

# The Age of Revolution

1789-1848

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## PREFACE

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THIS book traces the transformation of the world between 1789 and 1848 insofar as it was due to what is here called the 'dual revolution'—the French Revolution of 1789 and the contemporaneous (British) Industrial Revolution. It is therefore strictly neither a history of Europe nor of the world. Insofar as a country felt the repercussions of the dual revolution in this period, I have attempted to refer to it, though often cursorily. Insofar as the impact of the revolution on it in this period was negligible, I have omitted it. Hence the reader will find something about Egypt here, but not about Japan; more about Ireland than about Bulgaria, about Latin America than about Africa. Naturally this does not mean that the histories of the countries and peoples neglected in this volume are less interesting or important than those which are included. If its perspective is primarily European, or more precisely, Franco-British, it is because in this period the world—or at least a large part of it—was transformed from a European, or rather a Franco-British, base. However, certain topics which might well have deserved more detailed treatment have also been left aside, not only for reasons of space, but because (like the history of the USA) they are treated at length in other volumes in this series.

The object of this book is not detailed narrative, but interpretation and what the French call *haute vulgarisation*. Its ideal reader is that theoretical construct, the intelligent and educated citizen, who is not merely curious about the past, but wishes to understand how and why the world has come to be what it is today and whither it is going. Hence it would be pedantic and uncalled-for to load the text with as heavy an apparatus of scholarship as it ought to carry for a more learned public. My notes therefore refer almost entirely to the sources of actual quotations and figures, or in some cases to the authority for statements which are particularly controversial or surprising.

Nevertheless, it is only fair to say something about the material on which a very wide-ranging book such as this is based. All historians are more expert (or to put it another way, more ignorant) in some fields than in others. Outside a fairly narrow zone they must rely largely on

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the work of other historians. For the period 1789 to 1848 this secondary literature alone forms a mass of print so vast as to be beyond the knowledge of any individual, even one who can read all the languages in which it is written. (In fact, of course, all historians are confined to a handful of languages at most.) Much of this book is therefore second- or even third-hand, and it will inevitably contain errors, as well as the inevitable foreshortenings which the expert will regret, as the author does. A bibliography is provided as a guide to further study.

Though the web of history cannot be unravelled into separate threads without destroying it, a certain amount of subdivision of the subject is, for practical purposes, essential. I have attempted, very roughly, to divide the book into two parts. The first deals broadly with the main developments of the period, while the second sketches the kind of society produced by the dual revolution. There are, however, deliberate overlaps, and the distinction is a matter not of theory but of pure convenience.

My thanks are due to various people with whom I have discussed aspects of this book or who have read chapters in draft or proof, but who are not responsible for my errors; notably J. D. Bernal, Douglas Dakin, Ernst Fischer, Francis Haskell, H. G. Koenigsberger and R. F. Leslie. Chapter 14 in particular owes much to the ideas of Ernst Fischer. Miss P. Ralph helped considerably as secretary and research assistant. Miss E. Mason compiled the index.

E. J. H.

*London, December 1961*

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## INTRODUCTION

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WORDS are witnesses which often speak louder than documents. Let us consider a few English words which were invented, or gained their modern meanings, substantially in the period of sixty years with which this volume deals. They are such words as 'industry', 'industrialist', 'factory', 'middle class', 'working class', 'capitalism' and 'socialism'. They include 'aristocracy' as well as 'railway', 'liberal' and 'conservative' as political terms, 'nationality', 'scientist' and 'engineer', 'proletariat' and (economic) 'crisis'. 'Utilitarian' and 'statistics', 'sociology' and several other names of modern sciences, 'journalism' and 'ideology', are all coinages or adaptations of this period.\* So is 'strike' and 'pauperism'.

To imagine the modern world without these words (i.e. without the things and concepts for which they provide names) is to measure the profundity of the revolution which broke out between 1789 and 1848, and forms the greatest transformation in human history since the remote times when men invented agriculture and metallurgy, writing, the city and the state. This revolution has transformed, and continues to transform, the entire world. But in considering it we must distinguish carefully between its long-range results, which cannot be confined to any social framework, political organization, or distribution of international power and resources, and its early and decisive phase, which was closely tied to a specific social and international situation. The great revolution of 1789-1848 was the triumph not of 'industry' as such, but of *capitalist* industry; not of liberty and equality in general but of *middle class* or '*bourgeois*' liberal society; not of 'the modern economy' or 'the modern state', but of the economies and states in a particular geographical region of the world (part of Europe and a few patches of North America), whose centre was the neighbouring and rival states of Great Britain and France. The transformation of 1789-1848 is

\* Most of these either have international currency, or were fairly literally translated into various languages. Thus 'socialism' or 'journalism' are fairly international, while the combination 'iron road' is the basis of the name of the railway everywhere except in its country of origin.

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essentially the twin upheaval which took place in those two countries, and was propagated thence across the entire world.

But it is not unreasonable to regard this dual revolution—the rather more political French and the industrial (British) revolution—not so much as something which belongs to the history of the two countries which were its chief carriers and symbols, but as the twin crater of a rather larger regional volcano. That the simultaneous eruptions should occur in France and Britain, and have slightly differing characters, is neither accidental nor uninteresting. But from the point of view of the historian of, let us say, AD 3000, as from the point of view of the Chinese or African observer, it is more relevant to note that they occurred somewhere or other in North-western Europe and its overseas prolongations, and that they could not with any probability have been expected to occur at this time in any other part of the world. It is equally relevant to note that they are at this period almost inconceivable in any form other than the triumph of a bourgeois-liberal capitalism.

It is evident that so profound a transformation cannot be understood without going back very much further in history than 1789, or even than the decades which immediately preceded it and clearly reflect (at least in retrospect), the crisis of the *ancien régimes* of the North-western world, which the dual revolution was to sweep away. Whether or not we regard the American Revolution of 1776 as an eruption of equal significance to the Anglo-French ones, or merely as their most important immediate precursor and stimulator; whether or not we attach fundamental importance to the constitutional crises and economic reshuffles and stirrings of 1760–89, they can clearly explain at most the occasion and timing of the great breakthrough and not its fundamental causes. How far back into history the analyst should go—whether to the mid-seventeenth century English Revolution, to the Reformation and the beginning of European military world conquest and colonial exploitation in the early sixteenth century, or even earlier, is for our purposes irrelevant, for such analysis in depth would take us far beyond the chronological boundaries of this volume.

Here we need merely observe that the social and economic forces, the political and intellectual tools of this transformation were already prepared, at all events in a part of Europe sufficiently large to revolutionize the rest. Our problem is not to trace the emergence of a world market, of a sufficiently active class of private entrepreneurs, or even (in England) of a state dedicated to the proposition that the maximization of private profit was the foundation of government policy. Nor is it to trace the evolution of the technology, the scientific knowledge, or the



ideology of an individualist, secularist, rationalist belief in progress. By the 1780s we can take the existence of all these for granted, though we cannot yet assume that they were sufficiently powerful or widespread. On the contrary, we must, if anything, safeguard against the temptation to overlook the novelty of the dual revolution because of the familiarity of its outward costume, the undeniable fact that Robespierre's and Saint-Just's clothes, manners and prose would not have been out of place in a drawing-room of the *ancien régime*, that the Jeremy Bentham whose reforming ideas expressed the bourgeois Britain of the 1830s was the very man who had proposed the same ideas to Catherine the Great of Russia, and that the most extreme statements of middle class political economy came from members of the eighteenth-century British House of Lords.

Our problem is thus to explain not the existence of these elements of a new economy and society, but their triumph; to trace not the progress of their gradual sapping and mining in previous centuries, but their decisive conquest of the fortress. And it is also to trace the profound changes which this sudden triumph brought within the countries most immediately affected by it, and within the rest of the world which was now thrown open to the full explosive impact of the new forces, the 'conquering bourgeois', to quote the title of a recent world history of this period.

Inevitably, since the dual revolution occurred in one part of Europe, and its most obvious and immediate effects were most evident there, the history with which this volume deals is mainly regional. Inevitably also, since the world revolution spread outwards from the double crater of England and France it initially took the form of a European expansion in and conquest of the rest of the world. Indeed its most striking consequence for world history was to establish a domination of the globe by a few western régimes (and especially by the British) which has no parallel in history. Before the merchants, the steam-engines, the ships and the guns of the west—and before its ideas—the age-old civilizations and empires of the world capitulated and collapsed. India became a province administered by British pro-consuls, the Islamic states were convulsed by crisis, Africa lay open to direct conquest. Even the great Chinese Empire was forced in 1839-42 to open its frontiers to western exploitation. By 1848 nothing stood in the way of western conquest of any territory that western governments or businessmen might find it to their advantage to occupy, just as nothing but time stood in the way of the progress of western capitalist enterprise.

And yet the history of the dual revolution is not merely one of the triumph of the new bourgeois society. It is also the history of the emergence

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of the forces which were, within a century of 1848, to have turned expansion into contraction. What is more, by 1848 this extraordinary future reversal of fortunes was already to some extent visible. Admittedly, the world-wide revolt against the west, which dominates the middle of the twentieth century, was as yet barely discernible. Only in the Islamic world can we observe the first stages of that process by which those conquered by the west have adopted its ideas and techniques to turn the tables on it: in the beginnings of internal westernizing reform within the Turkish empire in the 1830s, and above all in the neglected and significant career of Mohammed Ali of Egypt. But within Europe the forces and ideas which envisaged the supersession of the triumphant new society, were already emerging. The 'spectre of communism' already haunted Europe by 1848. It was exorcized in 1848. For a long time thereafter it was to remain as powerless as spectres in fact are, especially in the western world most immediately transformed by the dual revolution. But if we look round the world of the 1960s we shall not be tempted to underestimate the historic force of the revolutionary socialist and communist ideology born out of reaction against the dual revolution, and which had by 1848 found its first classic formulation. The historic period which begins with the construction of the first factory system of the modern world in Lancashire and the French Revolution of 1789 ends with the construction of its first railway network and the publication of the Communist Manifesto.

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## CHAPTER 16

### CONCLUSION: TOWARDS 1848

*Pauperism and proletariat are the suppurating ulcers which have sprung from the organism of the modern states. Can they be healed? The communist doctors propose the complete destruction and annihilation of the existing organism. . . . One thing is certain, if these men gain the power to act, there will be not a political but a social revolution, a war against all property, a complete anarchy. Would this in turn give way to new national states, and on what moral and social foundations? Who shall lift the veil of the future? And what part will be played by Russia? 'I sit on the shore and wait for the wind,' says an old Russian proverb.*

Haxthausen, *Studien ueber . . . Russland* (1847)<sup>1</sup>

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#### I

WE began by surveying the state of the world in 1789. Let us conclude by glancing at it some fifty years later, at the end of the most revolutionary half-century in the history recorded up to that date.

It was an age of superlatives. The numerous new compendia of statistics in which this era of counting and calculation sought to record all aspects of the known world\* could conclude with justice that virtually every measurable quantity was greater (or smaller) than ever before. The known, mapped and intercommunicating area of the world was larger than ever before, its communications unbelievably speedier. The population of the world was greater than ever before; in several cases greater beyond all expectation or previous probability. Cities of vast size multiplied faster than ever before. Industrial production reached astronomic figures: in the 1840s something like 640 million tons of coal were hacked from the interior of the earth. They were exceeded only by the even more extraordinary figures for international commerce, which had multiplied fourfold since 1780 to reach something like 800 millions of pound sterling's worth, and very much more in the currency of less solid and stable units of currency.

Science had never been more triumphant; knowledge had never

\* About fifty major compendia of this type were published between 1800 and 1848, not counting the statistics of governments (censuses, official enquiries, etc.) or the numerous new specialist or economic journals filled with statistical tables.

been more widespread. Over four thousand newspapers informed the citizens of the world and the number of books published annually in Britain, France, Germany and the USA alone ran well into five figures. Human invention was climbing more dazzling peaks every year. The Argand lamp (1782-4) had barely revolutionized artificial lighting—it was the first major advance since the oil-lamp and candle—when the gigantic laboratories known as gasworks, sending their products through endless subterranean pipes, began to illuminate the factories\* and soon after the cities of Europe: London from 1807, Dublin from 1818, Paris from 1819, even remote Sydney in 1841. And already the electric arc-light was known. Professor Wheatstone of London was already planning to link England with France by means of a submarine electric telegraph. Forty-eight millions of passengers already used the railways of the United Kingdom in a single year (1845). Men and women could already be hurtled along three thousand (1846)—before 1850 along over six thousand—miles of line in Great Britain, along nine thousand in the USA. Regular steamship services already linked Europe and America, Europe and the Indies.

No doubt these triumphs had their dark side, though these were not so readily to be summarized in statistical tables. How was one to find quantitative expression for the fact, which few would today deny, that the Industrial Revolution created the ugliest world in which man has ever lived, as the grim and stinking, fog-bound back streets of Manchester already testified? Or, by uprooting men and women in unprecedented numbers and depriving them of the certainties of the ages, probably the unhappiest world? Nevertheless, we can forgive the champions of progress in the 1840s their confidence and their determination 'that commerce may go freely forth, leading civilization with one hand, and peace with the other, to render mankind happier, wiser, better'. 'Sir,' said Lord Palmerston, continuing this rosy statement in the blackest of years, 1842, 'this is the dispensation of Providence.'<sup>3</sup> Nobody could deny that there was poverty of the most shocking kind. Many held that it was even increasing and deepening. And yet, by the all-time criteria which measured the triumphs of industry and science, could even the gloomiest of rational observers maintain that in material terms it was worse than at any time in the past, or even than in un-industrialized countries in the present? He could not. It was sufficiently bitter accusation that the material prosperity of the labouring poor was often no better than in the dark past, and sometimes worse than in periods within living memory. The champions of progress attempted

\* Boulton and Watt introduced it in 1798, the cotton-mills of Philips and Lee in Manchester permanently employed a thousand burners from 1805.

to fend it off with the argument that this was due not to the operations of the new bourgeois society, but on the contrary to the obstacles which the old feudalism, monarchy and aristocracy still placed in the way of perfect free enterprise. The new socialists, on the contrary, held that it was due to the very operations of that system. But both agreed that these were growing-pains. The ones held that they would be overcome within the framework of capitalism, the others that they were not likely to be, but both rightly believed that human life faced a prospect of material improvement to equal the advance in man's control over the forces of nature.

When we come to analyse the social and political structure of the world in the 1840s, however, we leave the world of superlatives for that of modest qualified statements. The bulk of the world's inhabitants continued to be peasants as before, though there were a few areas—notably Britain—where agriculture was already the occupation of a small minority, and the urban population already on the verge of exceeding the rural, as it did for the first time in the census of 1851. There were proportionately fewer slaves, for the international slave-trade had been officially abolished in 1815 and actual slavery in the British colonies in 1834, and in the liberated Spanish and French ones in and after the French Revolution. However, while the West Indies were now, with some non-British exceptions, an area of legally free agriculture, numerically slavery continued to expand in its two great remaining strongholds, Brazil and the Southern USA, stimulated by the very progress of industry and commerce which opposed all restraints of goods and persons, and official prohibition made the slave trade more lucrative. The approximate price of a field-hand in the American South was 300 dollars in 1795 but between 1,200 and 1,800 dollars in 1860;<sup>3</sup> the number of slaves in the USA rose from 700,000 in 1790 to 2,500,000 in 1840 and 3,200,000 in 1850. They still came from Africa, but were also increasingly bred for sale within the slave-owning area, e.g. in the border states of the USA for sale to the rapidly expanding cotton-belt.

Moreover, already systems of semi-slavery like the export of 'indentured labour' from India to the sugar-islands of the Indian Ocean and the West Indies were developing.

Serfdom or the legal bonding of peasants had been abolished over a large part of Europe, though this had made little difference to the actual situation of the rural poor in such areas of traditional latifundist cultivation as Sicily or Andalusia. However, serfdom persisted in its chief European strongholds, though after great initial expansion its numbers remained steady in Russia at between ten and eleven million

males after 1811, that is to say it declined in relative terms.\* Nevertheless, serf agriculture (unlike slave agriculture) was clearly on the decline, its economic disadvantages being increasingly evident, and—especially from the 1840s—the rebelliousness of the peasantry being increasingly marked. The greatest serf rising was probably that in Austrian Galicia in 1846, the prelude to general emancipation by the 1848 revolution. But even in Russia there were 148 outbreaks of peasant unrest in 1826-34, 216 in 1835-44, 348 in 1844-54, culminating in the 474 outbreaks of the last years preceding the emancipation of 1861.<sup>5</sup>

At the other end of the social pyramid, the position of the landed aristocrat also changed less than might have been thought, except in countries of direct peasant revolution like France. No doubt there were now countries—France and the USA for instance—where the richest men were no longer landed proprietors (except insofar as they also bought themselves estates as a badge of their entry into the highest class, like the Rothschilds). However, even in Britain in the 1840s the greatest concentrations of wealth were certainly still those of the peerage, and in the Southern USA the cotton-planters even created for themselves a provincial caricature of aristocratic society, inspired by Walter Scott, 'chivalry', 'romance' and other concepts which had little bearing in the negro slaves on whom they battered and the red-necked puritan farmers eating their maize and fat pork. Of course this aristocratic firmness concealed a change: noble incomes increasingly depended on the industry, the stocks and shares, the real estate developments of the despised bourgeoisie.

The 'middle classes', of course, had increased rapidly, but their numbers even so were not overwhelmingly large. In 1801 there had been about 100,000 tax-payers earning above £150 a year in Britain; at the end of our period there may have been about 340,000;<sup>6</sup> say, with large families, a million and a half persons out of a total population of 21 millions (1851).† Naturally the number of those who sought to follow middle class standards and ways of life was very much larger. Not all these were very rich; a good guess‡ is that the number of those earning over £5,000 a year was about 4,000—which includes the aristocracy; a figure not too incompatible with that of the presumable employers of the 7,579 domestic coachmen who adorned the British streets. We may assume that the proportion of the 'middle classes' in

\* The extension of serfdom under Catherine II and Paul (1762-1801) increased it from about 3.8 million males to 10.4 millions in 1811.<sup>4</sup>

† Such estimates are arbitrary, but assuming that everyone classifiable in the middle class kept at least one servant, the 674,000 female 'general domestic servants' in 1851 gives us something beyond the maximum of 'middle class' households, the roughly 50,000 cooks (the numbers of housemaids and housekeepers were about the same) a minimum.

‡ By the eminent statistician William Farr in the *Statistical Journal*, 1857, p. 102.

other countries was not notably higher than this, and indeed was generally rather lower.

The working class (including the new proletariat of factory, mine, railway, etc.) naturally grew at the fastest rate of all. Nevertheless, except in Britain it could at best be counted in hundreds of thousands rather than millions. Measured against the total population of the world, it was still a numerically negligible, and in any case—except once again for Britain and small nuclei elsewhere—an unorganized one. Yet, as we have seen, its political importance was already immense, and quite disproportionate to its size or achievements.

The political structure of the world was also very considerably transformed by the 1840s; and yet by no means as much as the sanguine (or pessimistic) observer might have anticipated in 1800. Monarchy still remained overwhelmingly the most common mode of governing states, except on the American continent; and even there one of the largest countries (Brazil) was an Empire, and another (Mexico) had at least experimented with imperial titles under General Iturbide (Augustin I) from 1822 to 1833. It is true that several European kingdoms, including France, could now be described as constitutional monarchies, but outside a band of such régimes along the eastern edge of the Atlantic, absolute monarchy prevailed everywhere. It is true that there were by the 1840s several new states, the product of revolution; Belgium, Serbia, Greece and a quiverful of Latin American ones. Yet, though Belgium was an industrial power of importance (admittedly to a large extent because it moved in the wake of its greater French neighbour\*), the most important of the revolutionary states was the one which had already existed in 1789, the USA. It enjoyed two immense advantages: the absence of any strong neighbours or rival powers which could, or indeed wanted to, prevent its expansion across the huge continent to the Pacific—the French had actually sold it an area as large as the then USA in the 'Louisiana Purchase' of 1803—and an extraordinarily rapid rate of economic expansion. The former advantage was also shared by Brazil, which, separating peacefully from Portugal, escaped the fragmentation which a generation of revolutionary war brought to most of Spanish America; but its wealth of resources remained virtually unexploited.

Still, there had been great changes. Moreover, since about 1830 their momentum was visibly increasing. The revolution of 1830 introduced moderate liberal middle class constitutions—anti-democratic but equally plainly anti-aristocratic—in the chief states of Western Europe. There

\* About a third of the Belgian coal and pig iron output was exported, almost entirely to France.

were no doubt compromises, imposed by the fear of a mass revolution which would go beyond moderate middle class aspirations. They left the landed classes over-represented in government, as in Britain, and large sectors of the new—and especially the most dynamic industrial—middle classes unrepresented, as in France. Yet they were compromises which decisively tilted the political balance towards the middle classes. On all matters that counted the British industrialists got their way after 1832; the capacity to abolish the corn-laws was well worth the absence from the more extreme republican and anti-clerical proposals of the Utilitarians. There can be no doubt that in Western Europe middle class Liberalism (though not democratic radicalism) was in the ascendant. Its chief opponents—Conservatives in Britain, blocs generally rallying round the Catholic Church elsewhere—were on the defensive and knew it.

However, even radical democracy had made major advances. After fifty years of hesitation and hostility, the pressure of the frontiersmen and farmers had finally imposed it on the USA under President Andrew Jackson (1829-37), at roughly the same time as the European revolution regained its momentum. At the very end of our period (1847) a civil war between radicals and Catholics in Switzerland brought it to that country. But few among moderate middle class liberals as yet thought that this system of government, advocated mainly by left-wing revolutionaries, adapted, it seemed, at best for the rude petty producers and traders of mountain or prairie, would one day become the characteristic political framework of capitalism, defended as such against the onslaughts of the very people who were in the 1840s advocating it.

Only in international politics had there been an apparently wholesale and virtually unqualified revolution. The world of the 1840s was completely dominated by the European powers, political and economic, supplemented by the growing USA. The Opium War of 1839-42 had demonstrated that the only surviving non-European great power, the Chinese Empire, was helpless in the face of western military and economic aggression. Nothing, it seemed, could henceforth stand in the way of a few western gunboats or regiments bringing with them trade and bibles. And within this general western domination, Britain was supreme, thanks to her possession of more gunboats, trade and bibles than anyone else. So absolute was this British supremacy that it hardly needed political control to operate. There were no other colonial powers left, except by grace of the British, and consequently no rivals. The French empire was reduced to a few scattered islands and trading posts, though in the process of reviving itself across the Mediterranean



in Algeria. The Dutch, restored in Indonesia under the watchful eye of the new British entrepôt of Singapore, no longer competed; the Spaniards retained Cuba, the Philippines and a few vague claims in Africa; the Portuguese colonies were rightly forgotten. British trade dominated the independent Argentine, Brazil and the Southern USA as much as the Spanish colony of Cuba or the British ones in India. British investments had their powerful stake in the Northern USA, and indeed wherever economic development took place. Never in the entire history of the world has a single power exercised a world hegemony like that of the British in the middle of the nineteenth century, for even the greatest empires or hegemonies of the past had been merely regional—the Chinese, the Mohammedan, the Roman. Never since then has any single power succeeded in re-establishing a comparable hegemony, nor indeed is any one likely to in the foreseeable future; for no power has since been able to claim the exclusive status of 'workshop of the world'.

Nevertheless, the future decline of Britain was already visible. Intelligent observers even in the 1830s and 1840s, like de Tocqueville and Haxthausen, already predicted that the size and potential resources of the USA and Russia would eventually make them into the twin giants of the world; within Europe Germany (as Frederick Engels predicted in 1844) would also soon compete on equal terms. Only France had decisively dropped out of the competition for international hegemony, though this was not yet so evident as to reassure suspicious British and other statesmen.

In brief, the world of the 1840s was out of balance. The forces of economic, technical and social change released in the past half-century were unprecedented, and even to the most superficial observer, irresistible. Their institutional consequences, on the other hand, were as yet modest. It was, for instance, inevitable that sooner or later legal slavery and serfdom (except as relics in remote regions as yet untouched by the new economy) would have to go, as it was inevitable that Britain could not for ever remain the *only* industrialized country. It was inevitable that landed aristocracies and absolute monarchies must retreat in all countries in which a strong bourgeoisie was developing, whatever the political compromises or formulae found for retaining status, influence and even political power. Moreover, it was inevitable that the injection of political consciousness and permanent political activity among the masses, which was the great legacy of the French Revolution, must sooner or later mean that these masses were allowed to play a formal part in politics. And given the remarkable acceleration of social change since 1830, and the revival of the world revolutionary

movement, it was clearly inevitable that changes—whatever their precise institutional nature—could not be long delayed.\*

All this would have been enough to give the men of the 1840s the consciousness of impending change. But not enough to explain, what was widely felt throughout Europe, the consciousness of impending social revolution. It was, significantly enough, not confined to revolutionaries, who expressed it with the greatest elaboration, nor to the ruling classes, whose fear of the massed poor is never far below the surface in times of social change. The poor themselves felt it. The literate strata of the people expressed it. 'All well-informed people,' wrote the American consul from Amsterdam during the hunger of 1847, reporting the sentiments of the German emigrants passing through Holland, 'express the belief that the present crisis is so deeply interwoven in the events of the present period that "it" is but the commencement of that great Revolution, which they consider sooner or later is to dissolve the present present constitution of things.'

The reason was that the crisis in what remained of the old society appeared to coincide with a crisis of the new. Looking back on the 1840s it is easy to think that the socialists who predicted the imminent final crisis of capitalism were dreamers confusing their hopes with realistic prospects. For in fact what followed was not the breakdown of capitalism, but its most rapid and unchallenged period of expansion and triumph. Yet in the 1830s and 1840s it was far from evident that the new economy could or would overcome its difficulties which merely seemed to increase with its power to produce larger and larger quantities of goods by more and more revolutionary methods. Its very theorists were haunted by the prospect of the 'stationary state', that running down of the motive power which drove the economy forward, and which (unlike the theorists of the eighteenth century or those of the subsequent period) they believed to be imminent rather than merely in theoretical reserve. Its very champions were in two minds about its future. In France men who were to be the captains of high finance and heavy industry (the Saint-Simonians) were in the 1830s still undecided as to whether socialism or capitalism was the best way of achieving the triumph of the industrial society. In the USA men like Horace Greeley, who have become immortal as the prophets of individualist expansion ('Go west, young man' is his phrase), were in the 1840s adherents of utopian socialism, founding and expounding the merits of Fourierist 'Phalanxes', those *kibbutz*-like communes which fit so badly into what

\* This does not of course mean that all the precise changes then widely predicted as inevitable would necessarily come about; for instance, the universal triumph of free trade, of peace, of sovereign representative assemblies, or the disappearance of monarchs or the Roman Catholic Church.

is now thought to be 'Americanism'. The very businessmen were desperate. It may in retrospect seem incomprehensible that Quaker businessmen like John Bright and successful cotton-manufacturers of Lancashire, in the midst of their most dynamic period of expansion, should have been prepared to plunge their country into chaos, hunger and riot by a general political lock-out, merely in order to abolish tariffs.<sup>8</sup> Yet in the terrible year of 1841-2 it might well seem to the thoughtful capitalist that industry faced not merely inconvenience and loss, but general strangulation, unless the obstacles to its further expansion were immediately removed.

For the mass of the common people the problem was even simpler. As we have seen their condition in the large cities and manufacturing districts of Western and Central Europe pushed them inevitably towards social revolution. Their hatred of the rich and the great of that bitter world in which they lived, and their dream of a new and better world, gave their desperation eyes and a purpose, even though only some of them, mainly in Britain and France, were conscious of that purpose. Their organization or facility for collective action gave them power. The great awakening of the French Revolution had taught them that common men need not suffer injustices meekly: 'the nations knew nothing before, and the people thought that kings were gods upon the earth and that they were bound to say that whatever they did was well done. Through this present change it is more difficult to rule the people.'<sup>9</sup>

This was the 'spectre of communism' which haunted Europe, the fear of 'the proletariat' which affected not merely factory-owners in Lancashire or Northern France but civil servants in rural Germany, priests in Rome and professors everywhere. And with justice. For the revolution which broke out in the first months of 1848 was not a social revolution merely in the sense that it involved and mobilized all social classes. It was in the literal sense the rising of the labouring poor in the cities—especially the capital cities—of Western and Central Europe. Theirs, and theirs almost alone, was the force which toppled the old régimes from Palermo to the borders of Russia. When the dust settled on their ruins, workers—in France actually socialist workers—were seen to be standing on them, demanding not merely bread and employment, but a new state and society.

While the labouring poor stirred, the increasing weakness and obsolescence of the old régimes of Europe multiplied crises within the world of the rich and influential. In themselves these were not of great moment. Had they occurred at a different time, or in systems which allowed the different sections of the ruling classes to adjust their

rivalries peaceably, they would no more have led to revolution than the perennial squabbles of court factions in eighteenth-century Russia led to the fall of Tsarism. In Britain and Belgium, for instance, there was plenty of conflict between agrarians and industrialists, and different sections of each. But it was clearly understood that the transformations of 1830-32 had decided the issue of power in favour of the industrialists, that nevertheless the political status quo could only be frozen at the risk of revolution, and that this must be avoided at all costs. Consequently the bitter struggle between free-trading British industrialists and the agrarian protectionists over the Corn Laws could be waged and won (1846) in the midst of the Chartist ferment without for a moment jeopardizing the unity of all ruling classes against the threat of universal suffrage. In Belgium the victory of the Liberals over the Catholics in the 1847 elections detached the industrialists from the ranks of potential revolutionaries, and a carefully judged electoral reform in 1848, which doubled the electorate,\* removed the discontents of crucial sections of the lower middle class. There was no 1848 revolution, though in terms of actual suffering Belgium (or rather Flanders) was probably worse off than any other part of Western Europe except Ireland.

But in absolutist Europe the rigidity of the political régimes in 1815, which had been designed to fend off *all* change of a liberal or national kind, left even the most moderate of oppositionists no choice other than that of the status quo or revolution. They might not be ready to revolt themselves, but, unless there should be an irreversible social revolution, they would gain nothing unless someone did. The régimes of 1815 had to go sooner or later. They knew it themselves. The consciousness that 'history was against them' sapped their will to resist, as the fact that it was sapped their ability to do so. In 1848 the first faint puff of revolution—often of revolution abroad—blew them away. But unless there was at least such a puff, they would not go. And conversely the relatively minor frictions within such states—the troubles of rulers with the Prussian and Hungarian diets, the election of a 'liberal' Pope in 1846 (i.e. one anxious to bring the Papacy a few inches nearer to the nineteenth century), the resentment of a royal mistress in Bavaria, etc.—turned into major political vibrations.

In theory the France of Louis Philippe should have shared the political flexibility of Britain, Belgium and the Dutch and Scandinavians. In practice it did not. For though it was clear that the ruling class of France—the bankers, financiers and one or two large industrialists—represented only a section of the middle class interest, and

\* It was still no more than 80,000 out of 4,000,000.

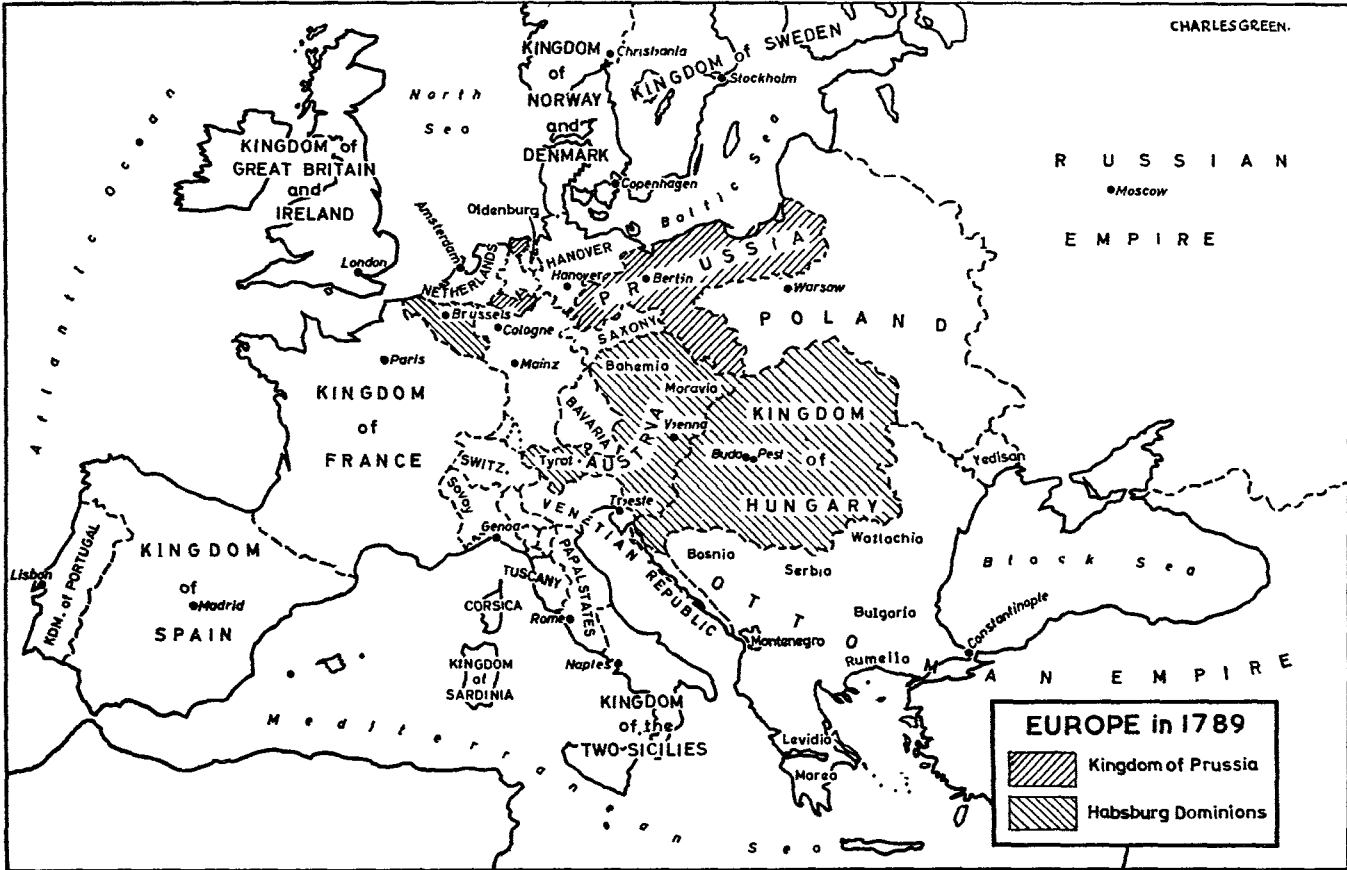
moreover, one whose economic policy was disliked by the more dynamic industrialist elements as well as by various vested interests, the memory of the Revolution of 1789 stood in the way of reform. For the opposition consisted not merely of the discontented bourgeoisie, but of the politically decisive lower middle class, especially of Paris (which voted against the government in spite of the restricted suffrage in 1846). To widen the franchise might thus let in the potential Jacobins, the Radicals who, but for the official ban, would be Republicans. Louis Philippe's premier, the historian Guizot (1840-48), thus preferred to leave the broadening of the social base of the régime to economic development, which would automatically increase the number of citizens with the property qualification to enter politics. In fact it did so. The electorate rose from 166,000 in 1831 to 241,000 in 1846. But it did not do so sufficiently. Fear of the Jacobin republic kept the French political structure rigid, and the French political situation increasingly tense. Under British conditions a public political campaign by means of after-dinner speeches, such as the French opposition launched in 1847, would have been perfectly harmless. Under French conditions it was the prelude to revolution.

For, like the other crises in European ruling-class politics, it coincided with a social catastrophe: the great depression which swept across the continent from the middle 1840s. Harvests—and especially the potato crop—failed. Entire populations such as those of Ireland, and to a lesser extent Silesia and Flanders, starved.\* Food-prices rose. Industrial depression multiplied unemployment, and the masses of the urban labouring poor were deprived of their modest income at the very moment when their cost of living rocketed. The situation varied from one country to another and within each, and—fortunately for the existing régimes—the most miserable populations, such as the Irish and Flemish, or some of the provincial factory workers were also politically among the most immature: the cotton operatives of the Nord department of France, for instance, took out their desperation on the equally desperate Belgian immigrants who flooded into Northern France, rather than on the government or even the employers. Moreover, in the most industrialized country, the sharpest edge of discontent had already been taken away by the great industrial and railway-building boom of the middle 1840s. 1846-8 were bad years, but not so bad as 1841-2, and what was more, they were merely a sharp dip in what was now visibly an ascending slope of economic prosperity. But, taking Western and Central Europe as a whole, the catastrophe of 1846-8 was



\* In the flax-growing districts of Flanders the population *dropped* by 5 per cent between 1846 and 1848.

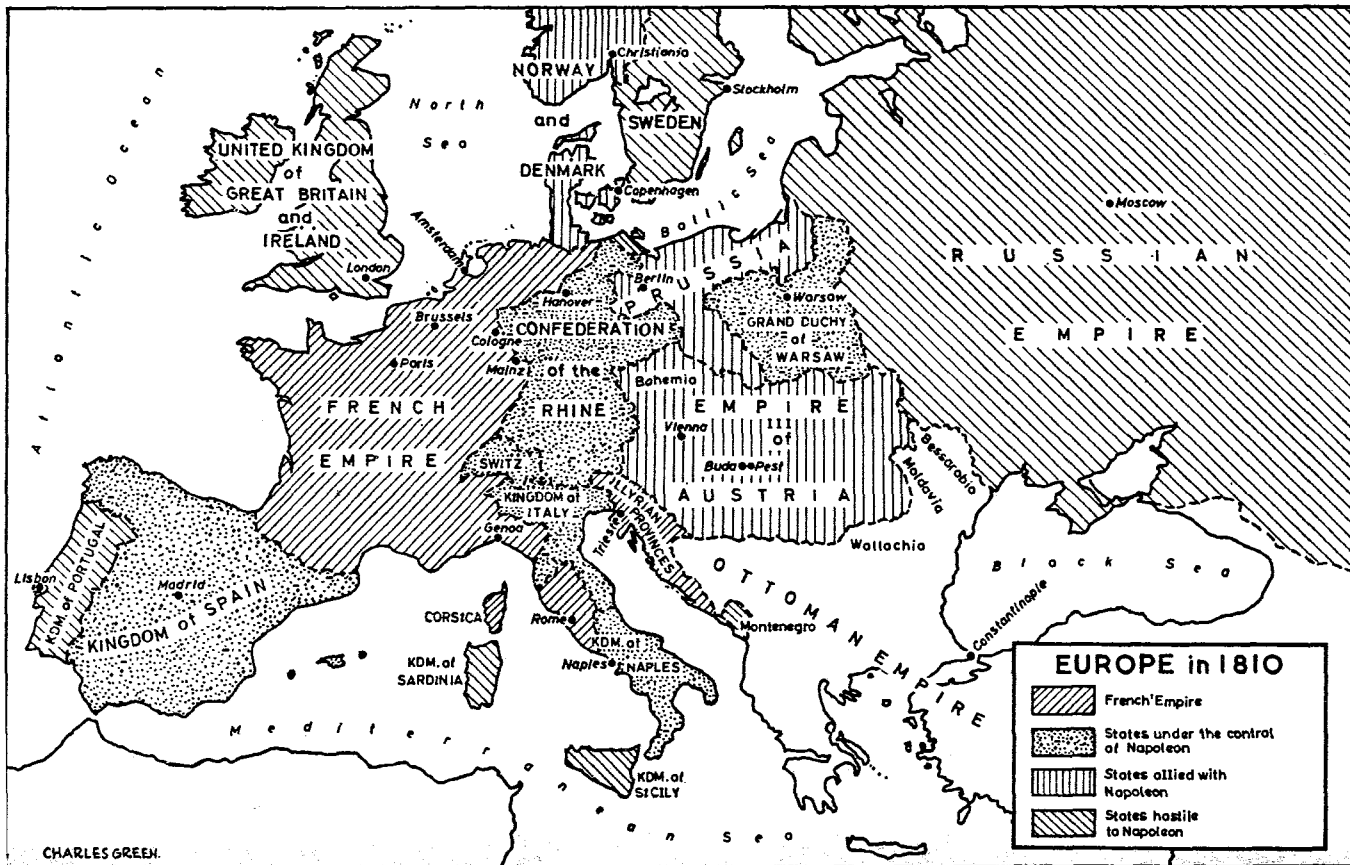
universal and the mood of the masses, always pretty close to subsistence level, tense and impassioned.

A European economic cataclysm thus coincided with the visible corrosion of the old régimes. A peasant rising in Galicia in 1846; the election of a 'liberal' Pope in the same year; a civil war between radicals and Catholics in Switzerland in late 1847, won by the radicals; one of the perennial Sicilian autonomist insurrections in Palermo in early 1848: they were not merely straws in the wind, they were the first squalls of the gale. Everyone knew it. Rarely has revolution been more universally predicted, though not necessarily for the right countries or the right dates. An entire continent waited, ready by now to pass the news of revolution almost instantly from city to city by means of the electric telegraph. In 1831 Victor Hugo had written that he already heard the dull sound of revolution, still deep down in the earth, pushing out under every kingdom in Europe its subterranean galleries from the central shaft of the mine which is Paris'. In 1847 the sound was loud and close. In 1848 the explosion burst.



EUROPE in 1789

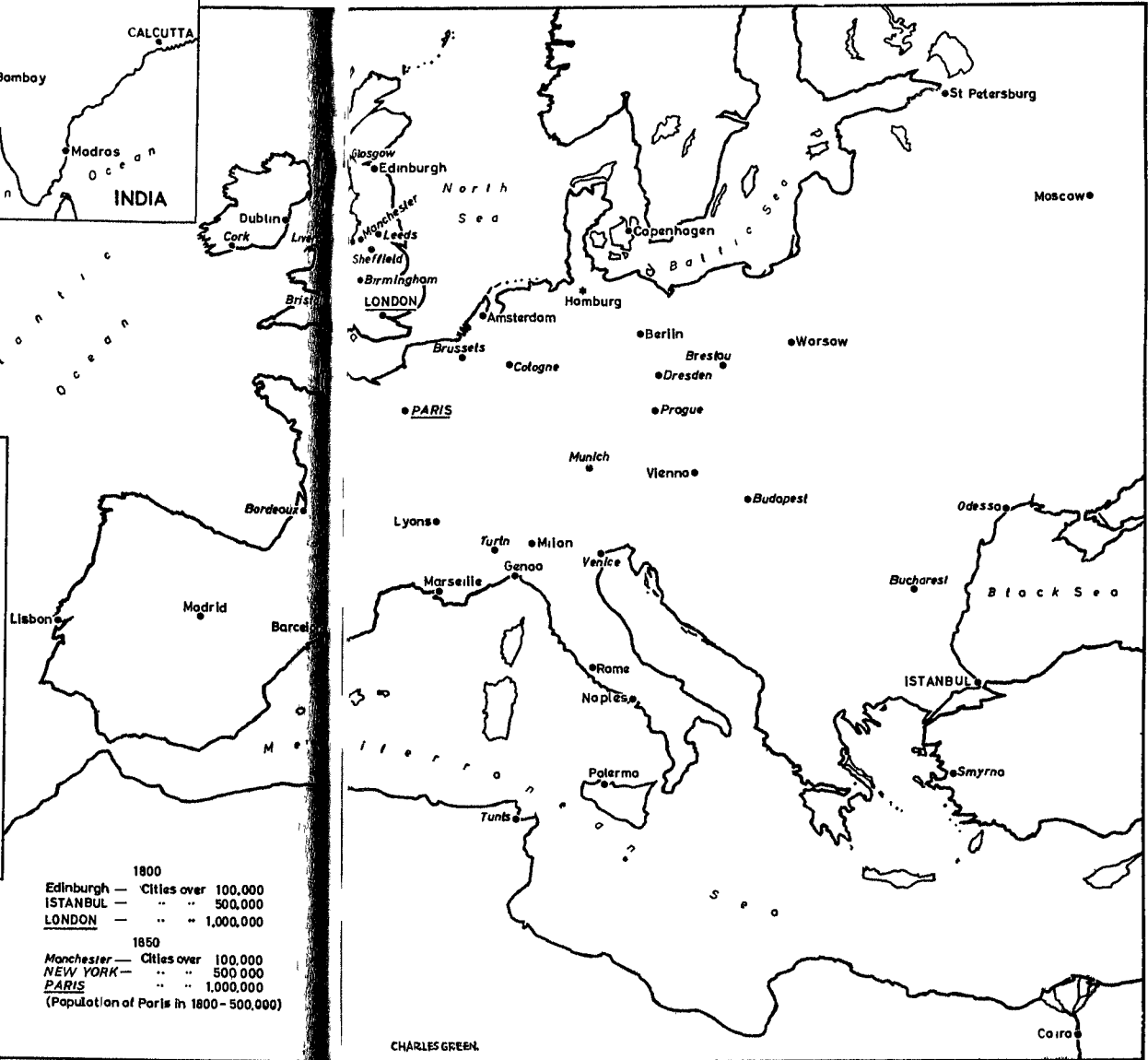
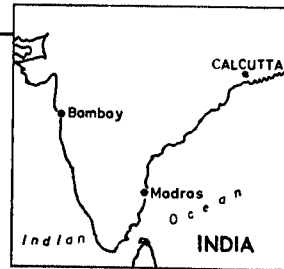
-  Kingdom of Prussia
-  Habsburg Dominions







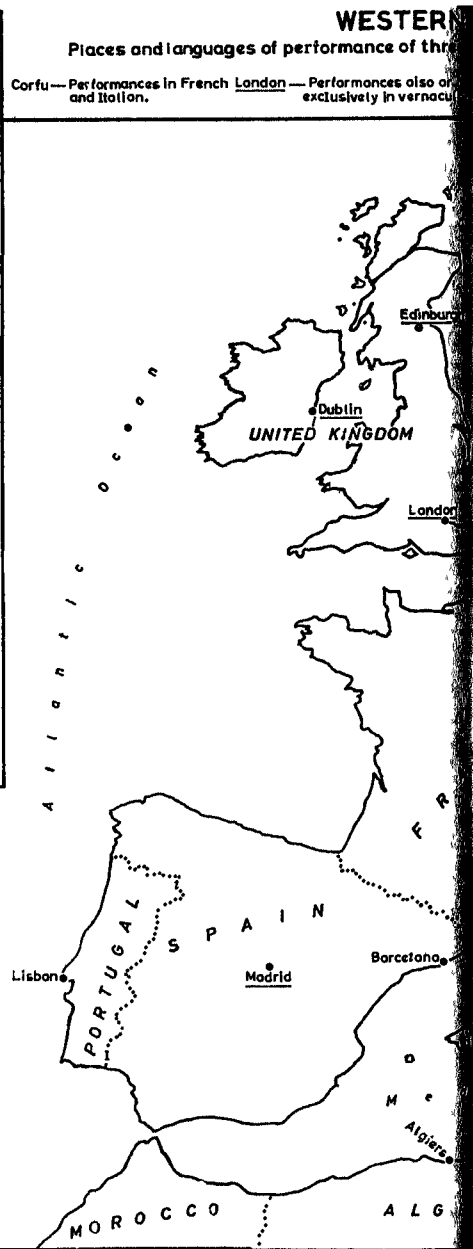
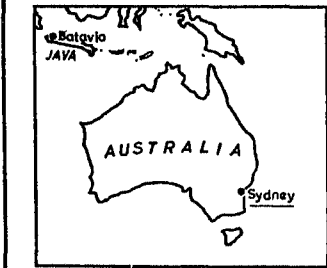
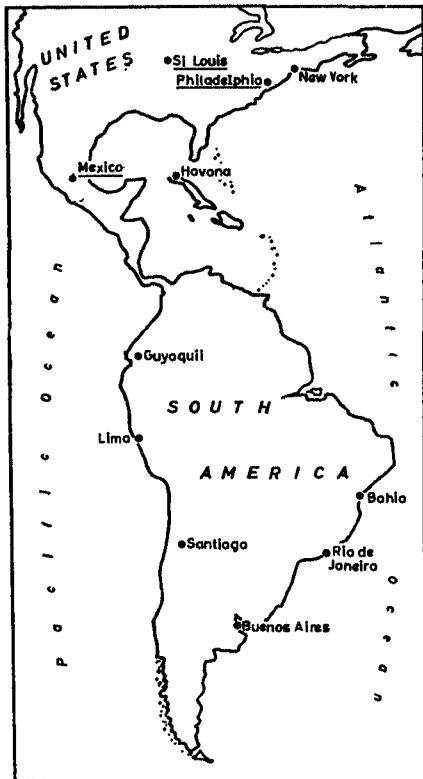
**EUROPE in 1840**  
— German Confederation



**WORLD POPULATION  
in LARGE CITIES  
1800-1850**

1800	
Edinburgh	Cities over 100,000
ISTANBUL	" " 500,000
LONDON	" " 1,000,000
1850	
Manchester	Cities over 100,000
NEW YORK	" " 500,000
PARIS	" " 1,000,000
(Population of Paris in 1800 - 500,000)	

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## THE STATES OF EUROPE IN 1836

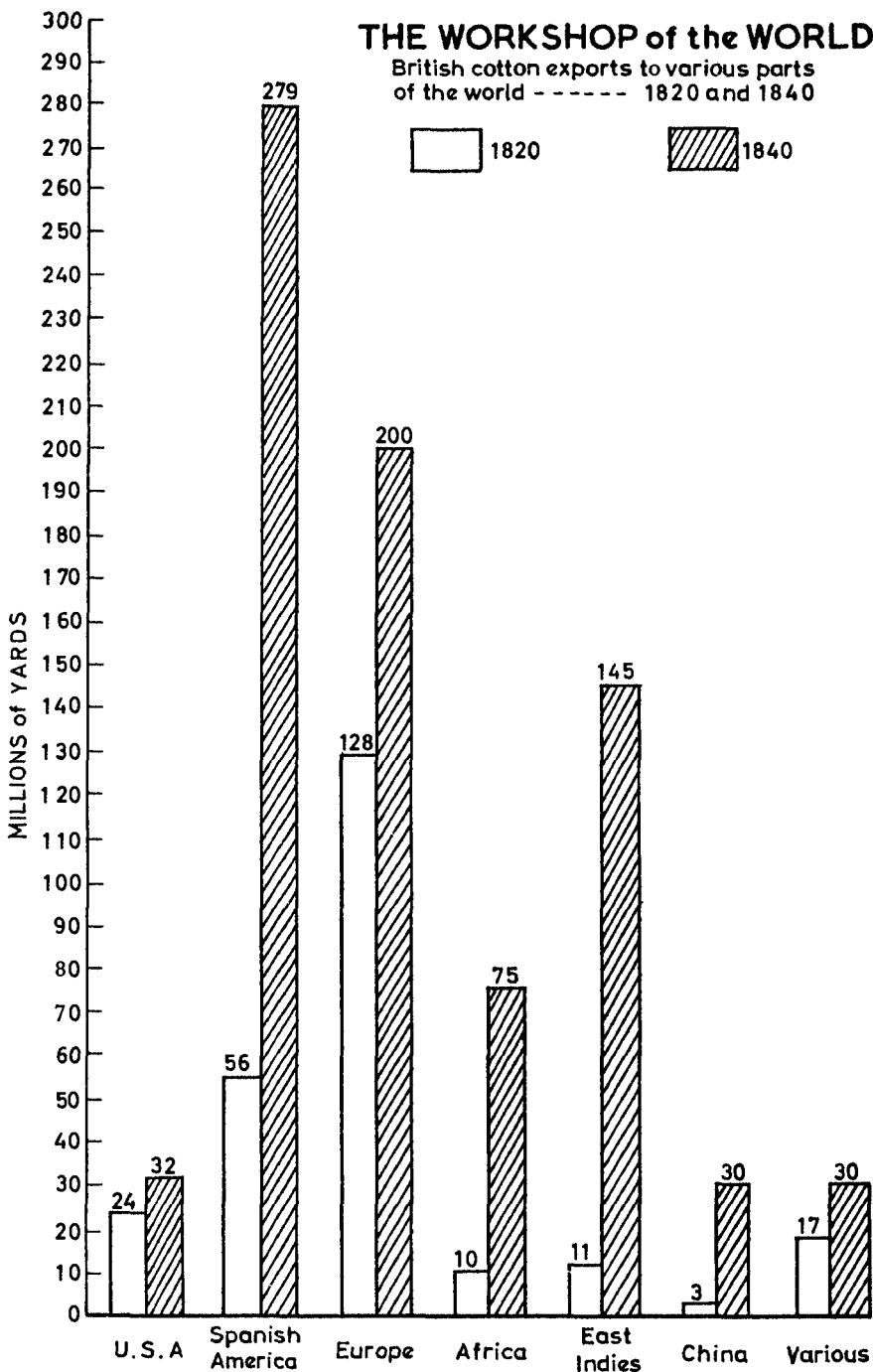
NAME	TOTAL POPULATION (THOUSANDS)	NUMBER OF CITIES (OVER 50,000)	LAND UNDER TILLAGE IN MORGEN (MILLION)	GRAIN PRODUCTION IN SCHEFFEL (MILLION)	BEEF CATTLE (MILLIONS)	IRON (MILLION GWT)	COAL
Russia, including Poland and Cracow	49,538	6	276	1125	19	2.1	—
Austria, including Hungary and Lombardy	35,000	8	93	225	10.4	1.2	2.3
France	33,000	9	74	254	7	4	20.0
Great Britain, including Ireland	24,273	17	67.5	330	10.5	13	200
German confederation (excluding Austria, Prussia)	14,205	4	37.5	115	6	1.1	2.2
Spain	14,032	8	30		3	0.2	0
Portugal	3,530	1	30		3	0.2	0
Prussia	13,093	5	43	145	4.5	2	4.6
Turkey, including Rumania	8,600	5					
Kingdom of Naples	7,622	2	20	116	2.8	0	0.1
Piedmont-Sardinia	4,450	2	20	116	2.8	0	0.1
Rest of Italy	5,000	4	20	116	2.8	0	0.1
Sweden and Norway	4,000	1	2	21	1.4	1.7	0.6
Belgium	3,827	4	7	5	2	0.4	55.4
Netherlands	2,750	3	7	5	2	0.4	55.4
Switzerland	2,000	0	2		0.8	0.1	0
Denmark	2,000	1	16		1.6	0	0
Greece	1,000	0					

# THE WORKSHOP of the WORLD

British cotton exports to various parts of the world - - - - - 1820 and 1840

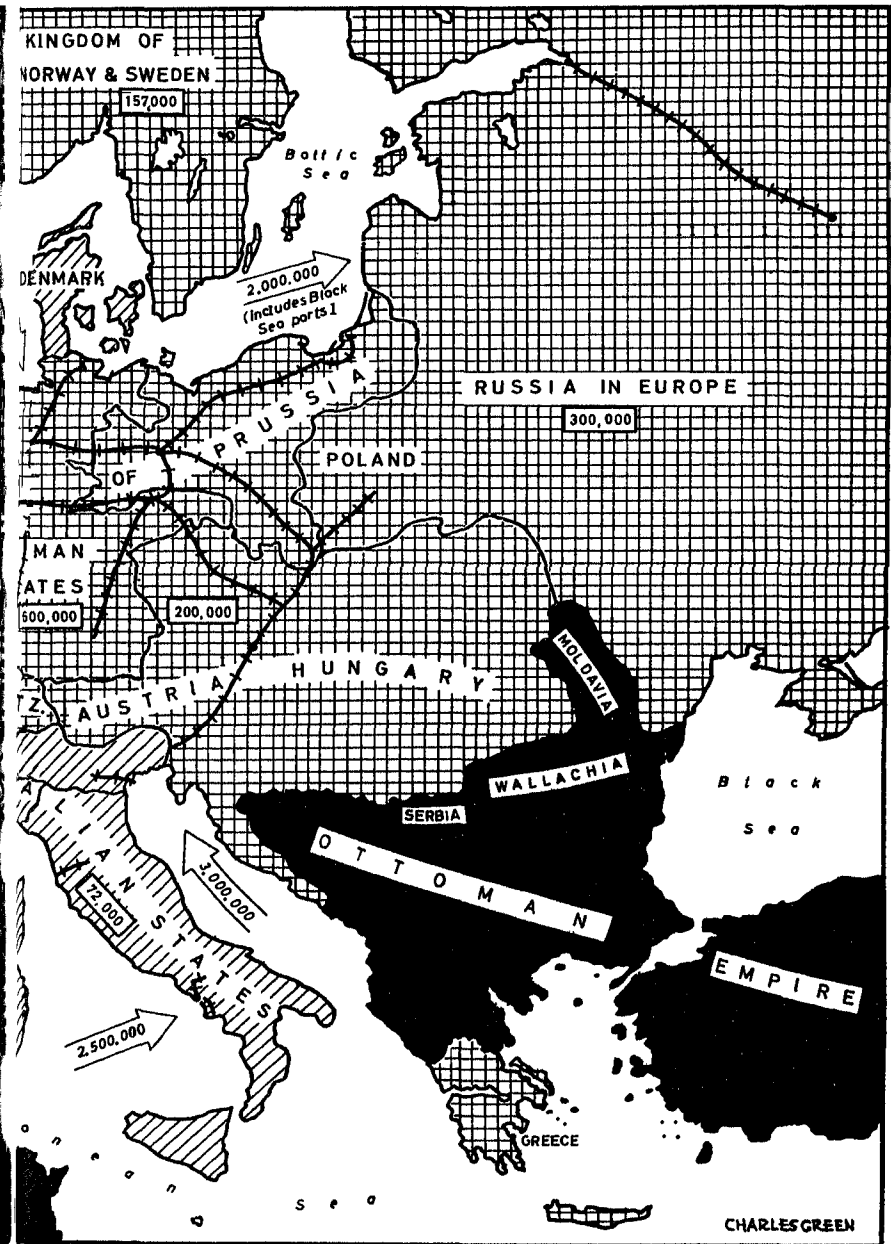
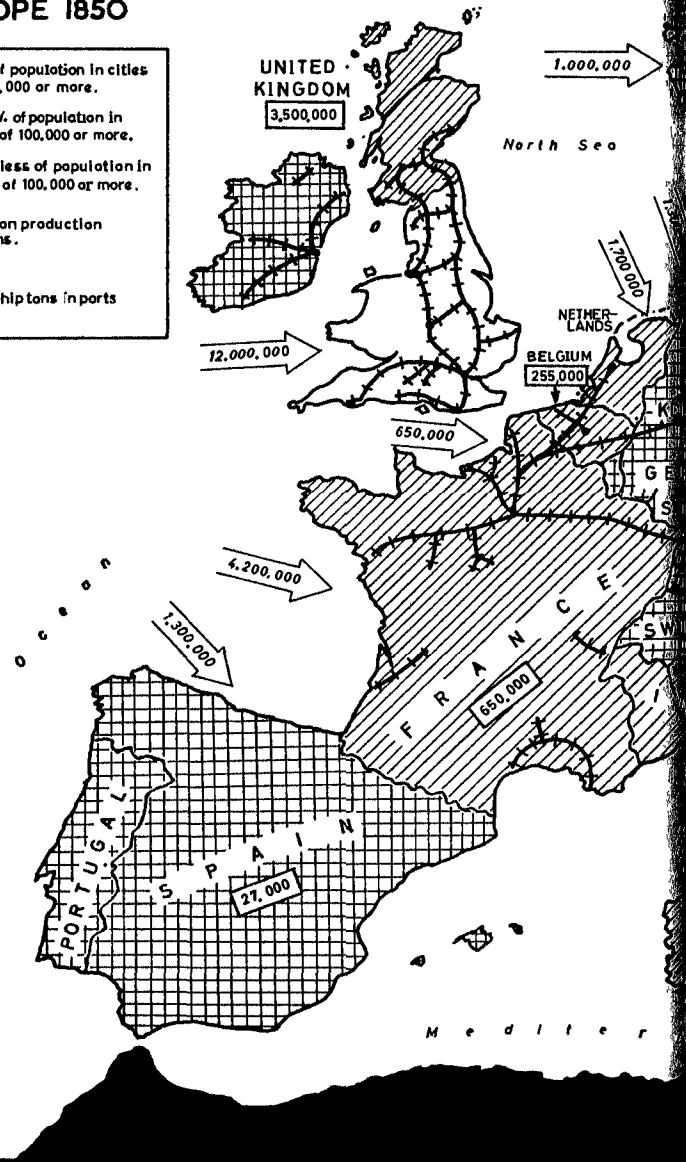
1820

1840

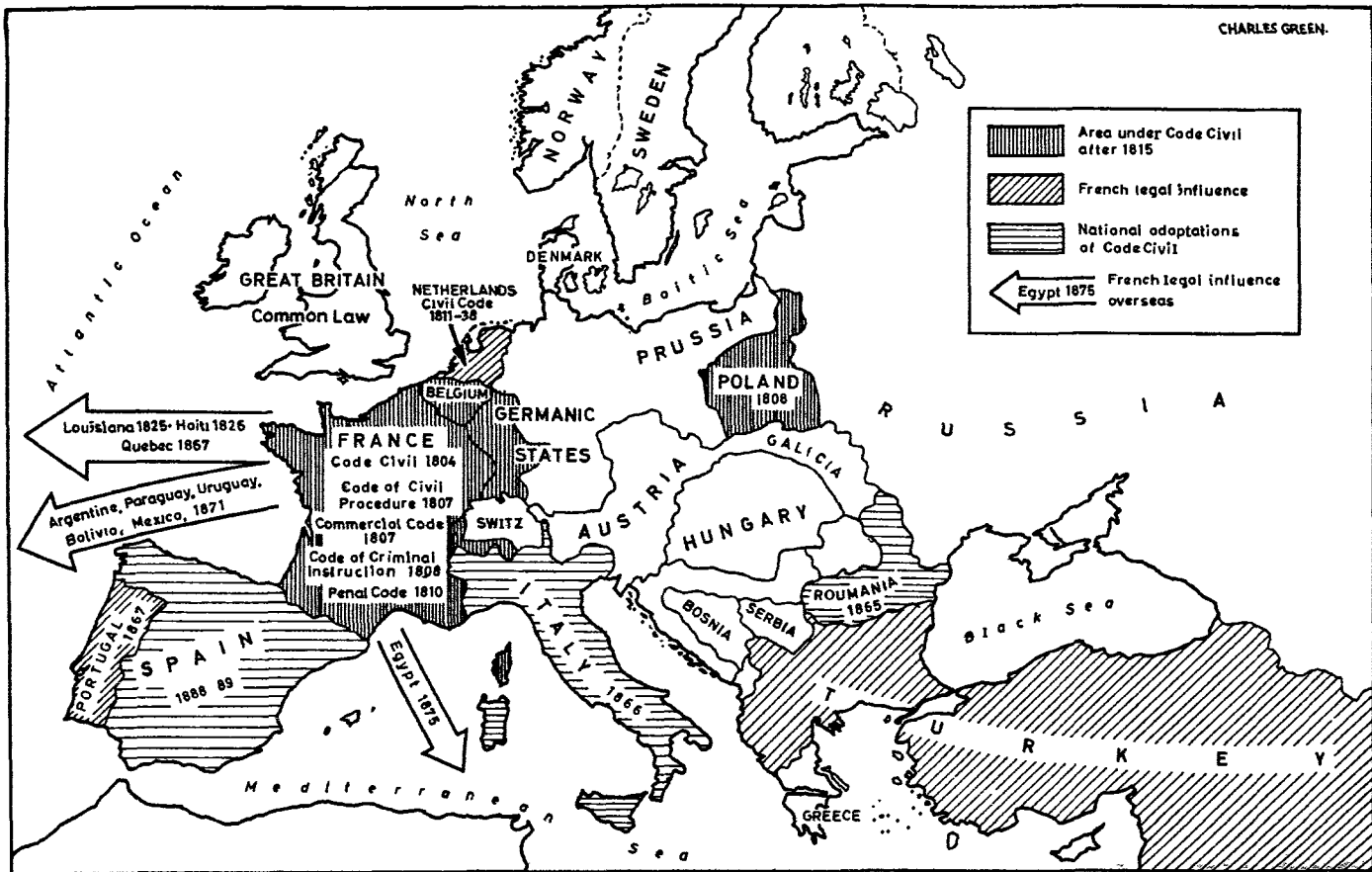


# INDUSTRIALISATION of EUROPE 1850

	20% of population in cities of 100,000 or more.
	6-10% of population in cities of 100,000 or more.
	5% or less of population in cities of 100,000 or more.
	Pig iron production in tons.
	Shiptons in ports



CHARLES GREEN



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## NOTES

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### CHAPTER 1: THE WORLD IN THE 1780s

- 1 Saint-Just, *Oeuvres complètes*, II, p. 514.
- 2 A. Hovelacque, La taille dans un canton ligure. *Revue Mensuelle de l'Ecole d'Anthropologie* (Paris 1896).
- 3 L. Dal Pane, *Storia del Lavoro dagli inizi del secolo XVIII al 1815* (1958), p. 135. R. S. Eckers, The North-South Differential in Italian Economic Development, *Journal of Economic History*, XXI, 1961, p. 290.
- 4 Quételet, qu. by Manouvrier, Sur la taille des Parisiens, *Bulletin de la Société Anthropologique de Paris*, 1888, p. 171.
- 5 H. Sée, *Esquisse d'une Histoire du Régime Agraire en Europe au XVIII et XIX siècles* (1921), p. 184, J. Blum, *Lord and Peasant in Russia* (1961), pp. 455-60.
- 6 Th. Haebich, *Deutsche Latifundien* (1947), pp. 27 ff.
- 7 A. Goodwin ed. *The European Nobility in the Eighteenth Century* (1953), p. 52.
- 8 L. B. Namier, 1848, *The Revolution of the Intellectuals* (1944); J. Vicens Vives, *Historia Economica de España* (1959).
- 9 Sten Carlsson, *Ständssamhälle och ståndspersoner 1700-1865* (1949).
- 10 Pierre Lebrun et al., La rivoluzione industriale in Belgio, *Studi Storici*, II, 3-4, 1961, pp. 564-5.
- 11 Like Turgot (*Oeuvres* V, p. 244): 'Ceux qui connaissent la marche du commerce savent aussi que toute entreprise importante, de trafic ou d'industrie, exige le concours de deux espèces d'hommes, d'entrepreneurs . . . et des ouvriers qui travaillent pour le compte des premiers, moyennant un salaire convenu. Telle est la véritable origine de la distinction entre les entrepreneurs et les maîtres, et les ouvriers ou compagnons, laquelle est fondé sur la nature des choses.'

### CHAPTER 2: THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

- 1 Arthur Young, *Tours in England and Wales*, London School of Economics edition, p. 269.
- 2 A. de Toqueville, *Journeys to England and Ireland*, ed. J. P. Mayer (1958), pp. 107-8.
- 3 Anna Bezanson, The Early Uses of the Term Industrial Revolution, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, XXXVI, 1921-2, p. 343; G. N. Clark, *The Idea of the Industrial Revolution* (Glasgow 1953).



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- 17 Ibid. pp. 243, 246, 251.
- 18 E. Halévy, *History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century* (paperback ed.), I, p. 509.
- 19 D. S. Landes, *Vieille Banque et Banque Nouvelle, Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, III, (1956), p. 205.
- 20 cf. the long-playing records 'Shuttle and Cage' *Industrial Folk Ballads*, (10T 13), *Row, Bullies, Row* (T7) and *The Blackball Line*, (T8) all on Topic, London.
- 21 Quoted in G. Taylor, *Nineteenth Century Florists and their Flowers* (*The Listener* 23.6.1949). The Paisley weavers were particularly enthusiastic and rigorous 'florists', recognising only eight flowers worthy of competitive breeding. The Nottingham lace-makers grew roses, which were not yet—unlike the hollyhock—a workingman's flower.
- 22 *Select Committee on Drunkenness* (Parl. Papers VIII, 1834) Q 571. In 1852, 28 pubs and 21 beershops in Manchester (out of 481 pubs and 1,298 beershops for a population of 303,000 in the borough) provided musical entertainment. (John T. Baylee; *Statistics and Facts in reference to the Lord's Day* (London 1852), p. 20.)

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- 1 Quoted in S. Solomon, *Commune*, August 1939, p. 964.
- 2 G. C. C. Gillispie, *Genesis and Geology* (1951), p. 116.
- 3 Quoted in *Encyclopédie de la Pléiade, Histoire de la Science* (1957), p. 1465.
- 4 *Essai sur l'éducation intellectuelle avec le projet d'une Science nouvelle* (Lausanne 1787).
- 5 cf. Guerlac, *Science and National Strength*, in E. M. Earle ed. *Modern France* (1951).
- 6 Quoted in S. Mason, *A History of the Sciences* (1953), p. 286.

## CHAPTER 16: CONCLUSION: TOWARDS 1898

- 1 Haxthausen, *Studien ueber . . . Russland* (1847), I, pp. 156-7.
- 2 Hansard, 16 Feb. 1842, quoted in Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians* (1961), p. 2.
- 3 R. B. Morris, *Encyclopedia of American History* (1953), pp. 515, 516.
- 4 P. Lyashchenko, *History of the Russian National Economy*, pp. 273-4.
- 5 Lyashchenko, op. cit., p. 370.
- 6 J. Stamp, *British Incomes and Property* (1920), pp. 515, 431.
- 7 M. L. Hansen, *The Atlantic Migration 1607-1860*, (Harvard 1945), p. 252.
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- 9 T. Kolokotronis, quoted in L. S. Stavrianos, *Antecedents to Balkan Revolutions, Journal of Modern History*, XXIX, 1957, p. 344.

*Also by E. J. Hobsbawm:*

THE AGE OF REVOLUTION 1789–1848

THE AGE OF EMPIRE 1875–1914

AGE OF EXTREMES 1914–1991

E. J. Hobsbawm

**THE AGE OF CAPITAL**  
**1848–1875**

**ABACUS**

# Contents

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Though this book is intended to stand on its own, it happens to be the middle volume of a series of three, which will attempt to survey the history of the modern world from the French Revolution to the First World War, of which the first has long been available as *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848*, and the last is still to be written. Consequently the book is likely to be read by some who know the earlier volume as well as by others who do not. To the former I apologize for including, here and there, material already familiar to them, in order to provide the necessary background for the latter. Similarly I have tried briefly, particularly in the Conclusion, to provide a few pointers to the future. I have naturally tried to keep material which duplicates *The Age of Revolution* to the minimum, and to make it tolerable by distributing it throughout the text. But the book can be read independently, so long as readers bear in mind that it deals not with a self-contained period which can be tidily separated from what went on before and came after. History is not like that.

At all events it ought to be comprehensible to any reader with a modicum of general education, for it is deliberately addressed to the non-expert. If historians are to justify the resources society devotes to their subject, modest though these are, they should not write exclusively for other historians. Still, an elementary acquaintance with European history will be an advantage. I suppose readers could, at a pinch, manage without any previous knowledge of the fall of the Bastille or the Napoleonic Wars, but such knowledge will help.

The period with which this book deals is comparatively short, but its geographical scope is wide. To write about the world from 1789 to 1848 in terms of Europe – indeed almost in terms of Britain and France – is not unrealistic. However, since the major theme of the quarter-century thereafter is the extension of the capitalist economy to the entire world, and hence the impossibility of any longer writing a purely European history, it would be absurd to write about it without paying substantial attention to other continents. Have I nevertheless written it in too Eurocentric a manner? Possibly. Inevitably a European historian not only knows much more about his own continent than about others, but cannot help seeing the global landscape which surrounds him from his particular vantage-point. Inevitably an American historian, say, will see the same landscape

somewhat differently. Nevertheless, in the mid-nineteenth century the history of the development of world capitalism was still centred in Europe. For instance, though the USA was already emerging as what was eventually to be the greatest industrial economy in the world, it was as yet somewhat marginal and self-contained. Nor, indeed, was it an unusually large society: in 1870 its population was not much larger than Britain's, about the same size as that of France, and a little less than that of what was about to be the German Empire.

My treatment is divided into three parts. The 1848 revolutions form a prelude to a section on the main developments of the period. These I discuss in both a continental and, where necessary, global perspective, rather than as a series of self-contained 'national' histories, though in the two chapters on the non-European world it would be both impracticable and absurd not to deal specifically with several important areas and countries, notably the USA and Japan, China and India. The chapters are divided by themes, rather than chronologically, though the main sub-periods should be clearly discernible. These are the quiet but expansionist 1850s, the more turbulent 1860s, the boom and slump of the 1870s. The third part consists of a series of cross-sections through the economy, society and culture of the third quarter of the nineteenth century.

My object has not been so much to summarise known facts, or even to show what happened and when, but rather to draw facts together into a general historical synthesis, to 'make sense of' the third quarter of the nineteenth century, and to trace the roots of the present world back to that period, insofar as it is reasonable to do so. But it is also to bring out the extraordinary character of a period which really has no parallel in history, and whose very uniqueness makes it strange and remote. Whether *The Age of Capital* succeeds in 'making sense' and bringing to life this period, must be left to readers to judge. Whether its interpretations are valid, especially when they disagree with more accepted ones, must be left to the discussion of my fellow-historians, who evidently do not all agree with me. I resist the temptation of the writer whose work has been widely and passionately reviewed, in terms ranging from enthusiasm to irritation, to take issue with the reviewers, though I have tried in this edition to eliminate several misprints and some plain mistakes to which some of them have drawn my attention, to straighten out a few syntactical confusions which have apparently led to misunderstanding, and to take account, at least in my formulations, of some criticisms which seem to me to be just. The text remains substantially as before.

Nevertheless, I should like to remove one misunderstanding which appears to exist, especially among reviewers whose natural sympathies are

as much with bourgeois society as mine are evidently not. Since it is the duty of the historian to let the reader make allowances for his bias, I wrote (see Introduction p. 17): 'The author of this book cannot conceal a certain distaste, perhaps a certain contempt, for the age with which it deals, though one mitigated by admiration for its titanic material achievements and by the effort to understand even what he does not like.' This has been read by some as a declaration of intent to be unfair to the Victorian bourgeoisie and the age of its triumph. Since some people are evidently unable to read what is on the page, as distinct from what they think must be there, I would like to say clearly that this is not so. In fact, as at least one reviewer has correctly recognised, bourgeois triumph is not merely the organising principle of the present volume, but 'it is the bourgeoisie who receive much the most sympathetic treatment in the book'. For good or ill, it was their age, and I have tried to present it as such, even at the cost of – at least in this brief period – seeing other classes not so much in their own right, as in relation to it.

I cannot claim to be expert on all but a tiny part of the immense subject-matter of this book, and have had to rely almost entirely on second- or even third-hand information. But this is unavoidable. An enormous amount has already been written about the nineteenth century, and every year adds to the height and bulk of the mountain ranges which darken the historical sky. As the range of historical interests widens to include practically every aspect of life in which we of the late twentieth century take an interest, the quantity of information which must be absorbed is far too great for even the most erudite and encyclopedic scholar. Even where he or she is aware of it, it must often, in the context of a wide-ranging synthesis, be reduced to a paragraph or two, a line, a passing mention or a mere nuance of treatment, or omitted with regret. And one must necessarily rely, in an increasingly perfunctory manner, on the work of others.

Unfortunately this makes it impossible to follow the admirable convention by which scholars punctiliously acknowledge their sources, and especially their debts, so that nobody but the originators should claim as their own findings made freely available to all. In the first place, I doubt whether I could trace all the suggestions and ideas I have borrowed so freely back to their origin in some book or article, conversation or discussion. I can only ask those whose work I have looted, consciously or not, to forgive my discourtesy. In the second place, even the attempt to do so, would overload the book with an apparatus of learning quite unsuitable to it. However, there is a general guide to further reading, which includes some of the works I have found most useful and to which I would wish to acknowledge my debt.

References have been almost entirely confined to the sources of quotations, of statistics and other figures, and for some statements which are controversial or surprising. Most of the otherwise unacknowledged figures are taken from standard sources or from such invaluable compendia as Mulhall's *Dictionary of Statistics*. References to works of literature – e.g. Russian novels – are to titles only, since they exist in a variety of editions. The one consulted by the author may not be the one available to the reader. References to the works of Marx and Engels, who are major contemporary commentators in this period, are both to the familiar title of work or date of letter and to the volume and page of the existing standard edition (East Berlin 1956–71), cited as *Werke*. Place-names have been given in the English form where there is one (e.g. Munich), otherwise in the form generally used in publications at the time (e.g. Pressburg). This implies no nationalist prejudice one way or another. Where necessary, the current name is added in brackets (e.g. Laibach [– Ljubljana]).

The late Sigurd Zienau and Francis Haskell were kind enough to read my chapters on the sciences and arts and to correct some of my errors. Charles Curwen answered questions on China. Nobody is responsible for mistakes or omissions except myself. W. R. Rodgers, Carmen Claudin and Maria Moisés helped me enormously as research assistants at various times. Andrew Hobsbawm and Julia Hobsbawm helped me to select the illustrations, as did Julia Brown. I am also deeply indebted to my editor, Susan Loden.

E.J.H.

February 1977

## Introduction

In the 1860s a new word entered the economic and political vocabulary of the world: 'capitalism'.\* It therefore seems apposite to call the present volume *The Age of Capital*, a title which also reminds us that the major work of capitalism's most formidable critic, Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* (1867), was published in these years. For the global triumph of capitalism is the major theme of history in the decades after 1848. It was the triumph of a society which believed that economic growth rested on competitive private enterprise, on success in buying everything in the cheapest market (including labour) and selling in the dearest. An economy so based, and therefore resting naturally on the sound foundations of a bourgeoisie composed of those whom energy, merit and intelligence had raised to their position and kept there, would – it was believed – not only create a world of suitably distributed material plenty, but of ever-growing enlightenment, reason and human opportunity, an advance of the sciences and the arts, in brief a world of continuous and accelerating material and moral progress. The few remaining obstacles in the way of the untrammelled development of private enterprise would be swept away. The institutions of the world, or rather of those parts of the world not still debarred by the tyranny of tradition and superstition or by the unfortunate fact of not having white skins (preferably originating in the central and north-western parts of Europe), would gradually approximate to the international model of a territorially defined 'nation-state' with a constitution guaranteeing property and civil rights, elected representative assemblies and governments responsible to them, and, where suitable, a participation in politics of the common people within such limits as would guarantee the bourgeois social order and avoid the risk of its overthrow.

To trace the earlier development of this society is not the business of

\* Its origin may go back to before 1848, as suggested in *The Age of Revolution* (Introduction), but detailed research suggests that it hardly occurs before 1849 or comes into wider currency before the 1860s.<sup>1</sup>

the present book. It is enough to remind ourselves that it had already achieved, as it were, its historical breakthrough on both the economic and politico-ideological fronts in the sixty years before 1848. The years from 1789 to 1848 (which I have discussed in an earlier volume [*The Age of Revolution*, see the Preface, p. 9 above] to which readers will be referred back from time to time) were dominated by a dual revolution: the industrial transformation pioneered in, and largely confined to, Britain, and the political transformation associated with, and largely confined to, France. Both implied the triumph of a new society, but whether it was to be the society of triumphant liberal capitalism, of what a French historian has called 'the conquering bourgeois', still seemed more uncertain to contemporaries than it seems to us. Behind the bourgeois political ideologists stood the masses, ready to turn moderate liberal revolutions into social ones. Below and around the capitalist entrepreneurs the discontented and displaced 'labouring poor' stirred and surged. The 1830s and 1840s were an era of crisis, whose exact outcome only optimists cared to predict.

Still the dualism of the revolution of 1789 to 1848 gives the history of that period both unity and symmetry. It is in a sense easy to write and read about, because it appears to possess a clear theme and a clear shape, and its chronological limits are as clearly defined as we have any right to expect in human affairs. With the revolution of 1848, which forms the starting-point of this volume, the earlier symmetry broke down, the shape changed. Political revolution retreated, industrial revolution advanced. Eighteen forty-eight, the famous 'springtime of peoples', was the first and last European revolution in the (almost) literal sense, the momentary realisation of the dreams of the left, the nightmares of the right, the virtually simultaneous overthrow of old regimes over the bulk of continental Europe west of the Russian and Turkish empires, from Copenhagen to Palermo, from Brasov to Barcelona. It had been expected and predicted. It seemed to be the culmination and logical product of the era of dual revolution.

It failed, universally, rapidly and – though this was not realised for several years by the political refugees – definitively. Henceforth there was to be no general social revolution of the kind envisaged before 1848 in the 'advanced' countries of the world. The centre of gravity of such social revolutionary movements, and therefore of

twentieth-century socialist and communist regimes, was to be in the marginal and backward regions, though in the period with which this book deals movements of this kind remained episodic, archaic and themselves 'underdeveloped'. The sudden, vast and apparently boundless expansion of the world capitalist economy provided political alternatives in the 'advanced' countries. The (British) industrial revolution had swallowed the (French) political revolution.

The history of our period is therefore lopsided. It is primarily that of the massive advance of the world economy of industrial capitalism, of the social order it represented, of the ideas and beliefs which seemed to legitimatise and ratify it: in reason, science, progress and liberalism. It is the era of the triumphant bourgeois, though the European bourgeoisie still hesitated to commit itself to public political rule. To this – and perhaps only to this – extent the age of revolution was not dead. The middle classes of Europe were frightened and remained frightened of the people: 'democracy' was still believed to be the certain and rapid prelude to 'socialism'. The men who officially presided over the affairs of the victorious bourgeois order in its moment of triumph were a deeply reactionary country nobleman from Prussia, an imitation emperor in France and a succession of aristocratic landowners in Britain. The fear of revolution was real, the basic insecurity it indicated, deep-seated. At the very end of our period the only example of revolution in an advanced country, an almost localised and short-lived insurrection in Paris, produced a greater bloodbath than anything in 1848 and a flurry of nervous diplomatic exchanges. Yet by this time the rulers of the advanced states of Europe, with more or less reluctance, were beginning to recognise not only that 'democracy', i.e. a parliamentary constitution based on a wide suffrage, was inevitable, but also that it would probably be a nuisance but politically harmless. This discovery had long since been made by the rulers of the United States.

The years from 1848 to the middle 1870s were therefore not a period which inspires readers who enjoy the spectacle of drama and heroics in the conventional sense. Its wars – and it saw considerably more warfare than the preceding thirty or the succeeding forty years – were either brief operations decided by technological and organisational superiority, like most European campaigns overseas and the rapid and decisive wars by means of which the German Empire was established between



1864 and 1871; or mismanaged massacres on which even the patriotism of the belligerent countries has refused to dwell with pleasure, such as the Crimean War of 1854–6. The greatest of all the wars of this period, the American Civil War, was won in the last analysis by the weight of economic power and superior resources. The losing South had the better army and the better generals. The occasional examples of romantic and colourful heroism stood out, like Garibaldi in his flowing locks and red shirt, by their very rarity. Nor was there much drama in politics, where the criteria of success were to be defined by Walter Bagehot as the possession of 'common opinions and uncommon abilities'. Napoleon III visibly found the cloak of his great uncle the first Napoleon uncomfortable to wear. Lincoln and Bismarck, whose public images have benefited by the craginess of their faces and the beauty of their prose, were indeed great men, but their actual achievements were won by their gifts as politicians and diplomats, like those of Cavour in Italy, who entirely lacked what we now regard as their charisma.

The most obvious drama of this period was economic and technological: the iron pouring in millions of tons over the world, snaking in ribbons of railways across the continents, the submarine cables crossing the Atlantic, the construction of the Suez canal, the great cities like Chicago stamped out of the virgin soil of the American Midwest, the huge streams of migrants. It was the drama of European and North American power, with the world at its feet. But those who exploited this conquered world were, if we except the numerically small fringe of adventurers and pioneers, sober men in sober clothes, spreading respectability and a sentiment of racial superiority together with gasworks, railway lines and loans.

It was the drama of *progress*, that key word of the age: massive, enlightened, sure of itself, self-satisfied but above all inevitable. Hardly any among the men of power and influence, at all events in the western world, any longer hoped to hold it up. Only a few thinkers and perhaps a somewhat greater number of intuitive critics predicted that its inevitable advance would produce a world very different from that towards which it appeared to lead: perhaps its very opposite. None of them – not even Marx who had envisaged social revolution in 1848 and for a decade thereafter – expected any immediate reversal. Even his expectations were, by the 1860s, for the long term.

The 'drama of progress' is a metaphor. But for two kinds of people it was a literal reality. For the millions of the poor, transported into a new world, often across frontiers and oceans, it meant a cataclysmic change of life. For the peoples of the world outside capitalism, who were now grasped and shaken by it, it meant the choice between a doomed resistance in terms of their ancient traditions and ways, and a traumatic process of seizing the weapons of the west and turning them against the conquerors: of understanding and manipulating 'progress' themselves. The world of the third quarter of the nineteenth century was one of victors and victims. Its drama was the predicament not of the former, but primarily of the latter.

The historian cannot be objective about the period which is his subject. In this he differs (to his intellectual advantage) from its most typical ideologists, who believed that the progress of technology, 'positive science' and society made it possible to view their present with the unanswerable impartiality of the natural scientist, whose methods they believed themselves (mistakenly) to understand. The author of this book cannot conceal a certain distaste, perhaps a certain contempt, for the age with which it deals, though one mitigated by admiration for its titanic material achievements and by the effort to understand even what he does not like. He does not share the nostalgic longing for the certainty, the self-confidence, of the mid-nineteenth-century bourgeois world which tempts many who look back upon it from the crisis-ridden western world a century later. His sympathies lie with those to whom few listened a century ago. In any case both the certainty and the self-confidence were mistaken. The bourgeois triumph was brief and impermanent. At the very moment when it seemed complete, it proved to be not monolithic but full of fissures. In the early 1870s economic expansion and liberalism seemed irresistible. By the end of the decade they were so no longer.

This turning-point marks the end of the era with which this book deals. Unlike the 1848 revolution, which forms its starting-point, it is marked by no convenient and universal date. If any such date had to be chosen, it would be 1873, the Victorian equivalent of the Wall Street Crash of 1929. For then began what a contemporary observer called 'a most curious and in many respects unprecedented disturbance and depression of trade, commerce and industry' which contemporaries called the 'Great Depression', and which is usually dated 1873–96.

'Its most noteworthy peculiarity [wrote the same observer] has been its universality; affecting nations that have been involved in war as well as those which have maintained peace; those which have a stable currency . . . and those which have an unstable currency . . .; those which live under a system of the free exchange of commodities and those whose exchanges are more or less restricted. It has been grievous in old communities like England and Germany, and equally so in Australia, South Africa and California which represent the new; it has been a calamity exceeding heavy to be borne alike by the inhabitants of sterile Newfoundland and Labrador, and of the sunny, fruitful sugar-islands of the East and West Indies; and it has not enriched those at the centres of the world's exchanges, whose gains are ordinarily the greatest when business is most fluctuating and uncertain.'<sup>2</sup>

So wrote an eminent North American in the same year in which, under the inspiration of Karl Marx, the Labour and Socialist International was founded. The Depression initiated a new era, and may therefore properly provide the concluding date for the old.

## *Part One*

# Revolutionary Prelude

## Chapter Sixteen

### Conclusion

*Do what you like, destiny has the last word in human affairs. There's real tyranny for you. According to the principles of Progress, destiny should have been abolished long ago.*

Johann Nestroy, Viennese comic playwright, 1850<sup>1</sup>

The era of liberal triumph began with a defeated revolution and ended in a prolonged depression. The first forms a more convenient signpost for marking the beginning or end of a historical period than the second, but history does not consult the convenience of historians, though some of them are not always aware of it. The requirements of drama might suggest concluding this book with a suitably spectacular event – the proclamation of German Unity and the Paris Commune in 1871 perhaps, or even the great stock-exchange crash of 1873 – but the demands of drama and reality are, as so often, not the same. The path ends not with the view of a peak or a cataract, but of the less easily identifiable landscape of a watershed: some time between 1871 and 1879. If we have to put a date to it, let us choose one which symbolises 'the middle 1870s' without being associated with any event sufficiently outstanding to obtrude itself unnecessarily, say 1875.

The new era which follows the age of liberal triumph was to be very different. Economically it was to move away rapidly from unrestrained competitive private enterprise, government abstention from interference and what the Germans called *Manchesterismus* (the free trade orthodoxy of Victorian Britain), to large industrial corporations (cartels, trusts, monopolies), to very considerable government interference, to very different orthodoxies of policy, though not necessarily of economic theory. The age of individualism ended in 1870, complained the British lawyer A. V. Dicey, the age of 'collectivism' began; and though most of what he gloomily noted as the advances of 'collectivism' strike us as insignificant, he was in a sense right.

The capitalist economy changed in four significant ways. In the first place, we now enter a new technological era, no longer determined by the inventions and methods of the first Industrial Revolution: an era of new sources of power (electricity and oil, turbines and the internal combustion engine), of new machinery based on new materials (steel, alloys, non-ferrous metals), of new science-based industries, such as the expanding organic chemical industry. In the second place, we now increasingly enter the economy of the domestic consumer market, pioneered in the United States, fostered not only (and as yet, in Europe, modestly) by rising mass incomes, but above all by the sheer demographic growth of the developed countries. From 1870 to 1910 the population of Europe rose from 290 to 435 million, that of the United States from 38.5 to 92 million. In other words, we enter the period of mass production, including that of some consumer durables.

In the third place – and in some ways this was the most decisive development – a paradoxical reversal now took place. The era of liberal triumph had been that of a *de facto* British industrial monopoly internationally, within which (with some notable exceptions) profits were assured with little difficulty by the competition of small- and medium-sized enterprises. The post-liberal era was one of international competition between rival national industrial economies – the British, the German, the North American; a competition sharpened by the difficulties which firms within each of these economies now discovered, during the period of depression, in making adequate profits. Competition thus led towards economic concentration, market control and manipulation. To quote an excellent historian:

Economic growth was now also economic struggle – struggle that served to separate the strong from the weak, to discourage some and to toughen others, to favour the new, hungry nations at the expense of the old. Optimism about a future of indefinite progress gave way to uncertainty and a sense of agony, in the classical meaning of the word. All of which strengthened and was in turn strengthened by sharpening political rivalries, the two forms of competition merging in that final surge of land hunger and that chase for 'spheres of influence' that have been called the New Imperialism.<sup>2</sup>

The world entered the period of imperialism, in the broad sense of the word (which includes the changes in the structure of economic organisation, e.g. 'monopoly-capitalism') but also in the narrower

sense of the word: a new integration of the 'underdeveloped' countries as dependencies into a world economy dominated by the 'developed' countries. Apart from the impulse of rivalry (which led powers to divide the globe into formal or informal reservations for their own businessmen), of markets and of capital exports, this was also due to the increased significance of raw materials not available in most of the developed countries themselves, for climatic and geological reasons. The new technological industries required such materials: oil, rubber, non-ferrous metals. By the end of the century Malaya was a known producer of tin, Russia, India and Chile in manganese, New Caledonia of nickel. The new consumer economy required rapidly growing quantities not only of materials also produced in the developed countries (e.g. grain and meat) but of those which could not be (e.g. tropical or sub-tropical beverages and fruit, or overseas vegetable oil for soap). The 'banana republic' became as much part of the capitalist world economy as the tin and rubber or the cocoa colony.

On a global scale this dichotomy between developed and (theoretically complementary) underdeveloped areas, though not in itself new, began to take a recognisably modern shape. The development of the new pattern of development/dependence was to continue with only brief interruptions until the slump of the 1930s, and forms the fourth major change in the world economy.

Politically the end of the liberal era meant literally what the words imply. In Britain the Whig/Liberals (in the broad sense of those who were not Tory/Conservatives) had been in office, with two brief exceptions, throughout the period from 1848 to 1874. In the last quarter of the century they were to be in office for no more than eight years. In Germany and Austria the Liberals ceased, in the 1870s, to be the main parliamentary base of governments, in so far as governments required such a base. They were undermined not only by the defeat of their ideology of free trade and cheap (i.e. relatively inactive) government, but by the democratisation of electoral politics (see chapter 6 above), which destroyed the illusion that their policy represented the masses. On the one hand, the depression added to the force of protectionist pressure by some industries and the national agrarian interests. The trend towards freer trade was reversed in Russia and Austria in 1874-5, in Spain in 1877, in Germany in 1879,

and practically everywhere else except Britain – and even here free trade was under pressure from the 1880s. On the other, the demand from below for protection against the 'capitalists' by the 'little men', for social security, public measures against unemployment and a wage-minimum from the workers, became vocal and politically effective. The 'better classes', whether the ancient hierarchical nobility or the new bourgeoisie, could no longer speak for the 'lower orders' or, what is more to the point, rely on their uncompensated support.

A new, increasingly powerful and intrusive state and within it a new pattern of politics therefore developed, foreseen with gloom by anti-democratic thinkers. 'The modern version of the Rights of Man', thought the historian Jacob Burckhardt in 1870, 'includes the right to work and subsistence. For men are no longer willing to leave the most vital matters to society, because they want the impossible and imagine that it can only be secured under compulsion of the state.'<sup>3</sup> What troubled them was not only the allegedly utopian demand of the poor for the right to live decently, but the capacity of the poor to impose it. 'The masses want their peace and their pay. If they get it from a republic or a monarchy, they will cling to either. If not, without much ado they will support the first constitution to promise them what they want.'<sup>4</sup> And the state, no longer controlled by the moral autonomy and legitimacy which tradition gave it or the belief that economic laws could not be broken, would become increasingly an all-powerful Leviathan in practice, though a mere tool for achieving the aims of the masses in theory.

By modern standards the increase in the role and functions of the state remained modest enough, though its expenditure (i.e. its activities) had increased almost everywhere in our period *per capita*, largely as a result of the sharp rise in the public debt (except in those strongholds of liberalism, peace and unsubsidised private enterprise, Britain, Holland, Belgium and Denmark).<sup>\*</sup> In any case social expenditure, except perhaps on education, remained fairly negligible. On the other hand, in politics three new tendencies emerged out of the confused tensions of the new era of economic depression, which

<sup>\*</sup> This increase in expenditure was much more marked in the developing countries overseas, which were in the process of building the infrastructure of their economies – the United States, Canada, Australia and Argentina – by means of capital imports.

almost everywhere became one of social agitation and discontent.

The first, and most apparently novel, was the emergence of independent working-class parties and movements, generally with a socialist (i.e. increasingly a Marxist) orientation, of which the German Social Democratic Party was both the pioneer and the most impressive example. Though the governments and middle classes of the time regarded them as the most dangerous, in fact they shared the values and assumptions of the rationalist enlightenment on which liberalism rested. The second tendency did not share this heritage, and was indeed flatly opposed to it. Demagogic anti-liberal and anti-socialist parties emerged in the 1880s and 1890s, either from under the shadow of their formerly liberal affiliation – like the anti-semitic and pan-German nationalists who became the ancestors of Hitlerism – or under the wing of the hitherto politically inactive churches, like the 'Christian-Social' movement in Austria.\* The third tendency was the emancipation of mass nationalist parties and movements from their former ideological identification with liberal-radicalism. Some movements for national autonomy or independence tended to shift, at least theoretically, towards socialism, especially when the working class played a significant role in their country; but it was a national rather than an international socialism (as among the so-called Czech People's Socialists or the Polish Socialist Party) and the national element tended to prevail over the socialist. Others moved towards an ideology based on blood, soil, language, what was conceived to be the ethnic tradition and little else.

This did not disrupt the basic political pattern of the developed states which had emerged in the 1860s: a more or less gradual and reluctant approach to a democratic constitutionalism. Nevertheless the emergence of non-liberal mass politics, however theoretically acceptable, frightened governments. Before they learned to operate the new system, they were – notably during the 'Great Depression' – sometimes inclined to relapse into panic or coercion. The Third Republic did not re-admit the survivors of the massacre among the Communards into politics until the early 1880s. Bismarck, who knew

\* For various reasons, among which the self-sealing ultrareactionary position of the Vatican under Pius IX (1846-78) was perhaps the most important, the Catholic Church failed to use its enormous potential in mass politics effectively, except in a few western countries in which it was a minority and obliged to organise as a pressure group – as in the 'Centre Party' in Germany from the 1870s.

how to manage bourgeois liberals but neither a mass socialist party nor a mass Catholic party, made the Social Democrats illegal in 1879. Gladstone lapsed into coercion in Ireland. However this proved to be a temporary phase, rather than a permanent tendency. The framework of bourgeois politics (where it existed) was not stretched to breaking-point until well into the twentieth century.

Indeed, though our period subsides into the troubled time of the 'Great Depression', it would be misleading to paint too highly coloured a picture of it. Unlike the slump of the 1930s, the economic difficulties themselves were so complex and qualified that historians have even doubted whether the term 'depression' is justifiable as a description of the twenty years after this volume ends. They are wrong, but their doubts are enough to warn us against excessively dramatic treatment. Neither economically nor politically did the structure of the mid-nineteenth-century capitalist world collapse. It entered a new phase but, even in the form of a slowly modified economic and political liberalism, it had plenty of scope left. It was different in the dominated, the underdeveloped, the backward and poor countries, or those situated, like Russia, both in the world of the victors and the victims. There the 'Great Depression' opened an era of imminent revolution. But for a generation or two after 1875 the world of the triumphant bourgeoisie appeared to remain firm enough. Perhaps it was a little less self-confident than before, and its assertions of self-confidence therefore a little shriller, perhaps a little more worried about its future. Perhaps it became rather more puzzled by the breakdown of its old intellectual certainties, which (especially after the 1880s) thinkers, artists and scientists underlined with their ventures into new and troubling territories of the mind. But surely 'progress' still continued, inevitably, and in the form of bourgeois, capitalist and in a general sense liberal societies. The 'Great Depression' was only an interlude. Was there not economic growth, technical and scientific advance, improvement and peace? Would not the twentieth century be a more glorious, more successful version of the nineteenth?

We now know that it would not be.

TABLE 1

## EUROPE AND THE USA: STATES AND RESOURCES

	1847-50		1876-80			
	popu- lation (millions)	steam power (000 HP)	number of towns, 50,000 and over	popu- lation (millions)	steam power (000 HP)	post units per capita
United Kingdom	27	1,290	32	32.7	7,600	48.2
France	34.1	370	14	36.9†	3,070	29.5
Germany	—	—	17	42.7	5,120	28.7
Prussia	11.7	92				
Bavaria	4.8					
Saxony	1.8					
Hanover	1.8					
Württemberg	1.7					
Baden	1.3					
32 other states between 0.02 and 0.9 (Austria)	*					
Russia	66.0	70	8	85.7	1,740	2.6
Austria with Hungary	37.0	100	13	37.1†	1,560	12.0
Italy	—	—		27.8	500	13.4
2 Sicilies	8.0		4			
Sardinia	4.0		2			
Papal States	2.9		1			
Tuscany	1.5		2			
3 other states between 0.1 and 0.5 (Austria)						

\* Parts of the Austrian Empire counted in 'Germanic Confederation' until 1866.

TABLE 1 (cont.)

	1847-50		1876-80			
	popu- lation (millions)	steam power (000 HP)	number of towns, 50,000 and over	popu- lation (millions)	steam power (000 HP)	post units per capita
Spain	12.3	20	8	16.6	470	7.1
Portugal	3.7	0	2	4.1	60	5.4
Sweden (inc. Norway)	3.5	0	1	4.3	310	12.5
Denmark	1.4	0	1	1.9†	90	26.6
Netherlands	3.0	10	5	3.9	130	29.5
Belgium	4.3	70	5	5.3	610	35.5
Switzerland	2.4	0	0	2.8	230	46.1
Ottoman Empire	c. 30‡	0	7	28 (1877)†	—	?
Greece	c. 1.0	0	—	1.9	0	2.3
Serbia	c. 0.5	0	—	1.4	0	0.7
Rumania	—	—	—	5.0	0	1.5
United States	23.2	1,680	7	50.2†	9,110	47.7

† Significant loss or gain of territory/population, 1847-76.

‡ European territory only.

TABLE 2  
I DENSITY OF RAILWAY NETWORK, 1880\*

km <sup>2</sup> (per 10,000)	country
over 1,000	Belgium
over 750	United Kingdom
over 500	Switzerland, Germany, Netherlands
250-499	France, Denmark, Austria-Hungary, Italy
100-249	Sweden, Spain, Portugal, Rumania, United States, Cuba
50-99	Turkey, Chile, New Zealand, Trinidad, Victoria, Java
10-49	Norway, Finland, Russia, Canada, Uruguay, Argentina, Peru, Costa Rica, Jamaica, India, Ceylon, Tasmania, N.S. Wales, S. Australia, Cape Colony, Algeria, Egypt, Tunis

II RAILWAYS AND STEAMSHIPS, 1830-76\*

	km of railways	tons of steamships
1831	332	32,000
1841	8,591	105,121
1846	17,424	139,973
1851	38,022	263,679
1856	68,148	575,928
1861	106,886	803,003
1866	145,114	1,423,232
1871	235,375	1,939,089
1876	309,641	3,293,072

\* F. X. von Neumann Spallart, *Übersichten der Weltwirtschaft* (Stuttgart 1880), pp. 335 ff.

III SEA TRAFFIC OF THE WORLD. GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF TONNAGE, 1879\*

area	total tonnage (000)	area	total tonnage (000)
<i>Europe</i>		<i>Rest of the World</i>	
Arctic Sea	61	North America	3,783
North Sea	5,536	South America	138
Baltic	1,275	Asia	700
Atlantic, inc. Irish Sea and Channel	4,553	Australia and Pacific	359
Western Mediterranean	1,356		
E. Mediterranean, inc. Adriatic	604		
Black Sea	188		

\*A. N. Kiaer, *Statistique Internationale de la Navigation Maritime* (Christiania 1880, 1881).

TABLE 3  
WORLD GOLD AND SILVER PRODUCTION, 1830-75  
(000 KILOGRAMMES)\*

	gold	silver
1831-40	20.3	596.4
1841-50	54.8	780.4
1851-55	197.5	886.1
1851-60	206.1	905.0
1861-65	198.2	1,101.1
1866-70	191.9	1,339.1
1871-75	170.7	1,969.4

\* Neumann-Spallart, *op. cit.* (1880), p. 250.

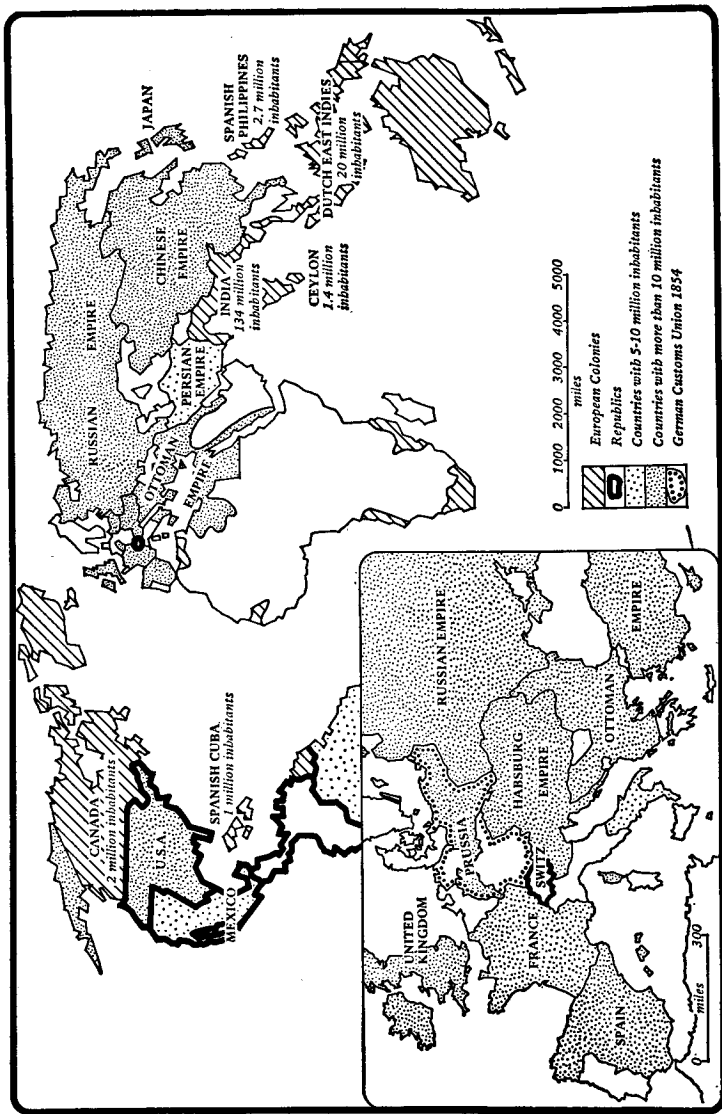
TABLE 4  
WORLD AGRICULTURE, 1840-87\*

	value of output (£ mill)		number employed (000)	
	1840	1887	1840	1887
Britain	218	251	3,400	2,460
France	269	460	6,950	6,450
Germany	170	424	6,400	8,120
Russia	248	563	15,000	22,700
Austria	205	331	7,500	10,680
Italy	114	204	3,600	5,390
Spain	102	173	2,000	2,720
Portugal	18	31	700	870
Sweden	16	49	550	850
Norway	8	17	250	380
Denmark	16	35	280	420
Holland	20	39	600	840
Belgium	30	55	900	980
Switzerland	12	19	300	440
Turkey, etc.	98	194	2,000	2,900
Europe	1,544	2,845	50,430	66,320
United States	184	776	2,550	9,000
Canada	12	56	300	800
Australia	6	62	100	630
Argentina	5	42	200	600
Uruguay	1	10	50	100

\* M. Mulhall, *A Dictionary of Statistics* (London 1892), p. 11.

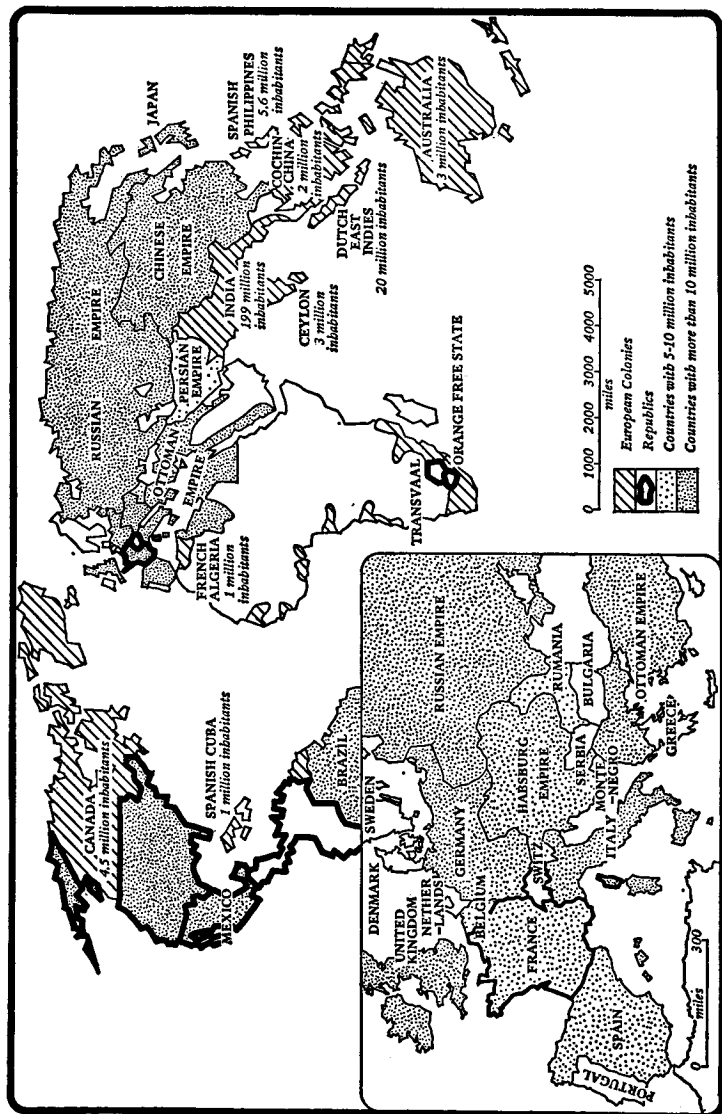


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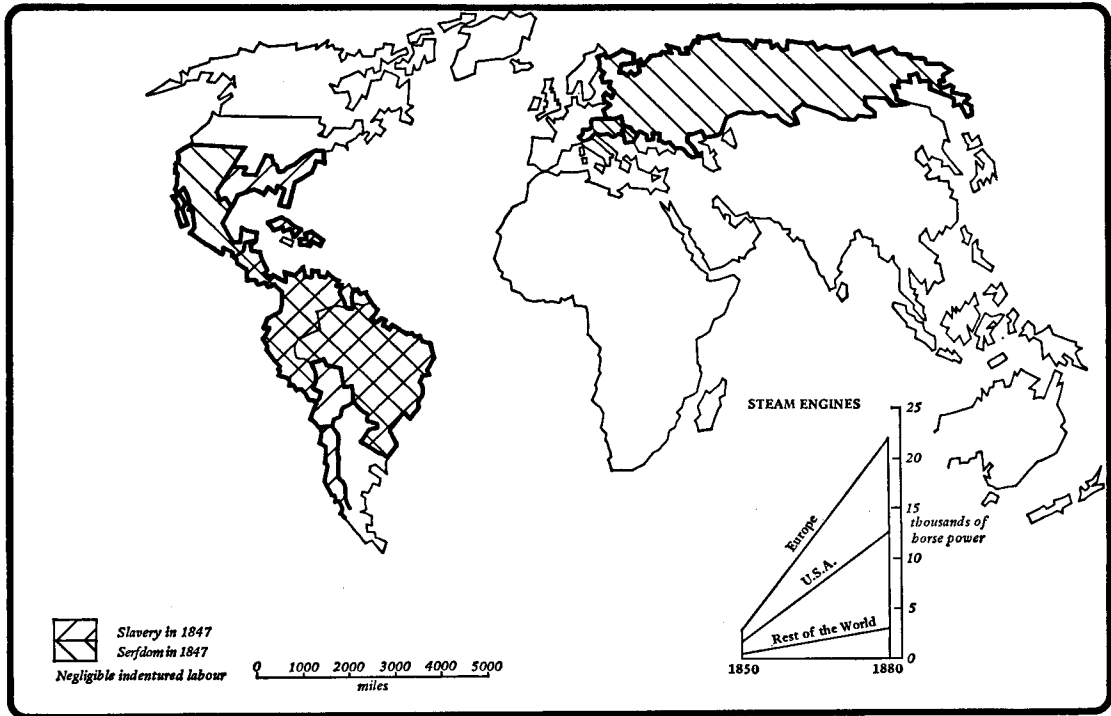
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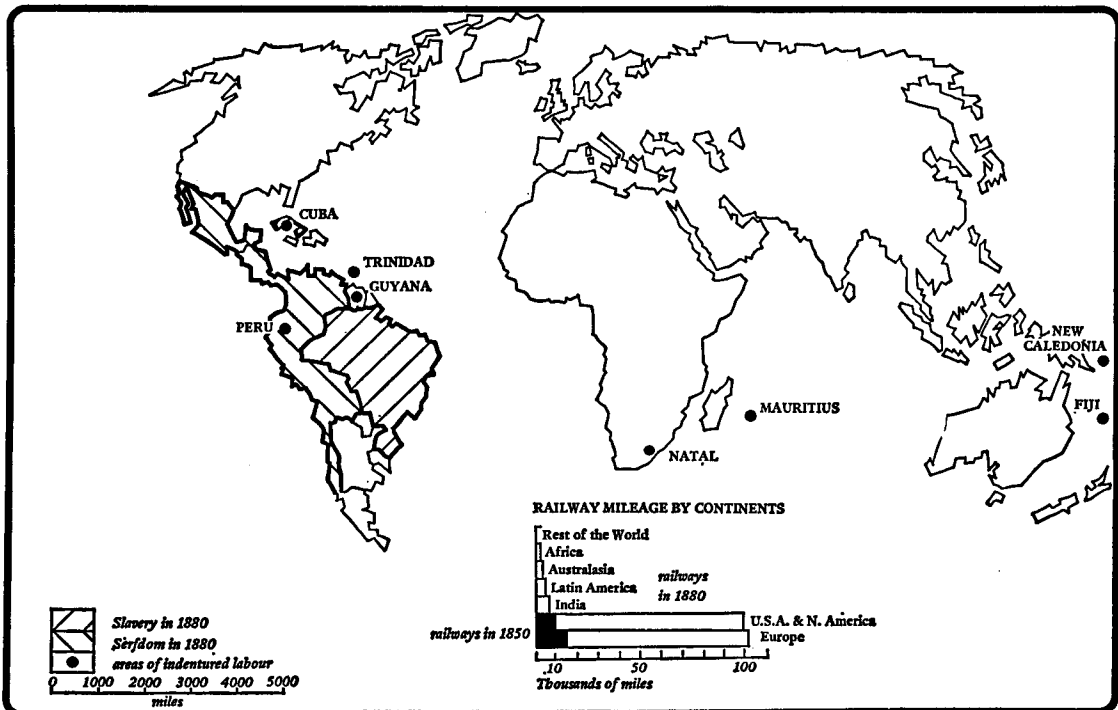
# 1847 Slavery and Serfdom in the Western World

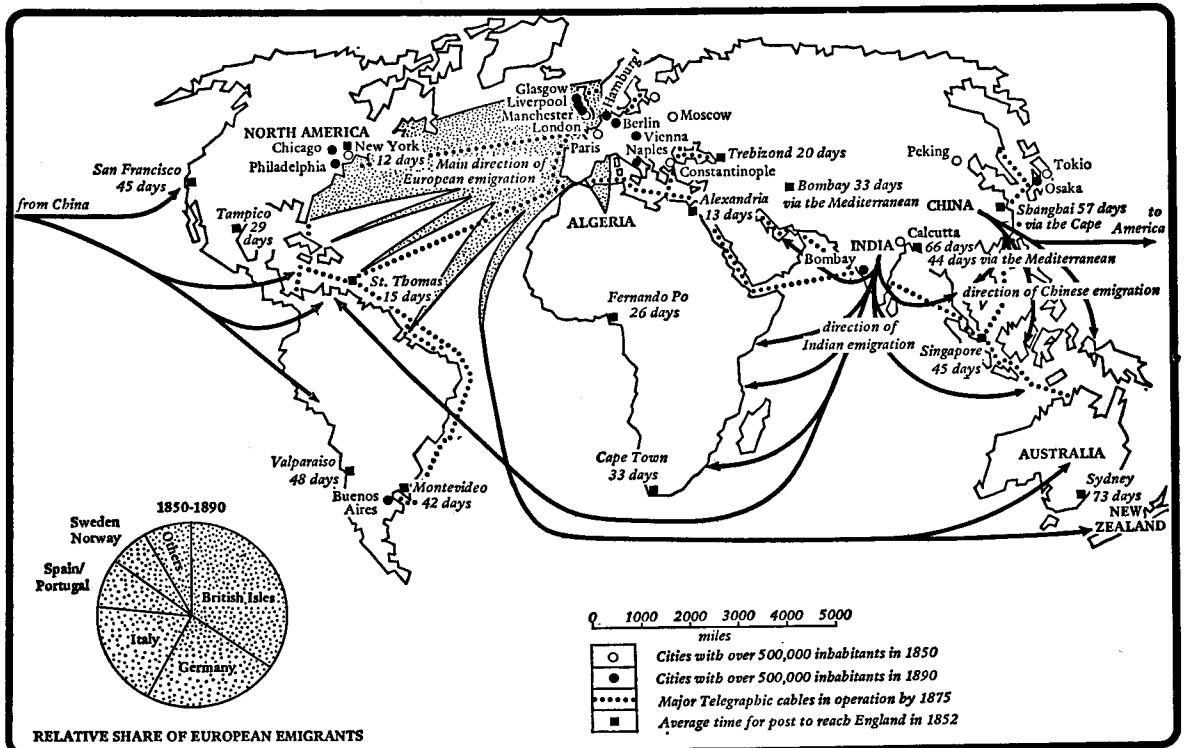
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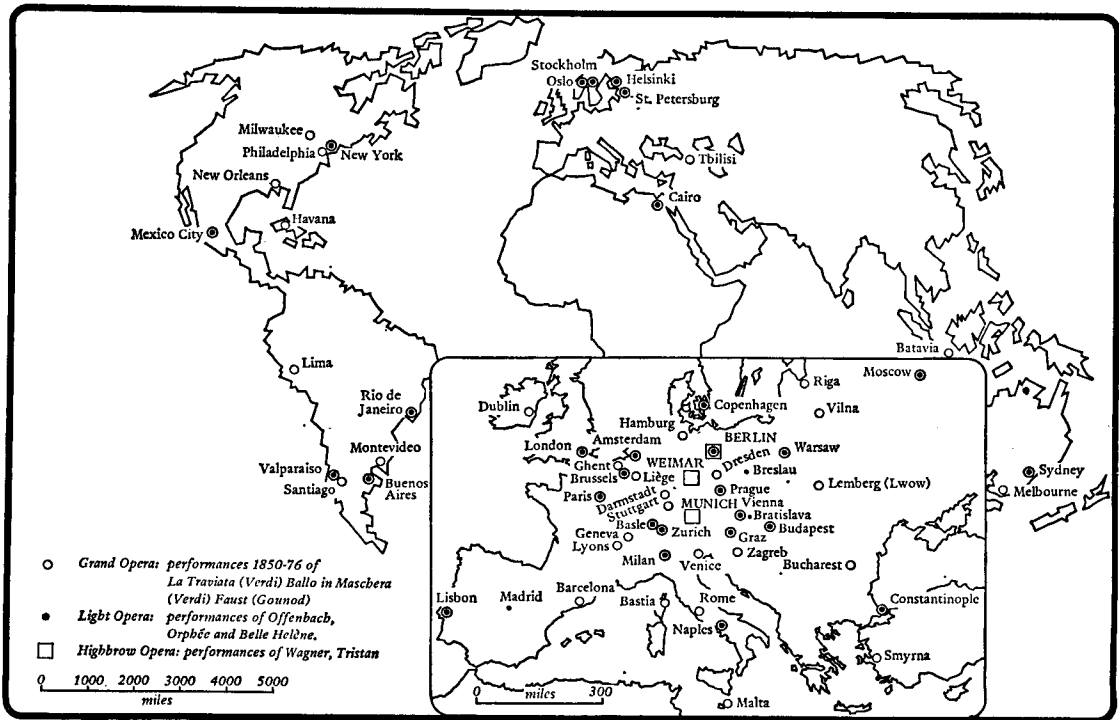
# 1880 Slavery and Serfdom in the Western World

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## Notes

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- 4 G. Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste* (London 1961), chapter 6. I have relied much on this valuable work, which brings to the study of art a hard-headed financial realism suitable to our period.
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- 4 Burckhardt, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

*The Age of Empire*  
*1875—1914*

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E. J. HOBSBAWM



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*To the students of Birkbeck College*

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## PREFACE

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Though written by a professional historian, this book is addressed not to other academics, but to all who wish to understand the world and who believe history is important for this purpose. Its object is not to tell readers exactly what happened in the world during the forty years before the First World War, though I hope it will give them some idea of the period. If they want to find out more, they can easily do so from the large and often excellent literature, much of which is easily available in English to anyone who takes an interest in history. Some of it is indicated in the guide to Further Reading.

What I have tried to do in this volume, as in the two volumes which preceded it (*The Age of Revolution 1789–1848* and *The Age of Capital 1848–1875*) is to understand and explain the nineteenth century and its place in history, to understand and explain a world in the process of revolutionary transformation, to trace the roots of our present back into the soil of the past and, perhaps above all, to see the past as a coherent whole rather than (as historical specialization so often forces us to see it) as an assembly of separate topics: the history of different states, of politics, of the economy, of culture or whatever. Ever since I began to be interested in history, I have always wanted to know how all these aspects of past (or present) life hang together, and why.

This book is therefore not (except incidentally) a narrative or a systematic exposition, and still less a display of scholarship. It is best read as the unfolding of an argument, or rather, the tracing of a basic theme through the various chapters. Readers must judge whether the attempt is convincing, though I have done my best to make it accessible to non-historians.

There is no way of acknowledging my debts to the many writers whose works I have pillaged, even as I often disagreed with them, and still less my debts to the ideas I have obtained over the years in conversation with colleagues and students. If they recognize their own ideas and observations, they can at least blame me for getting them or the facts wrong, as I have certainly done from time to time. I can,

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however, acknowledge those who made it possible to pull a long pre-occupation with this period together into a single book. The Collège de France enabled me to produce something like a first draft in the form of a course of thirteen lectures in 1982; I am grateful to this august institution and to Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie who instigated the invitation. The Leverhulme Trust gave me an Emeritus Fellowship in 1983-5, which allowed me to get research help; the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme and Clemens Heller in Paris, as well as the World Institute for Development Economics Research of the United Nations University and the Macdonnell Foundation, gave me the possibility of a few quiet weeks in 1986 to finish the text. Among the people who assisted me in research I am particularly grateful to Susan Haskins, Vanessa Marshall and Dr Jenna Park. Francis Haskell read the chapter on the arts, Alan Mackay those on the sciences, Pat Thane that on women's emancipation, and preserved me from some, but I am afraid not from all, error. André Schiffrin read the entire manuscript as a friend and exemplar of the educated non-expert to whom this book is addressed. I spent many years lecturing on European history to the students of Birkbeck College, University of London, and I doubt whether I would have been able to envisage a history of the nineteenth century in world history without this experience. So this book is dedicated to them.

HISTORY OF CIVILIZATION

*The Age of Empire*

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## OVERTURE

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*Memory is life. It is always carried by groups of living people, and therefore it is in permanent evolution. It is subject to the dialectics of remembering and forgetting, unaware of its successive deformations, open to all kinds of use and manipulation. Sometimes it remains latent for long periods, then suddenly revives. History is the always incomplete and problematic reconstruction of what is no longer there. Memory always belongs to our time and forms a lived bond with the eternal present; history is a representation of the past.*

Pierre Nora, 1984<sup>1</sup>

*Merely to recount the course of events, even on a world-wide scale, is unlikely to result in a better understanding of the forces at play in the world today unless we are aware at the same time of the underlying structural changes. What we require first of all is a new framework and new terms of reference. It is these that the present book will seek to provide.*

Geoffrey Barraclough, 1964<sup>2</sup>

### I

In the summer of 1913 a young lady graduated from secondary school in Vienna, capital of the empire of Austria–Hungary. This was still a fairly unusual achievement for girls in central Europe. To celebrate the occasion, her parents decided to offer her a journey abroad, and since it was unthinkable that a respectable young woman of eighteen should be exposed to danger and temptation alone, they looked for a suitable relative. Fortunately, among the various interrelated families which had advanced westwards to prosperity and education from various small towns in Poland and Hungary during the past generations, there was one which had done unusually well. Uncle Albert had built up a chain of stores in the Levant – Constantinople, Smyrna, Aleppo, Alexandria. In the early twentieth century there was plenty of business

to be done in the Ottoman Empire and the Middle East, and Austria had long been central Europe's business window on the orient. Egypt was both a living museum, suitable for cultural self-improvement, and a sophisticated community of the cosmopolitan European middle class, with whom communication was easily possible by means of the French language, which the young lady and her sisters had perfected at a boarding establishment in the neighbourhood of Brussels. It also, of course, contained the Arabs. Uncle Albert was happy to welcome his young relative, who travelled to Egypt on a steamer of the Lloyd Triestino, from Trieste, which was then the chief port of the Habsburg Empire and also, as it happened, the place of residence of James Joyce. The young lady was the present author's future mother.

Some years earlier a young man had also travelled to Egypt, but from London. His family background was considerably more modest. His father, who had migrated to Britain from Russian Poland in the 1870s, was a cabinet-maker by trade, who earned an insecure living in East London and Manchester, bringing up a daughter of his first marriage and eight children of the second, most of them already born in England, as best he could. Except for one son, none of them was gifted for business or drawn to it. Only one of the youngest had the chance to acquire much schooling, becoming a mining engineer in South America, which was then an informal part of the British Empire. All, however, were passionate in the pursuit of English language and culture, and anglicized themselves with enthusiasm. One became an actor, another carried on the family trade, one became a primary school teacher, two others joined the expanding public services in the form of the Post Office. As it happened Britain had recently (1882) occupied Egypt, and so one brother found himself representing a small part of the British Empire, namely the Egyptian Post and Telegraph Service, in the Nile delta. He suggested that Egypt would suit yet another of his brothers, whose main qualification for making his way through life would have served him excellently if he had not actually had to earn a living: he was intelligent, agreeable, musical and a fine all-round sportsman as well as a lightweight boxer of championship standard. In fact, he was exactly the sort of Englishman who would find and hold a post in a shipping office far more easily in 'the colonies' than anywhere else.

That young man was the author's future father, who thus met his future wife where the economics and politics of the Age of Empire, not to mention its social history, brought them together – presumably at the Sporting Club on the outskirts of Alexandria, near which they would establish their first home. It is extremely improbable that such



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an encounter would have happened in such a place, or would have led to marriage between two such people, in any period of history earlier than the one with which this book deals. Readers ought to be able to discover why.

However, there is a more serious reason for starting the present volume with an autobiographical anecdote. For all of us there is a twilight zone between history and memory; between the past as a generalized record which is open to relatively dispassionate inspection and the past as a remembered part of, or background to, one's own life. For individual human beings this zone stretches from the point where living family traditions or memories begin – say, from the earliest family photo which the oldest living family member can identify or explicate – to the end of infancy, when public and private destinies are recognized as inseparable and as mutually defining one another ('I met him shortly before the end of the war'; 'Kennedy must have died in 1963, because it was when I was still in Boston'). The length of this zone may vary, and so will the obscurity and fuzziness that characterizes it. But there is always such a no-man's land of time. It is by far the hardest part of history for historians, or for anyone else, to grasp. For the present writer, born towards the end of the First World War of parents who were, respectively, aged thirty-three and nineteen in 1914, the Age of Empire falls into this twilight zone.

But this is true not only of individuals, but of societies. The world we live in is still very largely a world made by men and women who grew up in the period with which this volume deals, or in its immediate shadow. Perhaps this is ceasing to be so as the twentieth century draws to its close – who can be certain? – but it was certainly true for the first two-thirds of our century.

Consider, for instance, a list of names of political persons who must be included among the movers and shapers of the twentieth century. In 1914 Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (Lenin) was forty-four years old, Joseph Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili (Stalin) thirty-five, Franklin Delano Roosevelt thirty, J. Maynard Keynes thirty-two, Adolf Hitler twenty-five, Konrad Adenauer (maker of the post-1945 German Federal Republic) thirty-eight. Winston Churchill was forty, Mahatma Gandhi forty-five, Jawaharlal Nehru twenty-five, Mao Tse-tung twenty-one, Ho Chi-minh twenty-two, the same age as Josip Broz (Tito) and Francisco Franco Bahamonde (General Franco of Spain), that is two years younger than Charles de Gaulle and nine years younger than Benito Mussolini. Consider figures of significance in the field of culture. A sample from a *Dictionary of Modern Thought* published in 1977 produces the following result:

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Persons born 1914 and after	23%
Persons active in 1880-1914 or adult in 1914	45%
Persons born 1900-14	17%
Persons active before 1880	15%

Quite patently men and women compiling such a compendium three-quarters of the way through the twentieth century still considered the Age of Empire as by far the most significant in the formation of the modern thought then current. Whether we agree with their judgment or not, this judgment is historically significant.

Hence not only the relatively few surviving individuals who have a direct link with the years before 1914 face the problem of how to look at the landscape of their private twilight, but so, more impersonally, does everyone who lives in the world of the 1980s, insofar as it has been shaped by the era which led up to the First World War. I mean not that the remoter past is of no significance to us, but that its relation to us is different. When dealing with remote periods we know that we confront them essentially as strangers and outsiders, rather like Western anthropologists setting out to investigate Papuan hill peoples. If they are geographically or chronologically, or emotionally, remote enough, such periods may survive exclusively through the inanimate relics of the dead: words and symbols, written, printed or engraved, material objects, images. Moreover, if we are historians, we know that what we write can be judged and corrected only by other such strangers, to whom 'the past is another country' also. We certainly start with the assumption of our own time, place and situation, including the propensity to reshape the past in our terms, to see what it has sharpened our eye to discern and only what our perspective allows us to recognize. Nevertheless, we go to work with the usual tools and materials of our trade, working on archival and other primary sources, reading an enormous quantity of secondary literature, threading our way through the accumulated debates and disagreements of generations of our predecessors, the changing fashions and phases of interpretation and interest, always curious, always (it is to be hoped) asking questions. But nothing much gets in our way except other contemporaries arguing as strangers about a past which is no longer part of memory. For even what we think we remember about the France of 1789 or the England of George III is what we have learned at second or fifth hand through pedagogues, official or informal.

Where historians try to come to grips with a period which has left surviving eyewitnesses, two quite different concepts of history clash, or, in the best of cases, supplement each other: the scholarly and the

## OVERTURE

existential, archive and personal memory. For everyone is a historian of his or her own consciously lived lifetime inasmuch as he or she comes to terms with it in the mind – an unreliable historian from most points of view, as anyone knows who has ventured into ‘oral history’, but one whose contribution is essential. Scholars who interview old soldiers or politicians will have already acquired more, and more reliable, information about what happened from print and paper, than their source has in his or her memory, but may nevertheless misunderstand it. And, unlike, say, the historian of the crusades, the historian of the Second World War can be corrected by those who, remembering, shake their head and tell him or her: ‘But it was not like that at all.’ Nevertheless, both the versions of history which thus confront one another are, in different senses, coherent constructions of the past, consciously held as such and at least potentially capable of definition.

But the history of the twilight zone is different. It is itself an incoherent, incompletely perceived image of the past, sometimes more shadowy, sometimes apparently precise, always transmitted by a mixture of learning and second-hand memory shaped by public and private tradition. For it is still part of us, but no longer quite within our personal reach. It forms something similar to those particoloured ancient maps filled with unreliable outlines and white spaces, framed by monsters and symbols. The monsters and symbols are magnified by the modern mass media, because the very fact that the twilight zone is important to us makes it central also to their preoccupations. Thanks to them such fragmentary and symbolic images have become lasting, at least in the western world: the *Titanic*, which retains all its power to make headlines three-quarters of a century after its sinking, is a striking example. And these images which flash into our mind when it is, for some reason or another, turned to the period which ended in the First World War are far more difficult to detach from a considered interpretation of the period than, say, those images and anecdotes which used to bring non-historians into supposed contact with a remoter past: Drake playing bowls as the Armada approached Britain, Marie-Antoinette’s diamond necklace or ‘Let them eat cake,’ Washington crossing the Delaware. None of these will affect the serious historian for a moment. They are outside us. But can we, even as professionals, be sure that we look at the mythologized images of the Age of Empire with an equally cold eye: the *Titanic*, the San Francisco earthquake, Dreyfus? Patently not, if the centenary of the Statue of Liberty is any guide.

More than any other, the Age of Empire cries out for demystification, just because we – and that includes the historians – are no longer in it, but do not know how much of it is still in us. This does not mean that it calls for debunking or muckraking (an activity it pioneered).

## II

The need for some sort of historical perspective is all the more urgent because people in the late twentieth century are indeed still passionately involved in the period which ended in 1914, probably just because August 1914 is one of the most undeniable 'natural breaks' in history. It was felt to be the end of an era at the time, and it is still felt to be so. It is quite possible to argue this feeling away, and to insist on the continuities and enjambments across the years of the First World War. After all, history is not like a bus-line on which the vehicle changes all its passengers and crew whenever it gets to the point marking its terminus. Nevertheless, if there are dates which are more than conveniences for purposes of periodization, August 1914 is one of them. It was felt to mark the end of the world made by and for the bourgeoisie. It marks the end of the 'long nineteenth century' with which historians have learned to operate, and which has been the subject of the three volumes of which this is the last.

No doubt that is why it has attracted historians, amateur and professional, writers on culture, literature and the arts, biographers, the makers of films and television programmes, and not least the makers of fashions, in astonishing numbers. I would guess that in the English-speaking world at least one title of significance – book or article – has appeared on the years from 1880 to 1914 every month for the past fifteen years. Most of them are addressed to historians or other specialists, for the period is not merely, as we have seen, crucial in the development of modern culture, but provides the frame for a large number of passionately pursued debates in history, national or international, mostly initiated in the years before 1914: on imperialism, on the development of labour and socialist movements, on the problem of Britain's economic decline, on the nature and origins of the Russian Revolution – to name but a few. For obvious reasons the best known among these concerns is the question of the origins of the First World War, and it has so far generated several thousand volumes and continues to produce literature at an impressive rate. It has remained alive, because the problem of the origins of world wars has unfortunately refused to go away since 1914. In fact, the link between the past and present concerns is nowhere more evident than in the history of the Age of Empire.

Leaving aside the purely monographic literature, most of the writers on the period can be divided into two classes: the backward lookers and the forward lookers. Each tends to concentrate on one of the two most obvious features of the period. In one sense, it seems extraordinarily remote and beyond return when seen across the impassable

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canyon of August 1914. At the same time, paradoxically, so much of what is still characteristic of the late twentieth century has its origin in the last thirty years before the First World War. Barbara Tuchman's *The Proud Tower*, a best-selling 'portrait of the world before the war (1890-1914)' is perhaps the most familiar example of the first genre; Alfred Chandler's study of the genesis of modern corporate management, *The Visible Hand*, may stand for the second.

In quantitative terms, and in terms of circulation, the backward lookers almost certainly prevail. The irrecoverable past presents a challenge to good historians, who know that it cannot be understood in anachronistic terms, but it also contains the enormous temptation of nostalgia. The least perceptive and most sentimental constantly try to recapture the attractions of an era which upper- and middle-class memories have tended to see through a golden haze: the so-called 'beautiful times' or *belle époque*. Naturally this approach has been congenial to entertainers and other media producers, to fashion-designers and others who cater to the big spenders. This is probably the version of the period most likely to be familiar to the public through cinema and television. It is quite unsatisfactory, though it undoubtedly catches one highly visible aspect of the period, which, after all, brought such terms as 'plutocracy' and 'leisure class' into the public discourse. One may debate whether it is more or less useless than the even more nostalgic, but intellectually more sophisticated, writers who hope to prove that paradise lost might not have been lost, but for some avoidable errors or unpredictable accidents without which there would have been no world war, no Russian Revolution, or whatever else is held to be responsible for the loss of the world before 1914.

Other historians are more concerned with the opposite of the great discontinuity, namely the fact that so much of what remains characteristic of our times originated, sometimes quite suddenly, in the decades before 1914. They seek these roots and anticipations of our time, which are indeed obvious. In politics, the labour and socialist parties which form the government or chief opposition in most states of western Europe are the children of the era from 1875 to 1914, and so are one branch of their family, the communist parties which govern the regimes of eastern Europe.\* So indeed are the politics of governments elected by democratic vote, the modern mass party and nationally organized mass labour union, and modern welfare legislation.

Under the name of 'modernism' the *avant garde* of this period took over most of twentieth-century high cultural output. Even today, when

\* The communist parties ruling in the non-European world were formed on their model, but after our period.

some *avant gardes* or other schools no longer accept this tradition, they still define themselves in terms of what they reject ('post-modernism'). Meanwhile the culture of everyday life is still dominated by three innovations of this period: the advertising industry in its modern form, the modern mass circulation newspaper or periodical, and (directly or through television) the moving photograph or film. Science and technology may have come a long way since 1875-1914, but in the sciences there is an evident continuity between the age of Planck, Einstein and the young Niels Bohr and the present. As for technology, the petrol-powered road-running automobiles and the flying-machines which appeared in our period, for the first time in history, still dominate our landscapes and townscapes. The telephones and wireless communication invented at that time have been improved but not superseded. It is possible that, in retrospect, the very last decades of the twentieth century may be seen no longer to fit into the framework established before 1914, but for most purposes of orientation it will still serve.

But it cannot be enough to present the history of the past in such terms. No doubt the question of continuity and discontinuity between the Age of Empire and the present still matters, since our emotions are still directly engaged with this section of the historical past. Nevertheless, from the historian's point of view, taken in isolation, continuity and discontinuity are trivial matters. But how are we to situate this period? For, after all, the relation of past to present is central to the preoccupations both of those who write and of those who read history. Both want, or should want, to understand how the past has become the present, and both want to understand the past, the chief obstacle being that it is *not* like the present.

*The Age of Empire*, though self-contained as a book, is the third and last volume of what has turned out to be a general survey of the nineteenth century in world history – that is, the historians' 'long nineteenth century' which runs from, say, 1776 to 1914. It was not the author's original intention to embark on anything so crazily ambitious. But insofar as three volumes written at intervals over the years and, except for the last, not intentionally conceived as parts of a single project, have any coherence, it is because they share a common conception of what the nineteenth century was about. And insofar as this common conception has succeeded in linking *The Age of Revolution* to *The Age of Capital* and both in turn to *The Age of Empire* – and I hope it has – it should also be helpful in linking the Age of Empire to what came after it.

Essentially the central axis round which I have tried to organize the history of the century is the triumph and transformation of capitalism

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in the historically specific forms of bourgeois society in its liberal version. The history begins with the decisive double breakthrough of the first industrial revolution in Britain, which established the limitless capacity of the productive system pioneered by capitalism for economic growth and global penetration, and the Franco-American political revolution, which established the leading models for the public institutions of bourgeois society, supplemented by the virtually simultaneous emergence of its most characteristic – and linked – theoretical systems: classical political economy and utilitarian philosophy. The first volume of this history, *The Age of Revolution 1789–1848*, is structured round this concept of a ‘dual revolution’.

It led to the confident conquest of the globe by the capitalist economy, carried by its characteristic class, the ‘bourgeoisie’, and under the banners of its characteristic intellectual expression, the ideology of liberalism. This is the main theme of the second volume, which covers the brief period between the 1848 revolutions and the onset of the 1870s Depression, when the prospects of bourgeois society and its economy seemed relatively unproblematic, because their actual triumphs were so striking. For either the political resistances of ‘old regimes’, against which the French Revolution had been made, were overcome, or these regimes themselves looked like accepting the economic, institutional and cultural hegemony of a triumphant bourgeois progress. Economically, the difficulties of an industrialization and economic growth limited by the narrowness of its pioneer base were overcome, not least by the spread of industrial transformation and the enormous widening of world markets. Socially, the explosive discontents of the poor during the Age of Revolution were consequently defused. In short, the major obstacles to continued and presumably unlimited bourgeois progress seemed to have been removed. The possible difficulties arising from the inner contradictions of this progress did not yet seem to be cause for immediate anxiety. In Europe there were fewer socialists and social revolutionaries in this period than at any other.

The Age of Empire, on the other hand, is penetrated and dominated by these contradictions. It was an era of unparalleled peace in the western world, which engendered an era of equally unparalleled world wars. It was an era of, in spite of appearances, growing social stability within the zone of developed industrial economies, which provided the small bodies of men who, with almost contemptuous ease, could conquer and rule over vast empires, but which inevitably generated on its outskirts the combined forces of rebellion and revolution that were to engulf it. Since 1914 the world has been dominated by the fear, and sometimes by the reality, of global war and the fear (or hope) of

revolution – both based on the historic situations which emerged directly out of the Age of Empire.

It was the era when massive organized movements of the class of wage-workers created by, and characteristic of, industrial capitalism suddenly emerged and demanded the overthrow of capitalism. But they emerged in highly flourishing and expanding economies, and, in the countries in which they were strongest, at a time when probably capitalism offered them slightly less miserable conditions than before. It was an era when the political and cultural institutions of bourgeois liberalism were extended, or about to be extended, to the working masses living in bourgeois societies, including even (for the first time in history) its women, but the extension was at the cost of forcing its central class, the liberal bourgeoisie, on to the margins of political power. For the electoral democracies, which were the inevitable product of liberal progress, liquidated bourgeois liberalism as a political force in most countries. It was an era of profound identity crisis and transformation for a bourgeoisie whose traditional moral foundation crumbled under the very pressure of its own accumulations of wealth and comfort. Its very existence as a class of masters was undermined by the transformation of its own economic system. Juridical persons (i.e. large business organizations or corporations), owned by shareholders, employing hired managers and executives, began to replace real persons and their families owning and managing their own enterprises.

There is no end to such paradoxes. The history of the Age of Empire is filled with them. Indeed, its basic pattern, as seen in this book, is of the society and world of bourgeois liberalism advancing towards what has been called its 'strange death' as it reaches its apogee, victim of the very contradictions inherent in its advance.

What is more, the culture and intellectual life of the period show a curious awareness of this pattern of reversal, of the imminent death of one world and the need for another. But what gave the period its peculiar tone and savour was that the coming cataclysms were both expected, misunderstood and disbelieved. World war would come, but nobody, even the best of the prophets, really understood the kind of war it would be. And when the world finally stood on the brink, the decision-makers rushed towards the abyss in utter disbelief. The great new socialist movements were revolutionary; but for most of them revolution was, in some sense, the logical and necessary outcome of bourgeois democracy, which gave the multiplying many the decision over the diminishing few. And for those among them who expected actual insurrection, it was a battle whose aim, in the first instance, could only be to institute bourgeois democracy as a necessary preliminary to something more advanced. Revolutionaries thus remained within the



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Age of Empire, even as they prepared to transcend it.

In the sciences and the arts the orthodoxies of the nineteenth century were being overthrown, but never did more men and women, newly educated and intellectually conscious, believe more firmly in what small *avant gardes* were even then rejecting. If public opinion pollsters in the developed world before 1914 had counted up hope against foreboding, optimists against pessimists, hope and optimism would pretty certainly have prevailed. Paradoxically, they would probably have collected proportionately more votes in the new century, as the western world approached 1914, than they might have done in the last decades of the old. But, of course, that optimism included not only those who believed in the future of capitalism, but also those who looked forward with hope to its supersession.

In itself there is nothing about the historical pattern of reversal, of development undermining its own foundations, which is novel or peculiar to this period as distinct from any other. This is how endogenous historical transformations work. They are still working this way. What is peculiar about the long nineteenth century is that the titanic and revolutionary forces of this period which changed the world out of recognition were transported on a specific, and historically peculiar and fragile vehicle. Just as the transformation of the world economy was, for a crucial but necessarily brief period, identified with the fortunes of a single medium-sized state – Great Britain – so the development of the contemporary world was temporarily identified with that of nineteenth-century liberal bourgeois society. The very extent to which the ideas, values, assumptions and institutions associated with it appeared to triumph in the Age of Capital indicates the historically transient nature of that triumph.

This book surveys the moment in history when it became clear that the society and civilization created by and for the western liberal bourgeoisie represented not the permanent form of the modern industrial world, but only one phase of its early development. The economic structures which sustain the twentieth-century world, even when they are capitalist, are no longer those of 'private enterprise' in the sense businessmen would have accepted in 1870. The revolution whose memory dominates the world since the First World War is no longer the French Revolution of 1789. The culture which penetrates it is no longer bourgeois culture as it would have been understood before 1914. The continent which overwhelmingly constituted its economic, intellectual and military force then, no longer does so now. Neither history in general, nor the history of capitalism in particular, ended in 1914, though a rather large part of the world was, by revolution, moved into a fundamentally different type of economy. The Age of Empire,

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or, as Lenin called it, Imperialism, was plainly not 'the last stage' of capitalism; but then Lenin never actually claimed that it was. He merely called it, in the earliest version of his influential booklet, 'the latest' stage of capitalism.\* And yet one can understand why observers – and not only observers hostile to bourgeois society – might feel that the era of world history through which they lived in the last few decades before the First World War was more than just another phase of development. In one way or another it seemed to anticipate and prepare a world different in kind from the past. And so it has turned out since 1914, even if not in the way expected or predicted by most of the prophets. There is no return to the world of liberal bourgeois society. The very calls to revive the spirit of nineteenth-century capitalism in the late twentieth century testify to the impossibility of doing so. For better or worse, since 1914 the century of the bourgeoisie belongs to history.

\* It was renamed 'the highest stage' after his death.

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## EPILOGUE

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*Wirklich, ich lebe in finsternen Zeiten!  
Das arglose Wort ist töricht. Eine glatte Stirn  
Deutet auf Unempfindlichkeit hin. Der Lachende  
Hat die furchtbare Nachricht  
Nur noch nicht empfangen.*

Bertolt Brecht, 1937–38<sup>1</sup>

*Preceding decades were for the first time perceived as a long, almost golden age of uninterrupted, steady forward movement. Just as according to Hegel, we begin to understand an era only as the curtain is rung down on it ('the owl of Minerva only spreads its wings with the falling of dusk'), so can we apparently bring ourselves to acknowledge the positive features only as we enter a subsequent one, whose troubles we now wish to underline by painting a strong contrast with what came before.*

Albert O. Hirschman, 1986<sup>2</sup>

### I

If the word 'catastrophe' had been mentioned among the members of the European middle classes before 1913, it would almost certainly have been in connection with one of the few traumatic events in which men and women like themselves were involved in the course of a lengthy, and in general tranquil, lifetime: say, the burning of the Karltheater in Vienna in 1881 during a performance of Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffmann*, in which almost 1500 lives were lost, or the sinking of the *Titanic* with a similar number of victims. The much greater catastrophes which affect the lives of the poor – like the 1908 earthquake in Messina, so much vaster and more neglected than the more modest tremors of San Francisco (1905) – and the persistent risks to life, limb and health which always dogged the existence of the labouring classes, are still apt to attract less public attention.

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After 1914 it is a safe bet that the word suggested other and greater calamities even to those most immune to them in their personal lives. The First World War did not turn out to be 'The Last Days of Humanity', as Karl Kraus called it in his denunciatory quasi-drama, but nobody who lived an adult life both before and after 1914-18 anywhere in Europe, and increasingly in large stretches of the non-European world, could fail to observe that times had changed dramatically.

The most obvious and immediate change was that world history now appeared to proceed by a series of seismic upheavals and human cataclysms. Never did the pattern of progress or continuous change appear less plausible than in the lifetime of those who lived through two world wars, two global bouts of revolutions following each of the wars, a period of wholesale and partly revolutionary global decolonization, two bouts of massive expulsions of peoples culminating in genocide, and at least one economic crisis so severe as to raise doubts about the very future of those parts of capitalism not already overthrown by revolution, - upheavals which affected continents and countries quite remote from the zone of war and European political upheaval. A person born in, say, 1900 would have experienced all these at first hand, or through the mass media which made them immediately accessible, before he or she reached the age of pensionable retirement. And, of course, the pattern of history by upheaval was to continue.

Before 1914 virtually the only quantities measured in millions, outside astronomy, were populations of countries and the data of production, commerce and finance. Since 1914 we have become used to measuring the numbers of victims in such magnitudes: the casualties of even localized wars (Spain, Korea, Vietnam) - larger ones are measured in tens of millions - the numbers of those driven into forced migration or exile (Greeks, Germans, Moslems in the Indian subcontinent, kulaks), even the number massacred in genocide (Armenians, Jews), not to mention those killed by famine or epidemics. Since such human magnitudes escape precise recording or elude the grasp of the human mind, they are hotly debated. But the debates are about *millions* more or less. Nor are these astronomic figures to be entirely explained, and still less justified, by the rapid growth of the world population in our century. Most of them occurred in areas which were not growing all that fast.

Hecatombs on this scale were beyond the range of imagination in the nineteenth century, and those which actually occurred, took place in the world of backwardness or barbarism outside the range of progress and 'modern civilization', and were surely destined to retreat in the face of universal, if uneven, advance. The atrocities of Congo and Amazon, modest in scale by modern standards, so shocked the Age of

Empire – witness Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* – just because they appeared as regressions of civilized men into savagery. The state of affairs to which we have become accustomed, in which torture has once again become part of police methods in countries priding themselves on their record of civility, would not merely have profoundly repelled political opinion, but would have been, justifiably, regarded as a relapse into barbarism, which went against every observable historical trend of development since the mid-eighteenth century.

After 1914 mass catastrophe, and increasingly the methods of barbarism, became an integral and expected part of the civilized world, so much so that it masked the continued and striking advances of technology and the human capacity to produce, and even the undeniable improvements in human social organization in many parts of the world, until these became quite impossible to overlook during the huge forward leap of the world economy in the third quarter of the twentieth century. In terms of the material improvement of the lot of humanity, not to mention of the human understanding and control over nature, the case for seeing the history of the twentieth century as progress is actually rather more compelling than it was in the nineteenth. For even as Europeans died and fled in their millions, the survivors were becoming more numerous, taller, healthier, longer-lived. And most of them lived better. But the reasons why we have got out of the habit of thinking of our history as progress are obvious. For even when twentieth-century progress is most undeniable, prediction suggests not a continued ascent, but the possibility, perhaps even the imminence, of some catastrophe: another and more lethal world war, an ecological disaster, a technology whose triumphs may make the world uninhabitable by the human species, or whatever current shape the nightmare may take. We have been taught by the experience of our century to live in the expectation of apocalypse.

But for the educated and comfortable members of the bourgeois world who lived through this era of catastrophe and social convulsion, it seemed to be, in the first instance, not a fortuitous cataclysm, something like a global hurricane which impartially devastated everything in its path. It seemed to be directed specifically at their social, political and moral order. Its probable outcome, which bourgeois liberalism was powerless to prevent, was the social revolution of the masses. In Europe the war produced not only the collapse or crisis of every state and regime east of the Rhine and the western edge of the Alps, but also the first regime which set out, deliberately and systematically, to turn this collapse into the global overthrow of capitalism, the destruction of the bourgeoisie and the establishment of a socialist society. This was the Bolshevik regime brought to power in Russia by the collapse of tsarism.

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As we have seen, mass movements of the proletariat dedicated to this aim in theory were already in existence in most parts of the developed world, although politicians in parliamentary countries had concluded that they provided no real threat to the status quo. But the combination of war, collapse and the Russian Revolution made the danger immediate and, almost, overwhelming.

The danger of 'Bolshevism' dominates not only the history of the years immediately following the Russian Revolution of 1917, but the entire history of the world since that date. It has given even its international conflicts for long periods the appearance of civil and ideological war. In the late twentieth century it still dominated the rhetoric of super-power confrontation, at least unilaterally, even though the most cursory look at the world of the 1980s showed that it simply did not fit into the image of a single global revolution about to overwhelm what international jargon called the 'developed market economies', still less one orchestrated from a single centre and aiming at the construction of a single monolithic socialist system unwilling to coexist with capitalism or incapable of doing so. The history of the world since the First World War took shape in the shadow of Lenin, imagined or real, as the history of the western world in the nineteenth century took shape in the shadow of the French Revolution. In both cases it eventually moved out of that shadow, but not entirely. Just as politicians even in 1914, speculated about whether the mood of the pre-war years had recalled 1848, so in the 1980s every overthrow of some regime anywhere in the west or the Third World evokes hopes or fears of 'Marxist power'.

The world did not turn socialist, even though in 1917-20 this was regarded as possible, even in the long run as inevitable, not only by Lenin but, at least for a moment, by those who represented and governed bourgeois regimes. For a few months even European capitalists, or at least their intellectual spokesmen and administrators, seemed resigned to euthanasia, as they faced socialist working-class movements enormously strengthened since 1914, and indeed, in some countries like Germany and Austria, constituting the only organized and potentially state-sustaining forces left in being by the collapse of the old regimes. Anything was better than Bolshevism, even peaceful abdication. The extensive debates (mainly in 1919) on how much of the economies were to be socialized, how they were to be socialized, and how much was to be conceded to the new powers of the proletariats were not purely tactical manoeuvres to gain time. They merely turned out to have been such when the period of serious danger to the system, real or imagined, proved to have been so brief that nothing drastic needed to be done after all.

In retrospect we can see that the alarm was exaggerated. The moment

of potential world revolution left behind nothing but a single communist regime in an extraordinarily weakened and backward country whose main asset lay in the vast size and resources that were to make her into a political super-power. It also left behind the considerable potential of anti-imperialist, modernizing and peasant revolution, at that time mainly in Asia, which recognized its affinities with the Russian Revolution, and those parts of the now divided pre-1914 socialist and labour movements which threw in their lot with Lenin. In industrial countries these communist movements generally represented a minority of the labour movements until the Second World War. As the future was to demonstrate, the economies and societies of the 'developed market economies' were remarkably tough. Had they not been, they could hardly have emerged without social revolution from some thirty years of historical gales which might have been expected to wreck unseaworthy vessels. The twentieth century has been full of social revolutions, and there may well be more of them before it ends; but the developed industrial societies have been more immune to them than any others, except when revolution came to them as the by-product of military defeat or conquest.

Revolution thus left the main bastions of world capitalism standing, though for a while even their defenders thought they were about to crumble. The old order fought off the challenge. But it did so – it *had* to do so – by turning itself into something very different from what it had been in 1914. For after 1914, faced with what an eminent liberal historian called 'the world crisis' (Elie Halévy), bourgeois liberalism was entirely at a loss. It could abdicate or be swept away. Alternatively, it could assimilate itself to something like the non-Bolshevik, non-revolutionary, 'reformist' social democratic parties which actually emerged in western Europe as the chief guarantors of social and political continuity after 1917, and consequently turned from parties of opposition into parties of potential or actual government. In short, it could disappear or make itself unrecognizable. But in its old form it could no longer cope.

Giovanni Giolitti (1842–1928) of Italy (see pp. 87, 97, 102 above) is an example of the first fate. As we have seen, he had been brilliantly successful at 'managing' the Italian politics of the early 1900s: conciliating and taming labour, buying political support, wheeling and dealing, conceding, avoiding confrontations. In the socially revolutionary post-war situation of his country these tactics utterly failed him. The stability of bourgeois society was re-established by means of the armed middle-class gangs of 'nationalists' and fascists, literally waging the class war against a labour movement incapable of itself making a revolution. The (liberal) politicians supported them, vainly

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hoping to be able to integrate them into their system. In 1922 the fascists took over as government, after which democracy, parliament, parties and the old liberal politicians were eliminated. The Italian case was merely one among many. Between 1920 and 1939 parliamentary democratic systems virtually disappeared from most European states, non-communist as well as communist.\* The fact speaks for itself. For a generation liberalism in Europe seemed doomed.

John Maynard Keynes, also discussed above (see pp. 177, 184), is an example of the second choice, all the more interesting because he actually remained all his life a supporter of the British Liberal Party and a class-conscious member of what he called his class, 'the educated bourgeoisie'. As a young economist Keynes had been almost quint-essentially orthodox. He believed, rightly, that the First World War was both pointless and incompatible with a liberal economy, not to mention with bourgeois civilization. As a professional adviser to wartime governments after 1914, he favoured the least possible interruption of 'business as usual'. Again, quite logically, he saw the great (Liberal) war-leader Lloyd George as leading Britain to economic perdition by subordinating everything else to the achievement of military victory.† He was horrified but not surprised to see large parts of Europe and what he regarded as European civilization collapse in defeat and revolution. Once again correctly, he concluded that an irresponsible politicking peace treaty imposed by the victors would jeopardize what chances of restoring German, and therefore European, capitalist stability on a liberal basis. However, faced with the irrevocable disappearance of the pre-war *belle époque* which he had so much enjoyed with his friends from Cambridge and Bloomsbury, Keynes henceforth devoted all his considerable intellectual brilliance, ingenuity and gifts of style and propaganda to finding a way of saving capitalism from itself.

He consequently found himself revolutionizing economics, the social science most wedded to the market economy in the Age of Empire, and which had avoided feeling that sense of crisis so evident in other social sciences (see pp. 270, 271 above). Crisis, first political and then economic, was the foundation of the Keynesian rethinking of liberal orthodoxies. He became a champion of an economy managed and controlled by the state such as would, in spite of Keynes' evident dedication to capitalism,

\* In 1939, of the twenty-seven states of Europe, the only ones which could be described as parliamentary democracies were the United Kingdom, the Irish Free State, France, Belgium, Switzerland, the Netherlands and the four Scandinavian states (Finland only just). Of these all but the United Kingdom, the Irish Free State, Sweden and Switzerland soon disappeared temporarily under occupation by or alliance with fascist Germany.

† His attitude to the Second World War, fought against fascist Germany, was naturally very different.



have been regarded as the ante-chamber of socialism by every ministry of finance in every developed industrial economy before 1914.

Keynes is worth singling out because he formulated what was to be the most intellectually and politically influential way of saying that capitalist society could only survive if capitalist states controlled, managed and even planned much of the general shape of their economies, if necessary turning themselves into mixed public/private economies. The lesson was congenial after 1944 to reformist, social democratic and radical-democratic ideologists and governments, who took it up with enthusiasm, insofar as they had not, as in Scandinavia, pioneered such ideas independently. For the lesson that capitalism on the pre-1914 liberal terms was dead was learned almost universally in the period of the two world wars and the world slump, even by those who refused to give it new theoretical labels. For forty years after the early 1930s the intellectual supporters of pure free-market economics were an isolated minority, apart from businessmen whose perspective always makes it difficult to recognize the best interests of their system as a whole, in proportion as it concentrates their minds on the best interests of their particular firm or industry.

The lesson had to be learned, because the alternative in the period of the Great Slump of the 1930s was not a market-induced recovery, but collapse. This was not, as revolutionaries hopefully thought, the 'final crisis' of capitalism, but it was probably the only genuinely system-endangering economic crisis so far in the history of an economic system which operates essentially through cyclical fluctuations.

Thus the years between the start of the First and the aftermath of the Second World War were a period of extraordinary crises and convulsions in history. They can best be regarded as the era when the world pattern of the Age of Empire collapsed under the force of the explosions it had been quietly generating in the long years of peace and prosperity. What collapsed was clear: the liberal world system and nineteenth-century bourgeois society as the norm to which, as it were, any kind of 'civilization' aspired. This, after all, was the era of fascism. What the shape of the future would be remained unclear until the middle of the century, and even then the new developments, though perhaps predictable, were so unlike what people had grown accustomed to in the era of convulsions that they took almost a generation to recognize what was happening.

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### II

The period which succeeded this era of collapse and transition, and which still continues, is probably, in terms of the social transformations which affect the ordinary men and women of the world – growing in numbers at a rate unprecedented even in the previous history of the industrializing world – the most revolutionary ever experienced by the human race. For the first time since the stone age the world population was ceasing to consist of people who lived by agriculture and livestock. In all parts of the globe except (as yet) sub-Saharan Africa and the southern quadrant of Asia, peasants were now a minority, in developed countries a tiny minority. This happened in a matter of a single generation. Consequently the world – and not only the old ‘developed’ countries – became urban, while economic development, including major industrialization, was internationalized or globally redistributed in a manner inconceivable before 1914. Contemporary technology, thanks to the internal-combustion engine, the transistor, the pocket calculator, the omni-visible aeroplane, not to mention the modest bicycle, has penetrated the remotest corners of the planet, which are accessible to commerce in a way which few could have imagined even in 1939. Social structures, at least in the developed societies of western capitalism, have been dramatically shaken, including that of the traditional family and household. It is now possible to recognize in retrospect how much of what made nineteenth-century bourgeois society function was in fact inherited and taken over from a past which the very processes of its development were bound to destroy. All this has happened within a, by historical standards, incredibly brief period – within the memory of men and women born during the Second World War – as the product of the most massive and extraordinary boom of world economic expansion ever experienced. A century after Marx’s and Engels’ *Communist Manifesto* its predictions of the economic and social effects of capitalism seemed to be realized – but not, in spite of the rule of a third of humanity by their disciples, the overthrow of capitalism by the proletariat.

This period is clearly one in which nineteenth-century bourgeois society and all that went with it belong to a past that no longer immediately determines the present, though, of course, both the nineteenth century and the late twentieth are part of the same long period of the revolutionary transformation of humanity – and nature – which became recognizably revolutionary in the last quarter of the eighteenth. Historians may notice the odd coincidence that the super-boom of the twentieth century occurred exactly one hundred years after the great mid-nineteenth-century boom (1850–73, 1950–73), and consequently

the late-twentieth-century period of world economic troubles since 1973, began just one hundred years after the Great Depression with which the present book started. But there is no relation between these facts, unless someone were to discover some cyclical mechanism of the economy's movement which would produce such a neat chronological repetition; and this is rather improbable. Most of us do not want to or need to go back to the 1880s to explain what was troubling the world in the 1980s or 1990s.

And yet the world of the late twentieth century is still shaped by the bourgeois century, and in particular by the Age of Empire, which has been the subject of this volume. Shaped in the literal sense. Thus, for instance, the world financial arrangements which were to provide the international framework for the global boom of the third quarter of this century were negotiated in the middle 1940s by men who had been adult in 1914, and who were utterly dominated by the past twenty-five years' experience of the Age of Empire's disintegration. The last important statesmen or national leaders who had been adults in 1914 died in the 1970s (eg. Mao, Tito, Franco, de Gaulle). But, more significantly, today's world was shaped by what one might call the historical landscape left behind by the Age of Empire and its collapse.

The most obvious piece of this heritage is the division of the world into socialist countries (or countries claiming to be such) and the rest. The shadow of Karl Marx presides over a third of the human race because of the developments we have tried to sketch in chapters 3, 5 and 12. Whatever one might have predicted about the future of the land-mass stretching from the China seas to the middle of Germany, plus a few areas in Africa and in the Americas, it is quite certain that regimes claiming to realize the prognoses of Karl Marx could not possibly have been among the futures envisaged for them until the emergence of mass socialist labour movements, whose example and ideology would in turn inspire the revolutionary movements of backward and dependent or colonial regions.

An equally obvious piece of the heritage is the very globalization of the world's political pattern. If the United Nations of the late twentieth century contain a considerable numerical majority of states from what came to be called the 'Third World' (and incidentally states out of sympathy with the 'western' powers), it is because they are, overwhelmingly, the relics of the division of the world among the imperial powers in the Age of Empire. Thus the decolonization of the French Empire has produced about twenty new states, that of the British Empire many more; and, at least in Africa (which at the time of writing consists of over fifty nominally independent and sovereign entities), all of them reproduce the frontiers drawn by conquest and inter-imperialist

negotiation. Again, but for the developments of that period, it was hardly to be expected that the great bulk of them would at the end of this century conduct the affairs of their educated strata and governments in English and French.

Somewhat less obvious an inheritance from the Age of Empire is that all these states should be described, and often describe themselves, as 'nations'. This is not only because, as I have tried to show, the ideology of 'nation' and 'nationalism', a nineteenth-century European product, could be used as an ideology of colonial liberation, and was imported as such by members of westernized elites of colonial peoples, but also because, as chapter 6 has argued, the concept of the 'nation-state' in this period became available to groups of *any* size which chose so to describe themselves, and not only, as the mid-nineteenth-century pioneers of 'the principle of nationality' took for granted, to medium or large peoples. For most of the states that have emerged to the world since the end of the nineteenth century (and which have, since President Wilson, been given the status of 'nations') were of modest size and/or population, and, since the onset of decolonization, often of tiny size.\* Insofar as nationalism has penetrated outside the old 'developed' world, or insofar as non-European politics have become assimilated to nationalism, the heritage of the Age of Empire is still present.

It is equally present in the transformation of traditional western family relations, and especially in the emancipation of women. No doubt these transformations have been on an altogether more gigantic scale since the mid-century than ever before, but in fact it was during the Age of Empire that the 'new woman' first appeared as a significant phenomenon, and that political and social mass movements dedicated, among other things, to the emancipation of women became political forces: notably the labour and socialist movements. Women's movements in the west may have entered a new and more dynamic phase in the 1960s, perhaps largely as a result of the much increased entry of women, and especially married women, into paid employment outside the home, but it was only a phase in a major historical development which can be traced back to our period, and for practical purposes, not earlier.

Moreover, as this book has tried to make clear, the Age of Empire saw the birth of most of what is still characteristic of the modern urban society of mass culture, from the most international forms of spectator sport to press and film. Even technically the modern media are not fundamental innovations, but developments which have made more

\* Twelve of the African states in the early 1980s had populations of less than 600,000, two of them of less than 100,000.

universally accessible the two basic devices introduced during the Age of Empire: the mechanical reproduction of sound and the moving photograph. The era of Jacques Offenbach has no continuity with the present comparable to the era of the young Fox, Zukor, Goldwyn and 'His Master's Voice'.

### III

It is not difficult to discover other ways in which our lives are still formed by, or are continuations of, the nineteenth century in general and the Age of Empire in particular. Any reader could no doubt lengthen the list. But is this the main reflection suggested by looking back at nineteenth-century history? For it is still difficult, if not impossible, to look back dispassionately on that century which created world history because it created the modern capitalist world economy. For Europeans it carried a particular charge of emotion, because, more than any other, it was the European era in the world's history, and for the British among them it is unique because, and not only economically speaking, Britain was at its core. For North Americans it was the century when the USA ceased to be part of Europe's periphery. For the rest of the world's peoples it was the era when all the past history, however long and distinguished, came to a necessary halt. What has happened to them, or what they have done, since 1914 is implicit in what happened to them between the first industrial revolution and 1914.

It was a century which transformed the world – not more than our own century has done, but more strikingly, inasmuch as such revolutionary and continuous transformation was then new. Looking back, we can see this century of the bourgeoisie and of revolution suddenly heaving into view, like Nelson's battle-fleet getting ready for action, like it even in what we do not see: the kidnapped crews who manned them, short, poor, whipped and drunk, living on worm-eaten rusks. Looking back we can recognize that those who made it, and increasingly those growing masses who participated in it in the 'developed' west, knew that it was destined for extraordinary achievements, and thought that it was destined to solve all the major problems of humanity, to remove all the obstacles in the path of their solution.

In no century before or since have practical men and women had such high, such utopian, expectations for life on this earth: universal peace, universal culture by means of a single world language, science which would not merely probe but actually answer the most fundamental questions of the universe, the emancipation of women from

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all their past history, the emancipation of all humanity through the emancipation of the workers, sexual liberation, a society of plenty, a world in which each contributed according to their abilities and received what they needed. These were not only dreams of revolutionaries. Utopia through progress was in fundamental ways built into the century. Oscar Wilde was not joking when he said that no map of the world which did not contain Utopia was worth having. He was speaking for Cobden the free trader as well as for Fourier the socialist, for President Grant as well as for Marx (who rejected not utopian aims, but only utopian blue-prints), for Saint-Simon, whose utopia of 'industrialism' can be assigned neither to capitalism nor to socialism, because it can be claimed by both. But the novelty about the most characteristic nineteenth-century utopias was that in them history would *not* come to a stop.

Bourgeois expected an era of endless improvement, material, intellectual and moral, through liberal progress; proletarians, or those who saw themselves as speaking for them, expected it through revolution. But both expected it. And both expected it, not through some historic automatism, but through effort and struggle. The artists who expressed the cultural aspirations of the bourgeois century most profoundly, and became, as it were, the voices articulating its ideals, were those like Beethoven, who was seen as the genius who fought through to victory after struggle, whose music overcame the dark forces of destiny, whose choral symphony culminated in the triumph of the liberated human spirit.

In the Age of Empire there were, as we have seen, voices – and they were both profound and influential among the bourgeois classes – who foresaw different outcomes. But, on the whole, the era seemed, for most people in the west, to come closer than any before to the promise of the century. To its liberal promise, by material improvement, education and culture; to its revolutionary promise, by the emergence, the massed strength and the prospect of the inevitable future triumph of the new labour and socialist movements. For some, as this book has tried to show, the Age of Empire was one of growing uneasiness and fear. For most men and women in the world transformed by the bourgeoisie it was almost certainly an age of hope.

It is on this hope that we can now look back. We can still share it, but no longer without scepticism and uncertainty. We have seen too many promises of utopia realized without producing the expected results. Are we not living in an age when, in the most advanced countries, modern communications, means of transport and sources of energy have abolished the distinction between town and country, which was once thought achievable only in a society that had solved virtually

all its problems? But ours demonstrably has not. The twentieth century has seen too many moments of liberation and social ecstasy to have much confidence in their permanence. There is room for hope, for human beings are hoping animals. There is even room for great hopes for, in spite of appearances and prejudices to the contrary, the actual achievement of the twentieth century in material and intellectual progress – hardly in moral and cultural progress – is extraordinarily impressive and quite undeniable.

Is there still room for the greatest of all hopes, that of creating a world in which free men and women, emancipated from fear and material need, will live the good life together in a good society? Why not? The nineteenth century taught us that the desire for the perfect society is not satisfied by some predetermined design for living, Mormon, Owenite or whatever; and we may suspect that even if such a new design were to be the shape of the future, we would not know, or be able today to determine, what it would be. The function of the search for the perfect society is not to bring history to a stop, but to open out its unknown and unknowable possibilities to all men and women. In this sense the road to utopia, fortunately for the human race, is not blocked.

But, as we know, it can be blocked: by universal destruction, by a return to barbarism, by the dissolution of the hopes and values to which the nineteenth century aspired. The twentieth has taught us that these things are possible. History, the presiding divinity of both centuries, no longer gives us, as men and women used to think, the firm guarantee that humanity would travel into the promised land, whatever exactly this was supposed to be. Still less that they would reach it. It could come out differently. We know that it can, because we live in the world the nineteenth century created, and we know that, titanic though its achievements were, they are not what was then expected or dreamed.

But if we can no longer believe that history guarantees us the right outcome, neither does it guarantee us the wrong one. It offers the option, without any clear estimate of the probability of our choice. The evidence that the world in the twenty-first century will be better is not negligible. If the world succeeds in not destroying itself, the probability will be quite strong. But it will not amount to certainty. The only certain thing about the future is that it will surprise even those who have seen furthest into it.

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## TABLES

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## TABLES

TABLE I

## STATES AND POPULATIONS 1880-1914 (MILLIONS OF PERSONS)

		1880	1914
E/K	*UK	35.3	45
R	*France	37.6	40
E	*Germany	45.2	68
E	*Russia	97.7	161 (1910)
E/K	*Austria	37.6	51
K	*Italy	28.5	36
K	Spain	16.7	20.5
K, 1908R	Portugal	4.2	5.25
K	Sweden	4.6	5.5
K	Norway	1.9	2.5
K	Denmark	2.0	2.75
K	Netherlands	4.0	6.5
K	Belgium	5.5	7.5
R	Switzerland	2.8	3.5
K	Greece	1.6	4.75
K	Roumania	5.3	7.5
K	Serbia	1.7	4.5
K	Bulgaria	2.0	4.5
K	Montenegro	—	0.2
K	Albania	0	0.8
E	Finland (in Russia)	2.0	2.9
R	USA	50.2	92.0 (1910)
E	Japan	c. 36	53
E	Ottoman Empire	c. 21	c. 20
E	China	c. 420	c. 450

## Other states, orders of magnitude of population:

Over 10 millions	Brazil, Mexico
5-10 millions	Persia, Afghanistan, Argentina
2-5 millions	Chile, Colombia, Peru, Venezuela, Siam
Below 2 millions	Bolivia, Cuba, Costa Rica, Domin. Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Uruguay

E = empire, K = kingdom, R = republic.

\* The great powers of Europe.

## TABLES

TABLE 2

URBANISATION IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY  
EUROPE, 1800-1890

	Number of cities (10,000 and over)			Total urban population (percentage)		
	1800	1850	1890	1800	1850	1890
Europe	364	878	1709	10	16.7	29
N. and W.*	105	246	543	14.9	26.1	43.4
Central†	135	306	629	7.1	12.5	26.8
Mediterranean‡	113	292	404	12.9	18.6	22.2
Eastern§	11	34	133	4.2	7.5	18
England/Wales	44	148	356	20.3	40.8	61.9
Belgium	20	26	61	18.9	20.5	34.5
France	78	165	232	8.8	14.5	25.9
Germany	53	133	382	5.5	10.8	28.2
Austria/Bohemia	8	17	101	5.2	6.7	18.1
Italy	74	183	215	14.6	20.3	21.2
Poland	3	17	32	2.4	9.3	14.6

\* Scandinavia, UK, Netherlands, Belgium

† Germany, France, Switzerland

‡ Italy, Spain, Portugal

§ Austria/Bohemia, Poland

Source: Jan de Vries, *European Urbanisation 1500-1800* (London, 1984), Table 3.8.

TABLES

TABLE 3

EMIGRATION TO LANDS OF EUROPEAN  
SETTLEMENT 1871-1911 (MILLIONS OF  
PERSONS)

Years	Total	Britain/ Ireland	Spain/ Portugal	Germany/ Austria	Others
1871-80	3.1	1.85	0.15	0.75	0.35
1881-90	7.0	3.25	0.75	1.8	1.2
1891-1900	6.2	2.15	1.0	1.25	1.8
1901-11	11.3	3.15	1.4	2.6	4.15
	27.6	10.4	3.3	6.4	7.5

IMMIGRATION TO (MILLIONS OF PERSONS):

Years	Total	USA	Canada	Argentina/ Brazil	Australia/ N.Z.	Others
1871-80	4.0	2.8	0.2	0.5	0.2	0.3
1881-90	7.5	5.2	0.4	1.4	0.3	0.2
1891-1900	6.4	3.7	0.2	1.8	.45	0.25
1900-11	14.9	8.8	1.1	2.45	1.6	0.95
	32.8	20.5	1.9	6.15	2.5	1.7

Based on A. M. Carr Saunders, *World Population* (London, 1936). The difference between the totals for immigration and emigration should warn readers about the unreliability of these calculations.

## TABLES

TABLE 4

## ILLITERACY

1850	Countries of low illiteracy: below 30% adults	Medium illiteracy 30-50%	High illiteracy over 50%
	Denmark	Austria	Hungary
	Sweden	Czech lands	Italy
	Norway	France	Portugal
	Finland	England	Spain
	Iceland	Ireland	Rumania
	Germany	Belgium	all Balkans & Greece
	Switzerland	Australia	Poland
	Netherlands		Russia
	Scotland		USA (non-whites)
	USA (whites)		rest of world
1913	Countries of low illiteracy: below 10%	Medium 10-30%	High above 30%
	(As above)	N. Italy	Hungary
	France	N.W. Yugoslavia	Centr. & S. Italy
	England	(Slovenia)	Portugal
	Ireland		Spain
	Belgium		Rumania
	Austria		all Balkans & Greece
	Australia		Poland
	New Zealand		Russia
			USA (non-whites)
			rest of world

TABLE 5

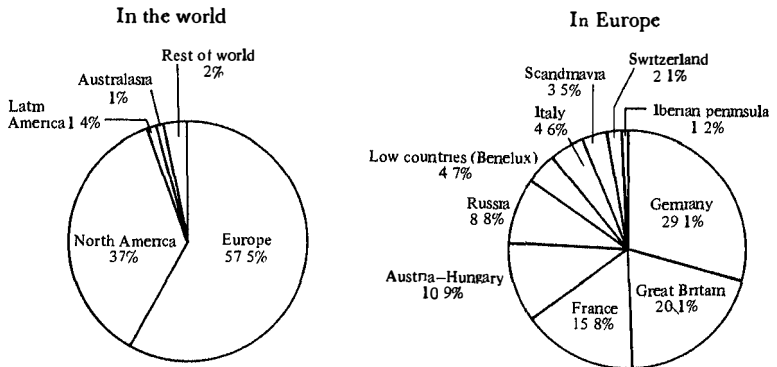
## UNIVERSITIES (NUMBER OF INSTITUTIONS)

	1875	1913
North America	c.360	c.500
Latin America	c.30	c.40
Europe	c.110	c.150
Asia	c.5	c.20
Africa	0	c.5
Australasia	2	c.5

TABLES  
MODERNITY

Newsprint used in different parts of the world, c. 1880

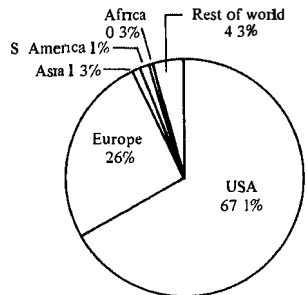
(Source: calculated from M. G. Mulhall, *The Progress of the World Since the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1880, reprinted 1971), p. 91.)



Telephones in the world in 1912

(Source: *Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv*, 1913, I/ii, p. 143.)

World total (in 000s)	12,453
USA	8,362
Europe	3,239



## TABLES

TABLE 6

THE PROGRESS OF THE TELEPHONE: SOME  
CITIES (PHONES PER 100 INHABITANTS)

	1895	Rank	1911	Rank
Stockholm	4.1	1	19.9	2
Christiania (Oslo)	3	2	6.9	8
Los Angeles	2	3	24	1
Berlin	1.6	4	5.3	9
Hamburg	1.5	5	4.7	10
Copenhagen	1.2	6	7	7
Boston	1	7	9.2	4
Chicago	0.8	8	11	3
Paris	0.7	9	2.7	12
New York	0.6	10	8.3	6
Vienna	0.5	11	2.3	13
Philadelphia	0.3	12	8.6	5
London	0.2	13	2.8	11
St Petersburg	0.2	14	2.2	14

Source *Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv*, 1913, I/II, p 143

TABLE 7

## % OF WORLD'S AREA IN INDEPENDENT STATES IN 1913

North America	32%
Central & South America	92.5%
Africa	3.4%
Asia	70% excluding Asiatic Russia
	43.2% including Asiatic Russia
Oceania	0%
Europe	99%

Source. calculated from *League of Nations International Statistical Yearbook* (Geneva, 1926)

## TABLES

TABLE 8

## BRITISH INVESTMENTS ABROAD: % SHARE

	1860-70	1911-13
British Empire	36	46
Latin America	10.5	22
USA	27	19
Europe	25	6
Other	3.5	7

Source: C. Feinstein cited in M. Barratt Brown, *After Imperialism* (London 1963), p. 110.

TABLE 9

WORLD OUTPUT OF PRINCIPAL TROPICAL  
COMMODITIES, 1880-1910 (IN 000 TONS)

	1880	1900	1910
Bananas	30	300	1,800
Cocoa	60	102	227
Coffee	550	970	1,090
Rubber	11	53	87
Cotton fibre	950	1,200	1,770
Jute	600	1,220	1,560
Oil Seeds	-	-	2,700
Raw sugar cane	1,850	3,340	6,320
Tea	175	290	360

Source: P. Bairoch, *The Economic Development of the Third World Since 1900* (London, 1975), p. 15.

## TABLES

TABLE 10

WORLD PRODUCTION AND WORLD TRADE,  
1781-1971 (1913 = 100)

	Production	Trade	
1781-90	1.8	2.2	(1780)
1840	7.4	5.4	
1870	19.5	23.8	
1880	26.9	38	(1881-5)
1890	41.1	48	(1891-5)
1900	58.7	67	(1901-5)
1913	100.0	100	
1929	153.3	113	(1930)
1948	274.0	103	
1971	950.0	520	

Source: W. W. Rostow, *The World Economy: History and Prospect* (London, 1978), Appendices A and B.



TABLES

TABLE II

SHIPPING: TONNAGE (VESSELS OVER 100 TONS ONLY) IN 000 TONS

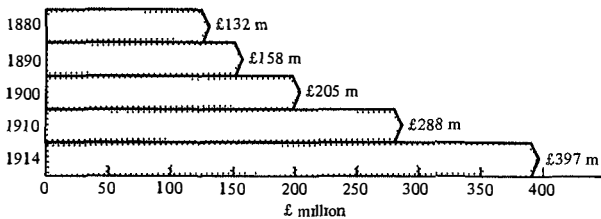
	1881	1913
World total	18,325	46,970
Great Britain	7,010	18,696
USA	2,370	5,429
Norway	1,460	2,458
Germany	1,150	5,082
Italy	1,070	1,522
Canada	1,140	1,735*
France	840	2,201
Sweden	470	1,047
Spain	450	841
Netherlands	420	1,310
Greece	330	723
Denmark	230	762
Austria-Hungary	290	1,011
Russia	740	974

\* British dominions

Source: Mulhall, *Dictionary of Statistics* (London, 1881) and League of Nations, *International Statistics Yearbook 1913*, Table 76

THE ARMAMENTS RACE

Military expenditure by the great powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Great Britain, Russia, Italy and France) 1880-1914



(Source: *The Times Atlas of World History* (London, 1978), p 250)

TABLES

TABLE 12

ARMIES (IN 000s)

	1879		1913	
	Peacetime	Mobilized	Peacetime	Mobilized
Great Britain	136	c 600	160	700
India	c 200	—	249	
Austria-Hungary	267	772	800	3,000
France	503	1,000	1,200	3,500
Germany	419	1,300	2,200	3,800
Russia	766	1,213	1,400	4,400

TABLE 13

NAVIES (IN NUMBER OF BATTLESHIPS)

	1900	1914
Great Britain	49	64
Germany	14	40
France	23	28
Austria-Hungary	6	16
Russia	16	23

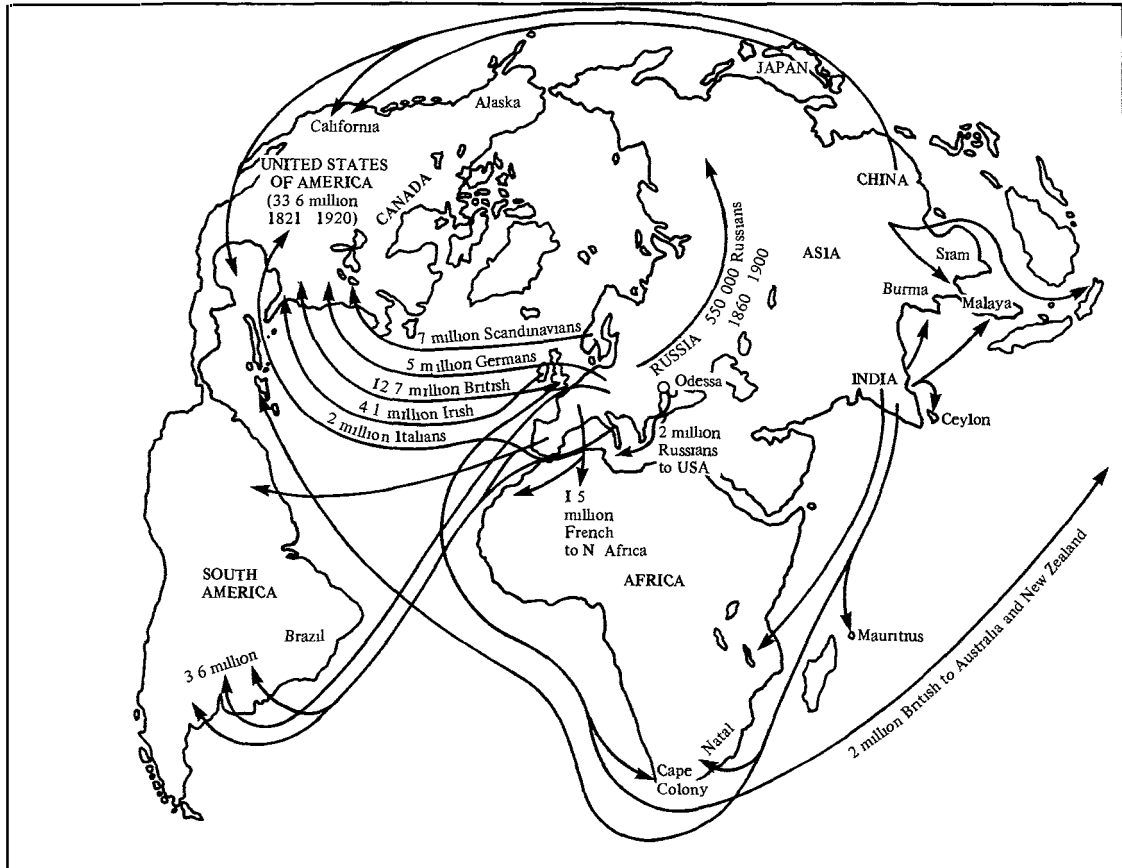
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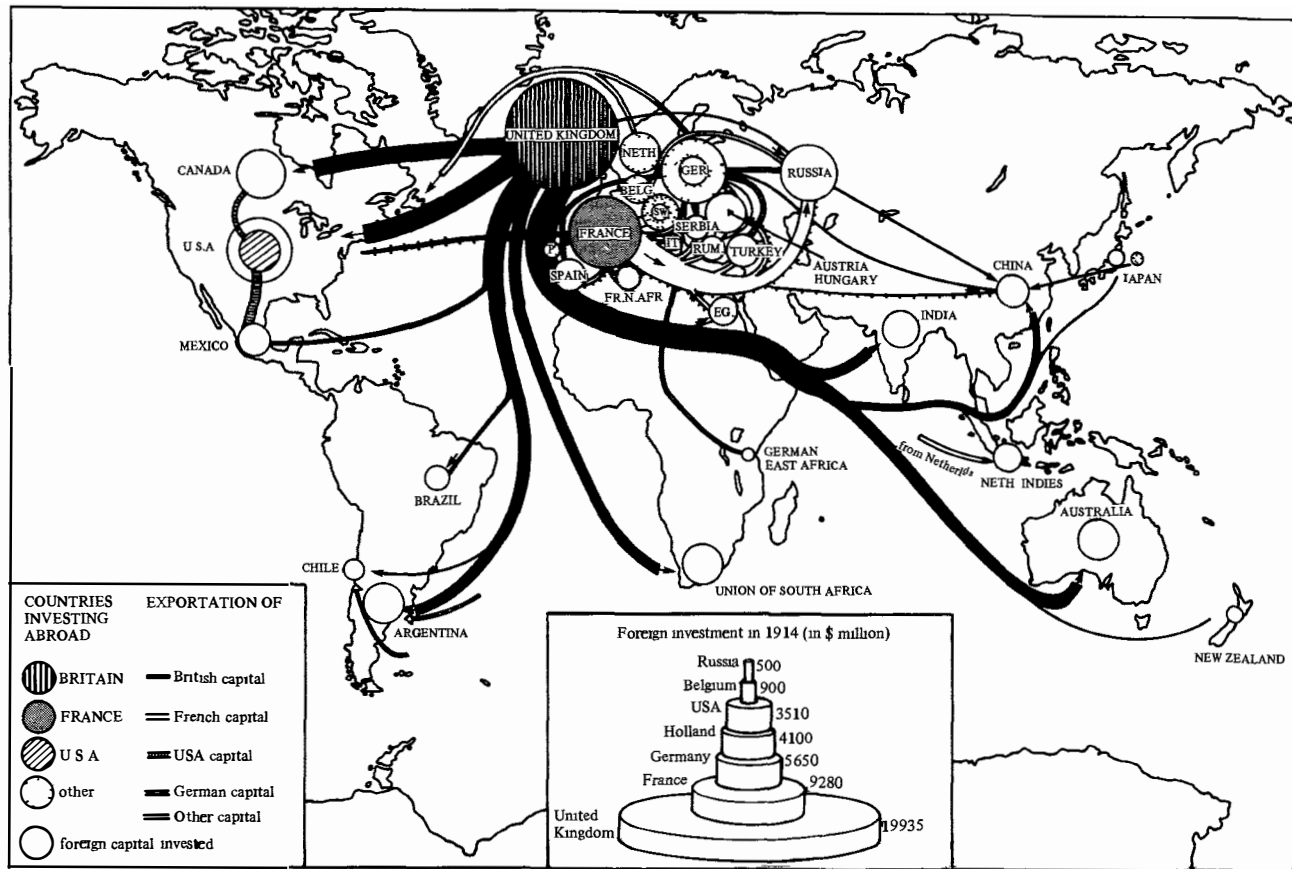
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## MAPS

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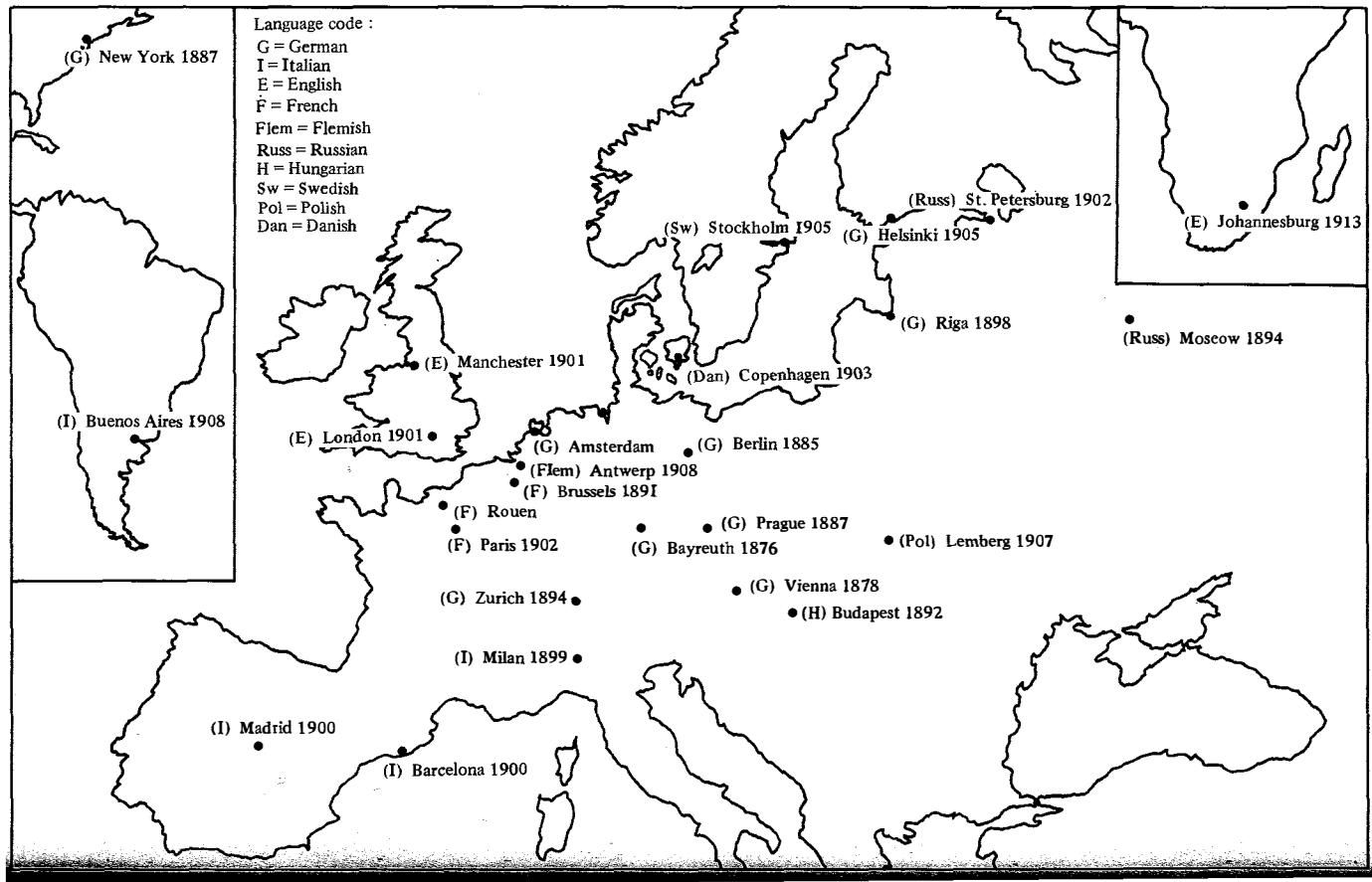
Map 1 International migrations 1820-1910 (Source *The Times Atlas of World History*)

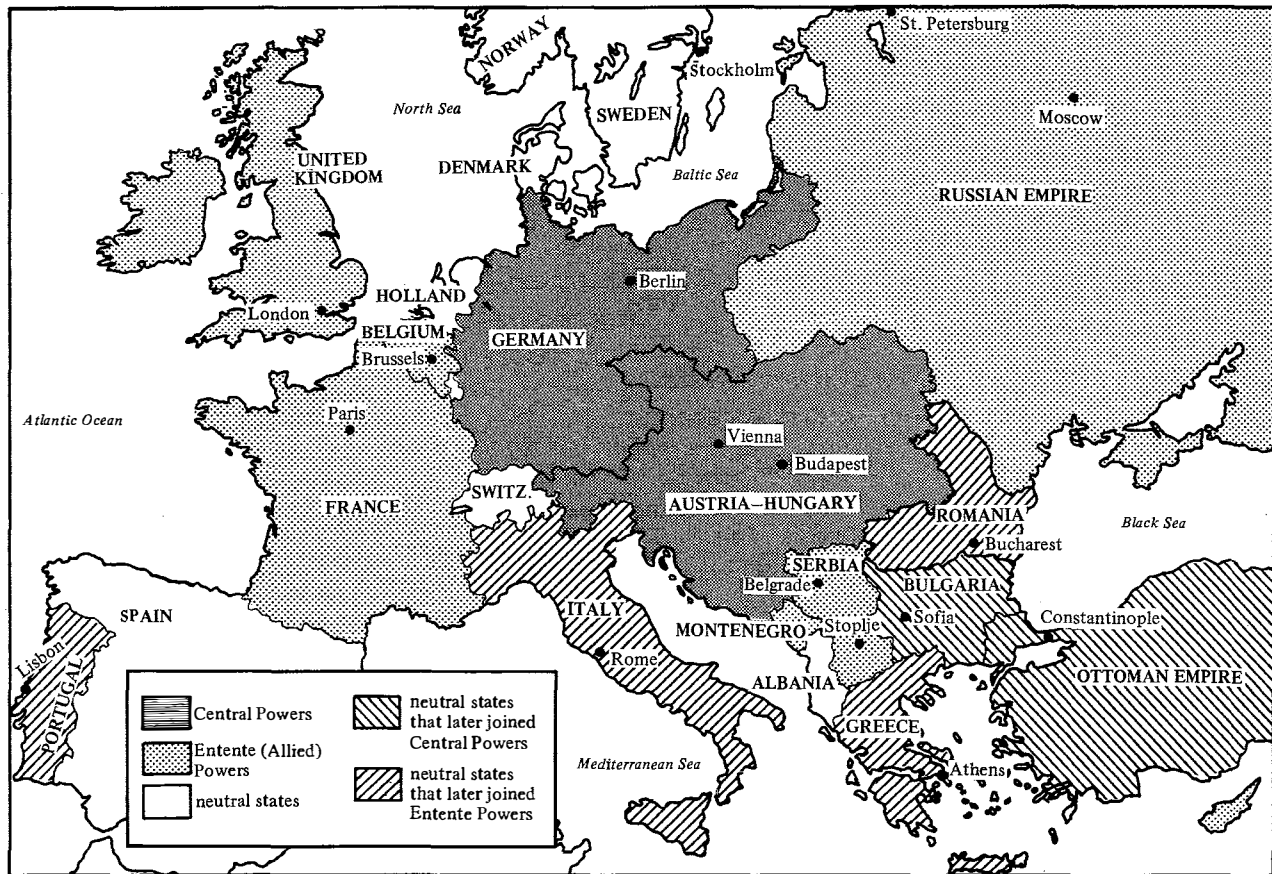




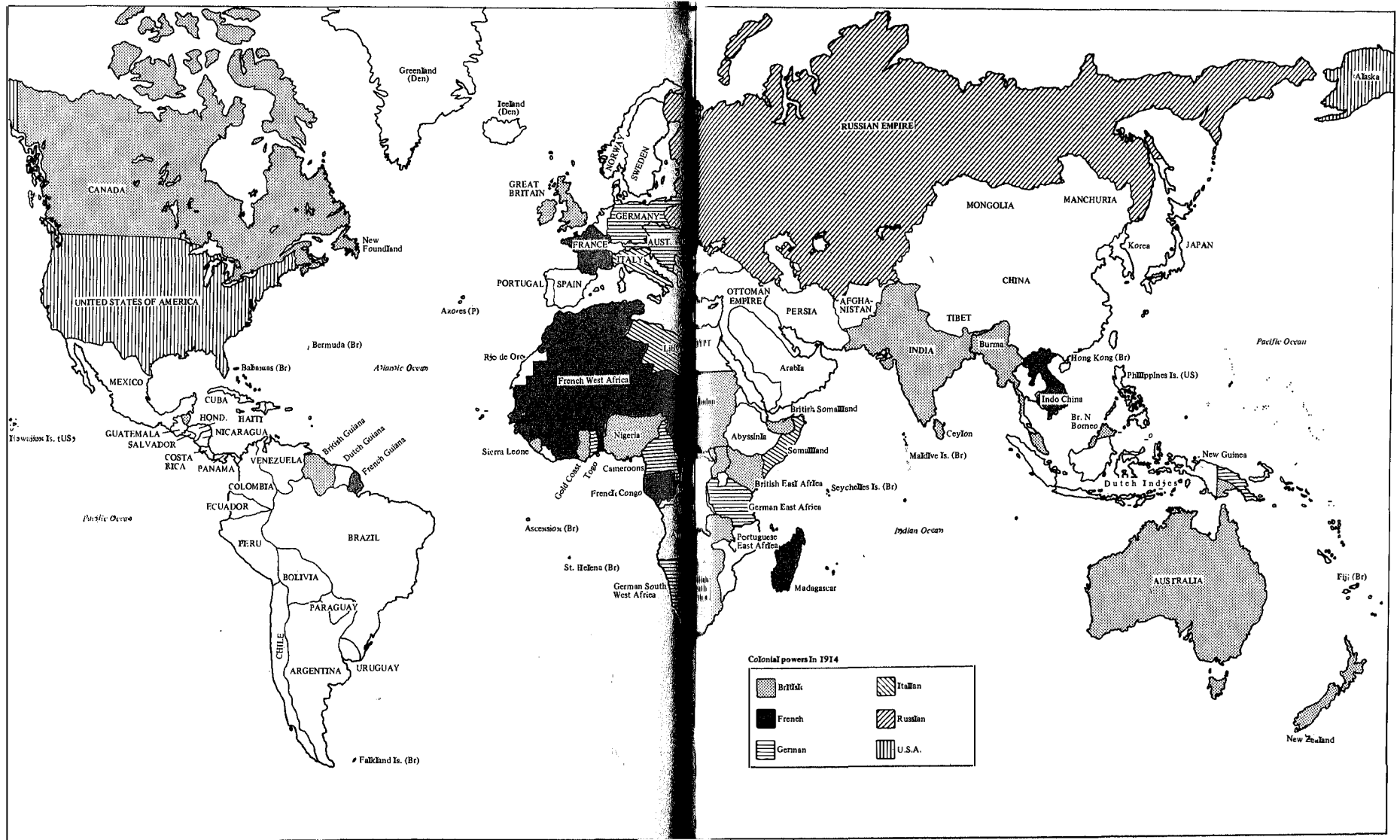
Map 2 Movements of capital 1875-1914

Map 3. Opera and nationalism: performances of Wagner's *Siegfried* 1875-1914





Map 4. Europe in 1914



Map 5. The world divided: empires in 1914



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## NOTES

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### OVERTURE

- 1 P Nora in Pierre Nora (ed), *Les lieux de la memoire*, vol I *La République* (Paris 1984), p xix
- 2 G Barraclough, *An Introduction to Contemporary History* (London 1964), p 1

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- 1 Finlay Peter Dunne, *Mr Dooley Says* (New York 1910), pp 46-7
- 2 M Mulhall, *Dictionary of Statistics* (London 1892 edn), p 573
- 3 P Baroch, 'Les grandes tendances des disparites economiques nationales depuis la Revolution Industrielle' in *Seventh International Economic History Congress, Edinburgh 1978 Four 'A' Themes* (Edinburgh 1978), pp 175-86
- 4 See V G Kiernan, *European Empires from Conquest to Collapse* (London 1982), pp 34-6, and D R Headrick, *Tools of Empire* (New York 1981), *passim*
- 5 Peter Flora, *State, Economy and Society in Western Europe 1815-1975 A Data Handbook*, 1 (Frankfurt, London and Chicago 1983), p 78
- 6 W W Rostow, *The World Economy History and Prospect* (London 1978), p 52
- 7 Hilaire Belloc, *The Modern Traveller* (London 1898), vi
- 8 P Baroch *et al*, *The Working Population and Its Structure* (Brussels 1968) for such data
- 9 H L Webb, *The Development of the Telephone in Europe* (London 1911)
- 10 P Baroch, *De Jéricho à Mexico Villes et économie dans l'histoire* (Paris 1985), partie C, *passim* for data
- 11 *Historical Statistics of the United States, From Colonial Times to 1957* (Washington 1960), census of 1890
- 12 Carlo Cipolla, *Literacy and Development in the West* (Harmondsworth 1969), p 76
- 13 Mulhall, *op cit*, p 245
- 14 Calculated on the basis of *ibid*, p 546, *ibid*, p 549
- 15 *Ibid*, p 100

## NOTES

### EPILOGUE

- 1 Bertolt Brecht, 'An die Nachgeborenen' in *Hundert Gedichte 1918-1950* (East Berlin 1955), p. 314.
- 2 Albert O. Hirschman, *The Political Economy of Latin American Development: Seven Exercises in Retrospection* (Center for US-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, December 1986), p. 4.