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Lecturer	Geoffrey Curgenvan Bolton
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GB: 1914 is regarded as the year when western civilization committed suicide. The people who are now 80 years old, would have been 19 in that year and old people generally, looking back on the period before the two world wars are often very nostalgic about what they see as an Indian summer of tranquillity, law and order and progress far removed from the pessimism which is often among us today. When we look closely at this world of 1914, however, doubts may occur to us perhaps the world we have lost was not uniformly attractive as it seems in hindsight. What I want to do in this lecture is to try and give a panoramic view of the world of 1914, which may be particularly interesting to the people who are 19 and will be 80, about one third of the way through the 20th century. It will be interesting to see if the rate of change continues to be quite so rapid. In 1914 the population of the earth was estimated as being 1 billion 721 million people, fewer than half as estimated today. Of these with a mathematical precision which sounds suspicious Whitakers Almanac stated that the British Empire and the Chinese Empire were equally the most populous, each having 421 million people, but of the 421 million in the British Empire three quarters were Indians

which made considerable difference. Russia had 166 million, United States 101 million, and these were seen as generally the most numerous powers. But of course mere numbers didn't make up dominance of the world, the British Empire as well as containing one quarter of the world's people, covered about one quarter of its area. The other dominate powers were all European, the reason for this European supremacy could almost entirely be attributed to the breakthrough which had been made during the past one hundred to one hundred and fifty years in the form of industrialisation. Europe had been coming to the fore throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries because of superior technology and command of the seas, but the nineteenth century had been the time when a great discrepancy opened up between the wealth and the power that Europeans could command as compared with the rest of the world. Europeans commanded the communications network across the world, they commanded the seas and potentially they commanded the air. In 1914 it was a little more than a decade since the Wright brothers had put the first aircraft into the air for more than a minute, but already there had been cross channel flights and the use of aircraft for commercial and passenger purposes was confidently foreseen. Steam ships had replaced sail over the previous fifty years or so and the speed with which people could get from one part of the world to another was frequently commented on. This was the more notices bullet we should see later because it has seldom been easier to cross frontiers than it was in that generation before 1914, a passport particularly if it was a British passport would take somebody almost anywhere in the world. But more than that European domination was also assured by a command of capital, by 1914 London alone had accumulated something like four thousand million pounds worth of capital exports and of these about 45% were invested in the British Empire, 55%

outside. The United States, France, Germany, were all powerful exporters of capital. Moreover, these European powers have command of the world's fuel and power resources, coal was still the dominance fuel and the coal mines of the United States and North West Europe had helped to make the fortunes of those nations, oil was coming into the picture particularly with the popularisation of the automobile after 1900, but it was still seen as a secondary source of fuel. In any case the United States held at that time the majority of the world's known oil supplies, it was only about seven years since the time when an Australian investor called William Knox Darcy had drawn attention to the presence of oil in what was then called Persia and is now Iran, he must have felt a little like the man that rubbed the magic lamp and produced the unpredictable genie because in contrast with Europe the rest of the world was inferior in power and prestige. The Islamic nations; Persia, Turkey, North Africa, seemed to be in a state of decadence and corruption. The Turkish Empire was being nibbled at its edges by greedy second rate European powers, such as; Italy and the Balkan States, Persia seemed about to be divided between Russia and British thegns of influence. There was no way in which the eastern Mediterranean or the North African nations looked to be in a position to challenge European hegemony. Further over in East Asia, in countries such as China and India which were regarded as the repository of ancient wisdom, there was also a feeling that they had entered into a long period of decline. The Chinese Empire had been overthrown in 1912, and had been replaced by a feeble and uncertain republican regime, frequently subjected to the activities of war lords and military adventurers. Only Japan was a rather uneasy portent that suggested that the Asians might after all be capable of technological adaptation and might at some stage in the future constitute a threat to European superiority. It was not fifty

years since the Japanese had been aroused from their feudal slumber but in that time not only had they produced a fiercely independent nation, they had also adapted western industrial techniques very successfully and they had managed to be successful in war not only against the Chinese, which everyone expected, but defeated Russia in a brief and brisk campaign in 1905 and for an Asian power to beat a European power, even the Russians, was a portent of humiliation.

Elsewhere in the world there was no obvious challenge, North Americans were regarded more or less as honorary Europeans, Latin America divided among over twenty struggling republics was summed up by one English editor as being the home of a mongrel race, party coloured and ignorant and was therefore, ripe for economic exploitation. Africa was still under the first generation of conquest, there were still many Africans alive who could remember the coming of the Europeans, the grab for Africa had parcelled that continent up into British, French, German, Italian and Spanish colonies, the only independent part of Africa was the Republic of Liberia on the west; which had been a home to freed slaves from America, and the ancient kingdom of Ethiopia where a bright young provincial leader who was to be known as Haile Selassie was gaining his first experience of war and politics. Even the ends of the earth were no longer free from European domination the North Pole and the South Pole had been conquered between 1909 and 1912.

What did the Europeans bring in their dominance to the rest of the world? In the first place they brought a stupendous technological achievement, they not only had brought a transport revolution which enabled them to give quick

communication to the ends of the earth which had brought about the telegraph and the telephone and which since 1901 had seen the first experiments with wireless, they had also cut canals through the sewage systems and across panama in order to shorten the shipping lanes, they were building greater and faster steam ships and even then in 1912 the sinking of the titanic which was thought to have been the world's greatest liner, and on its maiden voyage had an unfortunate and fatal encounter with an iceberg, hardly served to shake people's faith in the capabilities of modern western technology. Nevertheless, the very success of this technology was producing strains and potential conflicts on the international scene, Britain which had been the first nation to industrialise was being overtaken by the United States and Germany. The United States was specialising in the production of mass consumer goods because after all wasn't this the century of the common man? Germany was building up a high reputation in chemical engineering and in heavy industry, but even Germany was looking uneasily over its shoulder at the awaking giant Russia, a country with vast potentials in cheap man power and raw material, hither to underdeveloped, largely because of the conservatism of its religious and political institutions.

This trend towards industrialisation had much increased the dependence of Europe on overseas food, Europe was no longer able to feed itself and the wheat lands of North American and Australia, as well as the steps of Russia and Siberia had been opened up and developed during the nineteenth century to provide cheap food for the millions of Europe. In the hay day of this opening up there had been a policy of free trade but Britain was now the only major European nation seriously to adhere to this policy, and this was because cheap food

enabled wages to be kept fairly low and enable the British manufactures to compete successfully against his American and German rivals. Most other countries had built up a wall of protective tariffs under which they were able to advance their own industrialisation but this dependence on overseas food meant that in time of war control of the sea lanes, the risk of blockade, the risk of being brought to ones knees by a power which controlled the seas better, was an ever present menace and this was one of the reasons why several of the European nations, and most particularly Germany, had during the previous twenty years been building up their navies as well as their armed forces, as a defensive measure, we shall come back to this in a moment I just want to make the point that this very interdependence of industrial nations with producing colonies was a source of international tension.

On the other hand of course this industrialisation had seemed to lay to rest a nightmare which had previously haunted some of the world's thinkers, and this was the nightmare of overpopulation and scarcity. In 1798 an English writer, the reverend Thomas Malthus, had written a gloomy book prophesying that the growth of population would outstrip the growth of resources and that unless people indulged in celibacy that there would soon be great misery through famine. The nineteenth century seemed triumphantly to contradict Malthus's gloom, partly this was because the North American and other overseas grain producers had been opened up, partly it was because industrialisation seemed to be more labour intensive and therefore, able to provide gainful employment for many thousands more than would have otherwise found it. In addition, there had been great waves of migration during the nineteenth century North America had been the principal goal of European migrants, first the Irish fleeing from the

famine years of the 1840s, soon joined by Germans, later by Italians and in the later part of the nineteenth century there was a great outpouring of Poles and Russians, many of them Jewish by origin fleeing from persecution under the Tsar's Russia.

These migrants had been absorbed by the riches of America and by the growth of American industry, but there were now signs that even America had reached saturation and in most countries overseas from Europe policies of limited immigration was starting to come into existence. The other great migration had been internal within European countries and this had been the uprooting of peasants and small farmers and their move into the city in search of better opportunities. It is often argued that this rapid urbanisation produced slums, produced urban squalor, produced great misery and may have been a powerful cause of radical discontent but I think this is to idealise rural conditions. In farm labourers, peasants and others who lived in rural areas of Europe were often under conditioner even worse than those which they experienced in the cities and the city was often seen as the opportunity to break out of tradition, the opportunity to break out of a narrow restrictive circle without any hope for the future.

There was a certain difference in urbanisation patterns; in Britain it was often now three or four generations since families had moved in to the cities, in Germany and in Russia there was a much closer connection between the rural districts from which families came and it may be that the coming of the Russian revolution was partly facilitated by the habit of workers from moving in and out of their village communities into the big cities. But at any rate this pressure of

urbanisation was seen as a factor which made for change, which made potential consumers but also produced political strains which attracted some to the doctrines of socialism, I will recur to that a little later. I think the point has to be remembered that most European societies in 1914 were deferential to the forces of authority. One often hears it said that crime and violence have been on the upsurge since that time, I think the real difference is that at that time crime and violence were successfully confined to certain lower class areas, Hell's kitchen in New York, parts of the East End in London, the bourgeois and the upper classes were insulated from the unpleasant things in life and were often able to live out their whole existences without realising the conditions under which the workers and the unemployed were living, so that the appearance of law and order may have been greater but it was well known that there were some streets in most great cities into which the police did not care to venture.

Socialism I think was seen as a threat because it challenged in many ways entrenched and comfortable habits of thought which had served bourgeois Europe perfectly well for the last two or three generations. It challenged the distribution of property and as the last sixty or eighty years had been a period in which most people had been getting a little richer gradually there were many who disliked the idea of a radical upset to the status quo. There were other challengers to bourgeois thought in Europe at this time, the role of women was being questioned most avidly by persons demanding the right to vote, the suffragettes, they pointed to the fact that in some of the newer democracies, such as the United States and Australia, women were permitted to vote and they were not deterred by male politicians who said that participation in the grubby business of government was unladylike and degrading. Mostly I suppose people

were less adventurous in their sexual habits than they seemed to be sixty years later but it was possible to exaggerate the change even there, illegitimacy was often concealed and appears to be wide spread, um in a number of countries the habits of the upper classes exploiting working class girls seems to have been taken for granted, in addition there seems to have been a greater economic pressure on many of the petty bourgeois and the working classes in some way or another to limit the number of their children and that meant to take a repressive and often puritanical view of sex. Very often in order to succeed in bourgeois society it was necessary to astute all temptations, to turn your face against drink, to turn your face again amusements and to save hard.

One of the reasons why political change was to some extent distrusted, was that the overthrow of bourgeois society might imply the overthrow of many of the moral imperatives on which this society rested. But I think it is also fair to say most of the socialists were not such terrible fellows as they were painted, when the first World War broke out many of them at once pledged support to whatever nation they happened to be living in, when they achieved office as they had done already in France and in some other countries they behaved with the same moderation and respect for realism as most politicians do, the places where they constituted the greatest threat were paradoxically countries such as Germany, where the ruling classes by a variety of expedients were denying labour interests a part in the political process. Despite these pressures, despite the existence of a certain amount of trade union militancy it was the sublime conviction of most Europeans that they understood the art of good government, most Europeans would have agreed with Lord Curzon when he said of the English that they had partly by heredity, partly by upbringing, partly by nature

the knowledge of the principles of government, the habits and vigour of character which are essential to the task.

In France it was the mission to civilise, in Germany it was manifest destiny and throughout there was a conviction that the political lessons which Europe had learnt were a model and a prototype for the rest of the world. This however, was open to question nearly the whole of Europe was still organised under monarchies, these monarchies have been described by one recent writer as fossil monarchies, monarchies which had failed to change, monarchies which were still entrapped in the rituals and ceremonies which belonged to a bygone age. But we may again be exaggerating their lack of adaptability because of the fact they were all swept away by the first world war, even the Hapsburg Empire of the Austro-Hungarian circle was functioning most effectively as a free trade unit in central Europe, in a way which none of the successor states had managed to do, even Germany was managing to weld a combination between its industrialists and its military machine which was certainly powerful though its objectives were open to serious questioning. Even in Russia which was regarded as the least efficient, the most bigotedly superstitious of all the monarchies there had been politicians, such as Pyotr Stolypin between 1906 and 1911 who pursued policies of land redistribution and modernisation which might have dragged that country into the twentieth century, it was accepted that some degree of autocratic control was inevitable but it's by no means certain that this had to be as it turned out to be, the Bolsheviks who took the lead. If the monarchy of Nicholas the second had shown less stupidity, less adherence to established forms even Russia might have been susceptible for change. What we can say however, is that the human factor intruded and that in many of these

countries there was an inability at the top to identify the forces for change and to come to terms with them and there was even less ability to identify the challenge which might come from outside Europe. There was no doubt whatever of the racial superiority of Europeans, there was no hesitation in using terms such as Dago and Nigga, which would now be regarded as obscenities. And there was not more than perhaps the mildest curiosity at the attempt of various reformers in various parts in the non-European world to create change. The Islamic countries were producing a cast of younger men, military officers, politicians who were anxious to catch up. Turkey had already experienced a rising under the young Turks in 1908, in the Arab nations even sought a puritan but also a fantastically successful military leader was gradually welding together the various desert peoples, similarly over in the Republic of China Sun Yat-sen was putting forward the principles of a remodelled China and somewhere the twenty year old Mao Zedong was already absorbing his first lessons in politics. In India local thinkers and politicians looking at the Irish movement for home rule tried to adapt its principles to its own need and in South Africa an Indian migrant named Gandy was perfecting those techniques of passive resistants, of non-violent, non-cooperation with authorities who were too harsh, which he would later bring to their against the British in India. In short this was a world where change could be perceived by those who have the wit to perceive it. Europe on the whole placed its trust in its capacity to exert, if necessary, the military force. There had been considerable changed in armaments over the last forty of fifty years since the last round of major wars. The United States civil war, the Franko-Prussian wars had still been largely fought by horse drawn transport, though the railway was bringing in greater mobility to groups of forces, now by 1914 with Europe covered by railways it was taken for granted that troupes

could be brought to any particular spot with great speed and that when they met it was simply a matter of sitting down and having a pitch battle, a lightning campaign. The experience of the Franko-Prussian war and the experience of various minor wars which had taken place in the Balkans since suggested that one seasons campaigning would be enough to find a decisive verdict one way or the other, the idea that a modern war might last for four years or longer was scarcely imagined. The example of the Napoleonic wars of a hundred years previously been forgotten, and most general staffs concluded that if a war was risked it could be undertaken with little danger of involving the entire civilian population, nevertheless, most European powers had, for many years, had the habit of conscription for armed service, most young men in Europe were required to serve for a period of anything from two and seven years in the armed forces of their country and this idea of a citizen militia had proved so attractive that it was even being exported to Australia and other western democracies. The notion was that a citizen owed it to his country to be prepared to defend it and in practice in some of the poorer countries of Central and Eastern Europe a military careers was for many peasant boys the way out of their narrow circumstances. Early in the highly industrialised nations of Britain and the United States both protected from foreign invasion by the seas, both having a relatively high standard of living was there no attempt to introduce conscription, both countries put their faith in their naval power, each of them thought it was somehow incompatible with the idea of a democracy to demand this sort of service. This is important because as the European powers grew more competitive it seemed that the capacity to mobilise great armed forces loomed larger and larger in the thinking of most statesman.

The paranoiac was often thought to be Germany, in Germany the enmity of France was taken as a more or less consistent factor in politics ever since the German Empire had gained its unity by crushing France in the war of 1870-1871. Russia and France had come into alliance and the fear of Russia was perhaps even greater among the Germans than the fear of France, they felt themselves to be potentially encircled and their only reliable allies were the Austro-Hungarian Empire which was not a first class power in military terms and Italy which proved to be self-seeking and unreliable, and in fact, deserted Germany after war broke out. There was therefore, some external pressure on the Germans to maintain a bellicose military presence and this of course was reinforced by their internal politics by the fact that the social democrats, the trade union parties, had increased their share of the vote to 30% and were challenging many of the autocratic practices by which the regime of William the second kept itself in power. This was one of the pressures which made it possible that sometime in Europe a war would break out, there were others. During the previous generation the competitiveness between great powers had been sublimated by the grab for colonies in Africa and the Pacific, just as in our own time Russo-American rivalry has been partly neutralised by a competition to make the furthest progress in space exploration, so the desire to found far flung colonies somewhat took the heat off competition within Europe but by 1900 there were no more bits of the world surface left to be parcelled out, this meant that attention came back closer to Europe, to the Mediterranean countries and particularly for the disintegrating Turkish Empire. Germany had some interest in Turkey, both as an investor and strategically, so that the causes of war were becoming more pronounced every year.

The risk of a minor conflict was steadily growing but as well as power of politics you must had ideology in a war. Now the ideology which most people shared at the beginning of the twentieth century was a strong sense of patriotism, since the Napoleonic wars most people had come to identify themselves fairly strongly as citizens of a particular country, the religious impulse never perhaps very strong among the working classes had been to some extent weakened by urbanisation and by my migrations and while the churches were still very strong in many parts of Europe nationalism was often an even stronger emotion and certainly one which carried more conviction. The trouble was that nationalism is a two edged thing, it's one thing to be a patriot for the German Empire but within any empire certainly within the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Russian Empire there were a number of racial groups who define nationalism, not in political terms but in terms of the language they spoke, in terms of their ethnic character and increasingly felt that nationality was what determined your right to govern yourself, that political autonomy was justified not on class lines, not on loyalty to a particular monarchy but on belonging to an identifiable group of people who spoke, thought and believed as you did. So it was that the big multinationals empires were all under challenge from small groups within their own boarders each of which more or less vociferously chaffed for autonomy and nationalism was of course the great cause for which people were prepared to fight, the question really was whether the great powers could rally their citizens to leadership which they provided or whether the tug of brotherhood would prove stronger. Well we know what the answer was, we know that every nation from the Irish to the various African States have since 1914 demanded the right to self-determination on the main criterion of nationality. But this was the question that was still an issue in 1914 and this is why when the war came, it

came over a question of nationalism, it came over the right of self-determination for the Serbian inhabitants of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, whether they should join up with the rest of Serbia to form what is now known as Yugoslavia, or whether they would stay as one federated section of an Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The heir to the Austrian throne, Franz Ferdinand, was a great advocate of the federal solution and he seemed to feel it necessary to show his presence in the Serbian provenances of his empire. So it was that on a hot summer Sunday morning in June 1914 he and his wife were visiting Sarajevo, a sleepy provincial centre, in the Balkans, on a ceremonial showing the flag occasion. The picture of them is well known, the Archduke and the Archduchess clad in the panel pleat of European monarch walking down the steps with various local functionaries and their tail coats, sweating slightly in the summer sunlight. Now we all know that within an hour of that photograph being taken that the shot was to ring out which killed the Archduke and Archduchess, which provoked Germany and Austro-Hungary into demanding reprisals, which provoked the Russians into standing up in opposition to the Germans and which plunged Europe, and eventually the rest of the world, into a war which was more destructive of human life than any which had gone before. So we see in this portrait the confrontation of the old hierarchy deferential concept of monarchy with the effervescent force of self-determination, nationalism, a breaking away from tradition which was represented by the young man who shot the Archduke and we are still in 1975 feeling the repercussions.

End of Transcription