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**Jerry White, *Zeppelin Nights: London in the First World War*, hardback, i-xi, 356 pages, London: The Bodley Head, 2014. ISBN: 978-1847921659; £19.99.**

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Jerry White is a well-known historian and teacher of London's history, who is based at Birkbeck College, University of London. Usually, his books cover specific centuries and have been properly described as 'magisterial'. This time, however, he has concentrated on a smaller period: the four years of the First World War. His excellent book is a timely reminder of the grave difficulties facing London which have to a certain extent been overshadowed by the events of the Second World War. Indeed, I was surprised to read that Londoners had already suffered blitz-like conditions before the bombing began again in 1940. Thus, it is certainly time for London's ordeal, and its remarkable place in Britain's war effort, to be properly chronicled.

In general, White takes a chronological approach but has a theme running throughout the book: class. Governments, both national and local, were dominated throughout the war by the upper class, who were extremely concerned about the attitudes of the working class. In spite of the loyalty and sacrifices of working-class people this class-based fear never abated. Once you read of the armistice in November 1918, you can almost hear the sigh of relief from the authorities.

On 31 May 1915 London became part of the front line when it was bombed by Zeppelin airships, and, thereafter, would bear the brunt of the German air offensive. The local authorities, in this case the Admiralty, proved largely incompetent in organising air defences and most of what they had proved ineffective. These only improved when the Army took over in 1916, although it was the Royal Flying Corps

that inflicted heavy losses on the Zeppelins. From May 1917 a new menace emerged: bomber aircraft—in the shape of the Gotha and the Giant. One of the new things I learnt was that the latter was bigger than any German aircraft used to bomb London in World War II! But unlike during the 'Blitz', Londoners were not given early warnings of a raid: they had to wait until 1917 and then only for daylight attacks; they were never warned during night raids until the bombs were falling. The reason for this governmental oversight was class—the fear the authorities had of the working class panicking or worse. Such neglectful attitudes consequently contributed to the number of casualties caused by the bombing. In general, Londoners of all classes remained stoic and responded to the raids in familiar style: they fled to the tube stations and in 1917 many left London during an unofficial, and mercifully short-lived, evacuation. The last raids occurred in May 1918, by which time Germany was losing the fight on the Western Front. The fact that Londoners suffered from air attack and often took their own measures to avoid the bombs was something I had not appreciated.

Apart from the bombing, ordinary Londoners suffered in other ways. The authorities had periodic moral panics that adversely affected the working class in particular. For example, in 1915 controls on the sale and consumption of alcohol were instituted as a means to drive up productivity in the munitions factories. Pub opening hours were restricted and remained so until the 1990s. Drink, though, was an easy target for the moralists and was never the 'demon' affecting production that its critics suggested. Music halls, cinemas and football matches, then particularly working-class forms of entertainment, as well as theatres, were all attacked as places of frivolity, something moralists decided was not acceptable in wartime. Thankfully, these moral panics did not stop soldiers and civilians from enjoying themselves in order to find a temporary escape from the horrors of war. Some West End shows were massive hits, such as the 1916 revue *The Bing Boys are Here*, which featured the song, 'If you were the only girl in the world'.

It is well known that the war provided women of all classes with opportunities denied them beforehand. Upper- and middle-class women were allowed to go to work, a patriotic means of getting away from stifling class norms. For working-class women, the war factories would eventually provide a decent wage (still less than men's, of course) compared to domestic service and good working conditions, made even better by palpable work camaraderie. For the first time, young women had money to spend and often time on their hands to spend it. They sought the companionship of troops on leave, especially those from the Empire, such as Australians and Canadians. Such assignations were rarely sordid and most young women said they were 'just out for a lark'. This caused another moral panic and, ironically, provided opportunities for women in the very first women's police forces. These were deployed in London to monitor the 'morals' of girls about town. The suffrage movement often provided the police recruits, who brought with them the class snobbishness of many of the suffragist and suffragette leaders. Nevertheless, some women did take advantage of the opportunity to meet the many soldiers in London, especially around Waterloo station, which earned the area the nickname 'Whoreterloo'.

Perhaps the only moral panic to be associated with the upper and middle classes was that of 1916–17, when the incidence of drug taking, particularly morphine and

cocaine, increased dramatically. At that point, such forms of escapism were well beyond the means of the working class.

Londoners did get some benefits during the war: more allotments became available, rationing was introduced finally in early 1918 and ensured acceptable nutrition amongst all classes while rents were eventually controlled, especially after middle-class businessmen led a rent strike in 1915. Rent controls were one area where the working class benefitted and the middle class did not. In fact, White points out that the living standards of the middle class declined, whereas those for the working class went up, especially now that full employment had arrived. Nevertheless, the working class still suffered: illegitimacy rates increased, as did the contraction of infectious diseases. Many diseases, such as TB, were increasing before 1914, and continued to do so during the war. Pneumonia abounded and all this before the onslaught of the influenza pandemic in 1918. Why this happened remains unexplained in spite of improving home conditions and nutrition. Thankfully, infant mortality continued to decline, owing to women's employment opportunities and government intervention in infant welfare, such as the provision of clinics.

While Londoners could 'take it', they could still misbehave and a dark cloud hung over London's collective experience of the war: the violent riots against the German community. These were enough, as White explains, to remove whatever cultural influence the German population had brought to London life. To a much lesser extent, Jews were also targets of mob fury owing to the belief that they were shirkers, especially when conscription was introduced. Since many Jews had been born in Russia they were exempt from conscription, which did not go down well with many in the East End. In addition, many British-born Jews were not fit enough for service and were consequently deemed cowards. Jews were also accused of being the first to hide from the bombers in the tube stations (accusations that would appear again in 1940) or were castigated for having fled London altogether. There were said to be so many London Jews in Brighton that it was referred to as 'Jerusalem by the sea'. Hostility towards Jews was shown more by attitude, and there was little of the physical violence that was meted out to the German population in London.

Thus, the type of war experienced by Londoners often depended on one's social class, although for all there was danger, opportunity and bereavement. In spite of government fears, the working class remained steadfast, an attitude no doubt helped by the end of the absolute poverty, never to return, which had marked the pre-war years. London's women provided sterling service for the war effort and, as a result, London would, generally, benefit from the peace. New industries, such as aircraft and car manufacturers, and those making consumer goods, grew in and around London, particularly towards the west. These would help London struggle through the Great Depression. There were even improvements in housing for a few middle- and working-class families. London had been the centre of the British war effort, something it was not in the Second World War owing to decisions made to disperse industry and the population throughout the country. After 1918, London would never be the same again: 'For the First World War', as White nicely sums up, 'changed London and the Londoner for the rest of the twentieth-century—and beyond' (276). White's book is one that I cannot recommend too highly.

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