



Germany's Aims in the First World War

Fritz Fischer

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Professor Fischer's great work is possibly the most important book of any sort, probably the most important historical book, certainly the most controversial book, to come out of Germany since the war.

Germany's Aims in the First World War Details

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From Reader Review Germany's Aims in the First World War for online ebook

John says

it took me two weeks to get thru this. Had read little about the first world war before this. Had a bit of trouble with all the names i was not familiar with and my thoughts about the time were not the same as the author. I do not know for sure what they are now but i do know i must do a lot more reading up on it. It was a well organized book and i am sure well researched. Glad i read it.

Johann_tor says

An exhaustive (and a tad exhausting) account of its subject, this not just first-rate historical writing, but also an extremely rich resource for studying european politics in the first quarter of the 20th century.

Jon says

Interesting to go back and read the groundbreaking revisionist history of WWI. Fischer argues compellingly about the consistency and extremity of Germany's vision for a postwar order. With a critical mass of politicians, royalty, landowners, industrialists, military leaders, and populace supporting a lowest-common-denominator policy of expansion across Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and the South Pacific, Wilhelmine Germany would have made itself into a global power on par with only the U.S. after 1919. As the actual peace of Brest-Litovsk illustrated, Germany coveted the oil, minerals, agriculture, and strategic waterways of the Balkans, European Russia, the Baltic, Poland, Ukraine, and the Caucasus (enough to impose a harsh peace on defeated Russia). Fischer provides an extensive account of Germany's similar aims in the West (control over Belgium's and France's channel ports, annexation of the heartland of France's mines and industry, and annexations in Belgium and Luxemburg), Africa (Belgian Congo, French Equatorial Africa, Kenya, Rhodesia, Bechuanaland, Nigeria, Guinea, Canary Islands), and the South Pacific (Dutch East Indies, New Guinea, Marshall Islands). Although Fischer's account is by no means exhaustive, it does paint a fairly accurate picture of what the world would (and to some extent briefly did) look like had WWI ended differently. Furthermore, it provides a startling portrayal of the continuity of Imperial and Nazi German ambitions.

Ryan says

This is the book to read if you want to understand Germany's political and economic goals during World War I. Fischer demonstrates (sometimes ad nasueam) that the conservative German elites were intent on using the war as a pretext to further "Weltpolitik". The result, if they had gotten their way, would have been a German Empire to rival Britain, America and Russia. Surprisingly, the majority of the German left continued to support these goals in the Reichstag by voting for war credits until the end of the conflict. Although the length of this book can make it tiresome (at times it feels like Fischer is recounting for you every scrap of paper he found in the archives), it continues to flare up now and again with great insights. Fischer's discussion of Brest-Litovsk and its aftermath is especially fascinating.

I was motivated to read this because it was such "bombshell" for German historians when it was first published in the 60s. In this regard, I am thoroughly unimpressed and puzzled. I suppose this would be a ground-breaking publication if you believed that Germany fought a defensive war against encirclement in 1914, but the naivete of this view was probably apparent to many people before the book was even released. The idea that any of the Empires involved in World War I were not interested in territorial aggrandizement would most likely have been laughed at by sensible people in 1915. At this point in the war, Austria-Hungary had seized Serbia, Japan had devoured Germany's far eastern colonies and Anglo-French forces had conquered most of German Africa.

Fischer illustrates that Germany wanted to run Belgium and the Ukraine and all its other conquered territories like colonies, which would have resulted in a harsh Germanizing regime and economic exploitation for people living there. In the context of the world of 1914, isn't this a "so what?" I would never defend policies like these, but I have always suspected that the outrage over the Kaiserreich's imperialist excesses is partly due to the fact they were directed against white Europeans and not the millions of darker-skinned people under British, French, and Russian rule. Fischer wanted to use this book as a vehicle to demonstrate continuity in the history of German imperialism. According to this line of argument, Hitler's goals were a natural outgrowth of the policies of the Kaiserreich. All Fischer really demonstrates is that the Germans were as grandiosely imperialistic as any of the other major powers at the time. When he was criticized by other historians for not comparing German war aims to those of the Entente, Fischer replied that the scope of his research only allowed him to discuss Germany. This response is unconvincing coming from someone who wrote a work over 600 pages long. To his credit, Fischer does mention Sykes-Picot once or twice(!). As for his continuity theory: The Nazis planned to murder millions in the territories they occupied and did so. The imperialists in Wilhelmine Germany did neither. If anything, this disparity in goals suggest a serious break with the past, and not continuity.

One can take further exception with Fischer's idea (not expressed in this particular book) that "Hitler was no accident". Instead he was the likely or inevitable result of Germany's "Sonderweg" (special path to modernity). Before the Great Depression the Nazi's had the votes of 2-3% of the German electorate. After the crash in '29, their popularity skyrocketed to approximately 30% of the electorate in 1933. Unless the stock market crash was caused the by the Germans (wouldn't that be a wonderful way to unite all of modern history in a common narrative!), I would have to suggest that Hitler's rise to power was, to some extent, an accident after all.

AskHistorians says

An essential -- though controversial -- work which describes the manner in which Germany instigated the war and asserts that her war aims were essentially predatory from the start. The debate over this work is enormous, but Fischer's claims must be contended with by anyone who seriously hopes to understand what the war was about and how it is popularly perceived.
