



Gillard and long-term rival
Tony Abbott clash in June 2013

2006? I fear I may have been.”

In one way, this book confirms the age-old political adage that disunity is death. But it is also an extraordinary story of political delivery. In three years, the

“ What stands out in Julia’s memoir is not the narrative but the deep honesty of her account ”

Gillard government produced a National Disability Insurance Scheme, a new fair and redistributive scheme for funding all Australian schools (public and private), a carbon price, a reformed aged care system.

All of this was done by consolidating the budget and slashing middle-class welfare on a scale that would make George Osborne’s eyes water, all the while reducing inequality.

Julia Gillard combined the two greatest political gifts. She could do the numbers – essential to gaining and keeping power – and she had a driving purpose. Unlike many leaders, when she took power she knew exactly what to do with it. I loved working for Julia, and I miss it every day. Read this book and you’ll see why. 🇺🇸

John McTernan was director of communications for Julia Gillard from September 2011 to June 2013, and Tony Blair’s political secretary from 2005 to 2007

Conservative historian **Lord Lexden** hails a condensed analysis of the chaotic life of the last German Emperor



Kaiser Wilhelm II: A Concise Life
By John CG Röhl
Cambridge University Press
£16.99

John Röhl, Emeritus Professor of History at Sussex University, has won lavish and well-deserved praise for his three-volume biography of the Kaiser, which runs to some 4,000 pages and draws on 50 years’ research in archives all over Europe. Now he has produced a slim volume which presents the masterpiece in miniature form in under 200 pages of narrative. The portrait may be much smaller in size, but it provides – no less vividly than the much larger work – an utterly convincing likeness of a man who was by turns fearsome, endearing, self-pitying and ludicrous.

In boyhood he was tortured by well-meaning doctors as they toiled unsuccessfully to cure various disabilities, of which a useless left arm is the best known. For that, they prescribed ‘animal baths’: twice a week, the arm was thrust into the body of a freshly killed hare for half an hour. His mother, the eldest daughter of Queen Victoria, shrank from close contact with the ‘cripple’ and denigrated him mercilessly. She wrote him off at the age of 11 as “very arrogant, extremely smug [and] unbelievably lazy and slovenly”. A further insult – “so ignorant” – followed later. His hatred of her never wavered throughout his later career. The British royal curse of porphyria may have descended to him from his great-great-grandfather, George III. Sudden rages would replace tender charm.

“Where is this person to find love and faith, which he will need more than anyone else?” asked his despondent tutor, who signally failed to turn his charge into ‘a great man’ as his parents had commanded.

Wilhelm found love, not in his marriage or mistresses (with whom he played bondage games), but in an intense friendship with a homosexual courtier who adored him as “my dearly beloved Kaiser”. From handsome, sexually promiscuous Count (later Prince) Philipp zu Eulenberg he received devotion and blind political loyalty in a relationship which appears to have had no sexual element.

Eulenberg recruited friends and associates to his beloved’s service. The Kaiser found himself at the centre of a gay coterie who called him ‘*das liebchen*’ and exposed him to the constant threat of scandal which became lurid reality after 1906 with a succession of sensational court cases, though the heart attack which killed a highly placed general while he was dancing in an attractive ball gown – causing the Kaiser a nervous breakdown – did not become general public knowledge.

The Kaiser’s gays formed the nucleus of a substantial personal political entourage through which he ruled, largely disregarding the Reichstag, government departments and other formidable institutions (particularly in Prussia) with which he was supposed to share power under the terms of the German constitution. He had his own military, naval and civil cabinets. It was a recipe for confusion and incompetence. Nothing could have been further removed from the settled procedures followed by his royal British cousins in their dealings with elected politicians. Europe’s most advanced industrial economy appeared to be retreating to the 17th century in its style of government under a volatile monarch who believed passionately in the divine right of kings.

Like the members of his team, the Kaiser was completely

unstable, veering wildly from one flight of fancy to another in pursuit first of European supremacy and then of a leading world role, to the horror of Germany’s professional diplomats and politicians. Meeting him, leaders of other countries thought he must be mad, reacting to him as they would to

“ Meeting him, leaders of other countries thought he must be mad, reacting to him as they would to Hitler a generation later ”

Hitler a generation later (hatred of Jews poured forth from this earlier fanatic too). On a visit to Germany in 1903, US president Teddy Roosevelt encouraged the Kaiser to pursue his dreams of expansion in eastern Europe. Wilhelm wrote on his briefing paper for the meeting ‘That’s where the Russians are. No, South America is our goal, old boy’. At much the same time, what Röhl describes as ‘fantastic operational

plans’ were drawn up for the transport of an army of 100,000 men across the Atlantic, where it would shell New York City from Long Island. This did not prevent the Kaiser from proposing at other points that the United States and Germany should carve up the British Empire between them.

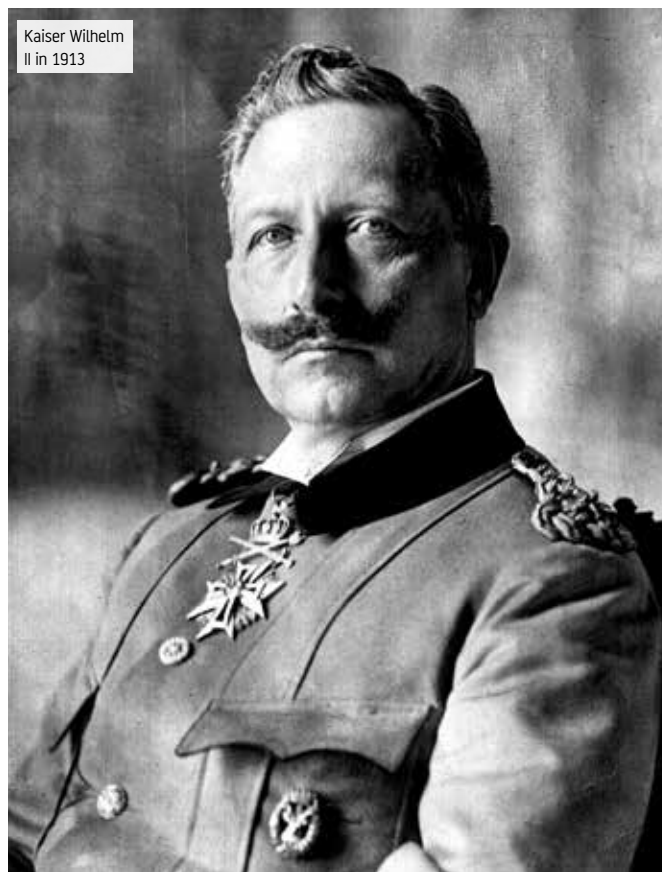
He seemed to relish the prospect of bloodshed. In July 1900, he told troops departing for China to behave “like the Huns under their King Attila a thousand years ago... Whoever falls into your hands will fall to your sword”. It was impossible to know what this impulsive ruler would say or do next.

It is hardly surprising that this reckless man, in command of the greatest armed forces in the world, should have been blamed for the outbreak of conflict in 1914. Yet when Europe stood on the brink of war, the Kaiser drew back. He was reported ‘to have pronounced in favour of maintaining peace’. Thirsting for war, his generals, assisted by key officials in his ramshackle government, conspired to

thwart him. They held back letters and distorted diplomatic reports, particularly those from London. Even so, the Kaiser still lurched towards the path of peace. Röhl concludes: ‘He saw more clearly than his army chiefs and diplomats the danger that British participation in a continental war represented for the German Reich.’

The sharp, distinctly unflattering portrait of the Kaiser which emerges from this brilliant short book is the more convincing because of the scrupulous fairness with which John Röhl has treated his unappealing subject and the extraordinary circumstances that shaped him. 🏰

Lord Lexden is a Conservative peer and political historian



Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1913