

“Remembrance” or “Lest We Forget”: Rethinking the War to End All Wars

Global Research News Hour Episode 81

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Theme: [GLOBAL RESEARCH NEWS HOUR](#)

*And I can't help but wonder no Willie McBride,
Do all those who lie here know why they died?
Did you really believe them when they told you 'The Cause?'
Did you really believe that this war would end wars?
The suffering, the sorrow, the glory, the shame
The killing, the dying, it was all done in vain.
For Willie McBride, it all happened again,
And again, and again, and again, and again.*

– from Eric Bogle's song [The Green Fields of France](#). This verse was deleted in Joss Stone's rendition for the Royal British Legion's 2014 Poppy Appeal.

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One of the most devastating conflicts in history the First World War drew in all the major powers at the time. Eight and a half million soldiers and Six and a half million civilians are estimated to have perished in the war that was supposed to end war. [1][2]

Set off by a diplomatic crisis, triggered by the assassination of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in June of 1914, The Great War as it was known at the time lasted four bloody years. On November 11, 1918, Germany became the last of the Central Powers to capitulate and sign an armistice with the victorious Allied Powers, signalling the end of the war.

To this day, the 11th hour of the eleventh month is set aside to reflect and honour those military men and women who paid the ultimate cost to secure a more peaceful and just world. The occasion is referred to as Remembrance Day in the British Commonwealth.

The spirit of Remembrance Day has shifted in recent years, especially in Canada.

Following the centenary of the start of World War I, the Canadian Prime Minister credited the war as a critical ingredient in establishing the country as an independent nation. [3]Harper stokes national pride over Allied victories in Ypres, Vimy and Passchendaele rather than

lament a tragic loss of life over a mostly pointless war. [4]

Cautionary warnings about the terrible toll of war with slogans like “Never Again” and “Lest We Forget” seem to have been eclipsed by imperatives to paint the sacrifices of military men and women serving the State (for whatever reason) as heroic and necessary.

Today, Remembrance Day may as well be called “Thank a Soldier for your Freedoms Day.”

Without disrespecting those who have died serving in past conflicts, it is worth reflecting during Remembrance Week on exactly why World War I and other twentieth century conflicts were waged in the first place. Were these wars truly for democracy, peace and democracy? Or were there more cynical motives being pursued by Canada and the other major powers?

To this end, this week’s Global Research News Hour interviews two prominent authors and dissident thinkers on the century old conflict known as World War I and Canada’s role in this and other military forays.

[Yves Engler](#) is an activist and author of numerous books on Canadian foreign policy including [The Black Book on Canadian Foreign Policy](#), [Canada and Israel: Building Apartheid](#) and his latest [The Ugly Canadian: Stephen Harper’s Foreign Policy](#).

Dr. Jacques Pauwels, Canadian historian and author of the 2000 book [The Myth of the Good War: America in the Second World War](#) . He has a French language book on World War 1 available now. An English version will be available in 2015.

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Notes:

1) Ulanis, Boris (1971). Wars and Population. Moscow. p. 85

2) Clodfelter, Michael (2002). Warfare and Armed Conflicts- A Statistical Reference to Casualty and Other Figures, 1500-2000 2nd Ed. Page 479

3) Lee-Anne Goodman (August 4, 2014). Canadian Press; 'Prime Minister Stephen Harper calls First World War essential to country's development'; http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2014/08/04/prime_minister_stephen_harper_calls_first_world_war_essential_to_countrys_development.html

4) [Thomas Walkom](#) (August 5, 2014), The Toronto Star; 'Stephen Harper fails to see that World War I was a mistake'; http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2014/08/05/stephen_harper_fails_to_see_that_world_war_i_was_a_mistake_walkom.html

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