

CHAPTER 9

Building on War

I

That the war played a crucial role in the memory of people between the wars needs no demonstration. Whether such memory led to a glorification of war, or sheer indifference and resignation, it was frequently based on a feeling that the First World War had not really ended at all. That feeling was strongest in those nations where normalcy was slow to return. This sense of continuing war could be shared by friend and enemy alike, those who abhorred war and those who held to the Myth of the War Experience. Thus in 1934, after the Nazis' seizure of power, the newly exiled German theater critic Alfred Kerr wrote that what he was witnessing was not war once more, but a mental confusion and universal chaos which were an extension of the First World War.¹ A few years later one of his Nazi persecutors wrote that the war against the German people continued.²

This continuity was crucial above all to the self-representation of the radical Right in Germany, which considered itself the heir of the war experience. In triumphant National Socialism some of the themes which informed the Myth of the War Experience were

driven to their climax in peacetime. Thus the martyrs of the Nazi movement were identified with the dead of the First World War, and identical symbols were used to honor their memory: steel helmets, holy flames, and monuments which projected the Nazi dead as clones of the soldiers who had earlier fought and died for the fatherland. For example, George Preiser, a young National Socialist killed by Communists in 1932, was supposed to have said as he died: "My father fell in the service of Germany. I as his son can do no less."³ Such men "fell in the same spirit as the unforgettable dead of the world war, they did so with the same ardor as the first soldier of the Third Reich, the immortal Albert Leo Schlageter, they died like Horst Wessel and all the rest."⁴ Example could be piled upon example here, but these will have to suffice to demonstrate the continuity between the cult of the war dead and the cult of the Nazi martyrs. But such continuity existed on every level, as in the attempt to enlist the example of wartime camaraderie to define the nature of the national community, or in the language used by the Nazis.

Language was important as the repository of this continuity. As we saw in the last chapter, it reflected the postwar process of brutalization. For the Nazis this meant, above all, adopting military language to their purposes. Thus the German term *einsatz*, meaning "marching orders," a call to do battle, was now used for virtually every service the state or party demanded. Even actors and dancers no longer "performed" in the service of the party, but got their marching orders. The word *front* with its wartime associations was used to designate many Nazi organizations which were thought to be in the vanguard of the Third Reich. There was the Nazi labor organization, the *Arbeitsfront*, and the *Frontgemeinschaft*, a word coined in 1936 denoting a true community of the *Volk* based upon the war experience. Earlier, members of the *Stahlhelm*, the veterans organization, had talked about the *Frontsozialismus* as wartime camaraderie opposed to the Marxist class struggle.⁵ The magic power of words must not be underrated in establishing continuity between the wars. This was a continuity which all of fascism advocated as a matter of policy. But during the Weimar Republic other rightist and even centrist parties were also

apt to use wartime vocabulary, for this language was part and parcel of the vocabulary of *Volk* and race, so widespread in Germany between the wars.

The Nazis also made ample use of the stereotype of the "new man" discussed in the last chapter, exemplary of the "race of new men" supposedly created by the First World War. These were men, according to one National Socialist novel, who had internalized the heritage of their fallen comrades, trumpeters of the Third Reich in the making.⁶ Adolf Hitler himself talked about the "new man" in terms of the First World War. Thus in his speech to German youth at the Nuremberg Party Day of 1936 he called on them to be courageous, resolute, and loyal, to bear all sacrifice for the sake of the eternal Reich and *Volk*, to be "great men," following the example of the war generation.⁷ Typically, whenever Hitler mentions the German new man, he immediately mentions his looks: he must be lithe and supple, and must represent a Germanic ideal of beauty.

Normalcy was also slow to return to Italy after the war; though no Free Corps came into existence, there were many paramilitary *squadristas* in a nation badly divided until the advent of fascism. Italian fascism took up the theme of violence and permanent war, but without the Free Corps' total disregard for human life: death to the enemy only came later when in the 1930s Mussolini tightened the reins. It was then, after returning from one of his visits to Berlin, that he said Italians must learn to become hard, implacable, and full of hate. At the same time he ordered all officials to exercise and to wear uniforms.⁸

Yet the Italian nationalist tradition was different from that in the north. Bismarck's policy of blood and iron which created the German Reich had no equivalent in the process of Italian unification. Nevertheless, here also the constant conjuring up of war, the preparation for another sacrifice for the fatherland, must have had its brutalizing effect. Mussolini wanted a new fascist man, a man of the future who was a "real man," a soldierly man, with fascist faith, courage, and willpower. And yet Mussolini's new man differed from the German model: he was not a prisoner of the past, but supposedly free to create the future of the fascist state.⁹ The new German type first looked backwards in order to look forward, like Erler's soldier rooted in German history and the Germanic

race. For all that, the fascist definition of manliness was much the same in both countries, building on the new type supposedly emerging from the war, even if one was more modern and future oriented than the other.

Whatever the differences between the ideals of the new man, he was always linked to the war experience. Even for those who did not take the warrior ideal to its extremes, soldierly comportment mattered—meaning clean-cut appearance, hardness, self-discipline, and courage. A sober, unexcitable bearing characterized the ideal type, as exemplified by the pictures and the descriptions we have mentioned, for that seemed to be one of the lessons of the war. And yet nationalism played a crucial role, arousing strong emotion. Again the Nazis, at the culmination of the search for a new man, provide the best example. Their stereotype of the "political soldier" in the service of an ideal embodied this tension between emotion and sobriety, romanticism and realism, especially when applied to the education of an elite of youth, the new men of the future. While in the Nazi elite schools, called National Political Schools, or *Napol*, there was much talk of the romanticism of blood and soil, the past examples held up before the boys advocated a sober attitude toward manly ideals—the Prussian Officer Corps, Sparta, the Jesuit Colleges, and English public schools.¹⁰ These men of the future were to be formed by the past, a past which seemed to put duty and discipline before any emotional commitment. Indeed, the fanaticism which these schools were supposed to produce was defined as dedication rather than inspiration, leading to "soldierly National Socialist comportment."

This was the formation of the new man in practice, not merely rightist theory. On the one hand, the fifteen *Napol* schools seemed to provide a training which rejected sentimentality and emphasized self-discipline and indifference to death, but on the other, an emotional commitment to a romantic Nazi ideology was also required. The boys had to be racially pure and, as one English observer put it, to look reasonably honest, "though their honesty is sometimes taken for granted if they have fair hair and blue eyes."¹¹ Appearance was of prime importance for the new German, as it was not for Mussolini's new man, who was left undefined in this particular as in most others. There was nothing new or experimen-

tal about the new German. He was merely the old racial ideal type refined by the war and propelled into the future.

Visual images played a crucial role in the continuity between the two wars: through war monuments everywhere, and through First World War posters and pictures in Germany, which were used routinely to exhort Germans to various duties. Fritz Erler's soldier served as a model for future paintings of Germans in battle. Thus, for example, Elk Ebert's *The Last Hand Grenade* of 1937 featured a soldier reminiscent of Erler's. To give another example, an illustration of a sergeant from the film *Strosstrupp 1917* (*Attack Force 1917*) appeared on the cover of a book called *Ewiges Deutsches Soldatentum* (*The Eternal German Soldier*) of 1940.¹² The SS for its yearly calendar of 1938 simply took a design from a First World War poster asking for war loans, showing a very blond and tall father sheltering a mother and baby in his arms. It would be interesting to trace the themes of picture postcards in this manner. They too must have transmitted the image of the ideal soldierly man from the First into the Second World War. Such visual transmission was of key importance quite apart from its excessive use by the Nazis. We have already discussed the various ceremonies commemorative of the fallen which in their symbols also kept alive the ideals and attitudes of the First World War.

The many picture books about the war which appeared in Germany in the interwar years for the most part transmitted a positive image of war. Most of them were careful not to show the reality of death in war, but instead concentrated upon ruined landscapes or destroyed houses and farms. Thus some realism was preserved even though the dead and wounded were missing from such photographs. This enabled some of the texts to praise the heroism and daring of war without mentioning the price which had to be paid for such an adventure. Picture books sometimes put their thesis into their title, as in Walter Bloem's *Germany: A Book of Greatness and Hope* (1924), which was published in conjunction with the state archives of the Republic. This book stressed war as an accomplishment, as a tremendous experience for all its sadness, as a confirmation of Germany's glorious fate. The photographs show many burnt-out villages, but either the trenches are empty or the soldiers present are idle or about to shoot: no casualties disfigure

these scenes. They are not so different from the postcard that shows soldiers having a good time in the trenches (see Picture 12, p. 131). When the dead do appear in such photographs, they are blurred: either too far away to be seen in detail or decently covered up, about to be taken for burial.¹³ Pacifist picture books did exist which accented the horrors of war and did not spare the reader's feelings, but they were in a decided minority.

War films were certainly more influential than picture books in establishing continuity between the wars, though picture books kept in the home must not be underestimated in their influence upon men who had been too young to fight. We addressed war films as a trivializing influence in Chapter 8, but after 1918 more serious war films also came onto the market, though those which treated the war as an adventure story continued to be made throughout the interwar years. Few films appeared immediately after the war, following the same pattern as war novels: first a long pause after the end of the war, and then, almost a decade later, a spate of works. The reasons for this delay are unclear: perhaps exhaustion, the distance needed to cope with the war, or the time needed to react to the confusion of the postwar world. There were surrogate war films, as we saw: mountain-climbing films in Germany or films about sports which glorified the national image of combative manliness. Most war films projected such an image, but not exclusively. Although the new man, the ideal type we have discussed, does appear, film as a whole had a scope and variety in its function as entertainment, which, except for propaganda films, precluded such single-minded concentration.

Italian films, for example, were by no means schematic, for all of Mussolini's concern with the creation of a new fascist man: they featured Lotharios, bankers, and aristocrats as well as libertines.¹⁴ From the mid-1930s onward several films treated the "conversion" of a wayward young man to fascism and proper manhood. Guino Brignone's *Red Passport* (*Passaporto rosso*, 1935) shows a young man who refuses to have any truck with the war until he is "converted" and enlists. The film ends with a posthumous award for bravery—a fascist medal presented by the state at the end of the First World War!¹⁵ However, self-conscious fascist films were only a small part of a broad offering. Even in the Third

Reich, films which centered upon Nazi ideology were in a minority, compared to films, such as musicals, which provided sheer entertainment.

For all that, it is striking how many serious films about the war now included scenes of its horror which had been so carefully avoided during the war itself. German war films at the end of the 1920s have been called singularly realistic: "Soldiers fall before our eyes and writhe in the agony of death, the faces of deadly wounded young men show their pain."¹⁶ Battle scenes made up three-quarters of Raymond Bernard's film *Croix de Bois* (1932), following closely Roland Dorgel e's famous novel.¹⁷ The American film *Havoc* (1925) won praise for its picture of the stark brutality of war, at a time when Hollywood films dominated the English market.¹⁸ These were films without pacifist intent, while the rare pacifist film like *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) linked the horror to the purposelessness of war. Yet though realism in film may have been more widespread than in the other media, it must still be kept in proportion. Most films sanitized the war and marketed it as entertainment. Other films did not trivialize war, but showed various aspects of it, such as camaraderie, to be serious commitments. Indeed, if the new type of man was not projected in a propagandistic manner, he was still present in the rough-and-tumble of male comrades at or behind the front. Thus one of the most sophisticated and multilayered French war films of the interwar years, *The Grand Illusion* (1937), projected this type through Jean Gabin as the leader of the squad. Even when any desire to glorify war was absent, it seemed impossible to avoid projecting ideals like camaraderie, courage, or sacrifice, which by their very nature endowed war with noble qualities.

Many more war films supported the Myth of the War Experience than opposed it: as in the picture books, scenes of destroyed landscapes and farms were much more common than those of the dead and injured. However, a trend toward greater realism persisted, to find its climax in the Second World War. Whatever harsh notes disturbed the masking of reality between the two wars, they were not harsh enough to challenge the continuance of war as offering for a great many people and political movements adventure, commitment, and hope for the future. We have given only some of

the most important examples of this continuity; many others remain to be discovered. The political Right provided the dynamic for such continuity and attempted to make it operative in national politics.

The Spanish Civil War, which broke out in 1936, brought into sharper focus the continuities between the wars and broadened their scope, for the first time taking in the political Left as well as the Right. The Spanish Civil War was the only armed conflict between the wars which, since the victory of the Bolshevik Revolution, had excited the European imagination. A new stream of volunteers enlisted, reviving a tradition so closely linked with the Myth of the War Experience. Most of them joined the International Brigades on the Republican side, and it was they who determined the image of the war for the outside world, whatever legacy the Spanish armies fighting the war may have left for their own country. The Spanish Civil War was the one occasion between the wars when volunteers once more had a chance to play an ideological role. The English philosopher C. E. M. Joad was reminded of 1914 when in 1937, during one of his pacifist lectures, a young volunteer who had been wounded fighting against Franco in Spain walked into the hall to the tumultuous applause of the audience.¹⁹ The civil war was the decisive political event—the political awakening—for many of the postwar generation, above all in the democracies where the myths it created had the greatest impact. It can demonstrate how the Myth of the War Experience influenced the political Left as well as the political Right, even if in this case the influence was of much less importance.

II

It has been said that young men went to Spain to join the International Brigades and to fight against Franco as their elders had gone to Flanders two decades earlier.²⁰ Their motives for joining were not different in spirit from those of earlier volunteers: ideological commitment, adventure, camaraderie, and freedom from social constraints, John Cornford, for example, joining the English Thomas Cromwell Brigade, echoed the thought of many volunteers of the

generation of 1914, and even of earlier wars, when he wrote, "It was partly because I felt myself for the first time independent that I came here."²¹ And an American said to be painfully conscious of his effeminate appearance, when asked why he enlisted, replied, "To make a man out of myself."²²

However, ideological commitment was decisive for the vast majority of volunteers, most of whom had engaged in antifascist political activity long before they fought in Spain. In their way they differed from earlier volunteers, as their cosmopolitan ideologies—socialism, communism, and anarchism—differed from the earlier nationalist fervor. They found their spirit of camaraderie among Germans, French, and Englishmen and those of other nations who fought side by side for freedom and justice—as they saw it; altogether some thirty-five thousand men joined the Brigades, which probably never exceeded eighteen thousand men at any one time.²³ This cosmopolitan spirit was supposed to inform the struggle, though in reality the Communists, with their allegiance to the Soviet Union, came to dominate the Brigades.

Once more volunteers built the Myth of the War Experience, and, as in the Great War, there were many writers and artists among them who could translate their enthusiasm into prose, poetry, and song, although some 80 percent of the Brigades were working class.²⁴ Here again, only the intellectuals carried the myth, just as it had been wrongly asserted that most of the volunteers of the German Wars of Liberation were students and professors. The myths created around the International Brigades' fight for freedom and democracy were powerful, as anyone who was alive at the time can attest. The songs of the Brigades played a central part in transmitting the myth, just as song had been a powerful weapon in the hands of the earlier volunteers. These so-called songs of the Spanish Civil War were as a rule highly political, some based upon folk tunes and others written by well-known left-wing composers like Hanns Eisler and Paul Dessau; Bertolt Brecht wrote the text for the "Song of the United Front." Many individual brigades had their own songs, the most famous of which was that of the Thaelmann Brigade, named after the former German Communist leader: "Die Heimat ist weit, doch wir sind bereit. Wir kämpfen uns siegen für dich: Freiheit!" (Home is far away, but we are at the ready.

We fight and are victorious for you, freedom!). Another popular song commemorated Hans Beimler, the chief political commissar of the International Brigades who was killed in battle. Earlier, volunteers had not sung songs about individual heroes, but the Brigades were still more close-knit, and besides Beimler had been one of the few, perhaps the only inmate, ever to escape from the Nazi concentration camp in Dachau.

Such songs fitted into the tradition of political folk songs popular in Germany, England, and the United States. They were sung on records and in concert by singers like Pete Seeger in America and Ernst Busch in Germany. At the same time, books, tracts, and lectures spread the message. Film joined in, attempting to preserve the "people's war" in the collective imagination. For example, while Joris Ivens filled his film *Terre d'Espagne* (*The Spanish Earth*, 1937) with realistic images of war, he also tried to find more profound truths in the war, and these he saw in the revolutionary romanticism of a united people trying to shape its own destiny. Christian themes, always so prominent as a justification for death in war, were present in such films as well. The film *Sierra de Teruel* (1939), based upon André Malraux's *Man's Fate*, was meant to show the crucifixion of a people torn between despair and hope, both always present in the image of Christ crucified.²⁵ The myth of the International Brigades once more activated the political and ideological role of volunteers in war, and—however oppressive and strife-torn the reality of the Spanish Civil War—proved central in the antifascist struggle.

The European antifascist movement found its voice through the Brigades, or at the very least a larger audience than ever before, and it is astonishing that the myth of the International Brigades has not yet found its historian. To be sure, the Brigades also sang traditional soldiers' songs, lamenting love left behind or complaining about their treatment (like the "Quartermaster Song," which accused him of keeping the food locked up). Nevertheless, ideology was always, and consciously, kept in the foreground. For example, Alfred Kantorowicz's *Spanish War Diary*, meant for publication, took pains to point out the difference between the Brigades and the German Free Corps. The Free Corps were adventurers who fought for the sake of fighting, while the Brigades were free-

dom fighters. Here Kantorowicz repeats the myth we mentioned earlier about the Free Corps and even cites Ernst von Salomon, its chief creator, as his authority.²⁶ Though the Free Corps were repudiated, a certain continuity with the First World War existed even among these volunteers—if not in the content, then in the form of their enthusiasm and mythmaking.

One reader of Kantorowicz's Spanish diary observed with some justice how enthusiasm for soldiering was found even among those of the Left who professed to reject all militarism and war. Kantorowicz was said to have written his diary in the spirit of a front-line soldier from the Great War, emphasizing the camaraderie among the volunteers in the Brigades.²⁷ Kantorowicz had indeed fought for a year in the First World War. Younger men who had not seen the First World War gave up their pacifism in order to fight in Spain. One of them was Julian Bell, who put aside his own pacifist opinions in order to enlist, but he did so against the wishes of his parents, who thought that no cause could justify a war. This dispute between parents and son has been described as a contest between reason and romanticism, meaning Julian Bell's sense of honor and his belief that here was a test which must not be failed.²⁸ This romanticism placed him squarely within the tradition of the earlier volunteers, including the generation of 1914. Many English and American volunteers had taken pacifist positions which they now rejected. The Communists, of course, had never done so; it has been estimated that about 60 percent of all volunteers were Communists before the war, while another 20 percent were converted to communism during the course of the war.²⁹

While the First World War was rarely referred to directly in accounts given by volunteers of their own experiences in Spain—and passed over in silence by those who built the myth of the war—at times it does surface as a reference point. Thus we hear that such antiwar poets of the First World War as Siegfried Sassoon, or such writers as Henri Barbusse, did not persuade those who enlisted for Spain that war was dull and dispiriting; "still less could they have persuaded us that our own war might disillusion us."³⁰ The pictures of the war, the songs from the film *Cavalcade* (which dealt extensively with the First World War), and the compassionate poems by Wilfred Owen produced envy rather than pity for a genera-

tion that had experienced so much. Thus we are back with the picture books discussed earlier, memories of the war which instead of revulsion produced envy in men too young to have fought. These feelings were now projected onto the "people's war" in Spain. "Even in our anti-war campaigns of the early thirties," just such a veteran of the Spanish War reminisced later, "we were half in love with the horrors we cried out against."³¹

However, there was no glorification of war itself but rather of this particular war, which was regarded as essential for the defeat of fascism both in Spain and at home: in Germany, Italy, or wherever it was on the offensive. The Spanish Civil War coincided with the height of fascist influence in Europe. The fallen were not honored as war dead, but as revolutionary heroes, compared, like Hans Beimler, to those of the Russian Revolution.³² The continuity between the wars affected the Left in form rather than in content, and yet the two cannot be clearly separated. The enthusiasm of the volunteers, their willingness to sacrifice their lives in war, and their feeling of camaraderie transcend such separation. They also built war into their lives, but in a defensive rather than in an aggressive manner. They did not stake the future upon war. Yet the First World War was too omnipresent to be ignored by those who fought once more at a time when its memory was still fresh; after all, many officers of the Brigades had been front-line soldiers in the First World War.

The volunteers of the International Brigades, who saw themselves fighting for good and against evil, could not help but idealize the war, creating a Myth of the War Experience. Their cause was embedded in a "culture of war," as proclaimed by Republican propaganda, and the means were traditional: song, poetry, prose, and painting. The war they fought was for them—as for the earlier volunteers—a cause which consumed their lives, even if the commitment was different. There is a continuity here worth noting, one which will be apparent again among the International Brigades of the SS in the Second World War, just before the volunteers and with them the Myth of the War Experience largely passed from the scene.

What about Franco's volunteers? They played no wider role, and not merely because of their small numbers, but also because

of Franco's approach to propaganda, to creating and propagating a dynamic myth. Both sides established Commissariats for Propaganda at the outset of the war, but while the Republic understood this task widely, as projecting the culture of war,³³ Franco's propaganda had a different and narrower scope. It emphasized the need for religion, fanaticism, and "visceral thought,"³⁴ not ideals which appealed to European intellectuals who were the successful transmitters of the myth of the Brigades. Articulate opinion was on the Loyalist side, and antifascism was reinforced by the culture and excitement the Brigades conveyed.

Those who, properly speaking, were volunteers for Franco did not serve in separate regiments, but in the division called *Tercio* under Spanish officers. Their numbers were small, about 250 Frenchmen and 650 Irishmen, but there were also White Russians and a smattering of other nationalities. Ten thousand Portuguese joined Franco's forces, mostly former professional soldiers, students, and unemployed intellectuals.³⁵ But these troops had at least the passive support of their government, and no more than the Germans and Italians who joined the war can they be classified as volunteers in the usual sense of the word. Volunteers proper came for the most part as Christian crusaders against communism. The Irish contingent had *in hoc signo vinces* inscribed on their flag, which featured a red cross on a field of emerald green, showing a continuity not with modern war but with the medieval crusades instead.³⁶ This did not preclude the English poet Roy Campbell, also a volunteer, who had once praised the "masculine intellect," from casting his Christian crusade in modern military vocabulary.³⁷ We know so little about these volunteers that it is impossible to say whether the memory of the First World War played a role in their commitment, though many seemed to have served in that war. Such Catholic crusaders do not seem to have adopted the Myth of the War Experience, which worked with another, civic religion.

The Italian intervention in the civil war was undertaken by so-called volunteers as well, partly drawn from the regular army and partly Black Shirts recruited by the Fascist Party. Both kinds of volunteers were attracted by the benefits promised by the Italian government. Professional soldiers got more pay and opportunity for promotion by the army; Black Shirt volunteers were in it be-

cause of economic necessity or social maladjustment. They fought badly and, as one report has it, did not hate the enemy.³⁸ These volunteers were also older than the average volunteer on either side of the war. The Italian troops were not volunteers in the normative sense of the term, but merely recruits of the Fascist regime.

The Legion Condor sent by Hitler was an extension of the Nazi regime, but here the continuity with the First World War was more conspicuous. The core of the Legion was the air force, though some members of the army and navy functioned as support troops. These so-called volunteers were selected by their own units stationed in Germany, though some may have volunteered as well. The only proper volunteering involved was the men's original enlistment in the air force, always an elite branch of the armed services. The men of the Legion Condor considered themselves aviators in the tradition of those who had fought in the First World War. The quasi-official history of the Legion, Werner Beumelburg's *Fight for Spain (Kampf um Spanien, 1939)*, took as one of its main themes the continuity between the First World War and the war in Spain. "Those who fell in the *Legion Condor* belong to the fallen of the world war and all of those who lost their lives on behalf of the new Germany."³⁹ The aviators who died in Spain were integrated into the pantheon of fallen soldiers, as were the National Socialist martyrs. Indeed, Beumelburg's book glorified the German soldier whose tradition the Legion Condor was supposed to reinforce. Volunteers who fought for Franco acted with the usual nationalist spirit which the Myth of the War Experience had always advocated.

The continuities we have discussed are important in linking the two world wars through the Myth of the War Experience. The horror of war was transcended; at the very least, war remained acceptable even after all that had passed. This acceptance was not merely reflected in the continuities which have concerned us, but also in the fate of pacifism after the war. Pacifism provides a mirror image of the strength of the Myth of the War Experience. After the unprecedented carnage of the First World War it would seem only right and natural that men and women would heed the cry, "Never again."

III

Immediately after the war it seemed to some German pacifists that the war itself had been their best ally.⁴⁰ At that time, a mass meeting organized in 1919 in Berlin under the slogan "War, Never Again" attracted some 100,000 to 200,000 people. The "War, Never Again" (*Nie wieder Krieg*) movement, organized after the first mass meeting, attempted to provide German pacifism with a mass base.⁴¹ It was successful as long as the trade unions and the Social Democratic Party gave their support. But this pacifist-Republican alliance could not last: the "War, Never Again" movement collaborated closely with English and French pacifists and was therefore suspected of supporting the Treaty of Versailles. Moreover, rivalries among the leaders virtually ended the movement by 1928, and with it any attempt to give German pacifism a mass base. To be sure, important pacifist groups remained in the Social Democratic Party, but they were effectively neutralized by the party's effort to provide constant support for the embattled Weimar Republic. The Social Democrats had to defend the Republic against the revolutionary Left as well as against the Right. That meant on the one hand calling upon the army to defeat attempted revolutions, and on the other founding the *Reichsbanner*, a paramilitary organization, as a defense against the radical Right.

There were other German pacifist organizations, some more moderate than the "War, Never Again" movement, but they remained relatively small, without a true mass base. The Catholic pacifist movement was of some importance because of its success among Catholic youth, while the longest lived and best-known German pacifist movement, the *Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft* (German Peace Society), never attracted more than about twenty-seven thousand members. The society, however, was subject to constant infighting between moderates and radicals, and at the end of the Weimar Republic, in 1932, it had shrunk to a pitiful five thousand people.⁴² Pacifism remained alive among some left-wing intellectuals and their journals. Men like Carl von Ossietzky and Kurt Tucholski gave luster to the movement and kept it within the political discourse, but it was politically relevant only for disclosing

the secret rearmament of the *Reichswehr*—a disclosure which remained without consequence—and as a convenient target for the nationalist Right. The failure of German pacifism was due only in small part to its inadequate leadership and its constant quarrels and secessions. These were signs of sectarianism, and German pacifism was forced into the position of a sect. Pacifism was handicapped from the start in a defeated and humiliated nation where the question of war guilt was an emotional issue on which all political movements had to take a stand. But, above all, the political Right increasingly dominated the political discourse of the Republic, pushing their adversaries into a defensive role. National issues tended to become nationalist demands during much of the Weimar Republic, and pacifism was deprived of meaningful political support.

Pacifism was weak in Italy as well, where it was cut short by the rise to power of the Fascist government, though the Italian Socialist Party had maintained its pacifist position until that time, even in the face of rightist aggression. French pacifism, however, managed to retain a political base in a large section of the Socialist Party. A powerful pacifist and war-resisting group continued to exist in France throughout the interwar years. Nevertheless, it was in England that the strongest peace movement existed between the wars. There the transition between war and peace had been relatively smooth despite economic hardships. Moreover, the evangelical tradition gave pacifist movements a solid base that was missing in countries where religion and pacifism had not been linked. Protestantism in Germany, for example, had no such tradition, but in England pacifism could be practiced as an act of faith. The Peace Pledge Union, the largest British pacifist society, had 136,000 members at its height in 1936.⁴³ Furthermore, unlike the Social Democrats in Germany, the Labour Party in England supported the pacifists. Commitment to the League of Nations also provided important support for the antiwar movement, a factor which, once again, was of slight importance in Germany where the League was widely regarded as a tool of the victors. Canon H. R. L. Sheppard provided the Peace Pledge Union with the kind of effective leadership absent elsewhere. And yet when in 1934 he called for postcards to express support for the statement that any kind of war for

whatever cause was a crime, he received only some fifty thousand cards.⁴⁴

The antifascist struggle, as exemplified by the Spanish Civil War, posed the greatest obstacle to a pacifist movement based upon the Left. Was it proper to turn the other cheek to fascism rather than to stop its progress by using any means, including war? This was a matter of priorities: thus C. E. M. Joad, when confronted with the uprising of General Franco, asked: "Suppose you were a Spanish socialist who loyally supported the government, would you have allowed the generals to establish fascism over your passive body?" But Joad, who took a "pure peace" position, concluded that "it can never be right to abandon the advocacy of a long-run method of salvation, merely because the circumstances are unfavorable to its short-run application."⁴⁵

C. E. M. Joad was isolated in his stand, as the slogan "Against War and Fascism," a contradiction in terms, demonstrates. Many who adopted this slogan enlisted in the Spanish Civil War. Obviously, the political realities caught up with English pacifists, as they had, in a different way, with pacifists in Germany. However, when all is said and done, was the largest pacifist movement in Europe really so impressive? A mass base did exist, but even 136,000 are not so many in a nation of forty million. Certainly, the movement had more political influence than those in other nations, not just through the Labour Party, which was in a hopeless minority in Parliament throughout the 1930s, but also through its impact on the university students within the ruling elites. Yet it never truly broke through to become part of the faith of the middle or lower classes. Nowhere between the wars could pacifism become a politically powerful force, nor could it engage the loyalty of a sizeable part of the population.

Pacifist literature between the wars had an impact as great, perhaps greater, than any pacifist political movements. Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) became one of the bestselling German books of all time, and its impact was feared by pro-war forces. The simplicity and the power of the theme—a group of young soldiers caught in a demeaning and destructive war—had much appeal not only in Germany but around

the world. The language is rough and the images are gruesome. And yet the left-wing and pacifist journal *Die Weltbühne* called the book "pacifist war propaganda."⁴⁶ Remarque had explicitly denied that *All Quiet on the Western Front* was an adventure story,⁴⁷ but this was exactly what *Die Weltbühne* claimed, citing, for example, the pranks which the soldiers, fresh from school, pulled on their officers, as well as their pride in the advantage their war experience would give them over those born too young to fight.⁴⁸ The book could indeed be read in this way, and that may account for part of its popularity. Nevertheless, Modris Eksteins is no doubt correct in seeing the book as a comment on the war's destruction of a whole generation, adding that it offers no alternatives.⁴⁹ Yet such a bleak account does not as a rule produce best-sellers of this magnitude (though the vast resources of what was perhaps Germany's most skilled publishing company, the house of Ullstein, cannot be discounted). Readers must have found some positive aspects in the book to cling to, such as the adventure or the noble aspects of war which we have mentioned so often in connection with the Myth of the War Experience. However, the film made from the book and released in 1930 was banned in that same year under right-wing pressure as a threat to internal order and to Germany's image in the world—and this by the Weimar Republic.

Ludwig Renn in his autobiographical account of the war, *Der Krieg* (1929), considered one of the most famous antiwar novels, also paints a realistic picture of the fear, slaughter, and hollowness of war. But he himself admits that he was once enthusiastic, and his own disillusionment came at the last minute, in 1918. Meanwhile he did his duty, fought bravely, admired courage, and was pleased with his Iron Cross. It is doubtful to what extent this book can be considered squarely opposed to the First World War.⁵⁰ Unambiguous and straightforward condemnations of war can be found in some much less read German novels and plays, like the works of Fritz von Unruh, but in popular fiction it seemed difficult to condemn war without leaving some way out for the reader. Henri Barbusse's *Under Fire* (1916) was the most famous exception, for its realistic portrayal of a squad in the trenches left little room for any ambivalence in condemning war. But Barbusse himself was no

pacifist; he hated only so-called imperialist wars, and not wars fought on behalf of the Soviet Union and for those he thought were oppressed.

However, German postwar literature as a whole—even if one can discern some disillusionment—emphasized those ideals which were part of the Myth of the War Experience: the cult of the war dead, camaraderie, soldierly comportment, and the heroism of the “new man” who provided the necessary leadership. The “new men” in these novels looked back into German history and forward into the future. As Josef Magnus Wehner has it in his *Seven before Verdun* (*Sieben vor Verdun*, 1930), describing the war in the trenches: “We went over the top into timelessness.”⁵¹ And one reviewer of this book found its heroes “figures which are truer than all truth.”⁵²

Pacifism after the traumatic experiences of the First World War was besieged from the Right as well as the Left. Nationalist movements saw war as a means to reconquer lost territories and to rejuvenate the nation, while movements on the Left got their chance to fight fascism by joining the Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War. Pacifism presented no real obstacle to the impact of the Myth of the War Experience.

The Second World War brought about a decisive change in the memory of war in Western and Central Europe, seeming to put an end to the way in which wars had been perceived by most peoples and nations ever since the wars of the French Revolution and the German Wars of Liberation. It undermined the effectiveness of the myths and symbols which had inspired the cult of the nation, as well as the stereotype of the new soldierly man.

CHAPTER 10

The Second World War, the Myth, and the Postwar Generation

I

The First World War has been at the center of our analysis of the origins and evolution of the Myth of the War Experience. The Second World War was a different kind of war that would blur the distinction between the front line and the home front, which knew no trench warfare—so important in the evolution of the myth—and where defeat and victory were destined to be unconditional.

To be sure, some of the so-called manly qualities which had been idealized during the First World War were still in demand during the Second, as armies on the move confronted each other. However, the wholesale destruction of cities and towns, the wholesale massacre of civilians as a part of warfare, and the use of new technologies gave different dimensions to the latest world war. Civilians had not been spared by military action in the First World War—witness the sinking of the *Lusitania*—but now the scale of