



## **How close did the world come to peace in 1914?**

### **Strike Not Fight**

**Narrated by Prof Margaret MacMillan, historian**

#### **Audio slideshow transcript**

In the early 1900s most European countries had powerful socialist movements with strong support from the working classes.

The Second International was an organisation that brought many of these groups together from around the world.

25 different political parties were affiliated to the Second International - including the British Labour party, which had 42 Members of Parliament. In France, socialists held 103 seats in the French parliament – while in Germany the Social Democratic Party, the SPD, had over a million members, 110 seats and a quarter of all German votes. The Second International strongly argued against war in Europe.

In 1912, at their congress in Basle they called upon workers to unite in their duty “to exert every effort in order to prevent the outbreak of war”. They declared that military action by Germany, France or Britain would be “criminal insanity”.

Such was the Second International’s apparent solidarity that European governments were unsure of the extent of public support for war in July 1914.

To their surprise and relief, many socialists rallied to their various national causes. They believed their governments when they said that they were acting in the national interest.

But what if the Socialists and the Second International hadn't decided to support the war? What if instead they'd stuck to their declaration of 1912 and opposed it? A general strike in 1914 would have taken away the labour of workers in dockyards, railways, or munitions factories, as well as prevented the many hundreds of thousands of reservists from turning up to their armies across Europe.

Without the support of the workers, could Europe's governments have mounted a war on the scale of World War One?

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