

At 7:00pm President Sara Lowman welcomed the membership and invited the members to enjoy dinner.



At 7:45pm President Lowman called the meeting to order and called the vote on bylaw changes to make it easier for lapsed members to come back to the organization. The voice vote passed the changes unanimously. Pat Hughes led the guest introductions around the tables.

At 7:50pm a ten minute break was announced.

At 8:00pm President Sara Lowman introduced the speaker and topic: “Bolshevism, National Socialism and the New Politics of World War One” by Professor Carl Caldwell the Samuel, G. McCann Professor of History at Rice University.

The focus of Professor Caldwell’s talk was “The New Politics created by World War One”. The thesis was that 100 years after the end of WWI, it is still of interest and relevant to us today. WWI altered politics by allowing new forms of civil organization into the European states that made more brutal domestic policies possible. The arc of the talk was that while Serbian terrorism generated the spark, the changes in civil society during the war weakened the nineteenth century power structure. This change allowed the right wing extremists and the radical millenarians to sway public sentiment in ways not possible before the war. Professor Caldwell focused on the experiences of Russia and Germany. Professor Caldwell did not cover ‘who started the war’; his focus was on ‘why populations accepted the war’.

At the beginning of the war the populations of each country feared the war and each country saw its participation in the war as their defensive response to other countries. Internal politics coalesced around a sentiment voiced in Germany as: “I don’t see parties, only Germans.” French and Russian sentiments followed those of Germany. In Russia, for instance, early in the war the Bolsheviks came together under the Czar to support the war. Lenin was isolated at first only to come back to create a more brutal response to civil organization that led the way to Stalin’s even more brutal regime. The British and Irish came together, even in the face of a near civil war, until 1916-1917. At that point the Irish begin to blame the British for being imperialists. The Irish uprising completed the break in the twenties.

The war was begun as a defensive war, but each month this rationalization became weaker and weaker. As the domestic structures of each country began to fall apart, domestic ‘mutinies’ began. Unskilled labor at first supported the war in a response based on the sentiment that others should “Not Take Over Our Land”.

Later in the war, when the unskilled and skilled began to lose their rights and safety in the civil

realm, their motivation was ready to change and discussions about a reorganization of civil society opened the door to the new politics which were inherently instable because the societies were ambivalent about which direction was in their best interest.

The example of Germany was the rise of the German Fatherland Party. The call was for personal leadership from the army. The Kaiser was not the center of the conversation. Socialists were called traitors, and they were criminalized. The definition of socialist started to expand to include Jews and others. In 1916-1917 Hindenburg and Ludendorff began to agitate for a program for taking property. While this didn't happen because the Reichstag didn't pass legislation, the stage was set without the Kaiser being central to the debate. This is the new politics. A call for a negotiated peace began.

In Russia a parallel set of events occurred. A labor party united to establish factory labor policy and was arrested for being Bolsheviks. Lenin, in Switzerland, began developing a new war theory: The War is caused by Imperialism, based on a class structure. The move from imperialism to class war began the move to civil war. In addition, this war was an agent that would promote the Bolshevik utopia. The war mixed the populations of Russia on the 1500 mile front who had previously not left their home towns. A different understanding of the population of itself came about because of this mixing.

Germany expanded the war with submarines which gave the US an opening to enter the war. German leadership turns the war into a War of Annexation, but doesn't have the troops to hold the land, and Germany enters into chaos. The pattern emerges of guns, moving people, new governments via civil wars leading to new civil structures, not a return to the Kaiser and the Czar. The 1918 flu epidemic was another de-stabilizing event that set the stage for civil war. Russia, an historically autocratic state, falls apart under these stresses. This allowed the beginning of the Soviet State. Lenin returns to Russia with policies of: Peace for Soldiers/Land for Peasants/ Bread for the Proletariat. At the end of the war the soldiers return with their weapons. Lenin's policies didn't require democratic assemblies.

Professor Caldwell went on to describe the attempt at a Bolshevik utopia in Russia under a scientific dictatorship led by Lenin and then Stalin; and a Nazi utopia in Germany under the control of a romantic leadership model that unites the leader with the people in a spiritual bond. The war swept away the previous leadership patterns of the nineteenth century and left a void that was filled in different ways in the various countries.