

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY



Timothy B. Smith

Many historians, including Theodore Hamerow, argue that the period 1815 to 1914 marks a distinct epoch in human history—an age dominated by the spirit of industry and commerce, the rise of democracy, the triumph of science, and the emergence of an almost religious faith in the idea of progress. As Hamerow stresses, no comparable change in the way of life had occurred since the prehistoric era, when humans made the leap from nomadism to farming, permanent settlements, and animal husbandry.

In 1800, Europe was closer to the old world of enlightened despotism, monarchy, and preindustrial modes of production than it was to the modern world. Europe was overwhelmingly rural and, with the exception of England, identities revolved around the local community, not the nation. By 1914, much of Europe had industrialized, become urban, and embraced democracy, the ideology and practice of individualism, consumerism, and the ideal (if not practice) of social mobility. The state had been transformed from a provider of basic security to a provider of social welfare, at least in parts of Europe (Germany and Britain in particular). Social welfare legislation had been introduced by the 1880s, and by 1914 many European nations had crude forms of welfare states. Legal privilege was gone or under intense attack. Societies organized around birth and divided according to estates or orders gave way by 1900 to class-divided societies, in which the main fault lines were economic, not based on birth.

During the nineteenth century, Europe prospered as never before. From a population of just under 200 million in 1800, the continent grew to 401 million in 1900, at which point there were also 100 million North Americans and 40 million Latin Americans of European descent. Europeans constituted 25 percent of the world's population but produced more than 60 percent of the world's manufactured goods. (At the end of the twentieth century Europe represented less than 10 percent of the world's population and produced less than 30 percent of all manufactured goods.) Reliable food supplies, better diet, stricter

housing and public health regulations, and a period of prolonged peace and economic prosperity had conspired to lift many parts of Europe out of the age-old Malthusian trap. During the nineteenth century, the crop cycle was finally tamed even if the business cycle was not. A sign of Europe's prosperity was the sudden and dramatic drop in the birthrate in the two decades before World War I. The rate of death by infectious diseases—another sign of the relative health of European society—was also on the decline in the period 1880–1914. As people became richer and more children survived into adulthood, families became smaller and expectations of material comfort rose, as did hope for the future.

By 1900, no continent, no region of the world had been left untouched by Europe, for better or for worse. Each year between 1871 and 1914, the European imperialist powers added an area the size of France to their empires. European superiority in technology—weaponry, steamships, battleships, industrial production, and military organization—made this possible, backed by Europe's belief in its inherent superiority. This confidence was grounded in a faith that European science and rationalism were necessarily superior to superstition. Machines, Michael Adas writes, were seen as the measure of men. The imbalance between Europe (and its settlements in North America) and the rest of the world in scientific knowledge and industrial capacity is one of the most important developments in world history since 1800.

Having said this, Europe was by no means a monolithic bloc in 1900. Much of the European peasantry was still mired in poverty, superstition, and tradition. Typhus and tuberculosis still stalked the poor. Approximately one-third of the population of London was considered poor. More than half of the French population still lived in small rural villages and towns. Tens of thousands of Russian peasants starved in the 1890s and 1900s. More than half of all Italians were illiterate in 1900. As a whole, and in relation to the rest of the world, the continent was indeed very rich, having accumulated layers of wealth and knowledge

over the centuries in its urban banks, corporations, academies, and universities. But, generally speaking, in the countryside (and in several regions) things were often quite different.

The popular image of the nineteenth century, however, is dominated by two major themes: 1) this was the age of the industrial revolution across Europe and North America; 2) this was also the age of political revolution, the century that witnessed the rise of democracy. It is not difficult to find convincing evidence to support these obvious facts. But this image of the nineteenth century may be colored excessively by the English, French, and American experiences, which were anything but typical. In fact, a good case could be made that continental European countries, whose economic, political, and social development was slower, represented the norm. In other words, it was the English, in particular, who deviated from the European norm.

In the case of the industrial revolution there is a common view that it began in England in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and by the nineteenth century (and certainly by 1914) Europeans had moved to the mines, the mills, and the factories, or to the city. In fact, as Maxine Berg and others remind us, this was not even true for most English workers as late as the 1850s. Most Russians, Portuguese, Spaniards, and Italians were still peasants in the 1890s, and half of France was still engaged in agriculture. By 1850, there were still only 400,000 factory workers in

all of France—one tenth of the entire manufacturing labor force. In England, they constituted one-half of the manufacturing labor force. Not until the last two decades of the century did the French and Italian economies really take off and become more urban-industrial. But as late as 1900, some 60 percent of French workers still worked in units of under ten employees. Industrial change and urbanization was rapid where it occurred (especially in England, Belgium, and Germany) but in many nations, including France, Italy, and Russia, urban-industrial society was concentrated in only a few places.

The nineteenth century was thus a time of great social change, but not for all people and all places. Pockets of misery, traditionalism, and inertia persisted into the twentieth century, escaping the winds of industrial, political, and social change. This is as true for Sicily and Spain as it is for large regions of central Europe, Russia, the Balkans, and even parts of France. There is a danger, however, in overemphasizing what did not change. Viewed through the lens of social history, the picture can become nuanced to the point where one loses a sense of the greater whole. Even as we distinguish between the varying rates of social change in different parts of Europe, and as we distinguish between the period 1815–1870 and the period 1870–1914 (the age of the second industrial revolution and the age of rapid urban growth), the general argument holds true: the nineteenth century in Europe witnessed more important social, economic, sci-

entific, and industrial changes than all previous eras of history combined.

THE BOURGEOIS CENTURY?

For many scholars who have written general histories of the century, including Roger Magraw, Harold Perkin, William Reddy, and Geoff Eley and David Blackburn, the nineteenth century was the “bourgeois century,” the age of the middle class, the age of commerce and the pursuit of wealth. The idea that the middling classes took over European society during the nineteenth century has a long pedigree. In *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote these famous words:

the bourgeoisie has . . . since the establishment of Modern Industry and of the world market, conquered for itself, in the modern representative state, exclusive political sway. The executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie. . . . [which] during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together.

Marx and Engels had a tendency to overstate their case. But certainly at some point in the nineteenth century the middle class exerted considerable influence on politics and in the realm of culture. In some nations, this occurred later in the century; in Britain, much earlier. Some of the key achievements of the century were: freedom of commerce, freedom of association, freedom of profession, an end to the key legal privileges of the aristocracy, free trade, freedom of religion, and written constitutions. Through the spread of such civic or cultural institutions as museums, the opera, zoos, and a flourishing press, the middling ranks set the tone for society.

Not everyone would agree with this argument. Some, like the historian Arno Mayer, would argue that in fact the aristocracy continued to dominate political and civil society right up to World War I. Others, such as Peter Gay, view the notion of a rising bourgeoisie as a “folktale” begun by Marx. In his influential study of the European and American middle classes during the nineteenth century, *The Bourgeois Experience*, Gay emphasizes the anxiety that permeated the middle classes: they knew they were not of the aristocracy above them, and they feared the workers beneath them. Everywhere the bourgeoisie attempted to reshape values, politics, and institutions in their image, all the while remaining a distinct minority of the population. In nineteenth-century Bochum and Barmen (Germany), only 10 to 12 percent of the population could claim bourgeois status. In Paris, per-

haps 15 percent could. The bourgeoisie had universal pretensions but not powers. Like Theodore Zeldin, Gay emphasizes the various fractured group identities within the middling ranks.

If the nineteenth century was indeed the bourgeois century, it nevertheless cannot be understood without reference to the continuing social, economic, and above all political power of the nobility. This is as true for England as it is for France, Germany, and Austria-Hungary. The old French nobility still owned one-fifth of the land in 1815. They continued to wield their social and political influence in rural France, especially in the poorer areas of the center and the west. Patronage was dispensed and political influence flowed from it. The church also retained its strong social and political influence into the twentieth century in many parts of rural France. Politics took a turn toward social inclusiveness beginning only in the 1870s, when the *nouvelles couches sociales* (new social types, or layers) were finally admitted to the political nation. At precisely this time, in the three decades before World War I, the European nobility lost economic power as agriculture prices plummeted (due to overproduction and North American competition). The new middling ranks born of commerce and industry were only too happy to nudge aside the nobility and seize the reins of government. Arguably, they succeeded only at the local level.

This process was gradual: the aristocracy still dominated the upper houses of most European legislatures, as well as the military and foreign service. Likewise, the peasantry remained the dominant social group right up until 1900. The survival of a large traditionalist and semiliterate peasant sector engaged in subsistence agriculture was the key obstacle to faster economic growth. The peasantry owned nearly half the land in nineteenth-century France, and it retarded economic growth, as it did in Spain, Italy, and eastern Europe. This basic fact explains the general economic backwardness of several areas in 1914, compared with Europe's two most dynamic economies of the time: Germany and Britain.

And yet, even as we accept these caveats, as well as Gay's nuanced portrayal of a complicated situation, it cannot be denied that there was a segment of the population—the middle classes—that managed to have the entire legal and economic framework of society recast in its favor by 1914. One of the many merits of Gay's work is his emphasis on the movement and uncertainty of a century that called myriad accepted truths to question.

Gay emphasizes that during the nineteenth century, everything was called into question: from the very foundations of religious principles to political princi-

ples, social ideals, and sexual morality. The century witnessed the rise of the worker's movement, the feminist movement, evolutionary biology, universal male suffrage, the end of slavery, and so on. The late nineteenth century, Stephen Kern reminds us, broke down the age-old barriers of distance, as fast steamships, the railroad, and the telegraph helped to link rural Europe to its capital cities and Europe to the world.

A CONTINENT ON THE MOVE

Between the 1820s and 1920s, over 60 million Europeans left for the New World. Globalization began in the nineteenth century, as Europeans carved up the world amongst themselves, linking it together with the "Victorian Internet" (the telegraph) and the steamship. Most European emigrants settled in North America, but several million headed for South America and Australia. Several hundred thousand French colonized Algeria. Within Europe, migration was equally important, as the countryside emptied into the cities. Paris had a population of fewer than 600,000 in 1800; by 1900, it had grown to well over 2.5 million. Most of this increase came from migration from the countryside. Similarly, Berlin grew from 170,000 in 1800 to 420,000 in 1850 to 2 million in 1900 and then 4 million in 1925. In Germany, the number of cities with a population of over 100,000 increased from 2 to 48 between 1830 and 1914. Most of this growth

occurred after 1870. Although the European population doubled between 1800 and 1900, its urban population increased by an unprecedented 600 percent. This created great strains on resources, but it also led to an effervescence of urban culture. Museums, public libraries, sports arenas, gardens, concert halls, and new parliamentary houses were erected across urban Europe. Rapid urban growth magnified social problems and brought them into sharper focus; collectivist remedies resulted.

The social impact of these movements of people was enormous. In 1830 the German town of Bochum was a sleepy town of 4,000. By 1900, it was a city of 65,000, and when neighboring industrial suburbs are included, an area with a population of 120,000 and an industrial labor force of 50,000. The vast majority of this population increase was due to immigration into the city. Nothing like this had ever happened before in history—to be sure, large cities had witnessed rapid growth (London in the eighteenth century, for instance), but never before had small towns been transformed into industrial cities in the span of one or two generations.

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND THE NEW POLITICAL ECONOMY

The French Revolution is traditionally designated as the turning point between "early modern" European

history and “modern Europe,” or Europe of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. More and more, however, there is a tendency among historians to downplay the social impact of the French Revolution. It is still common to portray it as a political and legal revolution of the greatest magnitude, but it is less common to stress its immediate social impact. Similarly, far from being a shot in the arm for capitalism, as Marxist historians used to claim, the Revolution probably retarded capital accumulation, (at least in France), by confirming the division of the nation’s rural property into millions of smallholding plots. But in the long term, there is no doubt that the Revolution reconfigured the basic legal and political structures of France (and of parts of Germany, Italy, Belgium, and other parts touched by Napoleon’s armies) in a way conducive to the development of a more commercially vibrant and socially fluid society.

The impact of the Revolution was not necessarily immediate, but over the course of the nineteenth century, dozens of ideals and goals proclaimed during the 1790s came to fruition in France and across western Europe. After the Revolution, most major western European states introduced some form of semidemocratic forum or parliament, with some form of limited suffrage (voting rights) for men of property. The Revolution gave rise to the concept of “human rights,” and over the course of the nineteenth century political, civil, and human rights were gradually extended to all men (and to some women). Chief among these was the principle of equality before the law, the end of legal privilege for the aristocracy. Some feminist scholarship stresses the idea that political equality between the sexes, while proclaimed during the Revolution, was in fact set back several decades, and that, on the contrary, the nineteenth century witnessed the legal codification of *inequality* between the sexes, as in the Napoleonic Code. The lynchpin in the Napoleonic system, where male-female relations were concerned, was the concept of the *chef du famille*. Upon marriage, women became the property of their husbands. Formerly, of course, they were the property of their father or their brothers. The concept of the *chef du famille* forbade women to own property in their names, to make decisions concerning their children, where the family would live, and so on. Women could not serve on juries in many countries or even testify in court. If the Revolution created a more rigidly gendered legal system, it also provided for uniformity of other laws: henceforth there would be one legal system for one country.

During the nineteenth century, the old corporate order was demolished in nation after nation. A more absolute conception of private property rights

(that is, the end of feudal dues and obligations, and the end of the seigneurial system of property) was codified in the law. The ownership of property became the fundamental basis of the new bourgeois political order. In France between 1791 and 1848, holders of property generally had greater political rights than the propertyless. Property rather than privilege became, as Sewell says, “the symbolic and practical hinge of the new political order” (p. 138).

The economic ramifications of the abolition of legal and commercial privilege, and above all the abolition of the guild system, were significant. After the French Revolution (and by the 1850s in most of western Europe), relations between employer and employee were free conventions between individuals. There were no barriers keeping a journeyman from becoming a master craftsman; he could go into business by himself, for himself, as soon as his savings enabled him to do so. This was a great boost to competition, trade, and capitalism. Employers and em-

employees were no longer superiors and subordinates, operating according to the traditional rules of a guild. Now they were either individual proprietors or propertyless proletarians, linked only through the free market, through the cash nexus. If the Revolution did not lead, overnight, to the modern industrial society of the late nineteenth century, it certainly cleared France (and its principles soon cleared most of western Europe) of what Marx called the “medieval rubbish” standing in the way of dynamic capitalism.

THE RISE OF THE WORKING CLASS

The rise of working-class consciousness is another key development in nineteenth-century social history, and it is directly related to the emergence of a more liberal-individualistic political order discussed above. The worker question dominated European politics until the 1950s, when the brightest flames of labor radicalism were finally extinguished by prosperity. In 1900, labor conflict was threatening to tear European society apart—or so many people thought at the time.

In 1800, most European workers had very few rights beyond a few paper, or legal, ones, which really had little impact on their economic well-being. Mistreatment by bosses was expected; there was no notion of workplace safety or worker's rights (a rudimentary form of worker's compensation emerged in France and Italy in 1898). When the century began, horizontal, cross-occupational class consciousness was in its infancy. Things changed in the 1830s as the urban artisanate was threatened by mechanization and deskilling, and by 1900 parts of Europe (especially Germany and northern Italy) were polarized into easily identifiable, hostile social classes. Scholars such as E. P. Thompson, Gareth Stedman Jones, Louise Tilly, William Reddy, and William Sewell have provided us with detailed studies of this topic. Urban uprisings and revolutions in 1830, 1848, and 1871 (the Paris Commune); 1905 (in Russia and Poland); and 1914 (Red Week in Italy) pit workers against the bourgeois state.

What were workers' grievances? During the nineteenth century the law of supply and demand assaulted the traditional rights of labor, and displaced the traditional concept of “just” prices (for bread or wages). Liberal political economy replaced an older, apparently more humane (at least to many scholars) “moral economy.” New “time-discipline” techniques were introduced in factories; “Saint-Monday” was eliminated as workers were pressed into a new, more rigid mold. By 1900, traditional communal usage rights over the land—to glean the stubble of the har-

vest, to forage, to squat, to collect wood in the forest, to traverse properties—were eroded by the developing civil codes of central states. Property was increasingly protected by a thick layer of laws, to the benefit of owners.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the old webs of paternalism were unraveling at the local level or were simply broken as a matter of central-state policy, and peasants and workers were increasingly left to fend for themselves. The law was unabashedly biased in favor of property and sometimes in favor of birth (as with the three-tiered voting system in Prussia), but nowhere was it resolutely on the side of the common person. In France, labor law was blatantly biased in favor of bosses, against the interests of workers. The Napoleonic Code, copied in Italy, Belgium, and parts of southern Germany, declared that in disputes between bosses and employees, the bosses were to be taken at their word. Until 1890, French industrial workers were required to carry a sort of internal passport as a means of social control.

If the middle classes increasingly set the tone of civil and political life, the emerging working class increasingly resented this tone. By the late nineteenth century, the battle lines had been drawn clearly between the new classes called forth by industrialization. The old guard, the aristocracy, tried to hold the dyke. It was challenged by the middling ranks, who in turn were challenged by the growing ranks of the working classes. Charles Tilly has estimated that the number of urban proletarians in Europe increased from 10 million in 1800 to 75 million in 1900 (Tilly, in Meriman, 1979). Some industrial cities might be 80 to 90 percent proletarian. These new, “dangerous classes” stirred fear in the hearts of European elites. Henri Mendras and Alistair Cole argue that in nineteenth-century France a clear class structure emerged, which today has become blurred beyond recognition. Prior to 1914, France was clearly divided between the peasantry, the working class, the middle class, and the leisured upper-middle class (and remnants of the nobility) at the top. Class divisions and resentments were ingrained and a very real part of people's lives.

FROM THE FAMILY ECONOMY TO THE FACTORY

The process was not linear and it did not occur overnight, but ultimately, in nation after nation, by World War I, the industrial revolution 1) removed most manufacturing work from the home; 2) segregated it by gender; 3) organized it into twelve-hour shifts (or some rigid length of time); 4) brought a new, less

rooted population to the city; and 5) eroded, to varying degrees, the old craft-based economy.

As Elinor Accampo argues in her detailed study of Saint-Chamond (France), the early-nineteenth-century urban economy was small-scale, cohesive, and artisanal. Work and family were inextricably linked. Wives and children often participated in the “family economy.” Fathers and mothers often passed on skills to sons and daughters. The family economic unit was characterized by relative stability, in that the ribbon maker’s son grew up knowing that he would most likely do what his father had done—and his father and mother would train him. In this system of domestic production, skills themselves became a sort of property. This shaped children’s worldviews, expectations, and determined whom they might marry. Few outside forces (schools, nationally disseminated cultural norms) competed with the authority and influ-

ence of the family and the neighborhood. Mechanization threatened this balance. From the 1830s and 40s, nail making and ribbon weaving declined. Domestic industry in general declined and eventually disappeared. Work once done at home either left the city or became mechanized. By the 1860s, then, most workers had to leave the home to work in factories for wages.

Much recent work stresses the ability of families to adapt to new urban and work conditions. Scholarship by Ellen Ross and others, for example, emphasizes the mutual-support networks established by the laboring poor in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Their work, however, is centered on large, semi-artisanal cities. Accampo makes a good case for the sudden disruption to family life brought on by the factories in smaller industrial towns. With the division of home and work, women could no longer easily

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coordinate productive and reproductive capacities (worker-mother roles). Many married women had no choice but to leave the home for work since their husbands' wages were inadequate. Men were also affected by this shift to the factory. Their presence in the home was reduced. Their moral authority over children suffered. The parent-child training process was destroyed or weakened.

Mechanization not only led to de-skilling; it also eroded paternal power. In Saint-Chamond in the 1820s, 50 percent of sons took up their father's occupation. By 1870, only 25 percent did. Workers became less and less able to choose their line of work. The bonds of shared experience, between parents, sons, and daughters, were more or less gone by 1900 in heavy-industry towns like Saint-Chamond. Slowly but surely the generation gap was widening in western Europe on the eve of World War I. Families were dispersing at a faster rate than before, through migration, and through the gender segregation of the new factory economy. New everyday work rhythms dictated by the factory whistle replaced the older, more flexible family-centered work routines.

The mechanization process is illustrated well by the case of Limoges, whose history has been told by John Merriman. Limoges was the capital of the European porcelain industry. In 1892, there were 5,246 porcelain workers in 32 factories; by 1905, 13,000 workers in 35 factories. The standardization of production meant that plates began to be decorated by impression, not by hand. Female workers increased as the porcelain industry de-skilled: women workers increased from 24 to 35 percent of the industry's workforce between 1884 and 1901. Improvements in machines, like the Faure plate machine, meant that a worker could put out some 8,000 saucers in 15 days, compared to 1,500 earlier. A number of factors, including the concentration of capital, standardization, mechanization, larger factories, larger kilns, more workers, and above all more industrial discipline, transformed the work place.

SOCIAL MOBILITY AND EDUCATION

One of the key promises of the nineteenth century was self-advancement, the opening of careers to talent. Significant social mobility, from the working class or the peasantry to the upper-middle class, however, was still very rare in the nineteenth century, although more and more exceptional individual cases could be found. Universities were reserved for the upper 1 percent of society until World War I. There were only 77,000 university students in Germany (population

65 million) in 1913. As late as 1938, there were still only 150,000 university students in Britain, France, and Germany combined. In the nineteenth century, higher education was a closed, male club. But at long last the idea of social mobility could no longer be seen as a myth, for there were enough prominent cases in the business world to give the ideal a basis in reality. Perhaps the twentieth century began, from a historian of social mobility's point of view, with the rise to power of a Welsh coal miner's son, David Lloyd George, to the position of chancellor of the exchequer in 1906.

Lloyd George's rise to prominence was made possible, to a certain extent, by a slow but significant expansion of the middling ranks and the lower-middle class in the three decades before the war. During the period 1870–1914, the lower-middle class, composed of clerks and modestly (but regularly) paid civil servants, mushroomed. People of modest birth were given more and more responsibilities, and gained more and more power in government, especially at the local level.

Social mobility was usually limited to the movement from the (poorly paid sector of) the working class up to the lower-middle class, or from the lower-middle class to the middle class. Scarcely was it possible to make the jump from peasant or proletarian status to respectable middle class. A significant barrier existed between manual and nonmanual labor. By 1890 only 7.7 percent of all manual workers in Bochum (Germany) had been able to cross into the non-manual world. By 1907 the figure was still only 18 percent. By contrast, in the United States, in late-nineteenth-century Birmingham, 50 percent of manual workers crossed the barrier into the world of non-manual work. In Atlanta, after one decade 20 percent, or 1 in 5, had crossed the line; in Bochum, only 1 in 13. The primary purpose of Bochum's gymnasium, and of secondary education in Europe in general, seems to have been to ensure status continuity of the middle class and professional class, not to aid social mobility. In France on the eve of World War I, only 5 percent of students went on to secondary education, to what we call high school (*lycée*). Less than 1 percent of European men went to university at this time. In Germany, 0.1 percent of the population went on to university in 1909.

Although the aristocracy continued to dominate the highest ranks of the army and the foreign service in most European countries, the nineteenth century did indeed witness the gradual spread of (official) civil and political equality. By the 1870s common people were entering the political arena, at least in local assemblies. In the period 1870–1890, western Euro-

pean society and politics opened up to new social groups. Politics became more inclusive; traditional social elites and the landed aristocracy saw their local influence wane. Peasants became active in local politics, and new job opportunities arose for those with a modicum of education: clerical positions, jobs in expanding municipal governments, nursing jobs, and teaching jobs (particularly for young women).

In the late nineteenth century major structural changes in the economy of Europe had widespread repercussions in the world of work and social relations. Beginning in the 1860s and 1870s, as the railroad began to create national markets and as the second industrial revolution boosted output and created massive new institutions, the world of work became more bureaucratized. A new army of white-collar clerks was spawned by the rise of the service sector and government bureaucracies. Schools, post offices, railroads, department stores, large companies, and burgeoning municipal governments required a new type of employee: semieducated, respectable, but modestly paid. Many of these new workers were young single women. In Britain in the 1870s, there were 7,000 female employees in local and central government; by 1911, there were 76,000. A new (but uncertain) class was born: the white-collar lower-middle class, situated uneasily between workers and the middle classes. To many social critics, this was a disturbing trend. But it signaled the emergence of a more fluid society; with a sort of passage between the working class and the middle class. Gradually, the social ladder was gaining more rungs.

Urban, economic, and social change was particularly intense and rapid in Germany. Industrial progress achieved over the course of two or three generations in England and France was achieved in one generation in Germany. No other nation was so thoroughly transformed by industry and cities: in 1907, only half of all Germans lived in their place of birth, and 40 percent of Germans worked in industry. Many historians would argue that there was a tragic lag between political change and social-economic change. Old elites clung to power at the expense of a more democratic and open society.

In general, however, across Europe the political world expanded, admitting more and more to the game. Accordingly, the tone of politics changed, and nationalism became a way to bind the nation together. Popular nationalism was not simply an elite conspiracy—it must have touched a receptive nerve with the general population. This was helped in no small part by the education and welfare systems, and mass-circulation newspapers (all of which date to the 1870s and 1880s), which made people see that they be-

longed to a larger whole. Educational and social welfare services were expanded in most major nations in the two decades before the war. One of German chancellor Bismarck's key goals in introducing social welfare legislation in the 1880s was to provide workers with a reason to support the newly forged German empire; the Liberals in Britain passed social legislation in the 1900s in order to steal the rising Labour Party's thunder; and in France radical republicans attempted to forge national "solidarity" and to ease class tensions with social legislation in the 1890s and 1900s.

Protective labor legislation, workday reduction legislation, and worker's accident insurance were introduced (the 1890s were particularly active). Some would argue that the advent of male suffrage was a political and social development of the utmost importance; others would argue that conservatives managed to contain the potentially revolutionary implications of universal male suffrage by rigging electoral districts, retaining property or wealth requirements for office, maintaining a multitiered electoral system (Prussia), literacy requirements (Italy), and so on. But in the decade before World War I, most of these restrictions were lifted. A slow democratization of political life and indeed of civic life in general was taking place on the eve of the war, particularly at the local level, where expanding municipal services necessitated greater input from people who had hitherto been excluded from power.

Rising living standards late in the century helped integrate workers into society. At precisely the moment when workers were uniting behind national parties of the left, the capitalist system was beginning to put more bread on their tables. Railroads created national markets for standardized goods, and prices of everyday staples dropped. Nominal wages increased in France by 50 percent between 1871 and 1913. In Britain, real wages rose by a third between 1850 and 1875 and again by 45 percent between 1870 and 1900. In Sweden, they rose by 75 percent in the last quarter of the nineteenth century; in Germany, by 30 percent. Diet became more diversified, with workers consuming more meat, vegetables, fruit, and wine. In the 1830s, bread alone consumed some 30 percent of a French worker's budget; by 1913, it required only 11 percent of monthly income to put bread on the table. By 1900, fewer children died before they reached the age of 5. Department stores tempted workers with new goods, although most were consumed by the expanding middling ranks. Cheap railroad tickets made it possible for the skilled working class to escape the city for a brief, modest annual vacation. In Britain, seaside resorts had become affordable for the members of the "labor aristocracy" by 1900. Workers now had

a bit of disposable income to spend at the pub, the tavern, the racetrack, or the soccer match when they were not toiling away at their 50–60 hour per week jobs. Thus, by 1900, for the first time in history, a society (western Europe as a whole) had managed to provide a regular and decent living for up to two-thirds of its citizens (in 1800, perhaps only one-third of Europeans lived in comfort).

THE DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH

Despite the immense social changes of the late nineteenth century, Europe remained a highly unequal place in 1900. Roughly speaking, the rich accounted for around 5 percent of any given nation; the middle class comprised perhaps 15 percent; the lower-middle class, the working class, and the poor comprised the remaining 80 percent of the population. In England in 1913, 10 percent of the population owned 92 percent of the nation's wealth.

Nowhere were the persisting class inequalities more evident than in death. The life expectancy of the wealthy was as much as ten years greater than that of the average manual laborer in England in 1900. The infant mortality rate in two London districts in 1901–1903 tells the story: in rich Hampstead it was 92 deaths per 1,000 live births; in poor Shoreditch, 186 deaths per 1,000 live births. In southern Europe (Spain and Italy) and eastern Europe (present-day Poland, Russia, etc.), life was much as it was in the feudal era. Serfdom was abolished in Russia in 1861 but the economic conditions associated with it remained for decades. In 1900 in the southern Spanish province of Andalusia, 2 percent of the population owned 67 percent of the land. One Hungarian family, the Esterhazys, owned 750,000 acres of land in Hungary. In parts of eastern and southern Europe, 5 percent of the population owned 90 percent of the land in 1900.

Yet the glass was half-full. By 1900, poor harvests no longer spelled disaster for most of Europe. A bad crop in Germany could be offset by imported grain from France or even Canada. By 1900 food supplies were stable around the western world. Beef and wheat from Canada, the U.S., Australia, and Argentina were shipped to Europe by steamship. Beef consumption among European workers doubled between 1880 and 1900. Tea, coffee, sugar, butter, chocolate, and half-decent wine were now within the reach of the common person.

Despite their relative prosperity, western workers were still haunted by the threat of illness or unemployment. Only in Germany did a significant por-

tion of the population have guaranteed access to health care, and sickness and accident insurance (four million Germans were covered by 1914). Working-class life was still fraught with risk and stalked by debt. As Ellen Ross recounts in her history of working-class London women, the local pawn shop was a sort of lifeline, without which many people would have had to seek charity.

Framed by political and industrial change in the nineteenth century, complex patterns emerged for women and gender relations. On the one hand, with the general separation of work from home, economic roles for women declined, particularly after marriage, and women came to depend on marriage for their economic well-being more than before (or since). Patriarchal assumptions in law and culture deepened this dependency. But women did gain ground in education. Among the middle classes, a powerful ideology arose emphasizing women's domestic virtue and their crucial role in the moral regulation of sexuality. With regard to morals, proper women were considered superior to men. The decline in the birthrate also affected women's opportunities, again particularly among the middle classes. And new political ideas spurred politically active women, and even some men, to push for voting rights and an end to legal inequality.

CONCLUSION

The vast political, social, and economic impact of World War I prompts most social historians to end consideration of nineteenth-century themes with 1914. On the eve of World War I, a powerful women's movement was threatening to overturn the sexual and political status quo. Some social historians would argue that this constituted one of the greatest threats to the stability of European society. Workers, who launched an unprecedented number of strikes in France and Britain in the 1890s and 1900s, and organized women were campaigning to overturn the cornerstones of nineteenth-century bourgeois society (or so it seemed). The Italian political system was in a state of crisis on the eve of the war, as were the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires. Britain was divided over the Irish question, France was deadlocked due to labor unrest, political stalemate over military spending issues, and the income tax. Germany seemed to be under siege from the socialist party. Beneath military and diplomatic rivalries, social tensions unnerved European aristocratic and big-business leadership.

As the genie of mass democracy was let out of the bottle, Europe's outdated political class (especially in Austria and Germany) feared for their futures, and

they may have decided that a Europe-wide war to distract the population was preferable to facing the necessity of domestic reform. Some historians argue that the social origins of World War I are just as important as the diplomatic origins. Others dismiss this as too simplistic, and impossible to prove. Most historians would probably agree that the desire to avert difficult

domestic reform played *some* small part, if not the overriding part, in the decision to risk a Europe-wide war. Political change in several nations had not kept pace with economic growth; Europe was divided by the labor question, ethnic tensions, and tensions between the sexes. After the war, these issues would be addressed, one way or another.

See also Capitalism and Commercialization; Civil Society; The Industrial Revolutions; The Liberal State; Nationalism; The Population of Europe; The Demographic Transition and After; Urbanization (*volume 2*); The Middle Classes; Social Class; Social Mobility; Working Classes (*volume 3*); and other articles in this section.

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Peter N. Stearns

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