysis like that by Jean de Bloch. But the actors were certainly not 'sleepwalkers' (Christopher Clark). In the early autumn of 1914 Kaiser Wilhelm II declared pathetically that he had not *wanted* this war. But this statement totally ignored the realities of his power and guilt. It was within his power not to have allowed the war to start, or to have put an end to the fighting after the first battle of Ypres in November 1914. He determinedly did not do this, and that is why the Allies wanted him put before an International Court as a war criminal, under the provisions of the Versailles Treaty.

* * *

'Who has won here? Nobody.' Bloch had clear-sightedly predicted this. There was no victory, just a truce. But he had thought even further, pursuing his approach of combining military matters with economic ones: even without a war, constant armament would, in the long term, overburden the states and lead to social and political disturbances.

Thus side by side with the growth of military burdens rise waves of popular discontent threatening a social revolution. Such are the consequences of the so-called armed peace of Europe—slow destruction in consequence of expenditure on preparations for war, or swift destruction in the event of war—in both events convulsions in the social order.⁴⁵

The only alternatives were to disarm or to find a way of guaranteeing peace. Shortly before his death, Bloch was able to give this, his

⁴⁴ Dieter Riesenberger, *Geschichte der Friedensbewegung in Deutschland: Von den Anfängen bis 1933* (Göttingen, 1985), 70.

⁴⁵ *The War of the Future*, 356.

THE GREAT WAR

major concern, expression by founding and financing the first International Museum of War and Peace in Lucerne, in neutral Switzerland.⁴⁶ But it had to close as early as 1912. Did Jean de Bloch want to create a memorial for himself? He almost won the first Nobel Peace Prize. His message, which is still relevant today, is that in every case, and for everyone involved, modern war is a political, military, economic, social, and human catastrophe.

Autumn 1918: no defeat—no victory. A number of Allies wanted to turn ceasefire into victory in the Versailles Treaty, with fateful and far-reaching consequences. In view of the provisions concerning Germany, General Foch commented, coolly and prophetically: 'This is not a peace, but a truce for twenty years.' He was right, to the very year.

⁴⁶ Peter van den Dungen, 'The International Museum of War and Peace at Lucerne', *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte*, 31 (1981), 185–202; *Krieg und Frieden im Museum: Jan Bloch und das Internationale Kriegs- und Friedensmuseum in Luzern*, exhibition catalogue, curator: Walter Troxler (Lucerne, 2002); Troxler, Walker, and Furrer (eds.), *Jan Bloch*.

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