

reached. As usual the bulk of the new taxation was placed upon articles of general consumption: beer, malt, spirits and an additional 5 per cent *ad valorem* on all goods paying customs duties. The government decided, on the pretext that the war had been fought for the benefit of the colonies, and although the American colonies had in fact borne a considerable share in the expenses of the campaigns in Canada, to impose taxes on the colonists intended to cover part of the cost of the army and navy still kept in America.

Grenville's Stamp Act of 1765 evoked immediate protests and was repealed in the following year, but a nominal tax was retained and the right of the English parliament to tax the colonies was specifically insisted upon. The colonists, who had representative bodies of their own, raised the old slogan, 'No taxation without representation'. It was over this issue that the revolution was ostensibly made. There were, however, other issues which went far deeper, though they made a less effective platform case and so remained in the background.

The economic organisation of the empire in the eighteenth century, embodied in the Navigation Acts, had as its object the utilisation of the trade and wealth of the colonies for the exclusive benefit of the English ruling class.

The most valuable products of the colonies, the tobacco of Virginia, the rice of the Carolinas, the sugar of the West Indies and the tar and timber of New England, priceless material for naval construction, might only be exported to England or Scotland. It must be added, however, that these goods received a preference in the home market. Equally, the colonies were forbidden to import manufactured goods from any foreign country and the development of colonial industry was checked where it might endanger an established home industry. Thus, although the smelting of iron reached some importance in New England early in the eighteenth century, the manufacture of iron and steel goods there was prohibited and the raw iron had to be shipped across the Atlantic to England, from which the Americans had to import manufactured iron goods for their own use.

The prohibition of direct trade between the American colonies and Europe was not a very serious matter: far more important was trade with the French and Spanish settlements in America itself. This trade was forbidden by all three

countries, all of which subscribed to the mercantilist theories on which the Navigation Laws were based.

In practice it was quite impossible for such trade to be stopped and it was carried on on a large scale, smuggling becoming one of the national employments of all the Americas. The Navigation Laws, indeed, were only tolerable because they were not and never had been strictly enforced. But with the Stamp Act and the attempt to tax the colonists went a general tightening up of the Navigation Laws, partly in the interests of home industry and partly for the sake of the additional revenue.

British warships began to hunt down smugglers, and it is probable that taxation was doubly resented because it was intended to maintain armed forces that were no longer needed to protect the colonists from the French but were used only to prevent them from carrying on what they regarded as their lawful occupation. If there had still been any danger from Canada the colonists might have been forced to submit to these innovations, but with the fall of Quebec they no longer felt any need of British protection or any inclination to submit to British dictation. The home government could not have chosen a more unsuitable time to make their demands.

A great deal of ingenuity has been wasted by historians on both sides in trying to make out a good legal case. Such a case can easily be made but it is quite futile to pass judgement upon a revolution on legal grounds. The important thing is that the American bourgeoisie were growing up, and like the English bourgeoisie of the seventeenth century, were forced by the very fact of their growth to break the barriers standing in their way. Allowing for the complicating addition of a national question, the American revolution and the English revolution form an almost exact parallel, both in their objects and in the forces at work. The American revolution had its upper class leadership and its lower middle class rank and file, its internal class struggle centred mainly around the agrarian question, a struggle not finally decided till the defeat of Andrew Jackson. The war was fought mainly by the small farmers, traders and artisans but its benefits went to the merchants and planters of whom Washington was a typical representative.

Because the American revolution was also a national war, the support it received in England was of a special character. The

defenders of the colonists had to be prepared to be dubbed anti-English and disloyal. The revolution coincides remarkably with the birth of English radicalism and helped to create the conditions for the birth of a working-class movement. Because the English bourgeoisie, their own revolution accomplished, had begun to be reactionary, the way was opened for a new class to take the field and for a new revolution to be placed on the order of the day.

One group, indeed, led by Pitt, now Earl of Chatham, opposed the coercion of the Americans as intelligent imperialists on the ground that it must lead to the break-up of the empire, but a powerful minority openly claimed for them the right to determine their own destiny. John Wilkes began his political life in the 1750s as an imperialist of the Chatham school. At this time he seems to have had no other idea than to play the political game as it was played by all young gentlemen of ability and means. In the early years of the reign of George III, during his famous battles over General Warrants and the freedom of the press, he reached a position far to the left of any then existing political group, and, almost in spite of himself, became the recognised leader of the London masses and the City merchants.

For half a generation 'Wilkes and Liberty' was the most popular of slogans; 1768, the year in which he was elected and unseated for the county of Middlesex, was marked by unprecedented demonstrations and strikes. On 10 May soldiers fired into a large crowd, killing six and wounding many more. This 'massacre of St George's Fields' only raised the agitation to new heights. At the same time as this agitation was going on, London was the scene of an unprecedented strike wave, in which weavers, merchant seamen, watermen, tailors, coal heavers and others were involved. Wilkes himself seems to have developed with the development of the mass movement. As Lord Mayor and Sheriff of London he acted as a popular tribune, his actions including the checking of profiteers in flour, a strong resistance to the pressing of Londoners into the armed forces and the improvement of prison conditions. Yet it is typical of his limitations that he always opposed any measure to interfere with the activities of the East India Company. His rich supporters were directly interested in the exploitation of India, about which the masses were as yet completely ignorant and indifferent.

Wilkes and his followers took part in the General Election of

1774 as a definite political group with a programme that included shorter parliaments, the exclusion from parliament of pensioners and placemen, fair and equal representation and the defence of the popular rights in Great Britain, Ireland and America – a programme which anticipated in some respects that of the Chartists. About twelve seats were won, a remarkable achievement when it is remembered how few constituencies were broad enough to give any reflection of popular feeling.

As early as 1768 Wilkes had been in close contact with the leaders of the revolt in the American colonies, and as the struggle over taxation became more acute he became their principal spokesman inside and outside parliament. A very large section of the merchants, particularly those who had trading connections with and even partners in America, were at this time strongly opposed to the action of the British government. After the outbreak of war, when many of his wealthier supporters had deserted him to get government contracts and many of the politically undeveloped workers had been caught up in the inevitable war fever, Wilkes continued and even strengthened his advocacy of what was now an unpopular cause. From 1779, the enthusiasm for the war began to diminish and he once more appeared likely to play an important part in politics.

In 1780, however, his active career was ended by the Gordon 'No Popery' Riots, a curious volcanic eruption of the London slum population, directed against a cause for which Wilkes had always fought and yet to a large extent the product of his earlier agitation. As a City magistrate, Wilkes helped to put down the riot, and in doing so snapped the chain that bound him to the London masses. His agitation dropped away and had no direct connection with the working class movement of the next decade<sup>1</sup> or with the 'Left' group of aristocratic Whigs led by Charles James Fox, yet it can only be understood as one of the first heavings of a wave which soon swept over all Europe.

In Ireland the response to the American revolution was far greater than in England. A force of 80,000 volunteers was raised in 1778, nominally to protect Ireland from invasion. The overwhelming majority of the volunteers regarded themselves rather as an army of national liberation, and there is little doubt

<sup>1</sup> But Horne Tooke, at one time associated with Wilkes, was later a leader of the Corresponding Society. See page 299.

that at this time, when England's forces were fully occupied elsewhere, Ireland could have secured complete independence. But the aristocratic and middle class leaders of the volunteers, having used them to obtain free trade and the legislative independence of the corrupt and oligarchic Dublin parliament, disarmed and betrayed them. Wolfe Tone a few years later bitterly declared that:

The Revolution of 1782 was a Revolution which enabled Irishmen to sell at a much higher price their honour, their integrity, and the interests of their country; it was a Revolution which, while at one stroke it doubled the value of every borough-monger in the kingdom left three-fourths of our countrymen the slaves it found them, and the government of Ireland in the base and wicked, and contemptible hands of those who had spent their lives in degrading and plundering her. ...The Power remained in the hands of our enemies.

So far as America itself was concerned the Stamp Act was only the beginning of a ten years' dispute which culminated in an American ban on English goods, an attempt to secure their importation by force, the 'Boston Tea Party', the closing of the port of Boston as a reprisal and the outbreak of hostilities at Bunker Hill in 1775. The first years of the war saw a number of English successes. The colonists suffered from the same defects of discipline and organisation which had handicapped the Puritans of the seventeenth century, and these were accentuated by the rivalries and disunity of the separate states. Like the Puritans they had to create the instruments of struggle during the actual conduct of the war. They were helped in this by the brutal methods of the British forces, composed largely of German mercenaries aided by Red Indians.

But, in October 1777 the Americans won their first great victory when General Burgoyne and 5,000 regulars were forced to surrender at Saratoga. This victory brought France Spain and later Holland into the war against England, which, largely owing to the way in which Prussia had been deserted at the Treaty of Paris,<sup>1</sup> was forced for the first time to fight without a European ally. The Baltic lands on whom the Navy depended more since the revolt in America than ever for its

<sup>1</sup> See page 265.

supplies of timber, tar and hemp, formed a pact of armed neutrality directed against England.

For the first time in the century the navy lost its command of the sea and it was largely the French blockade which led to the surrender of Cornwallis, British commander in America, at Yorktown in 1781. British supremacy in India was seriously threatened and it was only on account of some successes there and the naval victory of Rodney in the West Indies that the war could be brought to an end on reasonably favourable terms in 1783. The independence of America was recognised and Florida and Minorca were surrendered to Spain.

The victory of the American revolution was a blow to the whole corrupt, borough-mongering, oligarchic system of the eighteenth century and was followed by an immediate and powerful reaction against it at home. The first effect of this was to bring the Whigs back to power for a short time, during which they made some efforts to check the political activities of the crown and to remove some of the possibilities of parliamentary corruption.

The Whigs, however, were divided by conflict between William Pitt the younger, Chatham's son, champion of the East India Company, and Fox and Shelburne, who sought support from the manufacturers. Both factions intrigued with George III and his Ministers, Lord North and Thurlow, and Pitt, with the assistance of the resources for corruption of the East India Company, was able to outmanoeuvre his rivals. Fox and North formed a coalition, which brought in a Bill to establish parliamentary control over the company, but this was thrown out as a result of the opposition of Pitt, who then formed a coalition with Thurlow which had the backing of George III.

When, in 1783, Pitt, soon to be leader of the reorganised Tory party, became Prime Minister, and strengthened his position in an election won in 1784 by methods that even then were regarded as exceptionally discreditable, he still found it convenient to appear as a reformer and an enemy of corruption. Corruption had, however, become too powerful a vested interest for any change to be possible as long as the existing balance of class forces was preserved and within a few years the outbreak of the French Revolution had transformed most of the critics into defenders of the British constitution as a god-given and perfect masterpiece.

Any attempt at the slightest alteration of this masterpiece was branded as Jacobinism. This had the effect of reducing the advocates of reform in parliament to a handful of Whigs sufficiently well connected to be able to ignore such accusations, but it had also the effect of making parliamentary reform a matter of passionate interest to the working masses.

## **5 War and Industry**

The real history of the period between 1688 and the middle of the eighteenth century can be summed up in the three words: accumulation of capital. We have seen in the preceding sections of this chapter some of the ways in which this accumulation was taking place. First, through the growth of the national debt and consequently of taxation, concentrating great masses of capital in the hands of the small class able to provide the State with finances for war. Second, in the rapid increase of trade, based primarily on the monopoly control of a colonial empire. And, third, in the direct plunder of India. In the next chapter another source of accumulation will be described, the final destruction of the class of yeomen and the establishment of agriculture on a fully capitalist basis.

On the surface the period seems devoid of startling changes. Society was relatively stable, there were no marked alterations in the relations between the various classes, no rebellions and few signs of open discontent among the mass of the people. It was an age of the unquestioned acceptance of recognised authority, of the domination of squire and parson in the countryside, an age in which elegance was more prized than imagination and in which the word enthusiasm, carrying the implication of fanaticism, was always used in a disparaging sense. Only, beneath the surface, the streams of gold poured into the City, their level growing higher year by year, till the time when the flood burst out, transformed by some magic into mills and mines and foundries, and covered the face of half England, burying the old life and ways for ever. To this flood men have given the name of the Industrial Revolution, which forms the subject of the next chapter.

In actual fact, of course, it did not happen in quite the sudden and dramatic way in which this description might

suggest. What I have tried to convey is that here was a particularly striking example of the transition from a quantitative change – wars becoming *more* costly, the exploitation of the colonies *more* profitable, the capitalists becoming *more* rich – to a qualitative change – a change *from* a country predominantly agricultural *to* a country predominantly industrial, *from* an economy dominated by merchant capital *to* one dominated by industrial capital, *from* a country with class conflicts relatively masked and suppressed *to* one divided into classes violently and inevitably antagonistic.

With each accumulation of capital went increased possibilities for its profitable utilisation. The wars of the eighteenth century were almost all followed by the acquisition of new colonies: the colonies already established were growing rapidly in wealth and population. The American colonies had about 200,000 inhabitants in 1700 and between one and two million fifty years later. Between 1734 and 1773 the white population of the British West Indies rose from 36,000 to 58,000 and the slave population at least in proportion. The West Indies were, indeed, the most profitable of British possessions. In 1790 it was calculated that £70,000,000 was invested there against £18,000,000 in the Far East and that their trade with England was almost double the imports and exports of the East India Company. The richest West Indian planters, unlike the inhabitants of the American colonies, formed an integral part of the English bourgeoisie, which was why the American revolution had no counterpart among them.

Such a continuous increase of colonial wealth and trade provided a constantly rising market for British goods, a market for which the small-scale, hand production methods of the home industry were hardly adequate. And the wars of the eighteenth century, large-scale and long continued wars waged by professional armies, created not only a steady demand for British goods, but for goods of a special kind, for standardised goods.

Armies now wore regular uniforms and needed thousands of yards of cloth of a specified colour and quality, needed boots and buttons, needed muskets all capable of firing bullets of a definite calibre and bayonets all made to fix exactly on to these muskets. Not only the British armies had to be fed, clothed and equipped, but many of the armies of Britain's allies, who



depended equally upon her subsidies and her industry to keep them in the fields.

It was this demand for ever-increasing quantities of standard goods, and not the genius of this or that inventor, which was the basic cause of the Industrial Revolution. In theory the technical inventions of Watt, Arkwright or Roebuck might have been made at any time, though of course they depend on the technical advances of the immediately preceding generations. In fact, they were made towards the end of the eighteenth century because the conditions of the time were forcing men to use their wits on the problem of mass production of commodities and because the accumulation of capital had reached a point where full use could be made of mass production methods.

The wars of this age gave golden opportunities to all those who had the capital or the credit to take up army contracts, and the floating of loans and the remittance of subsidies to allied powers were equally profitable. Like most other things in the eighteenth century these contracts were freely jobbed and bankers and army contractors formed a permanent and not too reputable section of all eighteenth century parliaments. There was a continuous interpenetration of the landed aristocracy and the banking and merchant classes. In every generation scores of City magnates acquired titles and bought landed estates, especially in the Home Counties. Often their descendants could hardly be distinguished from the families who had done their jobbing in the seventeenth or even sixteenth centuries. Apart from the growing return to be obtained from capital invested in land, its possession gave a social status which could be obtained in no other way. At the same time the landowners began to invest their profits in industry and commerce, while the younger sons of landed families still often went into trade.

Such were the general conditions which led in England to the Industrial Revolution. In France the same series of events, under different circumstances, had quite different results. From the War of the Spanish Succession onward, France had been on the losing side. Even her victory in the American War brought no tangible benefit to offset its cost. One by one France was stripped of her colonies. Yet it was only as the centre of a great colonial empire that the complicated and expensive

bureaucratic and military organisations of the French state could justify themselves. Without colonies the State became top-heavy and was perpetually on the verge of bankruptcy.

At the same time the French bourgeoisie benefited, though to a less degree than their English rivals, from the general expansion of trade that followed the opening of the world to European exploitation and from the profits that even an unsuccessful war brings to this class. The result was a rising and ambitious capitalist class face to face with a discredited and bankrupt autocracy, an autocracy shored up with a certain number of institutions surviving from the age of feudalism. And below the French bourgeoisie were the overtaxed, exploited peasantry and artisans, of whom the latter at any rate saw as their main oppressors the aristocratic supporters of the monarchy.

The same chain of events, in short, differing in their incidence and operation, produced both the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution in England, and with them, produced the modern world.

# XI THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

## 1 Agriculture

Not only was agriculture by far the most important of English industries in the eighteenth century, but the changes which took place at this time in agricultural technique and organisation, and in the distribution of classes among the rural population, created conditions without which the Industrial Revolution would have been impossible. It is, therefore, necessary to begin any account of the Industrial Revolution with the series of events that completed the long drawn out transformation of agriculture from a subsistence to a capitalist industry. These events began before the Industrial Revolution and continued throughout it.

From 1685 a bounty of 5s. a quarter was paid on exported wheat when the price did not exceed 48s., that is, in all but years of famine. The last seven years of the seventeenth century were wet and sunless and prices rose well above the 48s. level, but from 1700 to 1765 prices were lower and relatively stable, averaging about 35s. and seldom rising much above 40s. or sinking much below 30s. Exports were considerable and increasing in amount:

1697-1705: 1,160,000 qrs. exported  
1706-1725: 5,480,000 qrs. exported  
1726-1745: 7,080,000 qrs. exported  
1746-1765: 9,515,000 qrs. exported

This steady export market, together with the considerable export of malt and barley and the provisioning of London provided agriculture with an external outlet which was a constant stimulus to improvement in technique. Having a steady market, the farmer no longer felt the urge to hang himself 'on th' expectation of plenty'. The results were especially

marked in the Eastern and South-eastern counties whose methods were in strong contrast to those of the still unenclosed cornlands of the Eastern Midlands whose produce could not easily be marketed in the absence of any adequate means of land transport. It was not till later, when canals had been built and a new market opened by the industrialisation of the adjacent regions of Yorkshire, the Black Country and Lancashire that the enclosure movement reached its height in the Midlands.

While some progress in agriculture was made during the seventeenth century it was not till after the revolution of 1688 that it became rapid. The revolution, which was the guarantee of this secure and expanding market, brought England into closer contact with the far more advanced technique of Holland, and such things as turnips and artificial grass crops like clover, which had been known for a century as curiosities, began to be used on a wider scale. The introduction of these crops meant the abandonment of the old rotation of two corn crops and a fallow for a more scientific rotation in which corn, roots and grass were sown in a four years' course. To get the full value from the new crops deep ploughing and hoeing were introduced, breaking up the soil more thoroughly and keeping it free from weeds.

No less striking was the effect on the breeding of sheep and cattle, which, up to this time, had been valued chiefly for their wool and as draught animals. So long as this was the case, and the bulk of the cattle were slaughtered every autumn because of the scarcity of fodder while those that were kept were half-starved throughout the winter, scientific breeding was impossible. Now it was possible, without any decrease in the production of corn, to feed beasts throughout the winter. Sheep, formerly rivals to tillage, became a valuable addition to the normal course of arable farming. Cattle, instead of being allowed to graze haphazard over the fallows, were stall fed. The average weight of sheep and cattle sold at Smithfield in 1710 was 28 lbs. and 370 lbs. In 1795 it was 80 lbs. and 800 lbs.

The new methods of breeding reacted in turn on the growing of corn. For the first time an abundant supply of manure became available both from the systematic folding of sheep over grass and root crops and from the cattle and pigs fattened in the farmyards. Thus each advance in one branch of agriculture created possibilities of further advance in other

branches. While the demand for meat grew with the increase of population, oxen were found unsuitable for the deep ploughing coming into vogue and were gradually replaced by horses. Agricultural tools and machinery were improved to keep in line with other advances. By the beginning of the nineteenth century an all iron plough began to come into quite general use: as early as 1730 Tull was experimenting with a seed drill, and this implement began to take something like its modern form in the 1780s.

All these changes had one thing in common: they could only be brought about by the application of considerable quantities of capital. They were entirely incompatible with the primitive open field farming still practised over about half the country and almost incompatible with the small-scale yeomen farming that had replaced it in some areas. The pioneers of the new methods were substantial men, mainly rich landowners farming large estates, men like Jethro Tull, Lord (Turnip) Townshend, Coke of Holkham and Bakewell who led the way in improving the breed of sheep. Consequently, the technical revolution led to, and developed alongside of, a social revolution that changed the whole structure of rural England.

While the enclosures of earlier times had been made with the object of turning arable land into sheep pasture,<sup>1</sup> those of the eighteenth century transformed the communally cultivated open fields into large, compact farms on which the new and more scientific mixed farming could be profitably carried out. In addition, much common land not then under the plough, land on which the villagers had certain long standing customary rights of pasturage or wood or turf cutting, as well as other land which had previously been mere waste, was now enclosed.

In other parts of England those of the smaller farmers who were tenants were gradually evicted or were ruined by rents four, five and even ten times as high as had been customary. Land farmed on the new methods could be made to pay these increased rents but this was no help to men whose farms and capital were too small to adopt them successfully. Many of the small freeholders were also forced to sell out by the impossibility of competing with the up-to-date methods of their richer neighbours. Heavy land taxes, especially after 1688, acted as an incentive to landlords to rent their estates to tenants

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VI, Section 3.

farming from 200 acres upwards and doing their own repairs, and this led to a general consolidation of holdings and the squeezing out of small tenant farmers.

The period saw a marked decrease of farms under 100 acres and a marked increase of those over 300 acres, and it has been calculated that between 1740 and 1788 the number of separate farms declined by over 40,000. The process was begun well before the former date and continued at an increased speed after the latter. The number of Enclosure Acts passed through parliament indicates roughly how the movement developed, except that in the earlier part of the century much land was enclosed without an Act being obtained. From 1717 to 1727 there were 15 such Acts, from 1728 to 1760, 226, from 1761 to 1796, 1,482 while from 1797 to 1820, the period of the Napoleonic wars, there were 1,727. In all, more than four million acres were enclosed under these Acts.

Beginning in Norfolk and Essex, the enclosures reached their height in the last part of the century when they began seriously to affect the Midlands. From about 1760 the whole situation was transformed. The growth of population changed England from an exporting to an importing country at a time when few countries had any considerable surplus of corn. Prices rose rapidly and began to fluctuate wildly. From 1764 to 1850 wheat was only four times below 40s. a quarter and in a number of years, especially between 1800 and 1813, exceeded 100s. While good profits had been made in the eighteenth century, it was now possible to make great fortunes: it was also possible to lose them. When the war cut off the European grain supply prices fluctuated still more wildly and corn growing became a gamble in which only those with ample resources could hope to survive. This both attracted capitalists to invest in landed property and weakened more than ever the position of the small farmers.

Acts of Enclosure were obtainable with the consent of four-fifths in number and value of the occupiers of land in the parish to be enclosed. Where, as was often the case, most of these were tenants of one or two big landowners this consent could easily be obtained, and, in general, improper pressure and bribery were freely employed. Force and fraud were not less the characteristics of the enclosures of the eighteenth century than of those of More's day.

After an Act had been obtained the land was reallocated among the holders. Even when this reallocation was fairly carried out it was usually accompanied by considerable hardship. Tenants at will might, and often did, lose land which their families had cultivated for generations. Copy and lease holders were often persuaded to sell out and the difficulty which they had in finding the considerable sums of money to meet the legal expenses of the enclosure and the cost of fencing their new farms made them more ready to do so. Even freeholders suffered in the same way, so that the enclosures effected a remarkable concentration of both the occupation and ownership of the land. The result of the enclosures is thus summed up by the French historians, G. Renard and G. Weulersse:

As soon as Parliament had passed the Act, the work of redistribution was carried out by a powerful commission, which was under the influence of wealthy landowners to such an extent that reallocation amounted practically to confiscation. The lot assigned to each small proprietor was usually worth much less than the one of which he had been despoiled.

The sums received under conditions amounting virtually to a forced sale were usually too small to be employed successfully in any other business even if the farmer had known how to make good use of them. A few, especially in Lancashire and Yorkshire, became successful manufacturers, but the vast majority spent their money quickly and then sank to the position of wage labourers whether on the land or in the new industrial towns.

A third class, the cottagers, found their rights even more ruthlessly violated. Few were able to establish any legal grounds for the customary rights over the village commons and fewer still received any adequate compensation for the loss of these rights. A whole class that had lived by a combination of domestic industry, the keeping of a few beasts or some poultry and regular or occasional work for wages, now found itself thrown back entirely on the last of these resources, since the period of enclosures was also the period in which domestic industry was being destroyed by the competition of the new factories. Lord Ernle fills nearly three pages of his *English Farming Past and Present* with a list of local and domestic

industries which perished at this time.

From about the middle of the eighteenth century the improvement in agricultural technique began to make it possible to economise in labour. Wages fell rapidly in relation to prices: in many parts cottages were destroyed or allowed to become ruinous and there was both a decrease in numbers and a decline in the standards of life of the majority throughout the greater part of rural England. In the later part of the century there was not only an increase in the total population but a marked shifting of population from one part of the country to another. No reliable figures are available, but it is at least probable that the increase was smaller and the shifting greater than was at one time supposed.

The revolution in agriculture had three results which went far beyond the limits of agriculture itself. First it increased the productivity of the land and so made possible the feeding of the great industrial population in the new towns.

Second, it created a reserve army of wage earners, now 'freed' completely from any connection with the soil, men without ties of place or property. It provided a force of free labourers corresponding to the free capital whose accumulation was outlined in the last chapter, and it was the coming together of this labour and this capital, at a time when the large scale production of commodities was at last possible, which was the essence of the Industrial Revolution.

Third, there was the creation of a vastly increased internal market for manufactured goods. The subsistence farmer, with his domestic industry and his isolation from the outside world, might consume a good deal and yet buy very little. The labourer into whom he had now evolved was usually compelled to consume a great deal less but everything he consumed had to be bought. And it was only on the firm basis of a substantial home market that a great exporting industry could be built up.

## **2 Fuel, Iron and Transport**

Early in the eighteenth century England was faced with an intensification of the fuel shortage which had led to so great an increase in coal mining a century earlier that London, and to a less extent other large towns, were mainly dependent on coal



for domestic use, and a whole range of new industries had developed entirely based on its use. In spite of this, the wastage of England's timber resources went on apace. For centuries the great forests had been invaded, trees felled and land brought under the plough. Little had been done in the way of replacement. Wood for domestic use began to be scarce and dear while the iron industry was threatened with extinction. All smelting was done with charcoal, and so primitive were the methods employed that many tons of wood were needed to produce one ton of iron. The timber of the Sussex Weald gave out first. That of Shropshire and the Forest of Dean, to which the industry migrated, was already showing signs of exhaustion. Ireland was soon stripped bare.<sup>1</sup> Strenuous and repeated efforts were made to establish iron smelting on a large scale in New England but here the Navigation Laws proved an obstacle to industrial development. In England itself the production of iron fell year by year and the country became increasingly dependent for its supplies upon Sweden and Russia.

Meanwhile experiments were being made to use coal for the smelting of iron ore. From quite early in the Middle Ages coal had been used for domestic purposes and in a number of industries, and it was mined in quantity around Newcastle, in Scotland and other areas where seams lay close to the surface and where easy transport was available by water. Large quantities of this Tyneside 'sea-coal' were shipped to London.

Attempts had been made to use coal for smelting iron even before the civil war, but it was not till the middle of the eighteenth century, when the fuel situation was becoming really desperate, that smelting with coal was established as a commercial possibility. The Darbys of Colebrookdale and Roebuck, who established his famous works at Carron in 1760, made a series of improvements which showed not only that it was practical to use coke for smelting iron but that with a blast sufficiently powerful to get rid of sulphur and other impurities it was a far more economical and effective form of fuel than charcoal. In 1765 the iron industry found a new centre at Merthyr and henceforward the number and size of the blast furnaces increased yearly. The production of pig iron, which was only 17,350 tons in 1740, had risen to 68,300 tons in 1788

<sup>1</sup> See page 221.

and to 125,079 tons in 1796.

Without coal there could have been no modern, scientific metallurgy and modern metallurgy is the technical key to large-scale industry. Without it the construction of the elaborate and delicate machinery needed by the textile and other industries would have been as impossible as that of steam engines strong and exact enough to serve as a source of industrial power. Iron was soon put to a variety of new uses: the first iron bridge was built over the Severn in 1779 and the first iron ship in 1790. Improvements in the quality and purity of the iron went hand in hand with increasing accuracy in tool making. The turn of the century saw the invention of the lathe with slide rest and the planer, which began to make it possible for the engineer to work to increasingly small fractions of an inch. Without these developments the elaborate machinery needed for large-scale production would have been quite impossible, and they paved the way for that interchangeability of parts which was to characterise the true mass production of half a century later. Nevertheless, British engineering, if only because it was the pioneer, advanced largely along rule of thumb lines and has always lagged behind that of the USA in standardisation and mass production methods.

With the exception of some of its lighter branches such as nail making, the iron industry had never been organised on a domestic basis. The iron masters of Sussex and the Midlands had been substantial men working with a large capital and it was therefore possible for the industry to make rapid progress without much structural alteration. By the end of the century England was a considerable exporting country and had even begun to import high quality ore from Sweden and Spain to be smelted with coal mined at home. It was for this reason that the industry took so firm a root, for example, along the coast of South Wales.

Coal mining also developed rapidly. New pits were opened up in South Wales, Scotland, Lancashire and Yorkshire, and output increased from 2,600,000 tons in 1700 to 7,600,000 tons in 1790 and over 10,000,000 tons in 1795. This industry, too, was always capitalist and many peers and great landowners were also coalowners. The Duke of Bridgewater, for example, famous as a builder of canals, was also noted for the truck system by which he robbed the Worsley miners of a large part of their

wages while the Lonsdale and Londonderry families shared the eighteenth century habit of regarding their colliers as a kind of serf.

Yet coal had one serious drawback as compared with wood: while the latter was fairly evenly distributed throughout the country, coal deposits were concentrated in a few counties. This disadvantage was only partly counterbalanced by the fact that in a number of places, such as South Wales and the Midlands, deposits of coal and iron were found side by side. Consequently coal could never be an effective substitute for wood so long as internal communications remained in the primitive state in which they were at the beginning of the eighteenth century. It was the mining of coal and the beginnings of the heavy industry which gave the first impulse to the improvement of transport and above all to the construction of canals.

In 1700 few roads existed along which wheeled traffic was possible at all times of the year. Lighter goods were carried in panniers slung over the backs of horses but for any bulky articles the cost of such transport was prohibitive. The carriage of coal from Manchester to Liverpool cost 40s. a ton. Even when better roads had been built between some of the important centres land transport remained costly.

The Duke of Bridgewater in 1759 employed Brindley to cut an eleven mile canal between his Worsley collieries and Manchester. This was so successful that when it was completed the price of coal in Manchester fell by exactly one half. Two years later the canal was extended to Runcorn, linking Manchester to the sea. The next venture was to connect this canal with the Trent and the Potteries which needed heavy material, such as clay from Devon and Cornwall and flints from East Anglia, and whose products were at once too bulky and too fragile to be suitable for carriage by road. When the Grand Junction Canal was finished the cost of transport was cut to one quarter and both the pottery industry and the working of the Cheshire salt deposits increased enormously.

Very soon a regular fever of canal building, comparable to the great railway boom of the nineteenth century, swept over the country which was quickly covered with a network of waterways.

In four years alone (1790-94) no fewer than eighty-one Acts for the construction of canals were obtained. The whole

interior of England, hitherto forced to consume and produce the great bulk of its own necessities, was now laid open to commerce. The wheat, coal, pottery and iron goods of the Midlands found a ready way to the sea and coal in particular could now be carried easily to any part of the country. Even though a general improvement in the roads was effected at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, canals remained the principal of means for the distribution of heavy and non-perishable goods till they were deliberately destroyed by the railway companies forty or fifty years later.

Little improvement was made in the roads so long as they were kept in repair by occasional forced labour of the villages through which they passed, labour organised in a haphazard way by parish overseers. Early in the eighteenth century this system was supplemented by the erection of toll gates along the main roads: in this way the upkeep of the roads was paid for by the traffic passing along them. After the Jacobite rising of 1745 some roads were constructed for military purposes but the development was still very uneven. In some places where efficient turnpike trusts existed a road would be good. A few miles farther on, if the trust was corrupt and inefficient, as was not unusual in this period, the road would be correspondingly bad. Farther on again it might still be maintained by parish labour and be almost impassable. The minor roads and by-roads had scarcely altered since the Middle Ages.

It was not till the early years of the nineteenth century, in the age of the stage coach and the scientific road engineering begun by Macadam, that there was a general improvement. Shortly after, the development of the roads, like that of the canals, was checked by the advent of the railway and little more was done till the motor came into general use.

Bad as roads were about 1800 by the standards of today, they had improved greatly in the preceding century, and, though canals were more important for the carriage of goods, the speed and ease with which communication could now be maintained between all parts of Great Britain, and the regular postal system which was established, proved a great stimulus to the progress of industry by bringing manufacturers more closely into touch with their markets.

### **3 Textiles: The Speenhamland Experiment**

The development of the wool industry to a semi-capitalist stage in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with the clothier acting as a virtual employer of the handworker, has already been outlined.<sup>1</sup> We have seen that this development was arrested in the later part of the sixteenth century, that the absence of machinery, the restricted market and the insufficient accumulation of capital combined to prevent the growth of a real factory system and of mass production methods. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century the industry remained in a state of suspension, growing in extent but not altering radically in structure and organisation.

In some respects, indeed, there was a tendency to move backwards. The older centres of the industry, East Anglia and the West Country, where the influence of the clothiers was strongest, remained stagnant, and it was in the West Riding of Yorkshire, where the weaving began afresh on a more purely domestic basis, that the most rapid progress was made. The difference between these areas is illustrated by the reception accorded to Kay's flying shuttle towards the middle of the eighteenth century. The flying shuttle was not too costly to be within the reach of the independent weavers, but when an attempt was made to introduce it into East Anglia there was violent opposition on the ground that it threw men out of work and that all the profits were reaped by the clothiers. In the West Riding the domestic weavers welcomed it because it added considerably to their earnings.

Nevertheless the steady growth of the industry, and especially of exports, was bound in time to have its effect. J. Massie, writing in 1764, said that the exports of woollen cloth, which under Charles II

did not much exceed the yearly value of one million pounds, amounted in 1699 to almost three millions sterling, from which vast sum, with occasional ebblings and flowings, our annual exports of Woollen Manufactures have gradually risen to full four millions of late years.

The West Riding had its due share of this increase. The

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VI, Section 1.

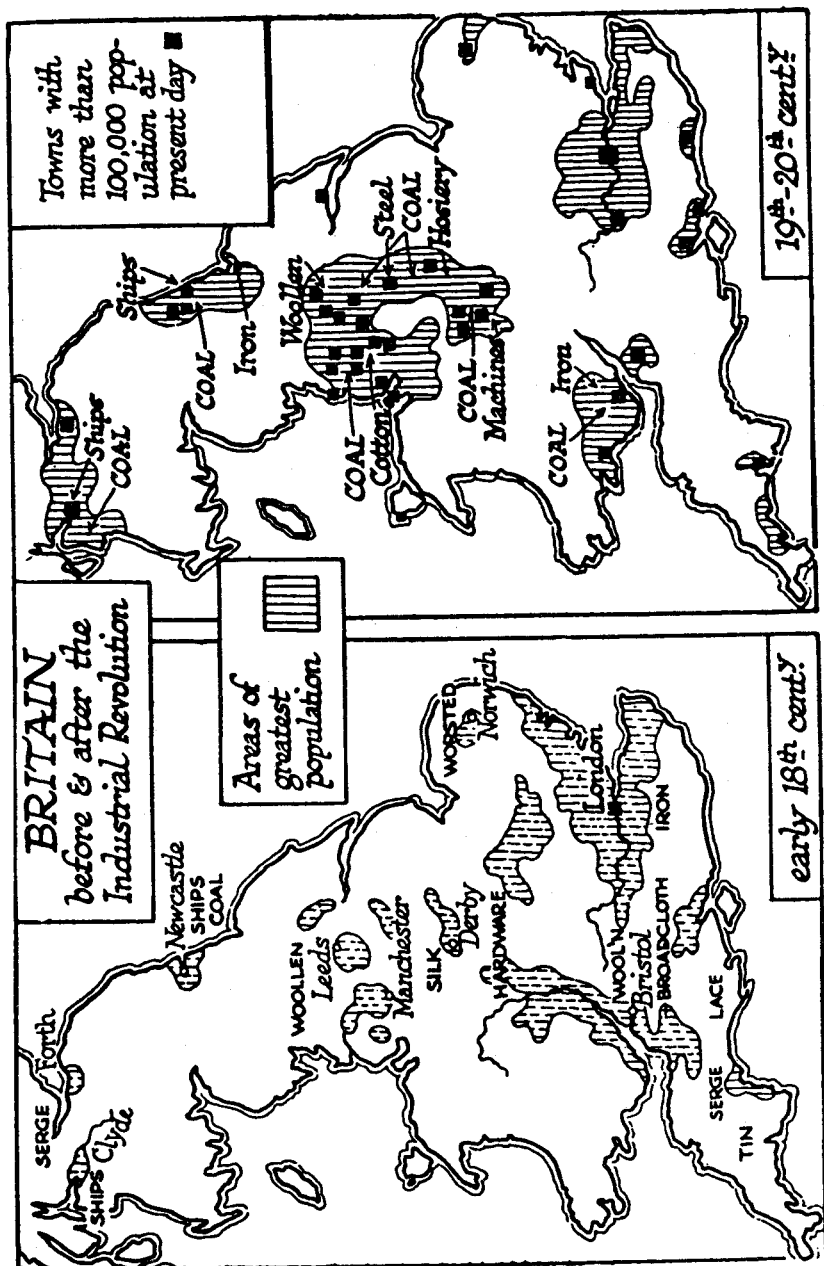
number of pieces of 'broad woollen cloth' manufactured there rose from 26,671 in 1726 to 60,964 in 1750, and at the same time the length of the piece had almost doubled from thirty-five to about sixty yards.

Striking as the progress in the wool industry was, it was not there, but in the newer, more concentrated, and, from the beginning, more capitalist cotton industry that the decisive advances were made. It was established only with difficulty and after a long struggle with the powerful wool interests which saw in it a dangerous rival. Fine cotton goods were imported from India and became very popular till an Act of Parliament forbade their import in 1700 on the grounds that it

must inevitably be to the great detriment of this Kingdom by exhausting the treasure thereof ... and taking away the Labour of the People whereby very many of the Manufacturers of the Nation are become excessively burdensome and chargeable to their respective Parishes.

The prohibition of Indian cotton goods gave an impetus to the manufacture of substitutes at home, though it was a long time before cotton yarn could be made sufficiently strong to be woven without a warp of linen or wool. At first the new industry was considerably hampered by restrictions insisted upon by the jealous wool manufacturers but the cheapness, lightness and novelty of the cotton cloths gave them a ready sale. It was just because the new industry was artificially planted, depended on a raw material imported from abroad and was forced to be adaptable and ready to adopt new methods to defeat attacks and to overcome technical difficulties that it developed on a capitalist basis and was the first to profit by the inventions of the late eighteenth century.

It was from the start centred in Lancashire, where there was wool needed for the warp and a damp climate which proved suitable for spinning cotton yarn. Like all textile industries it was sharply divided into two main sections, spinning and weaving. The latter was the better paid and the more prosperous. Spinning was a slow and laborious process and it had always been difficult for the spinners to supply the weavers with sufficient yarn to work upon. Kay's flying shuttle, by doubling the speed at which cloth could be woven, completely upset the balance between the two sections, creating a chronic



shortage of yarn and an urgent necessity for an improved method of spinning.

In 1764 a Blackburn weaver named Hargreaves produced his spinning jenny. A few years later Arkwright invented the water frame which not only spun cotton more rapidly but produced a yarn of finer quality so that cotton fabrics could be made with no admixture of wool or linen. Crompton's mule combined the advantages of both these machines. At about the same time Whitney's cotton gin simplified the extraction of workable cotton from the plant and so increased the supply of raw material and there was an immense increase in plantation slavery in the cotton states of the USA.

The balance between weaving and spinning was thus again destroyed, this time in favour of spinning. Henceforward, a continuous series of over-compensating technical advances resulted in each section, stimulating progress in the others and so creating a permanent disequilibrium. Cartwright's power loom, as perfected by Horrocks and others after a decade of experiment, enabled the weaver once more to outpace the spinner while other typical inventions concerned woolcombing and the printing of calicoes.

Unlike the flying shuttle and the spinning jenny, which were only improved forms of the hand loom and the spinning wheel, Arkwright's water frame and the machines that followed it required external power, supplied at first by water. This necessarily placed them beyond the reach of the domestic workers and led at once to the creation of factories where masses, at first of spinners and afterwards of weavers as well, were collected to work for wages paid by employers who not only owned the material that was being worked up but also the instruments that were used and the place where the work was done.

By 1788 there were 143 such water mills and the abundant water power in Lancashire led to a further concentration there of industry and population. In 1785 the steam engine was first used to drive spinning machinery and it rapidly drove out of favour the less manageable and dependable water power. The discovery of large coal deposits kept the industry still in Lancashire and by the end of the century the cotton capitalists were 'steam mill mad'. The use of steam as a source of power freed industry from its close dependence upon the rivers which it previously needed. Mills and whole towns sprung up in new



places wherever conditions were favourable. Nor was the use of steam long confined to the textile industries: for some time it had been used to pump water from the mines, now it began to be the main motive power for all industries in which power was needed. This in turn gave a great new impetus to the coal-mining and metallurgical industries and made new demands upon the transport system, demands which were met by the application of steam power itself to drive trains and ships.

A witness before the Factory Commission of 1833 described the varied recruits drawn into these factories:

A good many from the agricultural parts; a many from Wales; a many from Ireland and from Scotland. People left other occupations and came to spinning for the sake of the high wages. I recollect shoemakers leaving their employ and learning to spin; I recollect tailors; I recollect colliers; but a great many more husbandmen left their employ to learn to spin; very few weavers at that time left their employ to learn to spin, but as the weavers could put their children into mills at an earlier age than they could to the looms, they threw them into the mills as soon as possible.

The main sources of recruitment appear very clearly: it was upon child labour, the labour of handicraftsmen who were losing their occupations, of the Irish reduced to starvation level by English rule and above all upon the labour of the new rural proletariat fleeing from the vast distressed area into which enclosures had turned a great part of England that the Industrial Revolution was effected. The conditions and fortunes of the industrial workers in the towns will be dealt with in a later chapter.

Until about 1790 machine production was confined almost entirely to the cotton industry and to Lancashire. Its effects were therefore limited to a small section of the population and it provided employment for many more people than it displaced. When machinery began to be applied to wool textiles hardly a single county was not affected. And since the impact came at the very height of the enclosures, when the country workers had already been deprived of many of their accustomed sources of income, the effect was disastrous. Prices were rising much faster than wages just when thousands found themselves forced as they had never been before to rely entirely upon these wages. Hand spinners and weavers either found themselves deprived of their occupation or driven into a

hopeless contest with the machine which led to untold misery prolonged through more than a generation before domestic industry finally went under.

In 1795, when wheat stood at 75s. a quarter and the wages of agricultural workers averaged, perhaps, 8s. a week, it was clear that a man and his family could not exist upon such a wage unless it were supplemented from some outside source. The labourers themselves were certainly of this opinion and expressed it in bread riots which broke out in almost every county of England. The riots were remarkably orderly; there was little pillaging, and it was far more common for stocks of food to be seized and sold at a reduced price. The riots were, in fact, a crude way of fixing prices at what the people felt to be a reasonable level but they were none the less alarming for that.

Two possible courses lay before the authorities who had no practical means of fixing prices. One was to revive the obsolete legislation of the sixteenth century and fix rates of wages based on the cost of living. The other, and obviously the more satisfactory from the point of view of the employers, was to subsidise wages from the rates. This policy had already been adopted in a number of places before the Berkshire magistrates held their famous meeting at Speenhamland on 6 May 1795. Here they decided that 'every poor and industrious man' should have for his support 3s. for himself and 1s. 6d. for each member of his family, 'either procured by his own or by his family's labours, or an allowance from the poor-rate', when the gallon loaf cost 1s. This allowance was to increase with the price of bread. The scale was adopted so generally that the decision of the Berkshire magistrates came to be known as the 'Speenhamland Act' and was widely believed to have the force of law.

The effect was soon felt when the cost of the Poor Rate, which had averaged about £700,000 in the middle of the eighteenth century and stood at about £2,000,000 in 1790, rose to nearly £4,000,000 by 1800 and later to nearly £7,000,000. Between 1810 and 1834 it only fell below £6,000,000 in six years.

During the eighteenth century the Poor Law system had been based on the principle that a person was entitled to relief in the parish where he was born and nowhere else. In practice this meant that all the poor were regarded as potential paupers and were liable to be deported to their place of birth on the

suspicion that at some future date they might become chargeable upon the rates. Such a system was in keeping with the static civilisation of the eighteenth century: it was wholly out of keeping with the condition of wholesale migration characteristic of the Industrial Revolution. The Speenhamland system, which made paupers expensive to the ratepayers but profitable to the employing classes, gave the old Poor Law its death blow.

About 1720 a quite widespread movement had begun for the erection of workhouses. In many places this resulted in an immediate halving of the rate. The case of Maidstone, given with many more in *An Account of the Work-Houses in Great Britain*, published in 1732, is sufficiently characteristic to stand for the rest. After explaining that many of the poor were still maintained outside the workhouse and that in spite of that the rate had fallen from about £1,000 to £530, the account proceeds:

The advantage of a Workhouse does not only consist in this, that the Poor are maintained at less than half the Expence that their Weekly pay amounted to, but that very great numbers of lazy People, rather than submit to the Confinement and Labour of the Workhouses, are content to throw off the Mask, and maintain themselves by their own Industry. And this was so remarkable here at Maidstone, that when our Workhouse was finished, and publick Notice given that all who came to demand their weekly Pay, should be sent thither, little more than half the Poor upon the List came to the Overseers to receive their Allowance. Were all the Poor in our town obliged to live in the Workhouse, I believe we might very well maintain them for three hundred and fifty pounds a Year at the utmost.

A very large proportion of the inmates of these workhouses, especially the children, were taught spinning, weaving or some such trade. These pauper apprentices were later transported in thousands to the mills of Lancashire, where, being entirely defenceless, they formed the ideal human material for the cotton masters. The scandal of their treatment was eventually the starting point for factory legislation.

Whatever may have been the intention of the Berkshire magistrates, and it is highly improbable that they were the sentimental philanthropists some historians have supposed

them to have been, the Speenhamland Act proved to be little more than a subsidy for low wages, led to wholesale pauperisation of the working people, and eventually, by way of reaction, to the Poor Law Bastilles of the Act of 1834.<sup>1</sup> Farmers and other employers everywhere cut down wages, knowing that they would be made up out of the rates. In many areas the whole working population became pauperised and men were sent round from farmer to farmer by the parish authorities till someone could be found to give them work at any price. The system was obviously most profitable to the largest employers, who were able to transfer part of their wages bill on to those ratepayers who employed little or no labour.

It fell most crushingly upon the small farmers who were already faced with great difficulties. Those of them who had survived the enclosures shared few of the advantages which their richer neighbours derived from the war conditions. The price of cattle and dairy produce, for example, on which they chiefly depended, had risen much less than the price of corn. Now they were asked to pay high rates to supplement the wages of their successful competitors and many of them were ruined by this new burden.

Another effect of the Speenhamland system was to stimulate the growth of population, which increased rapidly in spite of the general distress and the reckless wastage of life in the factories. A peasant population tends to be relatively stable because too large families involve too great a division of the land holdings and because the young men often postpone marriage till they have a farm of their own. The enclosures had removed this restraint. Marriages took place much earlier because the labourer had no possible improvement in his fortune for which it would be reasonable to wait. Now, under the Speenhamland scale, children were actually a source of income, and in some places, one or more illegitimate children came to be looked upon as a kind of dowry which made it easier for a young woman to find a husband.

The growth of factories produced similar results in the industrial areas, where wages were often so low that it was necessary to send the children to work as young as possible. Machinery was soon developed to the point at which few men

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIII, Section 1.

were needed and widespread unemployment among them was often accompanied by the overworking and intense exploitation of women and especially of children. It was not uncommon for parents to be refused relief unless they sent their children to work in the mills. The period of high wages in spinning which had at first attracted labour from other trades proved of very short duration.

The peculiar misery of the time, due to the revolution in industrial and agricultural production, with its accompaniments of increasing population and high prices, was accentuated by two external factors. First, the years from 1789 to 1802 produced a remarkable and almost uninterrupted series of bad harvests due to weather conditions. And, second, the central period of the Industrial Revolution – 1793 to 1815 – was occupied by European wars on a scale never before known. It would hardly be too much to say that Britain entered these wars an agricultural and emerged from them an industrial country.

#### **4 The French Revolution**

Very few people in Europe realised that a new epoch was beginning when the French Estates-General met at Versailles on 5 May 1789. For nearly a decade France had appeared to be declining into the position of a second Spain. Unbalanced budgets and a bankrupt treasury, an army and a navy incompetently led and irregularly paid, a peasantry permanently overtaxed and suffering from the famine caused by a series of ruinous harvests formed the background to and the reason for the calling of an assembly that had not met since 1614.

Before long the Third Estate found itself in violent conflict with the crown and the aristocracy and was forced along the path of revolutionary struggle. In this it received strong support from the peasantry and the lower classes in the towns. Châteaux were attacked and burnt and great estates broken up. On 14 July the people of Paris stormed the Bastille. In October they marched out to Versailles and brought the king back as a virtual prisoner to Paris. To foreign observers all these events appeared to confirm their first impression that France was sinking into anarchy and could be neglected as a European

power. Austria, Russia and Prussia, relieved from anxiety in the West, turned to the congenial task of partitioning Poland. Only by degrees did they realise that a new power, and new menace against which the traditional defences were of little avail, was arising out of the chaos.

It was in England that this realisation first found expression. Here the power of the bourgeoisie had been consolidated in the revolutionary period a century earlier and here alone, therefore, the dominant sections of the bourgeoisie had no sympathy with the revolution in France. Abroad it might in time set up a commercial and industrial rival: at home a new revolution could only raise questions better left alone and rouse classes which up to now had been successfully kept in subjection. As the revolution in France became increasingly violent and popular their terror increased. 'Jacobinism' meant an attack on privilege and in England privilege was not so much aristocratic as bourgeoisie. While the revolution divided every country in Europe into two camps the line of demarcation was drawn at one point in England and at another in all the other European countries. In the first the higher strata of the bourgeoisie were above and in the second below this line.

On the other hand British interests were not at first directly threatened for geographical reasons. Britain, therefore, was one of the last countries actually to join in the counter-revolutionary war, yet, once involved, she was the most determined in carrying it through.

Characteristically it was Burke, a former Whig, who sounded the alarm in his fantastic but eloquent *Reflections on the French Revolution*. The *Reflections* had an immense vogue among the ruling class both in England and abroad, and even in France, where they encouraged the nobility to an unwise resistance. The powerful 'trade union of crowned heads' began to rally to the support of the French monarchy, and in 1791, the Emperor of Austria and the King of Prussia issued the Declaration of Pillnitz, in which they invited the powers of Europe to

employ in conjunction with their said Majesties the most efficacious means in their power to place the King of France in a position to establish in perfect freedom the foundations of a monarchical government equally suited to the rights of Sovereigns and the prosperity of the French nation.

The declaration was largely bluff but the French people had no means of knowing this and they were even more alarmed at the constant intrigues between the Emperor and the thousands of nobles (including the brothers of Louis XVI) who had left France and were now occupying themselves with counter-revolutionary conspiracy. The willingness of European sovereigns to intervene grew with the spread of revolutionary ideas among their own subjects. In England Tom Paine's *Rights of Man* created an even greater sensation than Burke's *Reflections* to which it was a reply.

Yet it would be a mistake to regard the war of 1792 merely as an attack by the reactionary powers on revolutionary France. 'Liberty, equality, fraternity' was an explosive slogan with a universal appeal that carried it easily across frontiers and the French regarded themselves as the pioneers of a general liberation. The idea of a revolutionary war gained ground rapidly among both the Girondists, the party of the upper middle class, and the Jacobins who represented the lower middle class and the artisans. Both parties were more than prepared to take up the challenge of Austria and Prussia and it was from the Girondists, who hoped to improve their position for their internal struggle against the Jacobins as well as to extend the revolution beyond the boundaries of France, that the actual declaration of war came. There can be little doubt, however, that war was by that time inevitable. It was preceded by a manifesto in which the French government promised assistance to all nations that should revolt against their oppressors. This was later explained as being meant only to apply 'to those peoples who, after having acquired their liberty by conquest should demand the assistance of the republic'.

After initial disasters the raw French armies poured into Belgium, which had been prepared to welcome them by a revolt against Austrian rule that had only been suppressed a couple of years before. It was the conquest of Belgium and the denouncing of commercial treaties connected with that country that brought revolutionary France into direct conflict with British interests. Early in 1793 Britain entered the war, joining with Austria, Prussia, Spain and Piedmont to form the First Coalition.

Before war began the radical and republican agitation which arose in England as a reflection of the revolution in France had been met with a pogrom and severe legal repression. Tory

mobs, with the connivance of the magistrates, looted and burned the houses of radicals and dissenters in Birmingham and elsewhere. Among the sufferers was the scientist Priestley. The Whig party was soon split, the majority going over to Pitt and the reaction and only a handful under Fox persisting in their demands for reform. Small as it was, this group was of great historical importance because it formed the link between the Whigs of the eighteenth century and the Liberals of the nineteenth century and the nucleus around which the new forces entering the Liberal Party centred after Waterloo.

Fox and his followers were aristocrats: the period saw also the first definitely working class political organisation, the Corresponding Society. Its official programme was only universal suffrage and annual parliaments, but most of its members were republicans and disciples of Paine. Paine, who had fought for the Americans in the war of independence and had helped to formulate both the Declaration of Independence and the Declaration of the Rights of Man, was a passionate advocate of the then novel idea that politics were the business of the whole mass of the common people and not only of a governing oligarchy. Government was only tolerable if it secured to the whole people 'Life, Liberty and the pursuit of happiness', and any government which failed by this test ought to be overthrown, if necessary by revolution. His clear and logical exposition of the principles of the French revolution won a ready hearing among the intelligent working men from whose ranks the Corresponding Society drew its members.

The weakness of the movement lay in its limited character. It was confined mainly to London and towns like Norwich, Sheffield and Nottingham whose skilled artisans and mechanics formed the upper stratum of the working class. It won little support as yet among the workers in the industrial towns of the North. These were full of misery and discontent but the dispossessed peasants and ruined domestic workers who crowded there were not yet capable of political thought or activity. Their protest took the form of desperate acts of violence and destruction, and on more than one occasion the ruling classes were able to direct this violence against the radicals as at Manchester and Bolton. It was only at the end, when the repression of Pitt was operating to crush the movement, that it began to make contacts with the new industrial proletariat and these contacts came too



late to be immediately fruitful.

In 1794 Pitt suspended habeas corpus and rushed through laws to prohibit the holding of public meetings. The suspension of habeas corpus lasted for eight years. Even before this *The Rights of Man* was banned and Paine only escaped trial by a flight to France. The rest of his life was spent there and in America. The Corresponding Society and other radical organisations were declared illegal and Thomas Hardy, a shoemaker, was put on trial for treason along with Horne Tooke and other leaders of the society. Their acquittal by a London jury, though a defeat for the government, did not prevent the continuation of the repression or save the Corresponding Society.

In the years that followed, although the open expression of radical views was made impossible, frequent strikes, bread riots and machine wrecking riots kept the government in a state of terror. The whole country was covered with a network of barracks, built so as to prevent contact between the people and the soldiers, who had formerly been billeted in houses and inns. The industrial areas were treated almost as a conquered country in the hands of an army of occupation. Troops were freely used to suppress disorder, but even so were often found to be unreliable because of their sympathy with the crowds they were ordered to attack.

It was for this reason that a new body, the yeomanry, a mounted force drawn from the upper and middle classes, was created at the beginning of the French wars. Quite useless from a military point of view, the yeomanry was, and was intended to be, a class body with the suppression of 'Jacobinism' as its main object. This object they pursued with an enthusiasm and an unflinching brutality which earned them universal hatred.

In Scotland radicalism developed more strongly and the repression was earlier and more severe. The Society of the Friends of the People included many of the middle class as well as workers and when it assembled a national Convention in Edinburgh in December 1792, 160 delegates represented eighty affiliated societies. In August 1793 one of its leaders, Thomas Muir, was brought before a packed jury and the notorious Justice Braxfield on a charge of sedition. The tone of the trial is indicated by Braxfield's remark to one of the jurors, 'Come awa', and help us to hang ane o' thae damned scoundrels,' and by Pitt's

subsequent comment that the judges would be 'highly culpable' if they did not use their powers 'for the present punishment of such daring delinquents and the suppression of doctrines so dangerous to the country'. Muir was sentenced to fourteen years' transportation. Later he was rescued from Botany Bay by an American ship and taken to France where he tried to persuade the Directory to invade Scotland.

After a number of similar trials the movement was forced into more definitely insurrectionary forms, but a body called the United Scotsmen and based on the Irish model remained small and was suppressed in 1798, together with the London Corresponding Society.

The anti-Jacobin fury of the government and ruling class was all the keener because of the continued success of the French armies. From the middle of 1793 to the middle of 1794 – that is to the overthrow of the Jacobins on the '9th Thermidor' – was indeed the heroic age of the revolution. After Thermidor power was assumed by the Directory, representing all the most disreputable sections of the bourgeoisie, the land speculators, currency crooks and fraudulent army contractors. Yet the revolution left many permanent gains, above all the division of the great feudal estates and the smashing of all restraints on the development of trade and industry. The way lay open for the *Code Napoléon*, the perfect legal frame for bourgeois development. The settlement of the agrarian question gave a firm basis for any government that was opposed to the return of the Bourbons and the nobility.

Wolfe Tone remarked in 1796, 'It is in the armies that the Republic exists.' It was certainly the revolution which created an army that had no equal in Europe. As Captain Liddell Hart says, it

inspired the citizen armies of France, and in compensation for the precise drill which it made impossible, gave rein instead to the tactical sense and initiative of the individual. These new tactics of fluidity had for their simple, yet vital pivot, the fact that the French now marched and fought at a quick step of 120 paces to the minute, while their opponents adhered to the orthodox 70 paces.

Further, the poverty of the young republic made it impossible to provide the armies with the customary vast baggage trains and cumbersome equipment. The armies were forced to live

upon the country they passed through and so to move constantly and rapidly, and to divide themselves into smaller, self-contained units. By adopting strategical methods in keeping with the actual situation they were able to transform a weakness into a source of strength.

The line formation, then employed by all European armies, was found to depend too much on precise drill for its possibility and was abandoned for the column. With the column was developed a tactic of a covering cloud of sharpshooters who moved ahead of it to disorganise the enemy. Artillery also brought up in advance of the main body was used for the same purpose. Against the unwilling conscripts of the European despotism these tactics proved invincible.

It was in the exact recognition of the merits and limitations of the instrument in their hands that the military genius of Carnot and Napoleon lay. Instead of trying to force the French army into the orthodox mould they took it for what it was and allowed it to attain its own perfection. Napoleon's greatest victories were almost all based on the rapidity of his movements before the actual battle and the weight and decision of the attack thrown at a carefully selected vital spot. It was only as the revolutionary impetus faded that he lost his elasticity and came to depend on mere mass rather than on mass in motion. His methods finally hardened into a dogma as petrifying as the dogmas it originally displaced.

The French navy never reached any great heights, partly because enthusiasm is no substitute for discipline on board ship and partly because the Norman and Breton fishing ports from which the old navy had drawn most of its best recruits remained clerical and reactionary throughout the revolution. From Howe's victory of 1 June in 1794 Britain maintained a naval superiority that was rarely challenged. At the beginning of the war Britain had 158 ships of the line to 80 possessed by France. By 1802 the numbers were 202 against 39 and after Trafalgar 250 against 19. At this time the combined fleets of France, Spain and Holland only totalled 92. The marked inferiority of the French Navy was itself a reason for concentrating almost all effort on land operations instead of wasting resources in a futile attempt to make up leeway on the sea.

## 5 The Napoleonic Wars

From the formation of the First Coalition in 1793 Britain took first place in the various combinations against France. Other powers changed sides or drifted in and out of the war, but with one short interval after the Treaty of Amiens in 1802 Britain remained continuously at war till the capture of Paris in 1814. The main source of her strength was the modern and capitalist economic organisation which enabled trade and industry to increase even under war conditions and vast sums of money to be raised without bankruptcy.

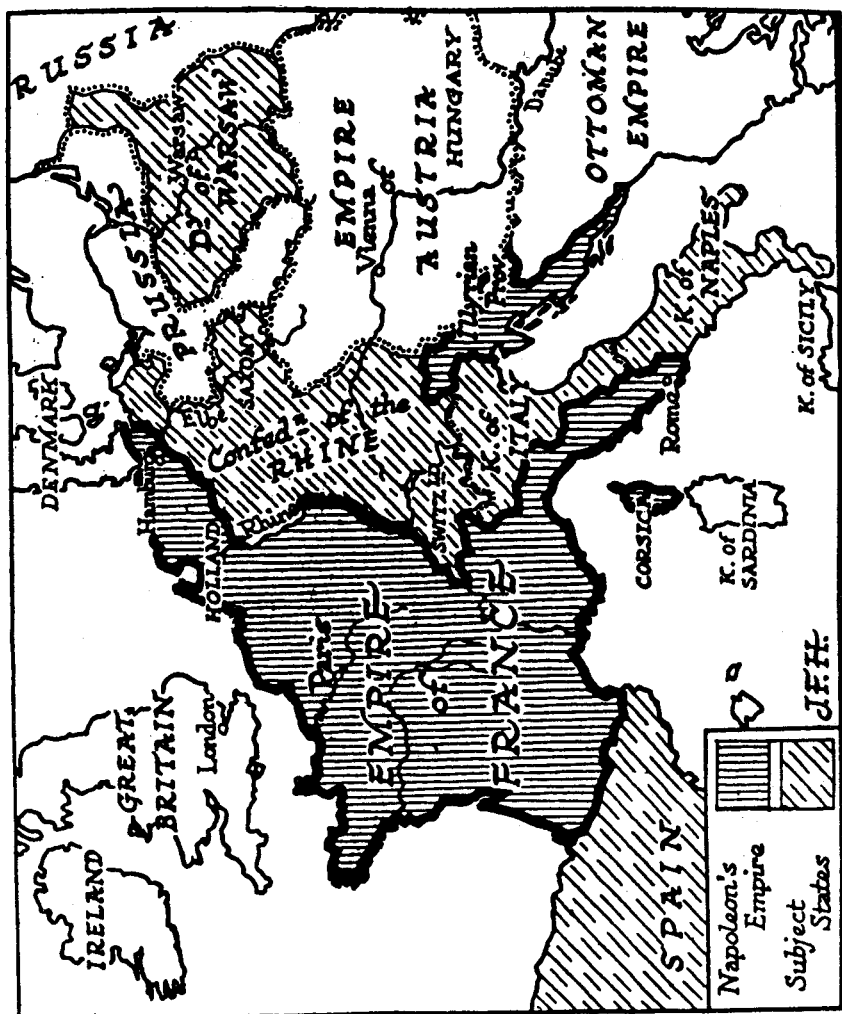
Pitt's war finance was merely an extension of that practised throughout the eighteenth century: heavy and increasing taxation of the necessities of life, a huge National Debt and subsidies totalling £50,000,000 to the European powers who were prepared to raise armies against Napoleon. It has been estimated that a labourer earning 10s. a week paid half of it in indirect taxes. Revenue increased steadily from £18,900,000 in 1792 to £71,900,000 in 1815, and in the same two years the interest on the national debt was £9,470,000 and £30,458,000. Loans were raised at a heavy discount, and, for the £334,000,000 added to the debt during Pitt's administration alone, only about £200,000,000 was received in cash by the government.

The effect of this war finance, besides reducing the real wages of the working masses and forcing up prices, was to reinforce the class of financiers and rentiers and to increase enormously the scope and volume of banking and credit operations. The new finance magnates so created became in due course landowners and pillars of the Tory Party. Peerages multiplied: in seventeen years Pitt created 95 English and 77 Irish peers. 'The ancient nobility and gentry', wrote Cobbett in 1802,

have with very few exceptions been thrust out of all public employments ... A race of merchants and manufacturers and bankers and loan jobbers and contractors have usurped their place,

and, in 1804,

There always was among the creature and close adherents of Mr



about A.D. 1810

Pitt a strange mixture of profligacy and cant: jobbers all the morning and Methodists in the afternoon.

Yet the wealth at Pitt's disposal could not prevent his coalitions from going down like ninepins before the armies of France. The First Coalition collapsed in 1795 after Flanders and Holland had been overrun and the Duke of York, possibly the most incompetent general ever to command a British army, was trounced at Dunkirk. The West Indies, always a vital concern of the City interests, absorbed the greater part of Britain's land forces. In three years, 80,000 men were lost there with no result. This expedition was in line with past practice, except that so large a body of inadequately equipped troops had not before been sent to a tropical climate. The conquest of Italy in 1797 drove Austria out of the war.

Britain was now as isolated as France had been in 1792. The war could probably have been ended but for the earliest and most fatal of Napoleon's strategic miscalculations. This was his decision to strike at Britain through Egypt and the East instead of through Ireland, a decision which shows to what an extent revolutionary realism had given place to grandiose imperial schemes. Victory at this time, before the French republic had finally hardened into a military dictatorship and before the demands which a prolonged war forced it to make upon the peoples of the occupied countries had forfeited their sympathy, might well have transformed the whole subsequent course of European history.

Ireland had been more affected by the French revolution than, perhaps, any other country in Europe. Under the leadership of Wolfe Tone the United Irishmen had combined a demand for Irish independence with the radical republicanism of Paine. Tone at least had a profound understanding of the relation of class to the national struggle. Rightly distrustful of the aristocracy and middle class after the betrayal of the Volunteers, he made his appeal to 'that large and respectable class of the community – the men of no property'. The United Irishmen quickly took the lead of the whole national movement and, for a time, succeeded in breaking down the hostility between Catholics and Protestants and combining both against England and its adherents in the Irish ruling class.

Preparations for revolt were pushed ahead, and in 1796

Tone went to France to persuade the Directory to send an expedition to Ireland to co-operate with the rebels there. He had to contend with the Eastern preoccupation already stirring in Napoleon's brain and though a force of 15,000 men was prepared, plans for the invasion were only half-hearted. When at the end of the year the fleet left Brest for the Munster coast a combination of bad weather and military blundering prevented a landing at Bantry Bay.

One chance was thus missed but a second presented itself in the summer of 1797. This time Holland was the base selected for an expedition and for more than a month the whole of the British North Sea fleet was paralysed by the Nore mutiny. Through mismanagement the expedition was not ready till after the mutiny had been crushed<sup>1</sup> and news of it only reached the Continent when it was all over. The cautious Dutch commanders then refused to sail and with the death of Hoche, the only French general who appreciated the importance of Ireland, hopes of effective intervention faded.

For two years the Irish had waited for help, and, now that it was apparent that no help was coming, the policy of the English authorities was to torment the peasants into a hopeless insurrection. Sir Ralph Abercrombie, the English commander in Ireland, himself declared that 'every crime, every cruelty that could be committed by Cossacks or Calmucks had been committed here'. In March 1798 the government was able, by help of an informer, to seize a number of the leaders, and the whole of Ireland was declared in a state of insurrection and placed under military law. The United Irishmen were faced with the alternative of rising without French help or of being destroyed piecemeal. At last 22 May was fixed as the date for rebellion, but once again the arrest of leaders, including Lord Edward Fitzgerald, created confusion. Further, the adroit mixture of terror and appeal to class interest had won over many of the upper and middle class supporters of the rising, which, when it came, had an overwhelmingly peasant character.

<sup>1</sup> The Nore mutiny was a sequel to the successful mutiny at Spithead earlier in the year. Neither was directly political but both arose from the low wages, irregular payments, bad food and brutal conditions prevailing in the fleet. But many of the sailors who were Irish must have counted on the mutiny assisting their cause.

In the South the effective risings were mainly in Wexford and Wicklow. In the North, under Protestant leadership, the men of Antrim and Down came out on 7 June. In both areas there were some initial successes of a limited character, but under all the circumstances the rebellion was hopeless. The rising was suppressed, after some hard fighting, with such brutality that the country was completely cowed and when a small French force did land in August they found that the rebellion was over and were unable to rally any support before they were surrounded and forced to surrender. Tone was captured soon after in a naval engagement and committed suicide in prison. In 1803 a second insurrection led by Robert Emmet was crushed.

While the rebellion in Ireland was still going on Napoleon had sailed for Egypt. The destruction of his fleet at the Battle of the Nile (August 1798) cut his troops off from home and left them in a position from which no victories were likely to extricate them. With Napoleon out of the way Pitt was able to form a Second Coalition with Russia and Austria. A Russian army drove the French out of North Italy and the Bourbon king of Naples was able to effect a counter-revolution in the South with the aid of Nelson's fleet. In the autumn Napoleon slipped back to France, leaving his army to its fate. By the *coup d'état* of 18th Brumaire (9 November) he overthrew the Directory and established himself as First Consul. His later decision to declare himself emperor changed nothing but a name. The war now definitely entered its second phase.

In the beginning the French armies were welcomed as liberators by the middle and lower classes of the countries they conquered. To Italy, Switzerland, the Rhineland and the Low Countries they carried the bourgeois revolution. A recent biography of Marx describes the typical reaction in Trier:

The inhabitants at Trier received the French with enthusiasm. The Revolution released the peasants from the trammels of feudalism, gave the bourgeoisie the administrative and legal apparatus they required for their advancement, freed the intelligentsia from the tutelage of the priests. The men of Trier danced round the 'tree of freedom' just like the inhabitants of Mainz. They had their own Jacobin club. Many a respected citizen in the thirties still looked back with pride to his Jacobin past.



Much that was done in these years proved of permanent benefit, but presently the people of the occupied countries found that they were to be allowed, at best, a second class revolution, with their interests always subordinated to those of France. The price of liberation was heavy taxes and the conscription of their sons to fill the gaps in the ranks of the French army. War was, or appeared to be, necessary for the continued internal stability of the Napoleonic regime yet war could only be carried on by the progressive exploitation of the 'liberated' territories and the longer war went on the more territory must be 'liberated' and exploited. In this way a contradiction was set up from which there was no escape. Further, the practice of living on the country, which the Army had begun from mere necessity and had turned into a source of military strength, was always a political weakness.

The result was that the very classes which had welcomed and been aroused to political maturity by the French were gradually alienated. Their history is that of Beethoven, who intended to dedicate his Heroic Symphony to Napoleon and then thought better of it. By breaking the shell of feudalism and ending the curious torpor that marked the eighteenth century in Europe the French created a bourgeois nationalism that turned inevitably against its creators.

Napoleon had many years of victory before him in 1799, however, and the reckoning was delayed by the incapacity of the monarchies, through whom the new nationalism was forced, however unwillingly, to express itself. A short and brilliant campaign reconquered Italy and the Second Coalition was smashed at Marengo in the last days of 1800. The years that followed, with Britain alone left in the war and no important land operations, were spent in drawing up the *Code Napoléon* and creating a modern and efficient civil service. The Treaty of Amiens, recognised by all parties as a mere truce, brought hostilities to a close from 1802 to 1803. It left France in control of Holland and all the west bank of the Rhine,

When war was resumed Napoleon had as allies Spain and Holland. The French Army was camped at Boulogne ready for a descent on England if the French and Spanish fleets could be concentrated to cover the crossing. How far this plan was serious has never been certainly determined. In March 1805 the Toulon fleet slipped past the blockade and sailed for the

West Indies with Nelson in pursuit. The Brest fleet failed to escape and the Toulon fleet doubled back to join the Spanish in Cadiz. In October both fleets were destroyed at Trafalgar.

Before Trafalgar was fought, however, the scheme for the invasion of England was abandoned. By the promise of unheard-of subsidies Pitt had persuaded Austria and Russia to join in the Third Coalition and the French army had been marched across Europe to meet the new enemy. It is myth that Trafalgar saved England from invasion: what it did was to place her naval supremacy beyond question for the rest of the war.

On the day before Trafalgar Napoleon defeated an Austrian army at Ulm on the Danube. Soon after he entered Vienna, and on 2 December overwhelmed both Austrians and Russians at Austerlitz. Pitt died in January, leaving the country to be governed by his jackals, Castlereagh, Sidmouth, Eldon and Perceval.<sup>1</sup> In October the King of Prussia, who had characteristically refused to join the Third Coalition when his intervention might have been effective, was pushed into war by the rising national feeling in Germany and crushingly defeated at Jena. For six years neither Austria nor Prussia counted as European Powers and after another defeat at Friedland in 1807 the Tsar of Russia made his peace. Napoleon now ruled over an Empire which included Northern Italy, the East coast of the Adriatic, all the territory west of the Rhine with Holland and a large area of North Germany from Cologne to Lubeck. Spain, Naples, Poland and all Central and Southern Germany formed vassal states.

It was upon Russia and Spain, the two remotest and least developed of the European powers, that Napoleon was finally broken. Neither of these countries had a strong middle class such as had made the victory of the French easier elsewhere. For a time Napoleon and the Tsar Alexander combined to dominate Europe but Napoleon was not prepared to treat Alexander as an equal and the latter refused to be subordinate. Failing all else Napoleon tried to strike at England by imposing a European ban on her manufactured goods. England replied with a blockade, and though neither ban nor blockade were completely effective, a strain was begun under which the

<sup>1</sup> For a characterisation of some of these gentlemen, see Shelley's 'Mask of Anarchy', a poem inspired by the Peterloo Massacre.

alliance between France and Russia and the other North European countries crumbled away.

Before this happened, however, Portugal, for a century dominated by the British government, refused to recognise Napoleon's 'Continental System'. A French army was therefore sent to prevent trade between Portugal and Britain. At the same time, Napoleon attempted to change his indirect control over Spain for a direct rule by making his brother Joseph king. This provoked an instantaneous and universal revolt. The Spanish proved to be the worst regular soliders and the best guerrillas in Europe: the armies were defeated wherever they showed themselves but the people's war went on and forced Napoleon to concentrate larger and larger forces in Spain.

In 1808 Sir Arthur Wellesley, later Duke of Wellington, was sent with a small army to defend Portugal and assist and encourage the Spanish insurrection. The French had now some 300,000 men in the Peninsula but were seldom able to concentrate more than about one-fifth against Wellington, the rest being engaged in small operations all over the country. Every attempt at a concentration left large areas open to the guerillas, so that the regular and irregular wars set up an interaction before which the French were helpless. The details of the six years' campaign, the advances, retreats and battles, are relatively unimportant. In 1811, when Napoleon had to draw away part of his forces for his Russian venture, Wellington was able to take the offensive and step by step the French were driven out of the Peninsula.

An army of nearly half a million – Poles, Italians and Germans as well as Frenchmen – was massed by Napoleon in 1811 for an attack on Russia. The march of the Grand Army to Moscow and its disastrous retreat set Europe once more ablaze. Germany rose against the defeated Emperor and at last the French found themselves opposed not to the conscript armies of kings but to nations in arms. Although he quickly collected a new army almost as large as the one he had lost, Napoleon was decisively beaten at Leipzig in October 1813. In spite of this he rejected an offer of peace which would have given him the Rhine as a frontier, and in April 1814 the allies entered Paris, the Bourbons were restored and Napoleon banished to Elba.

England, Russia, Austria and Prussia then settled down at the Congress of Vienna to fight over the spoils of victory. Their

deliberations were interrupted in 1815 by the sudden return of Napoleon to France and the Hundred Days' Campaign which ended with his defeat at Waterloo.

The main features of the settlement arrived at by the Congress of Vienna were the restoration of despotism and the triumph of what was called the 'principle of legitimacy'. This was only neglected when it happened to run counter to the interests of Austria, Russia or Prussia: thus Poland, Venice, Saxony and other small States were swallowed or dismembered by their more powerful neighbours.

Revolution was felt to be as much the enemy as France and the victory of reaction was sealed by the Holy Alliance in which Austria, Russia and Prussia agreed to give each other mutual support against the horrors of insurgent democracy. The Holy Alliance was used to justify international action against risings in Italy, Germany and elsewhere. Yet neither Metternich nor Alexander could restore Europe to its sacred torpor or do more than delay for a little the process set on foot by the Revolution, and the Holy Alliance did not survive the upheavals of 1830.

In France the restoration of the Bourbons did not mean the restoration of aristocratic privilege in the villages or the supersession of the *Code Napoléon*. In Germany, though Prussia extended its power over the Rhineland, many of the social changes resulting from the French occupation went undisturbed. The patchwork of German states was drawn together into the German Confederation in which Austria and Prussia both participated and which inevitably became the theatre of a battle between them for the hegemony of Central Europe.

England's share in the plunder was taken mainly outside Europe. The foundations for a great extension of the Empire were laid, perhaps unwittingly, by the acquisition of a number of strategic key points: Malta, Mauritius, Ceylon, Heligoland and the Cape, then inhabited only by a few Dutch farmers and valued only as a stopping place on the way to India. The British bourgeoisie came out of the war ready to consolidate a world monopoly for the produce of their factories and to begin a period of hitherto unimagined advance. Yet the first result of the peace was a severe political and economic crisis.

## XII THE TRIUMPH OF INDUSTRIAL CAPITALISM

### 1 England after Waterloo

In the general rejoicings that followed the Treaty of Amiens, Cobbett wrote:

The alliterative words, peace and plenty, sound well in a song or make a pretty transparency in the window of an idiot; but the things which these harmonious words represent are not always in unison.

The optimism with which the bourgeoisie greeted the peace of 1815 was even less well founded. Manufacturers had assumed that the ending of the war would at once throw open a vast market for their wares and had piled up stocks accordingly. Instead, there was an immediate fall in the demand for manufactured goods.

While it was true that the European market had been largely closed by Napoleon's Berlin Decrees,<sup>1</sup> and the American market by the war which had resulted from the British claim to search and seize neutral ships going to Europe, huge war contracts had compensated for these losses. These contracts had ceased abruptly after Waterloo, while Europe was still too disturbed and too poor to take any great quantity of British goods. One important new market had been actually opened by the war, which had cut Spain off from South America and left its colonies there virtually independent, but this had only led to crazy speculation and the flooding of the market with all kinds of goods for many of which no possible demand existed. For the rest, there were the West Indies and the Far East, neither of

<sup>1</sup> See page 308.

which could absorb more than a limited quantity of rather specialised goods.

The result was that in 1815 exports and imports fell and there was a heavy slump in wholesale prices, a smaller one in retail prices and widespread unemployment. The heavy industries, peculiarly dependent on war demands, were the hardest hit. Iron fell from £20 to £8 a ton. In Shropshire twenty-four out of thirty-four blast furnaces went out of production and thousands of iron-workers and colliers were thrown out of work.

Other causes helped to intensify and prolong the crisis. Three hundred thousand demobilised soldiers and sailors were forced to compete in an already overstocked labour market. Wages fell, but prices were kept artificially high by the policy of inflation which Pitt had begun in 1797 when he allowed the Bank of England to issue paper money without a proper gold backing. Taxation was kept at a high level by the huge debt charges, amounting in 1820 to £30,000,000 out of a total revenue of £53,000,000. The reckless borrowing by means of which the war had been financed left an unnecessarily heavy burden upon succeeding generations.

While not, as Cobbett and many of the radicals supposed, the real cause of the crisis, inflation and high taxes greatly increased the misery which it produced and prevented the rapid recovery of industry.

The radical Samuel Bamford describes the sudden outburst of class conflict which marked this post-war crisis:

A series of disturbances commenced with the introduction of the Corn Bill in 1815 and continued, with short intervals, until the close of the year 1816. In London and Westminster riots ensued and were continued for several days, while the Bill was discussed; at Bridport there were riots on account of the high price of bread; at Bideford there were similar disturbances to prevent the export of grain; at Bury<sup>1</sup> by the unemployed to destroy machinery; at Ely, not suppressed without bloodshed; at Newcastle-on-Tyne by colliers and others; at Glasgow, where blood was shed, on account of soup kitchens; at Preston, by unemployed weavers; at Nottingham by Luddites who destroyed 30 frames; at Merthyr Tydvil, on a reduction of wages; at Birmingham by the

<sup>1</sup> Bury St Edmunds, not Bury, Lancs.

unemployed; at Walsall by the distressed; and December 7th, 1816, at Dundee, where, owing to the high price of meal, upwards of 100 shops were plundered.

Such rioting was not in itself a new thing. The bread riots of 1795 have been referred to already. In 1812, Byron, in his superb speech against the proposal to make machine wrecking punishable by death, had ridiculed the efforts of the military to suppress the Luddite riots in Nottingham:

Such marchings and counter-marchings! from Nottingham to Bullwell, from Bullwell to Banford, from Banford to Mansfield! And when at length the detachments arrived at their destination in all 'the pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war', they came just in time to witness the mischief which had been done, and ascertain the escape of the perpetrators, to collect the *spolia opima* in the fragments of broken frames, and return to their quarters amidst the derision of old women and the hooting of children.

The Luddite riots centred in the Nottingham hosiery area, where the introduction of new production methods into a semi-domestic industry had cut prices to a point at which the hand stocking knitters found it almost impossible to make a living. Machine wrecking took place also in the West Riding and elsewhere. Strikes, many of them fought out with extreme bitterness, were common both before and after the passing of the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800.<sup>1</sup>

What distinguished these earlier disturbances from those which followed Waterloo was the consciously political character of the latter. Masses of workers were coming to realise as the result of ferocious class legislation and the rejection of countless petitions for a living wage and for improved conditions, that the state apparatus was in the hands of their oppressors. The demand for parliamentary Reform around which the agitation of these years now centred was therefore not a demand for abstract democracy so much as an attempt by the masses to gain control of parliament and make it serve their own interests. The Corn Law of 1815, devised by the landlords to keep prices at a high level while wages were everywhere falling, gave fresh point to this political agitation.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIV, Section 1.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter XIII, Section 2.

Early in 1817, the government 'discovered' that a treasonable conspiracy existed against the constitution and property. Habeas corpus was again suspended and an Act (the 'Gagging Bill') was hurried through to restrict the right to hold public meetings, to suppress the radical clubs and to give magistrates additional powers to prevent the publication and sale of radical and free-thought pamphlets.

In March the 'blanketeers' set out on the first Hunger March from Manchester to London with a petition against the suspension of habeas corpus. The march was proscribed and many of the five or six thousand men who intended to take part in it were prevented from leaving Manchester. The rest were attacked and broken up at Stockport and only a handful succeeded in forcing their way through and reaching Ashbourne in Derbyshire. Every method of repression, from military violence to the employment of provocateurs (one of whom, Oliver the Spy, became a figure nationally notorious) to foment abortive conspiracies and disorder as an excuse for further severity, was freely used by the government. For a moment they appeared to be successful, helped by a temporary trade revival in 1818.

The revival faded out in 1819 and huge radical meetings were held all over the North and Midlands, demanding Reform and the repeal of the Corn Laws. One such meeting was held at St Peter's Fields, Manchester, on 16 August, when 80,000 people assembled to hear 'Orator' Hunt, a well-known radical speaker. When Hunt began to speak he was arrested and the yeomanry suddenly charged into the crowd, hacking blindly with their sabres in all directions. In a few minutes eleven people were killed and about 400, including over 100 women, were wounded. The brutality of this attack on a peaceful crowd, and the callousness with which it was defended by the government, made the necessity for reform clearer than ever to the industrial workers, and at the same time convinced many of the middle class that Reform was the only alternative to a policy of repression that would lead inevitably to civil war. From this time parliamentary Reform began to be 'respectable' and to appear prominently on the programme of the Whigs from which it had been almost dropped since 1793.

But the immediate result of the 'Peterloo Massacre' was a tightening of the repression. Hunt, Bamford and others were



arrested and imprisoned. Cobbett was forced to seek a temporary refuge in America. In November the 'Six Acts' were hurried through a thoroughly frightened parliament. These Acts gave the magistrates powers to prevent meetings of more than fifty persons and to search private houses where they suspected arms were hidden. They forbade any kind of drilling or processions with bands or banners. They made publishers of 'blasphemous and seditious libels' liable to imprisonment or transportation and placed a tax of 4d. a copy on all newspapers and pamphlets. The object of this was to make such papers as Cobbett's *Political Register* and the *Black Dwarf* too dear for the mass of the people.

The 'Six Acts' made organised legal agitation for Reform more difficult and drove it once more into methods of conspiracy. In February 1820 the Cato Street Plot to assassinate the Cabinet was betrayed by a police spy and its leaders were seized and executed. On 1 April sixty thousand workers in and around Glasgow turned out in a political general strike that was everywhere expected to be the prelude to an armed rising. The word for such a rising was never given, and the only sequel was a skirmish at Bonnymuir between the 10th Hussars and a little body of weavers led into a trap by government agents. Neither the conditions nor the leadership for a successful insurrection really existed at this time.

The 'Six Acts' were in fact followed by a temporary diminution of Radical agitation. For this they were perhaps less responsible than the revival of industry that began in 1820 and continued up to the boom year of 1826. Such a revival was inevitable once the effects of the war had passed, because British industry really did have a world monopoly at this time. This is the fundamental difference between the crisis after 1815 and that following the First World War with which it has far too often been compared. Manufacturers bent on cutting wages liked to talk about foreign competition but actually no other country had any considerable large scale industry or any surplus of manufactured goods for export. France and the United States were just beginning to develop a cotton textile industry, but even by 1833 their combined output was only two-thirds of that of Britain. In mining and the iron and steel industries British supremacy was equally marked.

Exports increased from £48,000,000 in 1820 to £56,000,000

in 1825 and imports from £32,000,000 to £44,000,000. But this was only one side of the expansion. At home the same period was marked by the steady decline of small-scale and domestic industry before the competition of the factories. This was the era of the consolidation of the home market. The decline of domestic industries was uneven, taking place in the cotton before the linen and woollen industries, in spinning before weaving and in East Anglia and the West Country before the North and Midlands. It was not completed before the 1840s and was the cause of the most widespread and prolonged suffering. But it divided the working classes into sections with differing interests and wrongs, and forced those who were the worst sufferers into futile and objectively reactionary forms of protest.

With the consolidation of the internal and external monopoly of the British industrial capitalists a new period began, with new class groupings and new political tactics. Its advent was marked in August 1822 by a dramatic incident. Castlereagh, universally believed, rightly or wrongly, to be responsible for the government's social policy, cut his throat. Great crowds lined the London streets as his coffin was carried to Westminster Abbey, cheering as they saw in his passing the passing of the Age of Peterloo.

## **2 The War in the Villages**

The working people of England were peculiar among their fellows throughout Europe in that they alone derived no benefit from the French revolution and the wars which followed it, while at home they were the one class which was poorer and not richer at the end of these wars than at their beginning. This is especially true of the farm labourers, and it would be hard to say if they suffered more from the high prices of the war period or the lower prices which followed it.

From 1793 to 1815 every available scrap of land was ploughed up for wheat: however poor or unsuitable the soil there was still the possibility of profit with prices running up to 100s. a quarter. One result of this was that agriculture became dangerously specialised and that when the slump came farmers on poor land had nothing to fall back upon. Also, the higher

the price of wheat the greater the incentive to enclose and the more unjustly the enclosure was likely to be carried out. The barest common and the smallest garden were grasped at by landlords eager to turn them into gold. Farmers prospered as a whole, but the landlords and the tithe owners prospered still more. Only the real wages of the labourers fell continually. When a proposal was made in 1805 to fix a legal minimum wage it was ridiculed on the ground that to fix a wage in relation to the price of bread at the standard of 1780 when the average wage was 9s. would have meant a wage of £1 11s. 6d. The actual wages paid at this time certainly did not average more than one-third of this sum.

The peace brought a rapid change. Wheat cost 109s. a quarter in 1813, 74s. 4d. in 1814, and 65s. 1d. in 1815. In 1816, under the influence of the Corn Law of 1815 and a bad harvest, it rose again to 78s. 6d., though here the bare figures, being averages for the year, do not tell the whole story, since the price was much lower at the beginning of the year and much higher in the autumn. The Corn Laws saved the landlords and some of the farmers: they did nothing to save the labourers from unemployment, lower wages and cuts in Poor Law relief.

In 1816 corn fell and wages fell but rents and food prices remained high. The result was riots which in the East Anglian wheat counties amounted almost to a general revolt. Houses and stacks were fired. At Bury St Edmunds and Norwich the rioters fought the yeomanry in the streets. At Littleport in the Isle of Ely a three-day rising ended in a pitched battle in which two labourers were killed and 75 taken prisoner. Five of these were hanged and nine transported. General if temporary increases in wages followed these riots.

The general tendency, however, was for a continued decline in the standard of life. The Speenhamland scale of 1795, conceived as the bare minimum on which existence was possible, had allowed seven and a half gallon loaves for a family of four: the scales prevailing in 1831 allowed only five. In a little over a generation the mass of the rural population passed from a beef, bread and ale standard of living to a potato and tea standard. It was this fact which lay behind Cobbett's hatred of potatoes and his curious-seeming denunciation of tea-drinking as 'a destroyer of health, an enfeebler of the frame, an engenderer of effeminacy and laziness, a debaucher of youth and a maker of misery

for old age'.

Cobbett was not a clear political thinker. A yeoman of genius, looking back, as the dispossessed peasantry whose woes he voiced always will, to a largely imaginary golden age and dreaming of an impossible return, he proposed a great many impracticable remedies for troubles he only partly understood. Yet one thing he did grasp, that the common people, his people, had been robbed, were being robbed and would continue to be robbed until they combined to check and control the property-owning class. This clear, simple conception of politics gave his demand for democracy, for Parliamentary Reform, a directness and an application to the desires of the masses which made him hated and feared by every Government from 1810 to 1830.

His *Political Register*, written in an English prose so clear that no one could ever mistake his meaning, was the first to denounce every act of oppression and was felt by thousands all over England to be an amplification of their own voice. Above all it fought for the country worker, the most exploited, most ignorant and most helpless figure of the age and the one best known to and best loved by Cobbett himself. He was not an even-tempered man, and he raged furiously against the landlords, tithe-owners and bankers, and against 'the Thing', the whole conspiracy of the rich against the poor. Without Cobbett there would doubtless have been discontent and revolt in these years, but it would have been ill-directed and aimless.

There were many bankruptcies in 1815 and the years following and much land went out of cultivation. But more still was under-farmed: less labour was used, less manure, less stock kept, fewer repairs carried out. High taxation and the claims of bankers and mortgages added to the difficulties of the time. Not only the farm labourers but the village craftsmen, the blacksmiths, carpenters and wheelwrights, suffered severely and all these were to be found taking an active part in the movement of revolt that swept over Southern England in the year 1830.

Quite apart from this revolt and the sporadic rick-burning that followed and preceded it, the class struggle in the countryside took a peculiar form, that of organised poaching. The villagers who had lost their strips of land and their rights over the commons turned inevitably for revenge and

compensation upon the landlords' game preserves. For some sixty years a relentless guerilla war went on all over England between gangs of armed poachers and rival gangs of the gentry and their game keepers. From 1770 a series of laws increasing in severity were passed by Parliaments consisting almost entirely of landowners. In 1800 poachers became liable to hard labour and to two years' imprisonment for a second offence. In 1803 it was enacted that any poacher who pointed a gun or attempted to cut or stab while resisting arrest should be hanged as a felon. In 1817 any person not belonging to the class entitled to pursue game who might be found in any park or wood with a gun or any other weapon became liable to transportation. In practice, transportation was almost always for life, since no passages were paid home and the transported man rarely returned.

These laws did not check poaching, they only increased the size of the gangs and made the poachers increasingly reckless in what they would do to avoid arrest. Spring guns and mantraps were added to the other methods of protecting game allowed by the law, and every captured poacher had the certainty of being tried before a bench of magistrates every one of whom regarded him as their natural enemy. At Bury St Edmunds commitments for poaching rose from five in 1810 to 75 in 1822. In only three years from 1827 more than 8,500 men and boys were convicted of offences against the Game Laws and of these a very high proportion were transported.

Poaching was the most obvious and often the only way of adding to a starvation wage, since game sold easily at high prices, but it was also often a deliberate or half deliberate defiance, an answer to the war of the rich upon the poor and a reflection of the sullen anger of this hungry time. The poacher was rarely a criminal in the ordinary sense: he was more likely to be a man of outstanding intelligence and daring.

In 1830, this anger flared up in what has been called 'the last labourers' revolt'. Its immediate cause was the introduction of the threshing machine. Threshing was the one remaining rural industry at which a living wage could be earned or at which the villager could supplement his ordinary income. But the threshing floor and the hand flail could not compete with machinery which was not only cheaper and quicker but

extracted the grain more thoroughly. Besides this, 1830 was a year of general economic crisis and of exceptional agricultural distress, increased by a terrible epidemic of the rot which, it has been estimated, killed off two million sheep.

The first riots were in Kent, where threshing machines were destroyed in August. Rick burning, too, was common, but the movement was not merely one of destruction. A complete social programme is hinted at in the well-known letter circulated over the signature of 'Captain Swing', which declares:

We will destroy the corn stacks and the threshing machines this year, next year we will have a turn with the parsons and the third year we will make war upon the statesmen.

Although the outbreak began with machine smashing, the demand for a living wage, 2s. 6d. a day in Kent and Sussex, 2s. in Wiltshire and Dorset where conditions were generally worse, was brought more and more to the front. A striking feature was the readiness of farmers in many places to accept these demands, to point out that they could only be granted if tithes and rent were reduced, to take part in the movement and direct it against the landlords and parsons. A number of cases are even on record in which farmers helped in the destruction of their own machinery.

As it spread westward throughout November the rising took on a more violent and desperate character. Rioting and demands for money became more frequent. In Hampshire workhouses were destroyed and there were brushes with the yeomanry. Quickly as it spread and threatening as it appeared to be, the revolt was doomed from the start. A whole generation of starvation and the pauperisation of the Speenhamland system had sapped the strength and destroyed the solidarity of the villagers. The Game Laws had taken away thousands of their natural leaders, the men of the greatest energy and independence – men capable of a wild outburst, but not of any sustained effort.

With almost pathetic ease the revolt collapsed once the authorities brought their forces into action. In spite of this the ruling class was thoroughly alarmed and correspondingly brutal in its counter measures. Among those who were especially active were the Barings, a great banking family whose

prosperity dated from the Pitt era and one of whom distinguished himself by beating with his stick a handcuffed prisoner awaiting his trial.<sup>1</sup>

In all, nine men were hanged, at least 457 transported, and about as many were imprisoned. The transported men came from thirteen counties, but 250 were from Hampshire and Wiltshire. All were from the South and East of England. In the North, where alternative employment was available in the mines and factories, wages were always higher and the Speenhamland system was never so universally applied. It is worth recording, though it is not possible to say how far the fact is connected with this rising, that agricultural wages in the 1830s were on the average about a shilling a week higher than in either 1824 or 1850.

The government attempted to round off their victory by putting Cobbett on trial for articles written in the *Political Register*. The crown lawyers who had triumphed over terrified and illiterate labourers soon found themselves on the defensive while Cobbett revealed how one of the imprisoned rioters had been threatened with death and then promised a pardon if he would say that Cobbett had incited him to violence. After this his acquittal was certain and was received with great enthusiasm. Unfortunately this victory did not help either the hundreds transported nor the thousands who remained in the villages.

The main importance of the rising lies in its being the last great political movement in the country districts. Agriculture had its ups and downs after this, but was always somewhat the poor relation of industry, and the farm workers, the heroes of so many struggles since the great rising of 1381, sank into a torpor only partly broken by the trade union agitation of Joseph Arch in and after 1872. In our own time, especially since 1914, there has been a growing awakening, both in the industrial and political fields. If the long story of agrarian revolt is now ended in England, this is because the rural working class has ended its backwardness and isolation and is taking its share in the struggles of the working class as a whole.

<sup>1</sup> See page 411.

### 3 Factory Legislation

This history of factory legislation is in a great measure the history of the development of machinery. In the earliest stages of the Industrial Revolution, when machinery was crude, soon obsolete and worked by the uncertain and irregular power of water, factory owners were determined to get the fullest possible use out of this machinery in the shortest possible time. Hours of work rose to sixteen and even eighteen a day, and where as few hours as twelve were worked a shift system was common so that the machinery was never idle. In this way the greatest output could be obtained with the least outlay of capital, and it is important to remember that many mill owners started with a very small capital indeed, in some cases no more than £100.

The results of this system in human misery, and especially of the terrible wastage of child labour, are common knowledge. When the facts about factory conditions first became generally known they shocked even the tough conscience of the early nineteenth century, and humanitarian people, and especially Tory landlords who drew their wealth from the more genteel exploitation of the agricultural workers<sup>1</sup> began to agitate for the prohibition of some of the worst abuses. They would have found their agitation very unfruitful if other forces had not been operating to produce the same results.

As early as 1800-1815, in the years during which he managed the New Lanark Mills, Robert Owen had shown that output was not in direct proportion to the number of hours worked, and that it was possible to work a ten-and-a-half hour day, to do without the labour of very young children, and yet to make substantial profits. With the development of faster, more accurate, more powerful, and more costly machines and with the substitution of steam power for water power, the advantages from a very long working day became less. It was always the water power mills where hours and conditions were worst and whose owners put up the most stubborn opposition to any kind of change. More capital was sunk in machinery, the relation between the capital so used and the capital used for the

<sup>1</sup> The *Morning Chronicle* published figures showing that on the estates of the Earl of Shaftesbury labourers earning 7s. to 8s. a week were being charged 1s. 6d. and 2s. for the rent of their cottages.



payment of wages gradually changed. The amount of actual manual labour needed to produce a given article decreased, and at the same time the speed at which the new machinery could work became increasingly greater than the speed at which the men and women who tended it could work for a day lasting for sixteen or eighteen hours. It became less economical to work the machine at part speed over a long day than at full speed over a shorter one.

This does not mean that the factory owners welcomed shorter hours or allowed the passing of the Factory Acts without a bitter struggle. The Factory Acts, politically speaking, were the product of two inter-related sides of the class struggle.

First, they were extorted by the constant agitation of the working classes themselves, who linked their demands for parliamentary Reform with demands for shorter hours, higher wages, better factory conditions and the abolition of child labour, and, indeed, regarded Reform largely as a means of securing these things.

Secondly, they were a by-product of the savage internal struggle between the two main sections of the ruling class, the industrialists and the landowners.

The industrialists were pressing for the repeal of the Corn Laws, since cheaper food would enable them to reduce wages and so compete more effectively in the world market. In revenge, and to prevent too much attention being concentrated on themselves, the landowners campaigned against the long hours and oppressive conditions in the factories of their rivals. Oastler, the Tory Chartist and leader of the ten-hours agitation, curiously illustrates in his own person the point of contact of the two tendencies.<sup>1</sup>

Marx in 1848 commented that:

The English workers have made the English free traders realise that they are not the dupes of their illusions or of their lies; and if, in spite of this, the workers have made common cause with them against the landlords, it is for the purpose of destroying the last remnants of feudalism and in order to have only one enemy to deal with. The workers have not miscalculated, for the landlords, in order to revenge themselves upon the manufacturers, have made common cause with the workers to carry the Ten Hours' Bill, which

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIII, Section 2 and Chapter XIV, Section 2.

the latter have been vainly demanding for thirty years, and which was passed immediately after the repeal of the Corn Laws.

The arguments of the manufacturers were both general and particular. There was an appeal to the sacred principles of *laissez faire*, the prevailing dogma that it was socially desirable that everyone should be free to follow his own 'enlightened self-interest' and that thereby, in some mysterious way, the general good of the community would be furthered. On these grounds any state interference with industry was condemned as an infringement of natural law. It is worth notice, in passing, that in the heyday of *laissez faire* two important exceptions were made: one by which workers were legally forbidden to form combinations to improve their wages and the other by which the landlords were able to secure the prohibition of the import of wheat.

Apart from these general principles the menace of foreign competition was urged.<sup>1</sup> It was argued that to restrict hours or to force employers to fence their machinery would make it impossible for them to sell their goods abroad. In this way factory legislation, however well-meaning, would only lead to unemployment and greater misery for the workers. Another favourite argument was that 'all profits are made in the last hour' and that therefore to reduce the hours of work by one would automatically destroy all profits. These arguments, as it proved, were so at variance with the economic facts that they convinced few people besides those who put them forward.

The first legislation, passed in 1802, was a very mild Act to prevent some of the worst abuses connected with the employment of pauper children. It was followed by the Cotton Factories Regulation Act of 1819 which forbade the employment of children under nine in cotton factories and limited to thirteen and a half the hours of work of those between nine and sixteen. As no machinery was ever provided for the enforcement of this Act it remained a dead letter.

It was not till 1833, after the passing of the Reform Bill and under pressure of a most violent working class agitation throughout the whole of the North of England, that an

<sup>1</sup> Except in the case of the 'climbing boys'. Here there was no question of foreign competition, and defenders of this particular atrocity had to do a little independent thinking.

effective Act was passed. This prohibited the employment of children under nine except in silk factories,<sup>1</sup> limited the hours of older children and provided a number of factory inspectors to see that these restrictions were carried out. Finally in 1847 the Ten Hours' Bill limited the hours of women and young people, and, in practice, secured a ten hour day for most of the men, since it proved unprofitable to keep the factories open for them alone. This result was not achieved for some years, however, during which the employers tried every conceivable evasion and device short of flat defiance of the provisions of the Act.

These Acts applied only to the textile industries. They did not apply, for example, to mining, and the Mines Commission of 1842 disclosed that the conditions had actually become worse since the Act of 1833 had resulted in an increase of child labour in the mines, especially in Lancashire and the West Riding. The fact was that the wages of adult workers were so low that parents were forced to put their children into any occupation that was open for them.

Before each Factory Act was passed, the employers were full of insuperable difficulties, of things that had always been done by child labour and could not be done otherwise. Afterwards it was quickly found that machines could be devised to serve the same ends, usually with a saving of labour and production costs.

The compulsory regulation of the working day as regards its length, pauses, beginning and end, the system of relays of children, the exclusion of children under a certain age, etc., necessitated more machinery and the substitution of steam as a motive power in the place of muscles ... in one word, the greater concentration of the means of production and a correspondingly greater concourse of work-people.' (*Capital*, I)

Thus, for example, the extension of the Factory Acts to the match industry resulted in the invention of a dipping machine, which made the manufacture of matches much more healthy

<sup>1</sup> Silk was the only textile industry faced with serious foreign competition. Engels commented: 'The monopoly that the hypocritical free traders repealed with regard to foreign competitors, that monopoly they created anew at the expense of the health and lives of English children.'

and at the same time, in one factory, enabled thirty-two young workers to do the work which had previously required 230.

Perhaps the most striking example of the way in which capitalists were able to turn the labours of the humanitarian to their advantage is provided by the Davy lamp. Sir Humphry Davy was so shocked at the prevalence of accidents in the mines that he invented, in 1816, his lamp to prevent explosions. The lamp was quickly and widely adopted, Davy himself refusing to take any royalties for what he regarded as his gift to humanity. The actual result was an increase in the number of accidents, since the owners were able to open up deeper and more dangerous seams, and, in many cases, the existence of the lamp was made an excuse for not providing proper ventilation.

If the Factory Acts led to the use of more and better machinery, this result was not of course uniform. Only the larger and more prosperous concerns were able to carry out the necessary changes in such a way as to increase their profits. The factories that were already the most obsolete, and especially the old water-power mills, were just those which could not be adapted to meet the new conditions. Some went under or were absorbed by richer firms, but their disappearance did not mean that the industries as a whole declined. On the contrary, the Factory Acts led to an increase in industry by providing a stimulus to the adoption of more efficient methods and at the same time led to a concentration in the hands of the largest and most modernised firms, with a corresponding concentration of capital. They actually helped the larger concern to drive the smaller out of the market.

Another result of factory legislation was, as Marx said,

to spread the mass of labour previously employed more evenly over the whole year; that this regulation was the first rational bridle on the murderous meaningless caprices of fashion, caprices that consort so badly with the system of modern industry; that the development of ocean navigation and of the means of communication generally has swept away the technical basis on which season-work was really supported ... But for all that, capital never becomes reconciled to such changes – and this is admitted over and over again by its own representatives – except ‘under pressure of a General Act of Parliament’ for the compulsory regulation of the hours of labour.

Factory legislation, in short, however much the factory owners may have disliked it, was a part and perhaps a necessary part of that development which included the displacement of water power by steam, the wholesale use of machinery to manufacture not only consumption articles but the means of production themselves and the transfer of the decisive point in production from the small to the large unit which constitutes the final triumph of industrial capitalism in England. The time had come for this triumph to result in an open conflict between the industrial capitalist and the landlord and financier combination for political supremacy.

#### **4 The Roots of Liberalism**

From 1793 the Tory Party was able to collect behind it the bulk of all the property-owning classes for the struggle against Jacobinism at home and abroad. The Whig remnant, which was not prepared to join the anti-Jacobin front and was yet incapable of leading a mass movement against a government, which, after all, represented the classes from which its members also came, ceased to be of any practical importance. It was a sect, based upon tradition and sentiment rather than upon any genuine class interest. Parliamentary politics inevitably became more of a struggle between groups within the Tory Party than between parties. For though the Tories united all sections of the upper classes they did not place them all upon an equal footing.

The landowners, with the City merchants and the finance oligarchy, who usually ended by buying landed estates and showed great aptitude for acquiring the character and outlook of landowners, kept the reins of power in their own hands. The industrial capitalists continued to be regarded as outsiders, against whom the political game, with its jobbery and manipulation of boroughs, was kept rigidly closed. Few of the new factory towns of the North, where their strength lay, sent members to Parliament. Factory owners might and sometimes did buy land and so acquire a political standing, but as a class they had their own special interests, often bluntly opposed to those of the landlords and bankers. Their whole character and outlook was bourgeois and not aristocratic.

The first great cleavage came in 1815, after the external Jacobin danger had been finally laid, over the Corn Laws, which the industrialists regarded as a sacrifice of their interests to those of the landlords. For a time, the internal ferment which culminated in Peterloo prevented an open break, but from about 1820 there were many signs of coming change. One was the revival of the Whigs on a new basis. The eighteenth century Whigs had been aristocratic and commercial: the nineteenth century Whigs, who soon came to call themselves Liberals, were a party of the industrial capitalists and the middle class of the large towns, led at first, however, by the members of the old Whig aristocracy who had survived the pre-Revolution age.

Equally striking and more immediately important was the change in character and ultimate break up of the Tory Party, which found expression first in a change of policy at home and abroad and finally in the passing over of a large section of the Tories to join the Whigs just before the passing of the Reform Bill. On the death of Castlereagh, which coincided with the revival of trade and the dying down of the agitation for Reform, a new group headed by Canning and including Huskisson, Palmerston, sometimes Peel and other 'moderate' Tories came to the front. They found themselves often in conflict with the High Tories led by Wellington and Lord Eldon.

With the new situation new tactics had become necessary. The 'Six Acts' had staved off one revolutionary crisis, but the more far-seeing members of the ruling class began to understand that such methods were unlikely to be always effective in the future. They were not unwilling to coerce (as the events of 1830 and, later, of the Chartist period were to show) but they preferred to avoid the necessity of coercion where other methods would serve. The result was a whole series of 'liberal' measures, both before and after the Reform Bill, which had as their object the unobtrusive strengthening of the State apparatus, and which, though apparently less repressive than those of the Peterloo era, were in fact much more effective.

Such was the change which took place in the criminal code during the Home Secretaryship of Peel (1823-1830). Under the old code there were some 200 crimes, many of them of the most

trivial character, which were punishable by death. Yet crime was widespread, partly because there was no system of police other than the utterly inefficient organisation of night-watchmen, so that the chances of escaping detection were always high, and partly because the very severity of the code led juries to acquit prisoners who were obviously guilty rather than send them to be hanged for some petty theft.

Peel and the other reformers supposed that crime was likely to be decreased, not by making the law more severe but by imposing penalties that really could be enforced and by creating a police force which would be likely to catch a reasonable proportion of the criminals. The reshaping of the criminal code was therefore followed by the establishment of a new police force (Peelers), first in London and extending gradually to the provinces.

For political purposes the police had the advantage of strengthening the power of the state without the danger of serious internal disorder which the use of the yeomanry or of regular troops always involved. At the same time, the decline of radical agitation after 1820 made it possible to relax the censorship imposed on the press and to withdraw many of the spies and provocateurs from the radical and working class organisations. It was now obviously wise to avoid rather than to provoke disorder. The partial repeal of the Combination Acts in 1824 was similar in effect. So long as trade unions were illegal every union was the ground for a possible conspiracy. Francis Place, to whose astute lobbying the repeal was largely due, had persuaded the government, and possibly himself, that once legalised trade unions would become unnecessary and would decay and disappear.<sup>1</sup>

In somewhat the same spirit Huskisson at the Board of Trade set about revising the tangle of tariffs, some protective and some imposed for revenue purposes, with which the Statute Book was cumbered. Protection, necessary at an earlier stage, was now a nuisance to industries which had no visible rivals and only wished to produce as cheaply and sell their goods as widely as possible. Huskisson abolished some tariffs, reduced more to a nominal figure and opened the way to a general abolition by a system of imperial preference, then a

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 364-365.

halfway-house to free trade rather than to protection. Huskisson had a higher opinion of the commercial value of colonies than had been current since the American war of independence, and was in a sense the father of the school of Liberal imperialists. The Navigation Laws were considerably modified, and the general effect of the changes was to promote the import of raw materials at the lowest possible prices.

After 1822, Canning became Foreign Secretary, and here, too, policy developed along 'liberal' lines. During the years following Waterloo Britain had tagged along rather reluctantly behind the Holy Alliance, consenting rather than participating in its activities as the policeman of European reaction. But by 1822 the immediate danger of revolution had passed, and was replaced, from the point of view of the British government, by the much more real danger of the permanent domination of Europe by Austria, Russia and Prussia. Canning therefore fell back upon the old balance of power principle, by inclining towards an understanding with France, now a highly respectable power with a Bourbon monarchy and quite prepared to engage in repressive activities in Spain when a democratic revolution broke out there in 1822.

Canning did nothing to interfere, but sent an army to see that this intervention did not extend to Portugal and made it quite clear that no interference would be tolerated in South America. Here, British interests were direct and considerable. The Spanish colonies in America had cut themselves loose during Napoleonic Wars when they were isolated from Europe by the British naval blockade. Since 1815 a series of wars had been fought, but Spain had never been able to re-establish an effective control. The British merchant class, for whom South America had become an important market since the war, assisted the rebels with loans. Six thousand British volunteers had fought in their ranks under General Bolivar and their navy was commanded by a former officer of the British Navy, Lord Cochrane. Canning's 'Liberalism' was therefore a natural result of the reluctance of the British bourgeoisie to allow a great market, in which they had secured a virtual monopoly, to slip out of their hands.

Finally, the revolt of the Greeks against Turkish rule opened that eastern question that runs so tortuously through the history of the nineteenth century. Here Austria and Russia



were on opposite sides and Canning saw in intervention in Greece a method of splitting the Holy Alliance. He was careful to intervene in such a way as not to strengthen the position of Russia in the Balkans or allow her to advance farther along the shores of the Black Sea towards Constantinople. A British, French and Russian fleet defeated the Turks at Navarino in 1827, but both Britain and France were careful that the new Greek state should not be under Russian control.<sup>1</sup>

The Whigs co-operated to a large extent with the policy of the government during these years, and there seemed a probability that they would merge into the Canning group, which had much more in common with them than with the High Tories. The death in 1827 of Lord Liverpool, the Prime Minister, a nonentity who had served to prevent open war between the Canning and Wellington groups, laid bare the disintegration of the Tory Party. Canning formed a ministry of his own followers, with Whig support and with the High Tories more or less in opposition. Six months later, he too died and after a period of confusion Wellington formed a government from which Huskisson, who had succeeded to the leadership of the Canning Tories, soon resigned. The state of the Tories can only be compared to that of the Whigs about 1760.<sup>2</sup>

Professor G.M. Trevelyan seizes one aspect of the position very acutely when he writes:

The political history of the period is bewildering to the student, and rich in paradoxical happenings, because, while the old parties were breaking up, 'the spirit of the age' and the constant pressure of the unenfranchised from without overwhelm from day to day the policies of the nominal holders of power. The scene has all the confused inconsequence of a great military retreat, when no one knows what anyone else is doing, and positions are taken up only to be abandoned.

The point was precisely that behind the personal squabbles and the 'confused inconsequence' of the politicians, and working through them, were vast new class combinations, that the Industrial Revolution had reached the point at which the class it had engendered was becoming strong enough to dictate a

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIII, Section 3.

<sup>2</sup> See page 265.

new policy even before it had acquired direct political power. As often happens in such times, the government was driven to actions which were immediately inevitable but certain to be ultimately disastrous to themselves.

Hardly had Wellington taken office than he was faced with the alternative of civil war or agreeing to Catholic emancipation in Ireland. He chose the latter, though he knew that for the established church, the main prop of the High Tories, Catholic emancipation was the unspeakable thing for which there could be no pardon. By this almost accidental event, accidental, that is, in the sense of having no direct connection with English internal politics, the destruction of the Tory Party was completed. It was left with neither cohesion nor leadership, common principles, nor common policy. And the precise character of the coming change was determined by the fact that the Canning Tories were merged into the Whigs and not, as had at one time appeared probable, the Whigs in the Canning Tories.

When, in the late 1820s, the trade revival turned again into a slump, and the Whigs could release against the Tories and against the sinecures and absurd anomalies of the unreformed Parliament the discontent of the hungry masses, there was no force left that could offer any effective resistance.

## **5 The Reform Bill**

By 1830 the economic crisis had reached its height. Factories were closing down, unemployment increased rapidly, and the wages of those still employed fell. In the South the movement of revolt already described broke out in the autumn. In the North, trade unions sprang up like mushrooms and the air was full of wild rumours of workers arming and drilling. The revolution which took place in Paris in July and in Belgium in August helped to increase the tenseness of the atmosphere.

As in 1816, economic distress led quickly to a demand for parliamentary Reform. There was this important difference, that while from 1816 to 1820 the demand for Reform had come almost entirely from the working class, it was now a middle class demand as well. Having far closer contact with the masses than the Tories had, the factory owners and

shopkeepers realised the dangers of mere repression and set to work to turn the discontent of the people into a weapon for securing their own political supremacy.

The agitation for Reform was therefore more widespread and more dangerous than ever before and though Reform meant quite different things to different classes it was possible for a wire-puller as brilliant as Place to gloss over these differences and even to turn them to good account. When Lovett and the Owenites created their National Union of the Working Classes and Others, known popularly as the Rotundists from their usual place of meeting,<sup>1</sup> with a programme of universal suffrage, a secret ballot, and annual parliaments, Place saw at once the danger and the value of such an organisation. It was dangerous because it meant business, and because it regarded parliamentary Reform as the first step towards social reform and economic equality. It was useful because it could be turned into a weapon with which to blackmail the Tories into acquiescing in a certain measure of Reform (enough for the needs of the middle classes) as an alternative to revolution, which Place and the Whigs were never tired of painting in lurid colours while claiming that it was only being averted with the greatest difficulty by their own tact and moderation.

Bronterre O'Brien, later a leader of the Chartists, exposed this device bluntly in the *Poor Man's Guardian*, the organ of the Rotundists:

Threats of a 'revolution' are employed by the middle class and 'petty masters' as arguments to induce your allowance of their measures ... a violent revolution is not only beyond the means of those who threaten it, but is to them their greatest object of alarm.

To make the fullest use of the situation, Place created his own National Political Association, a body under middle class control but with a large working class membership which could be stimulated to produce the necessary revolutionary scare within carefully controlled limits. It worked in close harmony with Thomas Attwood's Birmingham Political Union and

<sup>1</sup> Later the Blackfriars Ring, but since destroyed in an air-raid during the Second World War.

kindred organisations in all parts of the country. The Rotundists only influenced the most advanced sections of the workers, and the Reform Bill did undoubtedly win the enthusiastic support of the majority, although it gave them few direct benefits. Why this was so can only be understood by considering the character of the unreformed parliament and of the proposed changes.

The character of parliament, the classes which dominated it, the methods by which elections were carried out, its unrepresentative nature and the accompanying system of sinecures and jobbery differed in no fundamental respect from that prevailing in the eighteenth century and already described.<sup>1</sup> A few sinecures had been abolished and corruption was forced by the growth of criticism to be a little more discreet, but these gains were more than outweighed by two changes for the worse.

The growth of population since 1760, and the changed distribution of that population, had made the members even less representative. Great new towns had sprung up which returned no members: these included Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and Sheffield. Many of the old boroughs had remained small or had even declined in population.

So that, quite apart from the fact that members did not in any case represent the bulk of the inhabitants of the places for which they sat, the industrial areas were almost disfranchised as compared with the rural areas and small but old market towns dominated by the local gentry. And, second, the class of forty shilling freeholders in whom the county franchise was vested had been almost swept out of existence by the enclosures. With the disappearance of the class of yeomen the electors were mainly the landowners and a heterogeneous collection of individuals who chanced to have smaller holdings of land.

The Reform Bill had really two sides. One regularised the franchise, giving the vote to tenant farmers in the counties (and thereby increasing the influence of the landlords in these constituencies) and to the occupiers of houses valued at over £10 per annum in the boroughs, that is, to the town middle class. In a number of boroughs the right to vote was actually taken from a large number of people who previously had exercised it. About this side of the Bill the working class was naturally unenthusiastic, but it was carefully kept in the

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter X, Section 2.

background while a furious campaign was worked up against the rotten boroughs and the sinecurists.

The really popular part of the Bill was that which swept away the rotten boroughs and transferred their members to the industrial towns and the counties. Fifty-six boroughs lost both their members and thirty more lost one. Forty-two new constituencies were created in London and the large towns and sixty-five new members were given to the counties. The workers were persuaded that once the old system of graft and borough-mongering was swept away they could count on an immediate improvement in their conditions. Most of them believed this: hence the enthusiasm aroused by the Bill and hence their speedy and complete disillusionment afterwards.

The general election of August 1830 was held early in the development of the great Reform agitation, but late enough to give a small majority to the various groups pledged to Reform but not yet amalgamated into the re-constituted Whig Party. In November Wellington was forced to resign and a Whig ministry took office, just in time to incur the odium of the stamping out of the revolt of the village labourers.

In March the new Prime Minister, Grey, and his lieutenant, Lord John Russell, introduced the Reform Bill, whose most striking and unexpected feature was the proposal to abolish all the rotten and pocket boroughs without compensation to their owners. Macaulay has described the scene in the Commons when the Second Reading was carried by a majority of one:

And the jaw of Peel fell; and the face of Twiss was as the face of a damned soul; and Herries looked like Judas taking off his necktie for the last operation. We shook hands, and clapped one another on the back and went out laughing, crying and huzzaing into the lobby.

It should be added, to complete the picture, that Macaulay had just made his most famous speech, supporting the Bill as an alternative to 'the wreck of laws, the confusion of ranks, the spoliation of property and the dissolution of the social order'.

A few days later the government was defeated in committee and resigned. A new election was held in May amid intense excitement. Almost every seat with any kind of popular franchise, including seventy-four of the eighty county seats,

was carried by the Whigs, and this, with about one-third of the rotten boroughs held by them, was enough to give them a majority of 136. The Bill passed the Commons but was rejected by the Lords in October. It is significant that most of the votes against came from the bishops and the war profiteer peers created by Pitt.

It was at this point that the machinery thoughtfully prepared by Place was really set in motion. With the help of secret government funds and money provided by wealthy supporters of the Bill widespread riots were staged and reports were circulated of vast insurrectionary movements arising in the industrial towns. To a large extent the popular indignation against the Lords was quite genuine and the general unemployment and hunger gave the masses good reason to riot and demonstrate. Amid this excitement the demands of the Rotundists for universal suffrage appeared academic and remote from the actual political conflict. In this way the Whigs were able to get the better of two sets of enemies at the same time.

The Lords were given some months for the lesson to sink in. Meanwhile a great part of the centre of Bristol was burned down, Wellington and the Bishops had their windows broken, scores of petitions rained in from all over the provinces and London was the scene of huge and stormy demonstrations. In December a new Bill was introduced into the Commons and on 13 April it was passed by a small majority in the House of Lords.

The Tories, however, then tried to emasculate the Bill in committee and in May the government resigned. Wellington tried to form a new government but was unable to secure even the support of his own party. Place and the Whigs, perhaps alarmed at the success of their previous manipulation of mass fury, employed the new but equally effective device of a run on the banks. After nine days Wellington gave up his attempt and Grey returned with a promise from William IV to create enough new peers to force the Bill through the Lords. Before this threat they surrendered and the Bill passed into law on 7 June 1832.

Meagre as it seems in many ways (it increased the electorate only from about 220,000 to about 670,000 in a population of 14,000,000), its importance can hardly be exaggerated. First, by

placing political power in the hands of the industrial capitalists and their middle class followers it created a mass basis for the Liberal Party which dominated politics throughout the middle of the nineteenth century. From this time, beginning with the return of Cobbett and Fielden for Oldham, some of the towns of the industrial North began to send radical members to Parliament, and a definite political group began to form to the Left of the Liberals, sometimes co-operating with them, but frequently taking an independent political line. There was always, for example, a small but capable group which supported the demands of the Chartists in the House of Commons.

In the fifty-five years between 1830 and 1885 there were nine Whig and Liberal governments which held office for a total of roughly forty-one years: in the same period six Tory governments had only fourteen years of office. Striking as this is, it is more remarkable still that the Tories were only able to govern at the cost of carrying through what were Liberal policies, as in the case of the repeal of the Corn Laws and the Reform Bill of 1867. The Reform Bill created the political institutions necessitated by the economic revolution of the two preceding generations.

Second, it altered the political balance as between Commons, Lords and Crown. The Commons gained at the expense of the Lords because they were now able, however fraudulently, to claim to be the representatives of the people against a clique of aristocrats and because the abolition of the rotten boroughs robbed the peers of much of their power to control the composition of the lower house. For the same reason the crown lost the last of its means of direct interference in parliamentary politics. By ceasing to have at its disposal the patronage and power of corruption it had wielded in the eighteenth century it ceased to have a following of its own in the House of Commons. From this time the influence of the crown, though often considerable, had to be exercised secretly and indirectly, through its private contacts inside the ruling class and with the heads of foreign states. It was for this reason that it remained much more powerful in foreign than in home affairs.

The third consequence of the passing of the Reform Bill, though perhaps the most important, was unintended and

indirect. The workers who had done most of the fighting soon realised that they had been excluded from all the benefits, and the Poor Law Act of 1834 convinced them that the Whigs were at least as indifferent to their interests as the Tories had been. It was not accidental that the years immediately after 1832 were marked by a disgusted turning away of the masses from parliamentary politics to revolutionary trade unionism, or that, when the limitations of this weapon had been exposed, they proceeded to build up in the Chartist movement the first independent political party of the working class.



## XIII LIBERAL ASCENDANCY

### 1 The New Poor Law and the Railway Age

The years after 1832 were spent by the Whig bourgeoisie in digging themselves in, in consolidating their position at the expense both of the landowners and of the workers whom they had been forced to accept as allies during the struggle for the Reform Bill. Their first task was to extend the victory of 1832 into the sphere of local government. If the parliamentary system had been antiquated and chaotic, the government of the boroughs was perhaps worse. Towns were controlled by corporations elected anyhow and usually representing some local landowner or a clique of influential individuals within the town. Many of the newer towns, having grown out of villages in the last generation or two, had no real administrative machinery at all. The country districts were governed despotically by the Justices of the Peace, while a great confusion of committees with un-coordinated functions and conflicting claims had been set up from time to time to deal with special problems. In this confusion corruption and inefficiency naturally flourished.

The Burgh Act in Scotland (1833) and the Municipal Reform Act in England (1835) swept away most of these bodies and replaced them by corporations elected, in the first case, by the ten pound householders and in the second by all ratepayers. In practice this ensured the control of most of the larger towns by the Whig middle class, since it was not till late in the century that the working class began to enter municipal politics as an independent force.

The rural districts were left, as the Whigs had been forced to leave them after 1688, in the hands of the Tory squirearchy. It was only in 1888 that county councils were set up to provide any form of local self-government for the areas not included in

the boroughs. This duality in local administration gave the landlords as a class a continued social basis throughout the whole period of the ascendancy of the industrial capitalists. It enabled them to fight a prolonged battle over the Corn Laws, and made the two-party system of parliamentary government a reflection of the division within the British ruling classes.

Among the other measures of this first post-Reform Whig government, the Factory Act of 1833 has been dealt with already and the abolition of negro slavery will be dealt with in a later section.<sup>1</sup> The intense class conflicts amid which these changes took place will also be described later, but it is necessary that they should be kept constantly in mind. Nothing aroused more bitter class feelings, or revealed more completely the real character of Whig rule, than the Poor Law of 1834, which applied to the solution of the most vexed of all the problems of local government the principles of the orthodox political scientists of the day.

A revision in the Poor Law was necessary to the ruling class for two reasons. First, because a crisis in national and local finance appeared to be rapidly approaching. In 1815, out of a total budget of £67,500,000 roughly £25,500,000 had been raised by direct taxation, over £14,000,000 coming from the income tax. After the war the bourgeoisie were able to secure the abolition of the income tax, and in 1831 only £11,500,000 out of a total revenue of £47,000,000 was obtained by direct taxation. This amount was no more than two-fifths of the sum paid as interest to the holders of the national debt. The result was a series of unbalanced budgets, together with an altogether disproportionate burden of taxation upon the mass of the people.

Locally, the Speenhamland system, growing less and less suited to the needs of an industrial country, had brought many parishes almost to bankruptcy. After dropping almost to four and a half million pounds in the middle twenties, the Poor Rate, under the influence of the economic crisis, had shot up again to over £7,000,000 in the financial year 1831-32.

The Speenhamland system was not, however, merely expensive. It also prolonged the struggle of small-scale against factory industry and dammed the supply of cheap labour which the manufacturers wished to see flowing into the industrial towns. For a generation the hand weavers and petty craftsmen

had fought desperately to escape the factories. Year by year their incomes had fallen till a man could not hope to earn more than five or six shillings for a full working week. Even with the help of Poor Law grants these were starvation wages – but at least the weavers and the unemployed and casually employed farm labourers starved in the open air. In 1834 they were offered a choice between the factory and the workhouse. Thus the Poor Law by abolishing outdoor relief brought fresh sections of the workers into profit-earning employment, much as the hut tax brought the African negroes at the end of the century.

The principle of the new law was simple: every person in need of relief must receive it inside a workhouse. Throughout the Speenhamland period workhouses had survived as places mainly for the reception of the aged, the disabled, of children and of all those too helpless and too defenceless to avoid being imprisoned there. These workhouses were taken as the model on which many more were built, not now by separate parishes but by groups of parishes known as 'unions'.

For the new system to have its full effect it was necessary that the condition of the pauper should be 'less eligible' than that of the least prosperous workers outside. In the sinister language of the Poor Law Commission of 1834, the able-bodied inmate must be 'subjected to such courses of labour and discipline as will repel the indolent and vicious'. At a time when millions of people were on the verge of starvation, this object could only be achieved by making the workhouse the home of every imaginable form of meanness and cruelty. Families were broken up, food was poor and scanty and the tasks imposed were degrading and senseless, oakum picking and stone breaking being among the most common.

The administration of the Act was deliberately removed as far as possible from popular control by the appointment of three virtually irresponsible Commissioners, the 'three kings of Somerset House', who became for a whole decade, together with their Secretary, Edwin Chadwick, the most detested men in England. This action, and the reasons for it, strikingly resemble the setting up of the Unemployment Assistance Boards by the National Government in 1934.

Cobbett, in the last year of his life, began to struggle against the 'Poor Law Bastilles' in the House of Commons, but it was

left to others to carry it on and to merge it in the great class movement of Chartism. Nothing did so much as the Poor Law to make the Whigs unpopular or to convince the people that they had been cheated over the Reform Bill. Huge and angry demonstrations applauded such speakers as Oastler or the Methodist minister, J.R. Stephens, who declared at Newcastle that:

Sooner than wife and husband and father and son should be sundered and dungeoned and fed on 'skillie' – sooner than wife or daughter should wear the prison dress – sooner than that – Newcastle ought to be, and should be, one blaze of fire with only one way to put it out, and that with the blood of all those who supported this measure.

In some places workhouses were stormed and burnt after fierce clashes between people and troops. In many of the northern towns it was ten years or more before the new law could be regularly enforced. At Todmorden it was thirty years before a workhouse was built. The mass agitation, however, died with the passing of the first phase of Chartist activity about 1839 and the Poor Law was able to achieve its main objects both in the rural and industrial areas. In the late thirties the Poor Rate fell to between four and four and a half million pounds.

For this there were outside reasons, of which the most important was the coming of the railway age. In 1823 the Stockton-Darlington Railway had been opened: in 1829 the much more important line connecting Manchester and Liverpool. At first the railway was looked on mainly as a means of carrying goods, but it was soon discovered that the steam engine was capable of far higher speeds than had been imagined and that it could carry passengers more quickly and more cheaply than the stage coach.

A regular fever of railway building, accompanied by a speculation boom and much gambling in stocks and land values, set in. In the years 1834-36 about £70,000,000 was raised for railway construction. First in the industrial areas, then on the main routes radiating from London and then on the minor branches, thousands of miles of track were laid down. Much of the capital expended on these works brought in no immediate profit, and in 1845 there was a severe crisis extending to many

branches of industry and affecting a large proportion of the banks. This crisis was rather the result of speculative optimism than of any real instability of the railway companies and soon passed, to be followed by an even greater outburst of building.

The result was what may almost be called a second Industrial Revolution. The railway age marks the beginning of an immense increase in all branches of industry, a strengthening of the monopoly of British manufacturers and the commencement of modern heavy industry. Exports rose from £69,000,000 in 1830 to £197,000,000 in 1850, but more important than this mere quantitative increase was the stimulus given to certain key industries, especially coal-mining and iron. The output of pig iron was 678,000 tons in 1830: in 1852 it was 2,701,000 tons. Coal output rose from ten million tons in 1800 to one hundred million tons in 1865.

Britain was not only the first country to construct a complete railway system for herself but soon began to build railways, at an immense profit, in countries all over the world, especially in the colonial and semi-colonial countries which had not a sufficiently dense population or sufficient concentration of capital to build for themselves.

In such cases railways were usually not only built by British contractors but financed by loans raised in London. In this way a new phase in British commerce was entered upon. Up to about 1850 exports were overwhelmingly of articles for consumption, and above all, of cotton textiles. From that date though textiles remained the largest single item, larger and larger quantities of iron ware, rails, locomotives and trucks and of machinery of all kinds were sent abroad. Britain began to export the means of production and the centre of gravity of British industrial capitalism began to shift from Manchester.

The immediate internal effect of the railway boom was to create a large demand for labour, both directly for railway construction and indirectly in the coal-mining, iron and steel and other industries. From 1830 thousands of navvies were at work, the number rising constantly till by 1848 there were nearly 200,000. Many were Irish, but the majority were probably English labourers 'released' by the Poor Law of 1834. Others went into the mines, where, being desperate and unorganised, they competed with the men already employed. Thus it was declared that in Stafford in 1843 the butties were

'very apt to take men into the pit from the plough, or other trades, who will come and work for 3d. or 4d. a day less than the regular miners'.

In the second place, the railways made it much easier for workers to get from place to place, to leave the villages and find a factory town where work was to be had. The Poor Law Commissioners in 1835 and 1836 claimed in their reports to have had much success in assisting migration from the 'distressed areas' of East Anglia and the South to the North and Midlands.

A second kind of emigration was also made possible on a far larger scale than before by the railway and its complementary development of the steamship. In 1837 the colonisation of New Zealand began. In 1840 the number of settlers in Australia was so large that its use as a convict station was virtually abandoned. Many emigrants went to Canada, while the building of railways in the United States (2,500 miles by 1840) opened vast new territories beyond the Alleghany Mountains. By 1840 about 70,000 people a year were emigrating, a number nearly doubled in the middle 1850s with the discovery of gold in Australia and California.<sup>1</sup>

By 1840 the Whig government was tottering. Five unbalanced budgets and a prolonged slump destroyed its prestige. The Poor Law was unpopular not only with the workers who had no votes but with a large section of the lower middle class who had. To other sections of the bourgeoisie the intense class struggles centred around the demand of the Charter seemed to demand an end to social experiment and the formation of a strong, reactionary government.

Besides this, the Whigs were unable, because of their peculiar class structure, to tackle the question of the Corn Laws, whose repeal was now becoming inevitable. The industrialists who formed the backbone of the party were set upon repeal, but the old Whig landowning families still occupied many of the leading positions and were unable to bring themselves to introduce a measure which they believed would drastically reduce their incomes as landowners. The shelving of repeal satisfied neither side and was everywhere correctly interpreted as a sign of weakness.

Under these circumstances the elections of 1841 resulted in a

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XV, Section 2.

Tory victory and the formation of a government headed by Peel. The landowners were intensely relieved, but economic necessity soon pushed the new government along the road to free trade and the repeal of the Corn Laws.

## **2 The Corn Laws**

The Corn Laws of 1815 were the last clear-cut victory of the landowners as a class in England, but it was a suicidal victory because it inevitably isolated them from every other class and enabled the industrialists to pose, however hypocritically, as the champions of the whole people against a selfish and monopolising minority. The object of the Corn Laws was frankly to keep the price of wheat at the famine level it had reached during the Napoleonic wars, when supplies from Poland and France were wholly or partly prevented from reaching England.<sup>1</sup> All wheat imports were forbidden when the price fell below 50s. the quarter.

From the beginning the Corn Laws were hated by everyone except the landowners and farmers, and even the latter found that in practice the fluctuations in wheat prices were ruinously violent and that the market was often manipulated so as to rob them of the profits they might have expected to make. Attempts in 1828 and 1842 to improve the laws by introducing a sliding scale were not successful. Opposition to the Corn Laws, coupled with demands for parliamentary Reform, were widespread throughout the Peterloo period, but died down after 1820, to be revived again by the coming of the industrial depression of 1837. This time it was an agitation not so much of the mass of the people as of the industrial bourgeoisie anxious to reduce labour costs.

From 1838, when the Anti-Corn Law League was formed by Cobden and Bright, it contended with the Chartists for the leadership of the working class. 'The people,' wrote Marx in 1848,

see in these self-sacrificing gentlemen, in Bowring, Bright and Co.,

<sup>1</sup> Even at the height of the war, in 1811, Napoleon was forced by the distress of the peasants of North France to allow corn to be exported to England. In other years the trade was often winked at by the authorities.

their worst enemies and the most shameless hypocrites. Everyone knows that in England the struggle between Liberals and Democrats takes the name of the struggle between Free Traders and Chartists.

Chartists organised counter-demonstrations to those of the League, brought the League speakers face to face with the facts of their condition, and in some industrial towns made it impossible for the League to hold meetings except those of their own supporters admitted by ticket. And C.R. Fay, the historian of the Corn Laws, describes how in the summer of 1842, the time of the great Lancashire turn out,

The red-hot orators of the League were transformed into pale policemen. The Delegates left London for the North, to keep there the peace of Her Majesty, whom Peel and Graham (the Tory Home Secretary) served.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless the Chartist agitation, which made the quarrel of Leaguers and Tories sound like the chattering of children, was one of the factors which had most to do with securing the repeal of the Corn Laws. Before the menace of revolution the warring sections of the ruling class were forced to sink their differences and, besides the repeal, to pass a Factory Act, a Coal Mines Act and the Ten Hour Act of 1847. It was the working class more than 'rotten potatoes' that 'put Peel in his damned fright'.

It would be a mistake, too, to imagine that the League's agitation was without effect on the workers. Unprecedented in scale and lavishly financed (£100,000 was collected in 1843 and 9,000,000 leaflets distributed) this agitation had all the advantages that the railways, cheap newspapers and the penny post could give. Whenever Cobden or Bright spoke their words were widely reported in scores of papers and the League orators were able to move swiftly and easily all over the country. They had facilities for spreading the free trade gospel that Pym and even Cobbett could never even have imagined.

In the light of this continued outside pressure, combined with the plain fact, which was becoming generally understood, that the growth of population was making it impossible for

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 374-375.



England to feed herself, the hesitating steps taken by Peel towards free trade after 1841 must be traced.

The first of these steps was dictated by the confused finance which he took over from the Whigs. A mass of tariffs and duties were swept away and replaced by an income tax which was both simpler and more productive, and in the long run less burdensome upon industry. These tariffs, being industrial, were not defended by Peel's landowning supporters.

But the effect of their disappearance, whether intended or not, was to leave the Corn Laws as an isolated anomaly, increasingly conspicuous and increasingly difficult to defend.

In these years Peel appears to have made a thorough study of the situation and to have realised that the belief common among landowners that vast stores of wheat were lying in the Baltic granaries ready to be poured into England was a pure fantasy. He knew, what few people on either side knew, that the surplus for export in any country was still quite small and that the most the repeal of the Corn Laws would do would be to prevent an otherwise inevitable rise in prices which might have had revolutionary consequences. He was, therefore, quite prepared, when the Irish famine provided him with an excuse, to force through the repeal against the will of the majority of his own supporters.

Before this point was reached, however, there was a political crisis with important results. Faced in the winter of 1845 with a revolt inside the Tory Party, Peel resigned. The Whigs, who had been forced by the pace set by the League to declare for complete repeal, set about forming a government. Suddenly, and on the thinnest of excuses, Lord John Russell announced that he could not form a government and handed back the responsibility to Peel. For once, an act of unashamed political cowardice was overwhelmingly rewarded. By forcing Peel to destroy the Corn Laws with Whig support, Russell precipitated a break within the Tory Party which left it helpless for twenty years.

The revolt against Peel was led by a young and almost unknown Jewish politician, Benjamin Disraeli, and it was Disraeli who re-created the Tory Party at the beginning of the age of imperialism, no longer primarily as a party of the landowners but as the party of the new power of finance capital.<sup>1</sup> When Peel died in 1850 a number of the Tory free

<sup>1</sup> See page 362.

traders joined the Whigs. Among them was William Ewart Gladstone, then aged 41.

The Corn Laws were repealed in June 1846, a small, temporary tariff being retained till 1849. The effect was hardly what had been expected. There was no fall in prices, in fact the average for the five years 1851-55 was 56s. against 54s. 9d. in the five years 1841-45. For this there were a number of reasons: increasing population and a greater demand due to the revival of industry, bad harvests in a number of years and the Crimean War in 1853 which interrupted the import of wheat from Poland. New but relatively small sources of supply were opened up in Turkey, the USA and elsewhere, and it is quite obvious that if the Corn Laws had been in operation prices would have been still higher. Later still, the American civil war interrupted the export of corn for several years, and it was not till about 1870, when the great wheat belt of the Middle West had been opened up by railways, that really large quantities of corn began to come in.

The manufacturers gained by repeal not through the cheapening of food, which had been their main argument when trying to win popular support, but by a larger flow of imports and a steadily expanding market for their goods. Thus, as the import of wheat from the Levant increased, so the export of Lancashire cottons rose from £141,000 in 1843 to £1,000,000 in 1854.

In this respect the repeal of the Corn Laws must be regarded as part of the whole free trade legislation which helped to make the period between 1845 and 1875 the golden age of the manufacturers. Free trade in corn was followed by free trade in sugar, and, finally, in 1860, in timber. Until the growth of industries abroad, nothing was to stand between the British manufacturer and the markets of the world.

Engels sums up the whole period thus:

The years immediately following the victory of Free Trade in England seemed to verify the most extravagant expectations of prosperity founded upon that event. British commerce rose to a fabulous amount: the industrial monopoly of England on the market of the world seemed more firmly established than ever: new iron works, new textile factories, arose wholesale; new branches of industry grew up on every side ... The unparalleled expansion of British manufactures and commerce between 1848

and 1866 was no doubt due, to a great extent, to the removal of protective duties on food and raw materials. But not entirely. Other important changes took place simultaneously and helped it on. The above years comprise the discovery and working of the Californian and Australian goldfields which increased so immensely the circulating medium of the world; they mark the final victory of steam over all other means of transport; on the ocean, steamers now superseded sailing vessels; on land in all civilised countries, the railroad took the first place, the macadamised road the second; transport now became four times quicker and four times cheaper. No wonder that under such favourable circumstances British manufactures based on steam should extend their sway at the expense of foreign domestic industries based upon manual labour.

Times were good for the British capitalists, and they regarded their good fortune as a law of nature and expected it to last for ever.

The effects of Corn Law repeal upon agriculture were much more surprising, unless they are regarded as a parallel to those of the Factory Acts upon industry. Instead of ruin, increased prosperity, instead of the acreage under the plough contracting, an expansion. The mere threat of foreign competition led to a number of improvements in technique. As compensation for their loss of the Corn Laws the landowners in parliament advanced themselves money for improvements at a very low rate of interest, thus enabling themselves to add to the value of their land and make a handsome profit out of the farmers who were charged for the improvements at a considerably higher rate.

A machine for pipe making, invented in 1845, made land drainage possible on a large scale. This added greatly to the productivity of the heavy wheat-growing land, made it more workable and made the use of artificial manures profitable. Nitrates, guano and bone manure all came into common use at this time. Much new machinery was introduced, so that at the Royal Agricultural Society's Show in 1853 no fewer than 2,000 implements were exhibited.

A more direct stimulus to the use of machinery was given by the increase in the wages of farm workers which took place between 1845 and 1859 as the result of the great demand for labour in the mines, in the construction of railways, etc. In time,

this increase in the use of machinery led to a reduction in the number of labourers employed, although the area under cultivation had increased by half a million acres and the total agricultural production had increased far more in proportion.

The greater application of capital to agriculture produced a further increase in the size of farms. Between 1851 and 1871 farms of all sizes below 100 acres decreased in number while farms of 300 acres and over increased from 11,018 to 13,006, the greatest proportional increase being in those of over 500 acres.

This period of prosperity lasted till the end of the short boom which followed the Franco-Prussian war. It then ended abruptly and a long depression set in with the arrival of American wheat and Australian wool in bulk. The improvement in the condition of the labourers ended much earlier when the rise in prices produced by the influx of Californian and Australian gold brought about a steady decline in real wages.

The simultaneous prosperity of industry and agriculture is the explanation of the remarkable absence of open conflict between manufacturers and landowners in the twenty years which followed the repeal of the Corn Laws. No great political issues divided the different sections of the ruling class till the resurgence of the Reform agitation in the sixties. Politics became a pleasant game, as in the eighteenth century, with Palmerston, embodiment of all the most conservative aspects of Whiggery, as presiding genius. The Great Exhibition of 1851, intended to usher in an era of universal peace but in fact followed by a new round of European wars, did nevertheless prelude in England a period of extraordinary social stability in which the details of political events became of far less interest than the steadily mounting statistics of exports and imports or the leaping and bounding of the income tax returns.

It was, *par excellence*, the Victorian age.

### **3 Foreign Politics: Palmerston to Disraeli**

The principles underlying Liberal foreign policy in the middle third of the nineteenth century were extremely simple. They were the principles of the 'inspired bagman', the man with

goods to sell. Behind the screen of a navy far larger than that of any rival power the economic penetration of the British empire and of the Far East was pushed ahead. In Europe all serious entanglements were avoided as far as possible, British influence being only exerted to prevent any one power from securing a predominating position. The more powerful states were treated with the utmost circumspection; and the smaller ones were bullied whenever bullying seemed likely to be profitable.

The embodiment of this policy was Lord Palmerston, who reigned almost without interruption at the Foreign Office from 1830 to 1865. In home affairs he belonged to the most reactionary section of the Whigs. In foreign affairs he has enjoyed an entirely undeserved reputation for liberalism. Marx, in 1853, after a careful study of all the information then available declared bluntly that 'Palmerston has been sold to Russia for several decades.' Whatever the truth of this may be, and it is still impossible to arrive at any certainty, it is at least clear that the policy followed by Palmerston did play into the hands of Russia.

He encouraged the Poles to revolt in the expectation of help from England and then betrayed them, much as he encouraged and betrayed the Danes in 1864. He approved the sending of Russian troops to crush the Hungarian revolution in 1848. His support of the revolution in Italy may have been the result of an appreciation of the fact that the unification of Italy would weaken Austria and so, indirectly, strengthen Russia. During the revolt of the mountain tribes of Circassia around 1850 Palmerston played a part not unlike that of Sir Samuel Hoare during Mussolini's conquest of Abyssinia. It was Palmerston, too, who hastened to recognise Napoleon III after his *coup d'état* in December 1851, and Palmerston who bears the heaviest responsibility for the predatory wars upon China in 1840 and 1860.

Nevertheless it was probably inevitable that England and Russia should clash after 1850. The failure of the revolutionary movement throughout Europe, a failure largely the result of Russian intervention, had left Russia without a rival on the Continent. Austria was decadent and bankrupt; Germany still divided into a patchwork of minor states which had not yet submitted to the primacy of Prussia; France, where the struggle had been most severe, still disturbed. Russia was 'the great

stronghold, reserve position and reserve army of European reaction'.

What was more to the point immediately, the advance of Russia threatened the interests of the British bourgeoisie in two directions. First in Asia, where Turkestan was being devoured in giant bites. Already the Russian advance towards India was causing alarm, since India was now becoming the keystone of the whole structure of British industry and finance.<sup>1</sup>

The direct threat to India was perhaps remote in 1850: the threat through Turkey was more immediate. With the development of the steamship the Mediterranean route to India and the East had once more become important. Steamers still had great difficulty in using the Cape route, and there was still a lack of coaling facilities. From about 1835, therefore, regular steamship lines were running from England to Alexandria and from Suez to India. The Suez Canal was not opened till 1869 but plans for its construction were already well advanced. The growing importance of this corner of the Mediterranean is at least one good reason for the keen interest shown by both Russia and Britain in the holy places at Jerusalem round about 1850.

Russian penetration into Turkey would not only have placed her astride of the route to India; it would also have made her predominant in the Eastern Mediterranean where both France and Britain had considerable direct interests, while the presence of Russian troops on the Danube would have turned her already strong position in Central Europe into one of unquestioned mastery. The Turkish empire at this time extended over the whole of the Balkan peninsula, but its hold was weakening and strong movements of national revolt were growing among the Serb, Bulgar and Roumanian populations. It was part of the policy of Tsarism to capture these movements and use them to weaken both Turkey and Austria.

Entirely selfish as were the motives of Britain and France in waging the Crimean War, a Russian victory would have been a disaster for progress and democracy throughout Europe. It was some realisation of this which made the war extremely popular in England, the main opposition coming from the

<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, British exports to inner Asia grew rapidly from about 1850 at the expense of Russia.

Bright-Cobden group. It was absurd and hypocritical enough for the exploiters of India and Ireland or the sharks and adventurers who supported Napoleon the Little to inveigh against tsarist tyranny, but among the masses, in whose minds the fate of Poland and Hungary was fresh, hatred of tsarism was both genuine and generous.

The pretended reasons for the war, the guardianship of the Holy Places and the treatment of Christian minorities in Turkey, were entirely trivial. It was characteristic of the prolonged discussions that preceded the outbreak of war that the British government, having agreed to terms with Russia, proceeded to induce the Turkish government to reject them, by unofficial assurances, made through Lord Stratford de Redcliffe the ambassador at Constantinople, of naval and military support in the event of war.

The military occupations, centred upon the siege of the naval base and fortress of Sebastopol, were one long series of blunders. Sebastopol could have been taken easily at any time for six weeks after the battle of the Alma (20 September 1854), but the French and British commanders decided through over-caution on a formal siege which they had not the forces to make effective. The besiegers soon found themselves caught by the winter, with neither the organisation nor the equipment that was required. Sickness and cold killed thousands and it was later stated by Florence Nightingale that of the 25,000 who died in the British forces, 16,000 were put to death by the inefficiency of the military system.<sup>1</sup>

The war was only successful because the Russian generals and administrators were even more incompetent. Serious weaknesses, which the outside world had not suspected, were revealed, weaknesses which were to become more apparent in the Russo-Japanese war and in 1914. Russia, economically and socially still in the eighteenth century, proved less and less capable of waging a large-scale war in exact proportion as the growing mechanisation of war demanded a basis in machine industry. In 1854 this process had only begun, and on both

<sup>1</sup> This was the first and last war in which the home population had accurate information of what was happening. The job of war correspondent had been created by the electric telegraph and had not yet been destroyed by military censorship. Hence the sensation caused by the despatches of Russell of the *Times*.

sides the arms, tactics and organisation hardly differed from those that had served in the Napoleonic wars.

The fall of Sebastopol in September 1855 was followed by a peace treaty in which the real problem of Turkish rule in the Balkans was shelved, the Turkish empire was patched together again and Russia was forbidden to fortify any harbours on the Black Sea or to keep any warships there.

This treaty had the desired effect of holding up the advance of Russia till 1870, when the victories of Prussia over France altered the whole balance of forces in Europe. The clauses in the treaty neutralising the Black Sea were denounced, and a new forward policy begun, culminating in the Russo-Turkish war of 1876. On this occasion a naval demonstration ordered by Disraeli checked the Russian advance without Britain becoming involved in actual war, and though, by the Treaty of San Stefano in 1878, a number of new states were carved out of the Balkan provinces of Turkey, this area did not become a Russian sphere of influence but a battleground between that country and Austria.

The Crimean war was the first of a series of European wars that were the natural result of the failure of the revolutions of 1848, which cast the rising centralised nation states into the form of military despotism. It was followed by the Schleswig-Holstein War of 1864, the Austro-Prussian war of 1866, the series of wars connected with the unification of Italy and the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. After 1871 a new period opened, a period in which the formation of compact, aggressive states had been completed and these states began to form themselves into rival groups. This was the period of imperialism, leading to the World War of 1914, and it will be discussed in later sections.<sup>1</sup>

In this series of wars Britain played only a small direct part and their effect on British history in this period was not great. Far more important in many ways was the American civil war which began in 1861. This was at bottom a war to determine whether the future development of the USA was to be into an industrial country or one with a plantation economy, an economy in which foodstuffs and raw materials were produced for export by slave labour and which was governed by a

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVI.



slave-owning aristocracy. Beyond a certain point these two economies could not exist side by side and the war was therefore a class struggle between a landed aristocracy on the one side and bourgeois democracy on the other. It was a modified form of the struggle begun in Europe by the French revolution, just as slavery was in certain respects the specifically American form of feudalism.

It was as a class struggle that it was regarded in England, and support was given to North and South on strictly class lines. Almost the whole ruling class was solid for the Southern slave-owners,<sup>1</sup> the landowners from natural sympathy, the cotton and shipping magnates because the North blockaded the Southern ports and prevented cotton from reaching Lancashire. There was an influential demand for the recognition of the Southern Confederate government, and every opportunity was taken to hamper and irritate the North. The climax was reached when the privateer *Alabama* was allowed to get away from Liverpool and worked havoc among the merchant shipping of the North.

The whole working class was equally solid in support of the North. This was most noteworthy in the case of the Lancashire cotton operatives, who suffered terribly from unemployment but resisted every effort of the employers to swing them into a campaign to force the North to raise the cotton blockade. It was this class conflict arising from the civil war which first broke through the complete stagnation in which the working class movement had remained since the collapse of Chartism in 1848. It was the beginning of the agitation which led to the Reform Bill of 1867, to the rebirth of socialism and to the rise of Fenianism in Ireland. These developments will be dealt with in later sections: it is only necessary here to touch on some of the economic effects of the civil war.

Cotton in 1861 was still the most important British industry and the great bulk of the cotton spun in Lancashire came from the United States. In 1860, 1,115 million pounds of cotton had been imported from the United States and 204 million pounds from India. By the autumn of 1863, when the famine reached its height, nearly 60 per cent of the textile workers were

<sup>1</sup> But Cobden, and Bright and their followers supported the North throughout.

unemployed. Those who were still working had their earnings greatly reduced, partly because of the substitution of inferior Indian cotton for that of America, but more because the employers took advantage of the depression to force down wages, which fell to as low as 4s. and 5s. a week in a number of cases. For the workers the famine was an unrelieved tragedy: the employers were able in the long run, to turn it into a source of additional profits. New cotton fields were being established in India (imports of Indian cotton had risen to 446 million pounds by 1865), and in Egypt which produced a longstaple cotton of fine quality. The whole profit from these fields went to British instead of to American capitalists. This introduction of a new commercial cash crop further limited the area available in India and Egypt for growing food, an area already insufficient to meet the needs of their increasing populations. This has been one of the factors making for chronic famine and ever growing peasant indebtedness.

At the same time the famine eliminated a number of the smaller, less profitable mills and led to extensive rationalisation in the rest. By 1868, when the industry had once more returned to the normal, there were fewer factories at work, more spindles, greater output and 50,000 fewer operatives. In the weaving section, there was actually an increased output from fewer looms.

The permanent results were not quite so satisfactory. The victory of the North, once the disorganisation caused by the war had been overcome, led to the growth of a great textile industry, first in New England and later in the Southern states, protected by high tariffs. The increased imports of Indian and Egyptian cotton into Lancashire would probably by themselves have forced the United States to consume an increased proportion of their own raw cotton. In the long run the civil war did much to destroy the monopoly of Lancashire and to hasten the transference, already referred to, of the centre of gravity of British industry from Manchester to Birmingham, a transfer followed in due course by corresponding political changes.

#### **4 The Second Reform Bill**

Palmerston died in 1865, after having been almost continuously since 1810 a member, first of Tory and then of Whig, ministries. His death completed the evolution of the Whig party towards Liberalism, the winning free of the industrialists from the equivocal leadership of a group of aristocratic landowners. With Palmerston out of the way and Lord John Russell growing senile, the leadership of the party passed into the hands of Gladstone and the predominance of the industrialists found expression in the increasingly close relations existing between Gladstone and the official party leadership and the radical group headed by Bright.

The alliance with the radicals committed Gladstone to an acceptance of their demand for an extension of the parliamentary franchise. It was in this agitation that the renewed militancy of the working class, mentioned in the last section as one of the results of the American civil war, became apparent. As early as 1861 some of the trade unions had taken up the question of parliamentary reform. In 1864 the International Working-Men's Association (First International) was founded, and it quickly acquired such a standing that early in 1865 the Cobdenites approached its General Council to secure their co-operation in the reform agitation.

In 1866 the London Trades Council, which had been formed in 1860 to co-ordinate support for a great builders' strike, took up the question and the London Working-Men's Association was formed.

There were thus two parallel agitations, one conducted by Cobden<sup>1</sup> and Bright and the bourgeois radicals, the other by the trade unions, receiving much of their political inspiration from the International. It is important to remember that this was the first time for nearly twenty years that working-class organisations as such had interested themselves in political questions. The agitations sometimes converged and sometimes separated, as the radicals attempted to water down the demand of the unions for complete manhood suffrage. In 1866 Gladstone, to the great disappointment of the left, introduced a Bill which only reduced the £10 property qualifications in the

<sup>1</sup> Cobden died in 1865.

boroughs to £7. Even this was too much for the Whig remnant which had survived Palmerston, and a group known as the 'Adullamites' and led by Robert Lowe, went over to the Tories and brought about the defeat of the government. The departure of this group had the effect of greatly increasing the weight of the radicals inside the Liberal Party.

It had a further result no one, perhaps, anticipated. Gladstone's Bill had aroused a very moderate enthusiasm but Lowe had opposed it frankly on the ground that in principle the workers as workers were unfit for the franchise. It was the insolence of this challenge which suddenly made reform a class question and almost a question of honour.<sup>1</sup> In the autumn of 1866 the ruling class was amazed and alarmed at the outburst it had provoked. In scores of industrial towns huge demonstrations were held in which almost the whole working and lower middle-class population seemed to be taking part. In these demonstrations the trade unions normally took part as organised bodies with their banners. In London there were huge gatherings at Trafalgar Square and Hyde Park, the latter turning into a vast riot in which half a mile of railings were torn up. This was the immediate sequel to the formation of a Tory government by Disraeli.

Disraeli had characterised all talk of an extension of the franchise as 'the doctrine of Tom Paine', but he had not counted on this storm. The reform agitation, the birth of the International, the revival of trade unions, and the activities of the Fenians combined to convince the Tories that they were on the verge of a revolutionary outbreak, and it was as a concession to avert revolution that Disraeli brought forward his Reform Bill in 1867.

This Bill gave the franchise to all householders and certain others in the boroughs, but not to those workers who were lodgers: it left voteless the agricultural workers and those industrial workers, including a large proportion of the miners, who did not happen to live in parliamentary boroughs. In 1885 the franchise was made uniform for both boroughs and counties. Almost equally important was the Ballot Act of 1872,

<sup>1</sup> The *Horby v.* Close decision of 1866, which threatened trade union funds, helped to rouse the union leadership to the necessity of defensive political activity.

which abolished open voting at the hustings. Without this Act the extension of the franchise to the agricultural workers would have been little more than a bad joke.

The great importance of the Reform Bill of 1867 was that it provided the basis for the formation of an independent parliamentary party of the working class. The Chartists had been an agitational party of the disfranchised, subject to violent fluctuations of fortune as conditions grew more or less favourable for their agitation. The Labour Party, handicapped as it was by its origins in bourgeois Radicalism and by the opportunism of its leaders, grew up with one leg in the trade unions and the other in parliament and so had a solidity which the Chartists never possessed.

A whole generation was required for the birth of this new party, and in the interval the immediate advantage went to the radicals, the political expression of the mid-Victorian alliance between the middle class and the workers, before the rise of an independent labour movement. This alliance, which worked, of course, mainly in the interest of the bourgeoisie, continued to be very close, mainly because the most advanced sections of the bourgeoisie had to fight for the completion of liberal-democratic reforms till well into the 1870s. Even after the great reforms of 1867-75 the political position of the manufacturers did not correspond to their industrial strength, and the first ministry with important radical representation was that of 1880, which contained Chamberlain and Dilke.

When, however, the main reforms of these years had been achieved and the radicalism of men like Bright appeared less ardent, we observe the emergence of a very much more advanced radicalism, which was in many ways the direct precursor of the political labour movement. In the provinces it was mainly Nonconformist in character, but even here and still more in London, it became at times boldly republican and secularist. In the Radical Clubs which provided the organisational form of the movement, Chartists and socialists, survivors from earlier days, found refuge. The outstanding figure was the atheist, Charles Bradlaugh, whose exclusion from parliament on account of his refusal to take the oath, was the chief popular cause of the early 1880s. In London these radical clubs even refused to merge with the Liberal Party organisation, and as late as 1887 it was the Metropolitan

Radical Federation which gave the call for the Bloody Sunday demonstrations in Trafalgar Square.

This radical movement took part in the last great progressive reform of Liberal capitalism, the completion of local government reorganisation. Indeed in many places it actually took shape around the various local bodies, such as the elected school-boards which were to administer the Education Act of 1870. With the rebirth of the independent labour movement a split took place among the radicals. The capitalist leaders like Chamberlain found their true home among the imperialists; some, like Bradlaugh and G.W. Foote, continued to preach secularism but to oppose socialism; but the majority, both Nonconformists in the provinces and secularist Londoners, gradually merged with the labour movement.

At the election of 1868 a substantial Liberal majority was returned. The Whig element had been eliminated, the radicals strengthened by the return of many of their group in the industrial towns, and when Gladstone formed his government Bright received for the first time a seat in the Cabinet. The years that followed were marked by a number of important social reforms. The ruling class could afford to make concessions and the temper shown by the masses in 1866 was not quickly forgotten. Under the extended franchise both parties were forced to bid for working-class support and there was little practical difference in internal policy whether the government was Liberal as from 1868 to 1874 or Tory as between 1874 and 1880.

The establishment of a system of universal elementary education; the work of the Act of 1870 associated with the name of W.E. Forster, was one of the most important measures of this period. It was indeed urgently demanded by the requirements of industry in the new age. In the past it had not been important for the working class to be literate, but now, with the fiercer foreign competition that was being experienced and the higher standards of education existing in Germany, the United States and elsewhere, it was an obvious necessity. At the same time, as England became the commercial and financial centre of the world, an increasing number of clerks and supervisory workers were required, and these had to be drawn from the working class. Finally, the workers were showing a disturbing tendency to educate themselves, and there was no

guarantee that this self-education would not develop along subversive lines.

The victory of Liberalism was also directly responsible for the reform of the civil service. In the past all branches of the service had been the preserve of the aristocracy and their hangers on. The result was a bureaucracy that was neither capable nor honest. In 1870 all posts were thrown open to be competed for by public examination, and the civil service began to be staffed largely by the middle class. In certain branches, however, notably in the Foreign Office and the diplomatic corps, social qualifications continued to weigh very heavily and these remain even today in the hands of the upper class. A similar effect, with similar limitations, was secured in 1871 by the abolition of the practice of purchasing commissions in the army.

These reforms, whose point turned rather against the aristocracy and against the established church, which lost its virtual monopoly of elementary education, were the work of Liberals. The Tories, as might be expected, concentrated rather upon factory legislation, housing and sanitation. During the Industrial Revolution, towns were allowed to grow up without check or plan, hideously ugly and barbarously unhealthy. It was not till the terrible cholera epidemic of 1831 and the following years had bludgeoned the rich into a realisation that pestilence could not be confined entirely to the slums, that anything at all had been done to secure adequate drainage or a supply of uncontaminated water. Further outbreaks in 1849 and 1854 made the authorities take more steps in the same direction, and the Public Health Act of 1875 co-ordinated and extended what had already been accomplished in sanitation.

It was during the government of Gladstone that attention was forced upon Ireland by the Fenians. Nothing could be more revealing than Gladstone's famous exclamation when he was called on to take office in 1868, 'My mission is to pacify Ireland.' Here 'pacify' is the operative word. For all sections of the ruling class, Ireland was a conquered province to be governed in their interests, peacefully if possible, but by violence when necessary. It was within the limits set by this conception that the whole struggle between Liberals and Tories over the Irish question was waged during the late nineteenth century. Their differences were purely tactical and it was

among the working class alone that the belief that Ireland was a nation with the right to determine its own destiny found any support.<sup>1</sup>

One outstanding event of the period, and the one which marks decisively the turn into a new age, must receive more detailed consideration in a later chapter. This was the purchase by the British government in 1875, on the initiative of Disraeli and with the assistance of the Rothschilds, of the shares in the Suez Canal held by the Khedive of Egypt. It is important both for its place in the development of the British Empire and for the close co-operation it reveals between the Tory government and the powerful international finance oligarchy.

New figures appear on the scene, Goschens, Cassels and the like, to balance the already established Barings and Rothschilds, and they exercise an increasing influence upon British policy and turn it into a new direction. As they grew in power, and as the influence of banking over industry extended, the Liberal Party became more and more a party of the middle class and its authority diminished<sup>2</sup> while the rise of the Labour Party on the other side ate away its mass basis among the workers. It is entirely characteristic that it was just as the Tory Party ceased to be really representative of the landowners that it adopted a pretentiously self-conscious 'Merrie England' propaganda patter. The peculiar task of Disraeli was to reconcile the English aristocracy to their position of junior partner in the firm of Imperialism Unlimited.

It was indeed a pressing necessity for the British bourgeoisie to learn new ways, for in the late 1870s a deep economic and social crisis was upon them, not to be overcome so lightly as the periodic crises of the bounding years of dominant Liberalism.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIV, Section 5.

<sup>2</sup> But note as an important counter tendency the growth of an imperialist wing of the Liberal Party, often curiously touched, as in the case of Joseph Chamberlain, by radicalism. This wing was of great importance in 1914. Latterly the interests of imperialism have found the Tories more serviceable but the Sir J. Simon group survived as a curiosity during the 1930s.



## XIV THE ORGANISATION OF THE WORKING CLASS

### 1 Revolutionary Trade Unionism

From the earliest times in which wage earners have existed as a class, they have formed associations to defend their interests and rights against their employers. Such associations, whatever they may have been called, and whether nation-wide organisations like the Great Society of the fourteenth century or local craft bodies like the yeomen guilds,<sup>1</sup> were in essence trade unions. So it was, when the industrial proletariat came at the close of the eighteenth century to be conscious of its corporate existence, that the trade union was the form of organisation spontaneously adopted, and the early struggles of this class were inspired by what may almost be called revolutionary syndicalism.

The weapon lay ready to hand. In spite of the condition of illegality in which the workers' organisations had to exist in the eighteenth century, we have many glimpses of their activity. A proclamation against unlawful clubs in Devon and Somerset in 1718 complains that

great numbers of wool combers and weavers ... had illegally presumed to use a common seal and to Act as Bodies Corporate by making and unlawfully conspiring to execute certain By-Laws or Orders, whereby they pretended to determine who had a right to the Trade, what and how many Apprentices and Journeymen each man should keep at once ... and that when many of the said conspirators wanted work because their Masters would not submit to such pretended Orders and unreasonable demands, they fed them with Money till they could again get employment, in order to

<sup>1</sup> These were guilds formed by journeymen, that is, wage labourers. See pp. 69-70.

oblige their Masters to employ them again for want of other hands.

Three hundred Norwich wool weavers, again, in 1754, desiring to obtain an increase of wages, retreated to a hill three miles from the town and built huts, where they lived for six weeks supported by contributions from their fellow workers. By 1721 the journeyman tailors of London had a powerful and permanent union, and early in the eighteenth century we hear of combinations and destruction of stocking machines in the Nottingham hosiery industry.

Such organisations were always liable to prosecution under the common law for conspiracy or for acts 'in restraint of trade', and were expressly declared illegal in the wool industry by Act of Parliament in 1726. But until the advent of the Industrial Revolution and of large-scale factory industry they were of necessity localised and usually quite small bodies of craftsmen, obnoxious to their employers but not felt to be a menace to the state or to social organisation as a whole. These craft bodies were often allowed to exist without molestation except in times of special stress, and the existing law was felt to be strong enough to keep their activities within decorous limits.

The Industrial Revolution changed all this by making wider and more formidable combinations possible. When the industrial discontent was crossed with political Jacobinism the ruling class was terrified into more drastic action, and the result was the Combination Laws of 1799 and 1800. These laws were the work of Pitt and of his sanctimonious friend Wilberforce, whose well known sympathy for the negro slave never prevented him from being the foremost apologist and champion of every act of tyranny in England, from the employment of Oliver the Spy or the illegal detention of poor prisoners in Cold Bath Fields gaol to the Peterloo massacre and the suspension of habeas corpus.

The Act of 1799, slightly amended in 1800, made all combinations illegal as such, whether conspiracy, restraint of trade or the like could be proved against them or no. In theory, the Act applied to employers as well as to workmen, but though the latter were prosecuted in thousands, there is not a single case of any employer being interfered with. Only too often the magistrates who enforced the law were themselves employers who had been guilty of breaches of it. Prosecutions under the

old common law also continued to be numerous.

Against the old-established craft societies the Act was not regularly enforced, though there were a number of notorious cases like those of the *Times* compositors in 1810 or the coachmakers in 1819. It was the workers in the textile factories who were most affected. 'The sufferings of the persons employed in the cotton manufacture,' wrote Place,

were beyond credibility: they were drawn into combinations, betrayed, prosecuted, convicted, sentenced, and monstrously severe punishments inflicted upon them: they were reduced to and kept in the most wretched state of existence.

By 1800 the relatively high wages paid at first in some sections of the textile industries were already a thing of the past, and for twenty years they declined continuously. The severity of the law was not able to prevent the formation of unions, and indeed there are few more splendid episodes in the history of the working class than the way in which the laws against combinations were defied, but it prevented union organisation from having much chance of success. Strikes were common and were carried through with remarkable tenacity, but the end was always wholesale arrests, broken organisation, defeat and new reductions in wages. Characteristic of the time was the long strike of Tyne and Wear seamen in 1815 against the under-manning of ships, a strike only broken by the calling in of troops and marked by bad faith on the part of the shipowners so flagrant that it scandalised even the Home Office representative sent into the area by Lord Sidmouth.

In 1824 Place and others were able to push through parliament a Bill repealing the Combination Laws, working so quickly and quietly that the employers were hardly aware of what was being done. The next year the latter were able to get the repeal modified by an Act which, though it left the formal existence of unions legal, made illegal almost every kind of activity they were likely to undertake.

Even so, this was a great improvement on the status of before 1824, and there was an instant outburst of organising activity and strikes such as had never before been known. In August 1824 the Lancashire weavers met to establish a permanent organisation. The Manchester dyers struck for higher wages.

There were strikes of Durham and London shipwrights and of Bradford woolcombers and weavers. The period was one of fiery energy, when Dick Penderyn was leading the ironworkers of Dowlais and Merthyr in a guerrilla warfare against the yeomanry and regular troops that was only ended by his capture and execution in 1831. All through 1826 Lancashire was in the grip of almost continuous strikes, accompanied by wholesale destruction of looms and frequent clashes between strikers and soldiery.

It was in Lancashire that the first outstanding trade union leader appeared. John Doherty had served his apprenticeship in the days of illegality, when he became a trusted leader of the cotton spinners. Experience of defeat before and after 1824 convinced him of the necessity of uniting local organisations into a solid union, and he was the moving spirit in a conference of English, Scottish and Irish textile workers held in the Isle of Man in 1829, at which a Grand General Union of the United Kingdom was set up. This, in spite of its name, appears to have been a union of cotton spinners only, but in 1830 Doherty became secretary to the National Association for the Protection of Labour.

This was the first trades union, or union of trades, as distinct from organisations catering for one section of workers only. It aimed at uniting the whole working class, and did actually reach a membership of 100,000, while its weekly journal, although costing 7d. because of the high tax, had a circulation of 3,000.

The National Association soon perished for reasons that are still obscure, and the next important development was the Operative Builders' Union which was formed in 1833 out of a number of craft unions and soon reached a membership of about 40,000, mainly around Manchester and Birmingham. Early in 1834 this Union became merged in a new organisation, the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union.

In this the idea of the one big union reached its fullest embodiment. Its objects are stated in one of the rules:

That although the design of the Union is, in the first instance, to raise the wages of the workmen, or prevent any further reduction therein, and to diminish the hours of labour, the great and ultimate object of it must be to establish the paramount rights of Industry and Humanity, by instituting such measures as shall effectually

prevent the ignorant, idle and useless parts of Society from having that undue control over the fruits of our toil, which, through the agency of a vicious money system, they at present possess; and that, consequently, the Unionists should lose no opportunity of mutually encouraging and assisting each other in bringing about *a different order of things*, in which the really useful and intelligent part of society only shall have the direction of its affairs, and in which a well-directed industry and virtue shall meet their just distinction and reward and vicious idleness its well-merited contempt and destitution.

In this declaration two things are apparent: first an instinctive and revolutionary class consciousness, and second, the confused and moralising opinions of Robert Owen. The two trends proved incompatible, and it was upon this above all that the Grand National destroyed itself. Owen had reached, about 1817, to conceptions of socialism and co-operation, but it was a socialism which took no account of class, which based itself upon abstract ideas of right and justice and which dissipated itself into all kinds of projects for currency reform, ideal commonwealths and the almost miraculous establishment of the millennium. Yet the element of crankiness in Owen's make-up should not blind us to the greatness of his positive achievement. First of all the Utopians, he firmly grasped the fact that 'human' nature is only a product of human society, and that to change society is to change man himself. This alone would have been much: it was more that he drew the conclusion that the key to the change of society lay in the hands of the working class. It was this understanding that gave him a decisive role in the creation of trade unionism, of the co-operative movement and in the movement for factory reform.

By 1834 Owen was at the height of his fame and he was welcomed as an ally by the working class leaders of the union movement. The strength of the Grand National lay in the profound disillusionment which spread among the masses after the Reform Bill of 1832 and their conviction that parliament and political action were useless to them and that their social aims could only be accomplished by industrial organisation and strike action. Owen shared their dislike of parliament, but wished to subordinate strike action to the establishment of

co-operative enterprises which would gradually and peacefully supplant capitalism.

Before the establishment of the Grand National, Owen's doctrines had involved the builders in costly attempts to set up productive guilds and in the building of a great Guildhall at Birmingham. He insisted that there must be no harsh criticism of the employers, and though he advocated a general strike for the eight hour day he regarded this rather as an apocalyptic act than as a serious class struggle.

Quarrels which broke out between Owen and Morrison and the other left-wing leaders soon weakened the union at a time when it was already in great difficulties. At first its success had been staggering. In a few weeks its membership grew to half a million. It had taken over a number of strikes from the builders and other constituent bodies, including the Derby Turn Out, where the members had been presented with a demand that they should sign what became known as 'the document' pledging themselves to leave the union and take no part in its activities, and a strike which paralysed the greater part of Lancashire for sixteen weeks. Once the Grand National had been formed, strikes broke out everywhere, making demands on its resources that it had no means of meeting and at the same time scaring the government into a belief that the revolution was at hand. It was under these circumstances that the arrest of six farm labourers at Tolpuddle in Dorset, on a charge of administering illegal oaths, acquired national importance. The men were hastily tried and sentenced to transportation, in spite of enormous protests. At least 100,000 people took part in the demonstration at King's Cross, on the outskirts of London, which was deliberately made into a vast parade of trade union solidarity. The agitation was not at once successful, but in 1836 the sentences were remitted and later the men returned home.

Meanwhile the Grand National was becoming less and less able to cope with the organisational difficulties created by its own rapid growth. The Derby Turn Out ended in defeat, but a crop of new strikes took its place. Owen's dispute with the left wing grew so bitter that he closed down the journals of the union to prevent his rivals from expressing their views. The decline was as rapid as the growth, and in August 1834 a delegate conference decided to dissolve the union which had already

become no more than a shell. Morrison had already left the executive in despair of accomplishing anything, and died a year later in great poverty.

The collapse of the Grand National was not the end, even for a time, of trade unionism. Local and sectional unions continued to exist, in most cases with much diminished memberships and with narrower aims, but it was the end both of attempts at organisation on a grandiose scale and of the naïve hopes which such attempts aroused. It had seemed that all that was necessary was to proclaim a general strike and the walls of capitalism would fall of their own accord. The general strike was preached as the end and not as one way of beginning the struggle.

Revolutionary trade unionism *alone* had failed: political agitation at the tail of one of the old bourgeois parties had been even more fruitless. The next stage was a political agitation with its roots in the mass of the working class. The workers were far from being disheartened by the defeat of the Grand National, and it was only two years after its dissolution that the first signs of the Chartist movement began to appear. The Chartists in their turn made many serious mistakes but they were mistakes at an altogether higher political level.

## **2 The Chartists**

The stronghold of Chartism, as of trade unionism, lay in the industrial North, but its origin was among the thoughtful, radical, artisans of London. The soil of London, with the proximity of Parliament, the relative prosperity of its artisans, many of whom were employed in the luxury trades, and their habits of political discussion rather than political action, was perhaps the most favourable for the seed to take root. But once transplanted to the richer soil and keener air of the North, it grew strangely into something quite unpromised. The excellent Lovett, who had come once more under the influence of Place, was as disconcerted as anyone at the thorny monster he had helped to raise.

The London Working-Men's Association was formed in June 1836 as a political and educational body intended to attract the

'intelligent and influential portion of the working classes'. It was radical and Owenite in outlook and might have proceeded quietly and unobtrusively in a course of modest usefulness if the crisis which broke early in 1837 had not revived the demand for parliamentary Reform. In February the association drew up a petition to parliament in which were embodied the six demands that afterwards became known as the People's Charter. They were:

Equal electoral districts; Abolition of the property qualifications for MPs; Universal manhood suffrage; Annual Parliaments; Vote by ballot; The payment of MPs.

These demands were accepted with enthusiasm by hundreds of thousands of industrial workers who saw in them the means to remove their intolerable economic grievances. Engels declared that the six points were 'sufficient to overthrow the whole English Constitution, Queen and Lords included'. 'Chartism,' he wrote,

is of an essentially social nature, a class movement. The 'Six Points' which for the Radical bourgeoisie are the end of the matter ... are for the proletariat a mere means to further ends. 'Political power our means, social happiness our end,' is now the clearly formulated war-cry of the Chartists.

In the spring of 1838 the six points were drafted into the form of a parliamentary Bill, and it was this draft Bill which became the actual Charter of history. It was endorsed at gigantic meetings all over the country: 200,000 assembled at Glasgow, 80,000 at Newcastle, 250,000 at Leeds, 300,000 at Manchester. At all these meetings the Charter received emphatic approval and the tactics by which it was proposed to secure its acceptance soon took shape. These were, a campaign of great demonstrations, a mass petition to parliament,<sup>1</sup> a national convention (the name was chosen deliberately for its

<sup>1</sup> Political petitions were a long-recognised method of agitation. They had been employed freely by the Wilkesites and on a much larger scale against the Corn Laws in 1815.



connection with the French revolution), and, if the petition were rejected, a political general strike or 'sacred month'.

As the movement spread beyond London its character changed and sharp divisions arose among its leaders. The customary distinction between moral force Chartists and physical force Chartists, though partly correct and commonly made at the time, is not entirely satisfactory. More accurately three groups may be distinguished. The right wing was composed of Lovett and his London followers and the different group led by Attwood, a radical banker from Birmingham. They represented the more or less prosperous artisans and petty producers of their respective areas and were mainly concerned with the purely political aspects of the Chartist agitation. As the conflict between the Chartists and the ruling classes grew keener they fell back more and more on methods of education and peaceful persuasion.

Then there was a vast centre, grouped round the dynamic figure of Feargus O'Connor. From the beginning O'Connor had the support of the great majority of the industrial workers, the miners and the ruined and starving hand workers of the North. This support he never lost, in spite of his many blunders and weaknesses. But while he called them to fight for the Charter and a better life, his conception of the better life was that of the independent producer. O'Connor was an Irishman, nephew of one of the leaders of the Rebellion of 1798, nurtured on the Irish revolutionary traditions which were quite different from those of England and not always adaptable to English conditions. He was a strong individualist, a man of fiery energy with a powerful but confused intellect, and his appeal was largely to the instinctive hatred of industrialism prevailing among a working class most of whom were no more than one or two generations removed from the land. He was a strong opponent of socialism and though he talked freely of insurrection he had no clear idea as to how it was to be carried out or what its objects should be.

Much less definite than the right or centre was the left wing among the Chartists. Very often it did not stand out clearly, being usually driven to support O'Connor against the right wing. Its leaders, Bronterre O'Brien in the early stages and later George Julian Harney and Ernest Jones, never had anything like O'Connor's popularity. O'Brien was considerably

influenced by the socialist and co-operative ideas of Owen, but he went far beyond Owen in his clear understanding of the class struggle. He was led to this largely by the economic theories of Thomas Hodgskin. Basing his ideas on the right of the worker to the whole produce of his labour, O'Brien declared war on the capitalists who condemned the worker to poverty. Justifying his position, he built up a class analysis of historical development in general and of the nature of the bourgeois revolutions in England and France in particular. From this it was a short step to a statement of the need for a new 'social' revolution. The presentation of these views included a penetrating study of the nature of the bourgeois state, of the functions of law, of the new police force and of the army. His ability as a theoretician earned for him the title of the Chartist Schoolmaster. Harney and Jones were younger men, and Jones only came into the movement when it was already in decline. Harney was an over-emotional man with a strong tendency to indiscriminate hero-worship.<sup>1</sup> His main practical importance was as an internationalist, and he did much useful work in making contacts between Chartism and revolutionary movements abroad. Both Harney and Jones held many views in common with Marx, with whom they were closely associated when the latter came to live in England after 1848.

The confusion and weaknesses of Chartism are apparent. Its strength was that while in Europe the working classes were still dragging at the tail of the industrial bourgeoisie, in England the workers were able by 1838 to appear as an independent force and were already realising that the industrial bourgeoisie were their principal enemy. Even in France this point was not reached till ten years later and then only among the workers of Paris and a few of the largest towns.

Elections for the first Chartist convention took place in October 1838. During the winter the collection of signatures for the petition was begun, and in February the convention met in London, where the right wing was disproportionately represented. When Harney raised the question of what should be done in case the petition were rejected the majority refused to allow this possibility to be discussed. The proceedings

<sup>1</sup> Max and Engels used to refer to him, in private, as Citizen Hip-Hip-Hurrah!

dragged on for some months, marked by repeated quarrels between right and left wing groups, while up and down the country some preparations for an armed rising appear to have been made. In July the government struck. Meetings were forbidden, many arrests were made, and on 4 July a body of police, specially imported from London, attacked a meeting at the Bull Ring, Birmingham, with exceptional brutality. The workers rallied and drove the police out of the Bull Ring and it was not till some days later that order was restored in the town. The news of the Birmingham outrage spread rapidly and there were bloody clashes in Glasgow, Newcastle, Sunderland and a number of Lancashire towns.

On 5 July Lovett was arrested. On 12 July the petition, which had 1,280,000 signatures<sup>1</sup> was rejected. The convention was now faced with the alternatives of admitting defeat or coming to a definite decision for action. A half-hearted attempt was made to call a general strike, but when it was found that there was no organisation for making the decision effective, the strike appeals were withdrawn. The convention dissolved on 14 September.

More arrests followed quickly and a decline began that was only made more rapid by the rising in South Wales. This episode is the most obscure in the whole history of Chartism. It is still uncertain whether it was part of a plan for a widespread insurrection, or a spontaneous local outburst, or even a mere attempt at the forcible rescue of the Chartist leader Henry Vincent from Monmouth Gaol. It is at least probable that any success would have been followed by similar risings elsewhere.

All that is certain is that some thousands of partly armed miners led by John Frost marched down on Newport through torrents of rain on the night of Sunday 3 November 1839. Other contingents which should have joined them failed to arrive, and when the drenched and weary column reached Newport they were fired on by troops concealed in the Westgate Hotel. Ten were killed and about fifty wounded. The rest dispersed and Frost and the other leaders were arrested and sentenced to death, the sentence being later commuted to transportation.

This gave the government the opportunity they wanted. In a

<sup>1</sup> The total number of electors at this time was only 839,000.

few months about 450 arrests were made, the victims including O'Connor, O'Brien and almost all the outstanding figures. During the first half of 1840 the movement was forced underground and appeared to have been beheaded and destroyed. As the leaders one by one came out of gaol a slow revival began. In this revival the formation of the National Chartist Association in July was the most important event. At this time any national party was illegal, and the movement had consisted only of local organisations with no real central leadership or co-ordinating force. The NCA in spite of its illegality, was thus the first real political party in the modern sense, a party with an elected executive, dues-paying membership and about 400 local sections. By 1842 it had a membership of 40,000 and through it the movement as a whole reached its highest point of influence and activity. The right wing had been discredited by the failure of the first convention and Lovett soon withdrew from active participation.

The NCA went far to remove one of the main weaknesses of Chartism, and efforts were now made to overcome another, the isolation of the Chartists from the trade unions, by building up Chartist groups inside them. This attempt was only partially successful.

O'Connor was released in August 1841, and preparations were made for a second petition. This was a very different document from the first, the language of which had been respectful and its demands purely political. The second bluntly contrasted the luxury of the rich with the poverty of the masses and included demands for higher wages, shorter hours and factory legislation. The Chartist paper the *Northern Star* reached a circulation of 50,000 and the movement received a valuable political education in its struggle against the Anti-Corn Law League.

The economic crisis, which had eased somewhat after the bad year of 1838, suddenly intensified, bringing unemployment to hundreds of thousands and general wage reductions to the working population. Chartism spread like wildfire and the second petition was signed by no fewer than 3,315,000 people – well over half of the adult male population of Great Britain. Nevertheless it was scornfully rejected by Parliament in May 1842.

Once more the crucial question of the next step arose. The

association was just as hesitant as the convention had been, but the decision was taken out of their hands by the spontaneous action of the workers.

Strikes against wage reductions broke out all over Lancashire and in August a trade union conference in Manchester decided by an overwhelming majority:

That it is our solemn and conscientious conviction that all the evils that afflict society, and which have prostrated the energies of the great body of the producing classes, arise solely from class legislation; and that the only remedy for the present alarming distress and widespread destitution is the immediate and un mutilated adoption and carrying into law the document known as the people's charter.

That this meeting recommend the people of all trades and callings to forthwith cease work, until the above document becomes the law of the land.

Taken by surprise the association could only recognise the strike, which spread swiftly all over Lancashire, Yorkshire and the Midlands. London and the South, however, failed to respond. Troops were sent into the strike areas and by September a combination of repression and hunger had forced the strikers back to work. There were over 1,500 arrests, and by the end of the year the movement had once again dwindled to small proportions. A revival of trade between 1843 and 1846 came to the rescue of the authorities.

As Chartism declined, O'Connor, who was now without a serious rival, turned his energies to grandiose and crack-brained schemes for the establishment of a chain of land colonies. Thousands of workers and small tradesmen took shares with which two estates were bought and divided among selected colonists, chosen apparently for their political convictions rather than for skill as farmers. It was hoped to buy further estates from the profits of the first and so continue to extend the scheme indefinitely. Economically the idea was absurd and doomed to failure from the start, and it took up energy that might have been better spent, but on the other hand it served to hold the movement together at a low level till the crisis of 1846, accompanied by the great famine in Ireland, brought Chartism into its third period of activity. The first sign

of this revival was the election of O'Connor as MP for Nottingham in 1847.

On the surface this revival had all the vitality of the agitations of 1839 and 1842. There were the same demonstrations, the same enthusiasm and the same terrible background of misery and starvation. But in reality there was a profound difference. The employed had not fully recovered from the defeat of 1842 and had meanwhile been pacified by the passing of the Ten Hour Day Act. The movement was therefore confined mainly to the unemployed. In Glasgow there were severe bread riots in April 1848 and many people were killed and wounded. The government made the most ostentatious military preparations and raised a large number of special constables from the upper and middle classes.

The mechanical adoption of the old, worn-out tactics of petition and convention was in itself a confession of weakness, and when the Convention met it had to discuss the certainty that the petition would be rejected. The younger leaders, Jones and Reynolds, pressed for an immediate insurrection. The older hands, including O'Connor and O'Brien, who had more means for comparing the situation with that of previous years, judged and judged rightly, that an insurrection would not receive sufficient support to have any chance of success. Not even the stimulus of the revolutions taking place all over Europe could bring the movement back to anything like the levels previously reached.

The petition, when presented, was found to have only 1,975,000 signatures against the five million O'Connor had claimed. The great meeting which was to have accompanied the presentation of the petition on 10 April was dwarfed by the forces which the government had called out to deal with a 'revolution' they knew would not take place. Some 30,000 people assembled at Kennington Common and O'Connor decided to abandon his plans for a march to Westminster. Chartist agitation continued to be strong during the summer of 1848 but was broken by systematic police attacks on its meetings and the arrest of its most active leaders including Ernest Jones.

Hereafter the story is one of unbroken decline, in spite of the adoption of a new programme with marked socialist features. O'Connor's Land company became insolvent and had to be

wound up, and in 1852 he became insane. After 1853 the association's death was formally recognised by a decision to discontinue the election of an executive committee. The National Charter Association lingered on till about 1858.

The failure of Chartism was partly a result of the weaknesses of its leadership and tactics. But these weaknesses were themselves only a reflection of the newness and immaturity of the working class. In the forties of the last century the bourgeoisie were still a rising class, had still a positive contribution to make to social progress and could still afford to make substantial concessions to stave off revolt. The distress of the time was more in the nature of growing pains than the sign of irresistible decay.

In 1848, though few people were probably aware of it, Britain was just on the verge of a long spell of trade expansion and prosperity, and even if little of this prosperity reached the workers there was still improvement enough to turn them from thoughts of revolution. Politically, the twenty years after 1848 afford a striking contrast to the Chartist decade. The attempt to create a great, independent party of the working class was not repeated: political activity became more localised, or was confined to some immediate practical issue, but, as we have already noted in connection with Victorian radicalism, it never ceased to exist.

This can be seen today: at the time it was not so obvious, and we can understand how Engels in 1858 could write with something very like despair that

the English proletariat is becoming more and more bourgeois, so that this most bourgeois of all nations is apparently aiming at the possession of a bourgeois aristocracy and a bourgeois proletariat *as well as* a bourgeoisie. For a nation which exploits the whole world this is of course to a certain extent justifiable.

The positive contribution of these middle years, and it was a real contribution whose value has sometimes been underestimated, was made in other fields, those of trade unionism and co-operation.

### 3 The New Model

Even before the old revolutionary trade unionism had passed in the splendour of the Grand National and the 'sacred month' of 1842, the first stirrings of a new kind of organisation can be discerned. After 1848, when the hopes of striking political victories vanished, the 'new model' unionism grew apace. It built upon a narrower but more solid foundation. Attempts to form a trades union were abandoned after one more abortive effort in the National Association of United Trades (1845-50) had failed. Even here there was a notable difference. The National Association was more in the nature of a federal body to which small local unions became affiliated, and its policy was always cautious, strikes being avoided whenever possible.

The new model, however, was not a trades union but a trade union. It was a national organisation of workers employed in a single craft. Nearly always it was composed of skilled workers. In policy and outlook these unions expressed the point of view of the skilled artisans who had long had their local unions and clubs and from whom Lovett and the moral force Chartists had drawn their following.

Their attitude was that expressed by the Committee of the London Compositors as early as 1835:

Unfortunately almost all the Trade Unions hitherto formed have relied for their success upon extorted oaths and violence ... Let the Compositors of London show the Artisans of England a brighter and better example; and casting away the aid to be derived from cunning and brute strength, let us, when we contend with our opponents, employ only the irresistible weapons of truth and reason.

Wages, the price of labour power, were thought of as being governed solely by the laws of supply and demand. The Flint glass makers declared in 1849 that 'the scarcity of labour was one of the fundamental principles ... It was simply a question of supply and demand.' The same idea was more forcibly expressed in the favourite gospel of Tommy Ramsey, a pioneer of trade unionism among the Durham miners:

Lads unite and better your condition.  
When eggs are scarce, eggs are dear;  
When men are scarce, men are dear.



The result was a tendency to discountenance strikes and to rely instead upon keeping down the supply of labour by restricting the number of apprentices, discouraging overtime, and, in extreme cases, subsidising emigration. 'Look to the rule and keep the boys back' was the characteristic slogan of the time.

Such were the principles on which the national unions grew up about 1850. Rigidly exclusive and often hereditary, they catered for a labour aristocracy which had little concern for the masses outside their ranks,<sup>1</sup> but within their limits they developed a solidarity which enabled the unions to survive the heaviest defeats with an almost unimpaired membership. They brought into the British working-class movement business methods and a care for the tedious details of organisation without which little of permanent value could be accomplished. They made trade unionism for the first time a normal and regular part of the daily lives of thousands of working men.

These new unions had high contributions, often a shilling a week or over, and carried out all kinds of functions besides that of conducting trade disputes. Sick benefits, funeral benefits and unemployment benefits were usually paid and the greatest danger was always that of the union becoming a mere friendly society whose real purpose was completely submerged and whose policy was cautious to the point of being cowardly. This was indeed the fate which overtook many of the new model unions and led to the rise of a quite different kind of trade unionism in the 1880s and 1890s. Another and more useful activity was that of helping in the self-education of the members, and this, beginning as early as 1840, has led the way to an important and valuable movement for independent working-class education.

Most of the organisational work in the early days had been done by enthusiastic volunteers in their spare time or by middle class sympathisers like Owen. Now it was necessary to have full-time officials who specialised in such work. This, too, had its dangers, but no permanent organisation on a national scale would have been possible without it.

The first of the new model unions was the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, founded in 1851 by the merging of a

<sup>1</sup> On a number of occasions, however, they gave generous help to less wealthy unions involved in disputes.

number of craft Unions, of which the Journeymen Steam Engine and Machine Makers and Millwrights Friendly Society was the most powerful. It was the ASE which formed the pattern for other craft unions. Its membership of 11,000 seems small compared with the half million of the Grand National or the tens of thousands who flocked into the various ephemeral organisations of the cotton operatives and miners. But it was a permanent membership, paying dues which gave the society the unprecedented income of £500 a week. The strongest of the other unions at this time were the ironfounders and the stonemasons, each with a membership of four to five thousand.

The difference between the old and the new unions was quickly shown by the three months' struggle which began in January 1852 over the question of overtime. The employers tried to smash the ASE by the old method of refusing employment to all workers who would not sign 'the document' undertaking to give up union membership. Such methods had been successful in the Derby Turn Out and on many other occasions. Now, however, they failed, and in spite of suffering a defeat the society ended the struggle with only 2,000 fewer members than at the beginning and within three years all the lost ground had been more than recovered.

In the next ten years the example of the engineers was widely followed. The Lancashire cotton operatives formed a permanent organisation in 1853, the stonemasons and ironfounders doubled their membership while the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters, founded in 1860, soon became second only to the ASE in numbers and influence. The Carpenters' Union was the direct result of a stubborn strike in London in 1859 which convinced the men of the need for a more powerful type of organisation.

About 1860 these unions developed an unofficial central leadership, often known as the junta. It was composed of officials who were active at the London headquarters, whose work put them constantly into touch with one another and who shared a common outlook on trade union and political questions. The inner circle consisted of Allan and Applegarth of the engineers and carpenters, Guile of the ironfounders, and Coulson of the bricklayers. A fifth member, George Odger, was of a different kind. Belonging only to a small union of skilled bootmakers, he was important as the secretary of the

London Trades Council and for his influence in radical circles. He was the politician of the group, and its mouthpiece when it wished to address a wider public.

From the start the junta interested itself in politics, but not in the sense in which politics had been understood by the Chartists. Its members had no idea of leading an independent class movement but used their influence in Union circles to exert pressure on the existing parties. They participated in the reform agitation of 1866-67 and did useful work in campaigning against such abuses as the Master and Servant Law. They stood just to the left of the Liberal Party and fell often enough into the most glaring opportunism because of their lack of any clearly formulated political philosophy. It was thus possible for them to collaborate at one moment with European revolutionaries on the Executive of the First International and at another with Bright and the Liberals. Their industrial policy was, as S. and B. Webb say, 'restricted to securing for every workman those terms which the best employers were willing voluntarily to grant'.

But in spite of this, and although they were 'possessed with a mania for compromise and a thirst for respectability', they were in the main honest and capable men with a real talent for organisation. The trade union movement would never have reached the dimensions it did reach without their unspectacular labours any more than it would have done if their methods had not later been transcended and their doctrines repudiated.

Even when at the height of its influence the junta and its policy was by no means unchallenged. Many sections, especially in the North and including the miners and textile workers, were not organised after the 'new model'. In these industries there was often much militancy, accompanied by marked fluctuations in membership, and it was from them, challenging the domination of the junta with its main base in London, that the first steps came towards the national organisation which finally produced the Trades Union Congress. In this struggle the northerners received invaluable support from George Potter, editor of the *Beehive*, the most influential union journal of the period. Potter's organisation, the London Workingmen's Association, convened a conference of unions in London in 1867, which, though boycotted by the junta, was widely representative. This boycott was maintained till 1872, though

three more national conferences were held meanwhile. In this year, however, the junta decided to take a hand, and forming an alliance with Alexander Macdonald, leader of the National Miners' Union, and other right wingers among the northern unions, were able to oust their old opponent Potter and secure control of the movement.

It is impossible to select any one of these conferences as being the 'first' Trades Union Congress. What is important is, that like many working class bodies, the TUC grew out of a practical need, in this case that of organising to oppose legislation detrimental and to further legislation helpful to trade unionism. In particular it developed to organise the resistance to an application of the conspiracy laws which threatened to put an end altogether to legal trade union activities and which led to an agitation which ended with the placing of the unions upon a secure legal basis. In the General Election of 1874 trade union leaders came forward as candidates for the first time independently of the Liberal and Tory Parties, though as individuals they were still only radicals. This brings us, however, to a new phase: the new model was now becoming itself antiquated and a new 'new unionism' was needed to replace it. The age of monopoly in which the respectable craft unions had grown up was nearing its close; the increasing misery of the millions for whom they did not cater was pressing for attention. The result of these changes will be the subject of the next section, but first something must be said of the development corresponding to the rise of the new model in another section of the movement, that of the co-operative Societies.

The earliest co-operatives were mainly attempts by groups of workers to break the monopoly of the millers and to provide cheap flour for their members. Such were the Hull Anti-Mill Society of 1795 and the Devonport Union Mill of 1817. Then came the floodtide of Owenite revolutionary Utopianism and the co-operatives were hailed as the key to the peaceful supersession of capitalism. The objects of the Brighton Society in 1829 were thus described:

They purchased at wholesale prices such articles as they were in the daily habit of consuming ... adding the difference or profit to the common stock (for it is a fundamental rule of these societies never

to divide any portion of the funds but to suffer it to accumulate till it becomes sufficient to employ all the members thereon).

Usually the societies hoped to establish co-operative communities like that of Owen at Orbiston in Scotland. Scores of such societies came into being and disappeared again during the 1830s.

The 'new model' co-operative was that of the Rochdale Pioneers who began in 1844 to pay a dividend on purchases. The co-operative movement gradually shed its Utopianism (though vestiges of it still remain in the confused language which some co-operators still use about the 'Co-operative Commonwealth') and the co-operative societies began to establish themselves successfully as strictly business concerns, selling goods to their members at current prices and distributing the profit as dividend. In the 1860s the Co-operative Wholesale Society came into being to supply goods to the retail societies and in the next decade it began actually to produce goods in its own factories.

Since that time the progress of the movement on the trading side has been rapid and almost uninterrupted. In it thousands of workers have learnt how to organise and administer large-scale business enterprise and have demonstrated conclusively that ability to do so is not confined to the capitalist class.

#### **4 Socialism and the Organisation of the Unskilled**

Changes in the position of British capitalism and the influence of developments in other countries combined to produce the revival of socialism and trade union militancy in the 1880s. The movement in England had always been sensitive to events abroad and had often shown a generous internationalism. To say nothing of the reaction caused by the French revolution, the Chartists had taken the initiative in the formation of the body known as the Fraternal Democrats, a forerunner of the First International. Founded in 1846, mainly through the efforts of Harney, it lasted till about 1854 and played an honourable part in keeping the movement in Britain in touch with revolutionary happenings elsewhere during one of the great epochs of the European revolution.

Then in 1861 came the American civil war, followed in 1864 by the formation of the First International. Under the leadership of Marx and Engels it was for ten years the directing force of all the advanced sections of the working class throughout Europe. In England it was supported, for mixed reasons, by leading trade unionists, including the members of the junta, but it was not able to wean them from their respectability and insular craft prejudices. In England the International perished and left no immediate fruits so far as organisation was concerned. In France and Germany, however, it left behind it young and healthy socialist parties. By 1880 these parties had already reached respectable dimensions.

The Franco-Prussian war was followed by a short replacement boom, particularly marked in the coal and iron industries. Hundreds of new pits were sunk, and there was a sudden (and temporary) rise in miners' wages. The conclusion of the war stimulated an intense industrial development both in France and Germany and it was just at this time, also, that the USA recovered from the effects of the civil war. For these reasons the attack on British manufacturing monopoly developed at a great pace. The boom passed into a profound crisis in 1875, followed by others in 1880 and 1884. And, what was most significant, the recovery after these slumps was less rapid and less complete than in the mid-century period. British industry still continued to make progress, but with greater difficulty and at a slower rate.<sup>1</sup>

The effects of this crisis were felt especially in London. Here the migration of the shipbuilding industry to the Tyne and Clyde about 1866 had caused widespread destitution, while the gradual decline of small-scale industry was ruinous to a region where, paradoxically, it had survived to a greater extent than elsewhere. The East End contained hundreds of thousands of dockers, unskilled and casual workers among whom unemployment spread to an alarming extent, while their wages when they were employed were extremely meagre.

Consequently, it was in London, and not as earlier in the industrial North, that the new movement had its centre and main support.

The first reactions to the change were to be seen among the intellectuals and a minority of the more thoughtful workers.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVI, Section 1.

Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* had a wide sale about 1880, focusing attention explicitly upon the private ownership of land but indirectly upon private ownership as an institution. In 1881 Engels wrote a series of leading articles in the *Labour Standard*, the newly-founded journal of the London Trades Council, in which the fundamental questions of the relation of trade unionism and working-class politics were trenchantly discussed. In all events that followed the value of the part played by Engels, working quietly in the background, can hardly be overestimated.

In 1884 the Democratic Federation, founded three years earlier by H. M. Hyndman, a well-to-do adventurer in search of a party, changed its name to the Social Democratic Federation and preached a gospel in which ill-digested Marxism was combined with a good deal of pretentious nonsense. The SDF was able to attract, but not always to retain, the support of many of the most politically advanced and class conscious workers and intellectuals, people like Tom Mann, John Burns, William Morris and the Avelings, as well as the more nondescript personal adherents of Hyndman.

Hyndman's dictatorial and unscrupulous methods, culminating in the scandal of the General Election of 1885 when three socialist candidates were run on money obtained from the Tories, soon discredited the Social Democratic Federation.

Even before 1885 Morris and others had left to form the Socialist League, but this came under the influence of an anarchist clique and fell to pieces after bitter internal squabbles.

1884 also saw the birth of the Fabian Society, a body which put forward an 'improved' and 'English' Socialism, substituting for the class struggle the peaceful and gradual permeation of the ruling class and its organs. The Fabian Society itself always remained small, but later its ideas were eagerly seized upon by the right-wing leaders of the Labour Party, anxious to find theoretical justification for their opportunism.

All these early socialist bodies were still isolated sects, and without the awakening of a mass movement they would have counted for very little. This movement began among the unemployed in East London in the winter of 1886 and 1887, though its progress was retarded by the tactics of the SDF who exploited it as a stunt for purposes of self-advertisement. On 13 November 1887, the famous 'Bloody Sunday', the police broke

up a demonstration with extreme brutality. The result was a concentration of all socialist and radical forces in a great free speech campaign, which was accompanied by numerous clashes with the police.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, persistent and fruitful propaganda was carried on in the many radical clubs to which the majority of the politically conscious workers then belonged.

By 1887 things were moving also in the provinces. Keir Hardie was beginning to work in what became the Scottish Labour Party, while a Labour Electoral Organisation won some successes on Tyneside. But the *annus mirabilis*, the movement of the breaking through of the latent volcanic forces, was 1888, and the place of this breakthrough was the East End of London, the home of thousands of workers who had never been organised and were regarded as unorganisable.

In May the girls at Bryant and May's match factory were led by socialists in a successful strike. This was followed by the organisation of a union among the gasworkers by Will Thorne with the help of Burns, Mann and the Avelings. In a few months the union had become so strong that the gas companies were forced to reduce the hours of work from twelve to eight and raise wages by 6d. a day. The Gasworkers' and General Labourers' Union, firmly established as a result of this victory, was the first of the 'new' unions which absorbed all the best lessons that craft unionism had to teach but avoided its narrowness and compromising attitude.

When the victory of the gasworkers was followed by the great dock strike of 1889 led by Burns and Mann (themselves actually members of the ASE) the unskilled workers began to pour into the unions. Within a year 200,000 had been organised. In 1888, too, the Miners' Federation was formed, linking up the older local unions which had latterly been making considerable progress. By 1893 the federation, with its policy of a minimum wage and a legal limitation of hours, as against the previously dominant system of the 'sliding scale which linked wages with prices', had grown from 36,000 to over 200,000 members.

All this happened rather in spite of than because of the SDF which remained outside the mass movement and even looked on it with some contempt because it was not avowedly socialist.

<sup>1</sup> A reflection of these events, in which Morris played an active part, is to be seen in Chapter XVII, 'How the Change Came', of *News from Nowhere*.



Members of the federation like Burns and Mann who worked actively in the unions did so as individuals and were often attacked for abandoning their socialist principles. For the time this attitude did not hold back the masses, but in the long run it was a disaster. The 'Socialists', the theoretically advanced minority, remained a sect, the mass movement was abandoned to the leadership of all kinds of careerists. Moreover, some of the most militant trade union leaders, Burns and Thorne for example, soon became infected with the opportunism prevailing among the older officials with whom they came into contact. Burns had the distinction of being the first trade union leader to sit in a Liberal Cabinet. There was never in England that fusion of theory and practice out of which alone right action can grow, and both sides of the movement had to pay dearly for its absence.

Nevertheless the new unionism did mark a great advance in spite of its lack of political clarity. Engels in 1889 hailed with delight the advance from the 'fossilised brothers' of the craft unions:

The people only regard the immediate demands as provisional, although they themselves do not know as yet what final aims they are working for. But this dim idea is firmly rooted enough to make them choose *only* openly declared Socialists as their leaders.

The difference was clearly shown when the General Railway Workers' Union, upon its foundation in 1890, declared, 'That this Union shall be a fighting one and shall not be encumbered with any sick or benefit funds.' From the start the new unions adapted a policy of low dues and wide recruitment instead of one of high dues and exclusiveness. For the first time, women were catered for, and the Gasworkers extended their organisation to Ireland.

When Engels in 1892 issued a new edition of his *Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*, he picked out this mass movement as the most important sign of the times:

That immense haunt of human misery [the East End] is no longer the stagnant pool it was six years ago. It has shaken off its torpid despair, it has returned to life, and has become the home of what is called the 'New Unionism', that is to say, of the organisation of the

great mass of 'unskilled' workers. This organisation may to a great extent adopt the forms of the old Unions of 'skilled' workers, but it is essentially different in character. The Old Unions preserve the tradition of the times when they were founded, and look upon the wages system as a once for all established, final fact, which they can at best modify in the interests of their members. The New Unions were founded at a time when the faith of the eternity of the wages system was severely shaken; their founders and promoters were Socialists either consciously or by feeling; the masses, whose adhesion gave them strength, were rough, neglected, looked down on by the working class aristocracy; but they had this immense advantage, that *their minds were virgin soil*, entirely free from the inherited 'respectable' bourgeois prejudices which hampered the brains of the better situated 'old' Unionists. And thus we see these new Unions taking the lead of the working class movement generally and more and more taking in tow the rich and proud 'old' Unions.

The new Unionism soon made itself felt and a keen struggle ended in an important victory at the Liverpool TUC of 1890 when the demand to have the enactment of a legal Eight Hour Day placed on the programme was adopted by 193 votes to 155 after a curious debate in which the leaders of the old unions used the most apparently revolutionary arguments. The importance of the vote was precisely that the trade union movement was being forced once more into the field of political action. Early in 1893 a conference of socialist and working class bodies was held at which the Independent Labour Party was formed. The SDF with its usual obstinacy, refused to co-operate and the result was that the leadership of the new party, by far the largest socialist party then in existence, passed first into the hands of Keir Hardie and then into those of the most dangerous Fabians and disguised Liberals, like Snowden and Ramsay MacDonald.

The SDF repeated their mistake even more disastrously in 1900 when the Labour Party (first known as the Labour Representation Committee) was formed by the TUC with the adhesion of the ILP and the Fabian Society. At first the new body did not receive very much support. All the candidates it put up in the 1900 General Election failed, and in 1901 the membership of its affiliated bodies was only 469,000. Then came the celebrated Taff Vale case and a fierce newspaper

campaign against trade unionism. Membership rose to nearly a million and there were several sensational by-election victories. After the Election of 1906 a group of twenty-nine Labour members was returned to the House of Commons.<sup>1</sup>

The independent mass political party of the workers, towards the formation of which a century of effort and sacrifice had gone, was now indeed in existence, but under the leadership of men who were content to follow the lead of the Liberals on almost all questions. Yet such as it was, the Labour Party was in fact the expression of the mass movement of the workers and its rank and file never succumbed entirely to the bourgeois infection which prostrated the leadership. Inside the party a constant war was going on against this infection. Lenin, supporting the application of the Labour Party for affiliation to the Second International in 1908, declared that 'it represents the first step on the part of the really proletarian organisations of England towards a conscious class party and towards a *Socialist* Labour Party.' And, in an article discussing the International's decision to accept the Labour Party, he comments that the English Unions are

*approaching* Socialism, awkwardly, hesitatingly, in a zig-zag fashion, but are approaching it nevertheless. Only the blind can fail to see that Socialism is now growing rapidly among the working class in England

From about 1900, and under the pressure of the tumultuous growth of militancy among the workers, this socialist opposition made rapid headway inside the Labour Party. In 1914 the outbreak of war interrupted this development and left the reactionaries, for the moment, more firmly established than ever.

## **5 The War for the Land and the National Struggle in Ireland**

The Act of Union of 1800 came as the natural consequence of the suppression of the revolt of the United Irishmen.<sup>1</sup> Corrupted and unrepresentative as it was, an Irish parliament

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 304-306.

sitting in Dublin was still a potential centre around which revolutionary nationalism might gather, and therefore it had to be destroyed. Pitt delegated the congenial task to Castlereagh, and by a campaign of bribery in which a million pounds were spent in buying a majority, the Protestant gentlemen who constituted the Irish parliament at this time were persuaded to vote themselves out of existence. The promise that the Act of Union would be followed by the removal of the legal disabilities imposed on the Catholics was not kept.

Instead, the Act of Union was followed by a series of Coercion Acts intended to crush the continued revolt of the peasants against the crushing burden of rent, tithes and taxes. Banded into such secret organisations as the Whiteboys and the Ribbonmen, the peasants conducted an irregular warfare, and tithes especially could only be collected at the point of the bayonet. Battles like that at Rathcormack where twelve people were killed were frequent. No repression could destroy this revolt, which sprang from the profound misery of the people, but what English bayonets failed to do was done by the Irish native upper class under the guidance of Daniel O'Connell.

John Mitchel said of O'Connell that 'next to the British government he was the greatest enemy Ireland ever had'. The spontaneous agrarian revolt was seized upon by him, given a central leadership and distorted into a weapon to increase the political power of the bourgeoisie. With the help of the priests he formed the Catholic Association, which soon gained an undisputed ascendancy over the peasants. The whole strength of the Association was turned to securing 'Catholic Emancipation', by which O'Connell meant the right of the Catholic gentry to become members of the Westminster parliament.

In 1829 he achieved this object, but at the same time the 40s. franchise was abolished and the Irish electorate reduced from 200,000 to 26,000. This disfranchisement of the small holders removed one of the main barriers to eviction, since up to then the political influence of any landowners depended upon the number of voters who were his tenants and could be trusted to use their votes at his direction. After this victory O'Connell began an agitation for the repeal of the Union, but was careful to confine it within limits that prevented any effective action of the masses.

Ireland was important to the English ruling classes only as a source of cheap food: for the last hundred and fifty years, no matter what form the exploitation has taken, this has been its essence. With the development of manufactures in England, Ireland was turned into a corn growing country. During the high prices of the Napoleonic wars, rents rose amazingly and there was an extreme sub-division of holdings. After the war, Ireland was the only place from which corn could be freely exported to England under the Corn Laws, and, though prices fell, the profits of the landlords were hardly affected because the fall in prices only meant that the peasants had to produce more wheat to pay their rent. Evictions were frequent and the steady growth of the population always made it easy to find new tenants however extortionate the rent.

In 1835 figures published in the report of the Irish Poor Law Commission revealed that the total value of Irish agricultural produce was £36,000,000. Of this £10,000,000 went in rent, £20,000,000 in taxes, tithes, and the profits of middlemen and merchants, and less than £6,000,000 to the actual producers, the small holders and labourers. The peasant grew wheat to pay the rent and potatoes to feed himself and his family. These are the facts which provide the essential background to the great famine which raged from 1845 to 1850.

The facts about the famine have been grossly distorted by all orthodox historians. There was really no famine in any ordinary sense of the word, but only the failure of one crop, the potatoes. 'Providence sent the potato blight, but England made the famine' was a saying current at the time. In 1847, when hundreds of thousands of people died of starvation and hunger typhus, food to the value of £17,000,000 was actually exported from the country under the protection of English troops. The million and a half people who died in these years did not die of famine but were killed by rent and profit.

The best leaders of the Young Ireland Movement, which had taken the place of O'Connell's association, advocated the forcible seizure of the land and the refusal of all rent and tithes. Just as Tone had looked to revolutionary France for an ally, John Mitchel and James Fintan Lalor planned for an insurrection in conjunction with the English Chartists. The rising was forestalled by the arrest of Mitchel and Lalor, and

the landlord Smith O'Brien into whose hands the leadership passed was not the man to lead an agrarian rising against his own class. He and his friends were unable to prevent a rising, but strong enough to make it localised and hopeless. The state of physical weakness to which the famine had reduced the people was perhaps also partly responsible for this failure in 1848.

The next generation was a time of great misery, of wholesale evictions and emigrations to the USA and to Canada. After the repeal of the Corn Laws Irish wheat lost its monopoly in the English market and wheat growing gave way steadily to cattle grazing. The population fell from 8,170,000 in 1841 to 4,700,000 in 1891, but at the same time the area under corn fell from 3,000,000 acres to 1,500,000 acres. Small holdings were 'cleared' of their occupiers and flung together into large grazing farms, so that in spite of the decline in the population the pressure of the peasants on the land available for them did not decrease.

The same period saw the driving out of the hand spinners and weavers by the machine-made goods of Lancashire, a process that in England had been completed a generation earlier. Between 1841 and 1881, the number of workers in the textile industries decreased from 696,000 to 130,000. Irish industry remained backward except round Belfast, where shipbuilding and linen-weaving were carried on almost entirely with English capital. It was for this reason that a powerful section of the English ruling class has always been so determined to prevent Home Rule from being applied to this area.

It was against the evictions that the next big movements, those of the Fenians and the Land League, were directed. The Fenian Society was formed at Kilkenny in 1857, though it derived its inspiration from a group of revolutionary exiles in Paris, led by James Stephens, who is said to have been in contact with the secret Party of Blanqui and the European communists. It remained unimportant till after the American civil war, in which thousands of Irish emigrants served with distinction. After the war many of these old soldiers were ready to put their military skill at the service of Ireland. The Fenians soon gained strength, and their leaders established close contact with the First International, of which some of them may have been

members.<sup>1</sup> Once more, plans for a rising were betrayed to the English government and the leaders were arrested. Without them the rising proved abortive and was quickly crushed when it came to a head in 1867.

The Fenians were a political organisation drawing their strength from agrarian discontent: the Land League was founded in 1879 to defend the economic interests of the peasants and only gradually became drawn into political action. Its tactics were to fight eviction by means of the boycott, and members pledged themselves:

Never to bid for, take or hold the farm from which our neighbour has been evicted for the non-payment of an unjust rent, and never to take any hand, act or part in sowing or saving the crops thereon and to hold the man who will do so as a public enemy.

It soon developed into a nation-wide resistance to the landlords and the government.

Closely connected with the Land League struggle was the fight for political self-government. The Home Rule Party had been formed in 1872 and had swept the field at the General Election of 1874. In the next year Parnell was returned to parliament for Meath and within a couple of years was recognised as the leader of the party. Parnell, though a landlord, had a bitter sense of Irish wrongs and a cold determination to end them at all costs. He quickly saw in the Land League a means of uniting the agrarian struggle with the struggle for national liberation, and formed a close alliance with its leader Michael Davitt, though it may be doubted if he ever shared Davitt's belief that the land war could act as a transition stage to armed insurrection. The famine of 1879, with its consequent misery and crop of evictions, made Parnell and Davitt irresistible as the head of a nation-wide political and economic struggle: every denunciation by the Catholic hierarchy, by terrified landlords or even by 'moderates' of their own party, only increased their standing among the peasantry who saw in them the only power that could save them from ruin.

By this time the government was thoroughly alarmed, and in

<sup>1</sup> Engels, at this time living in Manchester, a great centre of Irish emigration, was in close touch with the Fenian movement.

1881 Gladstone passed his Coercion Act, which made it possible for anyone suspected of supporting the Land League to be imprisoned and held without trial. Davitt and most of the League leaders were arrested and soon Parnell was sent to join them in Kilmainham Gaol. Outside there were signs that the movement was beginning to decline. On one hand, a section of the peasantry had been satisfied by the concessions offered in the Land Act of 1881, on the other, the mass struggle, now without any centralised leadership, appeared to be breaking up in acts of individual terrorism. Rightly or wrongly Parnell decided that it was time to retreat, and while in Kilmainham reached an agreement with the government by which violent and illegal methods were to stop in return for an amnesty and legislation to end evictions.

Parnell was released in May 1882. A few days later the value of this understanding was destroyed when the new Irish Secretary, Lord Frederick Cavendish, who had come to Dublin to implement it, was assassinated in Phoenix Park. Parnell had never believed in methods of terrorism, and now turned his energies more and more to a campaign for Home Rule, that is, for Irish self-government within the Empire. A supreme master of parliamentary tactics he succeeded in bringing into being a perfectly disciplined body of nationalist MPs. He worked on the assumption that such a body would be strong enough to command serious attention and at times, when the Liberals and Tories were evenly divided, would be able to hold the balance and extort large concessions as the price of their support. Under his leadership these tactics did win success, but after the party had been split and Parnell himself driven out of the leadership by an unprincipled alliance between Catholic Church and landlords and English imperialists, his successors led the Irish Nationalist Party into ever greater depths of opportunism until the day in 1914 when their leader John Redmond stood up in the House of Commons to assure the English government of the support of Ireland in the event of war. That pledge was the death sentence of Parnell's party.

The Land Act of 1881 was a cleverly calculated blow at the Land League. It set up tribunals to fix rents for a period of fifteen years, during which time the tenants were not to be evicted. The object of the Act was to save the landlords from the ruin with which the land war was threatening them and to



cut away the basis for the agitation of the league. In this it was largely successful, for the peasants were ready to snatch at any hope of escaping eviction.

This Act was followed by a series of Land Purchase Acts by which tenants could buy their farms by a series of annual payments. In this way the landowners received a smaller but safe income raised by a state loan and the peasants paid the interest on this loan instead of rent which, if the Land League had been able to continue its activity, they might well have been able to escape altogether. T. P. O'Connor, then quite a young revolutionary, summed up the object of this legislation by saying that

Gladstone's policy was to fix a relation between landlord and tenant; the policy of the League was to abolish the relation and trample landlordism beneath its heels.

Finally, Gladstone attempted by the Home Rule Bill of 1886 to end the nationalist agitation. He was defeated by the revolt of the openly imperialist section of the Liberal Party, headed by the Birmingham politician Joseph Chamberlain, and there was a renewed period of coercion under the Tory philosopher Balfour. A second Home Rule Bill was thrown out by the House of Lords in 1893.

The whole history of Ireland from the raising of the volunteers in 1778 to the present day has followed a tragic pattern of continuous struggle by the peasants and workers to free themselves from English exploitation and the regular betrayal of that struggle by upper and middle class leaders because such a struggle could not but be directed in time against native as well as foreign exploiters. The Irish landlords in particular, drawing huge rents from the peasants, which they spent and invested largely in England, have always been more hostile to their own tenants than to the English.

The key to the whole situation, today no less than when the United Irishmen declared in their manifesto of 1791:

When the aristocracy come forward the people fall backward; when the people come forward the aristocracy, fearful of being left behind, insinuate themselves into our ranks and rise into timid leaders or treacherous auxiliaries,

lies in the answer to the question, '*What class* is to lead the struggle for national liberation?'

## XV COLONIAL EXPANSION

### 1 India

The abolition of the trading monopoly of the East India Company in 1813 marked a new stage in the economic exploitation of India. The company was a trading company, drawing most of its revenue from the profits derived from the sale in England of the exotic products of the East. It was also a London company and London was the traditional centre of British merchant capital. It was not, by 1813, the centre of British industry. From this time can be dated the opening of the Indian market to English factory-made goods, above all to Lancashire-made cotton cloths. In a little over a decade the value of exports to India about doubled, and the export of cotton goods, trifling in 1813, reached nearly £2,000,000 a year in the 1820s.

After 1813 the main trading revenue of the East India Company came from its monopoly of the China tea trade, which it kept for another twenty years. As something like £4,000,000 worth of tea was sold by the company each year at prices roughly double those paid in Canton, these profits were very considerable. The first opium war (1839-1842) was fought just at the time when Lancashire was ready to flood China with cheap cottons as it had already flooded India. Hence the war, ostensibly fought to force the Chinese to buy Indian opium against their will,<sup>1</sup> had also the more general object of breaking down the barriers which prevented the free export of British goods to China. After the war, Hong Kong was annexed and five 'treaty ports' opened to British traders. A second war

<sup>1</sup> A certain Sir George Campbell remarked in the House of Commons: 'If the Chinese are to be poisoned by opium, I would rather they were poisoned for the benefit of our Indian subjects (!) than for the benefit of any other Exchequer.'

(1856-58) opened the way for the penetration of the Yangtse basin.

Lancashire goods destroyed the hand-loom industry of India with astonishing rapidity. Dr Bowring, the prominent free trade advocate, in a speech made in parliament, in 1835, declared:

Some years ago the East India Company annually received of the produce of the looms of India to the amount of from six million to eight million pieces of cloth. The demand gradually fell off to somewhat more than one million pieces and has now nearly ceased altogether.

...Terrible are the accounts of the wretchedness of the poor Indian weavers, reduced to absolute starvation. And what was the sole cause? The presence of the cheaper English manufacture ... Numbers of them died of hunger; the remainder were, for the most part, transferred to other occupations, principally agricultural ... The Dacca muslins, celebrated over the whole world for their beauty and fineness, are almost annihilated from the same cause.

The population of Dacca, the main centre of the Indian textile industry, decreased between 1815 and 1837 from 150,000 to 20,000.

Less spectacular but more important than the depopulation of Dacca was the gradual destruction of the self-supporting communities which formed the ground pattern of Indian social life. Marx, speaking of both India and China, wrote:

The broad basis of the mode of production is here formed by the unity of small agriculture and domestic industry, to which is added in India the form of communes resting upon the common ownership of the land. ...The English commerce exerts a revolutionary influence on these organisations and tears them apart only to the extent that it destroys by the lower price of its goods the spinning and weaving industries, which are an integral part of this unity.

By the destruction of the village handicraft industry the peasants were thrust back on to exclusive dependence on agriculture. India, like Ireland, became a purely agricultural colony, supplying Britain with food and raw materials. The

destruction of hand industry meant not only that Lancashire goods secured a monopoly market but that Indian cotton and jute were exported to England instead of being made up at home. This process was assisted by the heavy taxation which was part of the price that had to be paid for the benefit of British rule. Faced with a demand for payments in cash, the peasants were forced to sell their surplus produce at prices which had no relation to the cost of its production. In many parts of India the tax collector quickly developed into a species of landlord.

The result, throughout the whole of the nineteenth century and up to the mid-twentieth century, was a progressive impoverishment of the people, a continuous decline in the average size of the holdings as the proportion of the total population dependent upon agriculture rose, and a growing indebtedness of the peasantry to the village moneylenders. An official investigation showed that in a village in Poona the average holding was 40 acres in 1771, 17½ acres in 1818, and only 7 acres in 1915. In Bengal and elsewhere the holdings are much smaller, averaging about 2.2 acres. Later figures – the increase between 1921 and 1931 of landless labourers from 291 to 407 per thousand of the population and of the estimated agricultural indebtedness between the same dates from £400,000,000 to £675,000,000 – seem to show that this impoverishment not only continued during the twentieth century but developed at an increasing rate.

The abolition of the East India Company's monopoly in 1813 coincided with a period of conquest and aggression. Early in the century the Marquis of Wellesley fought a series of wars against the Marathas of Central India. Under Lord Hastings, governor-general from 1813 to 1823, large areas of Central India were brought under direct British rule and the native princes who escaped conquest acknowledged British supremacy. From this time the effective control of Britain over the whole country east of the Indus was a recognised fact. In 1824 the first expedition was made into Burma, outside the boundary of India proper, and its coastal area occupied. The seizure of Singapore in the same year gave Britain one of the main strategical keys to the Indian Ocean and the Far East.

From the end of the war in Burma (1826) to 1838 there was a period of peace and of a rapid expansion of British trade in

India. This period ended with an attempt to conquer Afghanistan, where the first rumours of the Russian penetration of Central Asia were making themselves heard. The amir of Afghanistan was dethroned and replaced by a puppet prince supported by an army of occupation 15,000 strong. In 1842 a rising of the tribes forced the army to withdraw from Kabul and in its retreat across the mountains it was surrounded and completely destroyed. The effect was far-reaching: for the first time a large British force had been defeated and the belief in the invincibility of the white conquerors was shattered. The wars against the Sikhs of the Punjab (1845-49) did nothing to restore this belief. The Punjab was conquered, but only after desperately close fighting, culminating in the battle of Chillianwallah, in which the Sikhs came very near indeed to victory. The Afghan and Sikh wars must be reckoned as among the main causes of the mutiny.<sup>1</sup>

British rule in India was based, politically, on the highly trained and disciplined army of sepoy and on the support of the native princes and landowners, who, in their turn, owed their own privileges to British authority. While destroying the village community, the social base of the life of the masses, British rule preserved a kind of petrifying feudalism, a corrupt and artificial oppression of princes and nobles. The masses were thus subjected to a double and, in a sense, parallel exploitation. So long as the two sets of exploiters worked in harmony, there was no danger of any effective revolt in an age when India was still entirely agricultural and composed of isolated fragments.

But in the middle of the nineteenth century the aggressive policy of the British brought them into conflict with the native feudal upper class. The newly devised 'doctrine of lapse', by which native states whose rulers died without heirs passed under British rule, cut right across the oriental custom by which such native princes used to adopt an heir. Between 1848 and 1856 a number of native states, including Satara, Jhansi, Nagpur and Oudh were annexed. It seemed only a matter of time before the whole country was brought under direct British rule.

<sup>1</sup> While I have used the term 'Indian mutiny' which is familiar to English readers, I ought to add that it is usually and rightly styled 'war of liberation' by Indian historians.

At the same time Indian culture and religions were being steadily undermined, and this was especially resented by the high caste sepoys who formed the bulk of the army. It was as the culminating point of this process that the famous incident of the cartridges greased with animal fat, which actually precipitated the mutiny, became important. The building of railways, though only 273 miles of track had been laid by 1857, and of the telegraph, were also regarded as signs of the increasing concentration of power in European hands.

The mutiny, when it broke out, was thus not primarily either a national or an agrarian revolt, but a revolt of the professional army led by reactionary feudal rulers whose power was being threatened by annexations and European innovations. Only in Oudh did it become a general movement against the British and only in a few areas, notably around Benares, did it become a class movement of the peasants against the landlords and tax-collectors. Here lay its main weakness and the secret of its speedy defeat.

From the start the decadent princes who took the lead showed a complete incapacity for decisive or combined action. The revolt was localised and small bodies of white troops were allowed to move about without interference. The decision to restore the authority of the Moslem Mogul deprived the mutiny of the support of many Hindus and especially of the military and recently conquered Sikhs. The main forces of the sepoys allowed themselves to be shut up in Delhi by a very small British Army, when a bold march into Bengal would probably have roused the whole country.

The mutiny began at Meerut in May 1857. In a few weeks Delhi had been taken and British garrisons besieged at Lucknow and Cawnpore. The whole of central India was ablaze, but elsewhere there were only isolated outbreaks. In the Punjab, attempts at mutiny were quickly put down and the absence of any popular rising here left the mutineers isolated in country strange and often hostile. The result was that the Punjab actually became the base from which the movement in central India was crushed. The smallness of the British forces was compensated for by their cohesion, greatly increased by the telegraph, and by their control of the artillery. By September Delhi had been recaptured and the tide had definitely turned against the mutiny.

The suppression was carried out with an extreme ferocity born of fear. Kaye and Malleon, in their standard *History of the Indian Mutiny*, record among many other incidents how:

Volunteer hanging parties went into the districts, and amateur executioners were not wanting to the occasion. One gentleman boasted of the number he had finished off quite 'in an artistic manner' with mango-trees for gibbets and elephants for drops, the victims of this wild justice being strung up as though for pastime, in 'the form of a figure of eight'.

This was at Benares. The same authorities admit that six thousand people 'regardless of sex or age' were slaughtered in and around Allahabad alone. Similar events occurred everywhere, and many of these atrocities were committed long before the famous 'Cawnpore massacre' which has been used ever since to excuse them.

After the suppression there was a general reorganisation of the British forces in India. The East India Company had plainly outlived its usefulness and was dissolved, its functions being taken over directly by the government. The number of British soldiers was increased to 65,000 and the number of Indian soldiers reduced. Most important of all, the native princes were conciliated. As Professor Trevelyan says, 'Dalhousie's "doctrine of lapse" was abandoned after the Mutiny, and the Native States were thenceforth regarded as essential buttresses of the structure of British India.' The princes, though their real powers steadily declined, were from this time kept loyal with titles and subsidies and by the tacit understanding that, within reason, they could torment and plunder their subjects as they pleased under the protection of British bayonets.

The building of railways and roads went on apace. The object of these was partly military, partly commercial. They made it possible for troops to be rushed to any corner of the country and they made it possible for English goods to penetrate everywhere and for Indian corn, cotton, tea and other raw materials to be carried cheaply in bulk to the ports. They had an additional and unintended consequence. However much the British bourgeoisie were determined to keep India as an agricultural colony and a market for their



industrial products, the necessity of creating a network of railways defeated this aim. Inevitably, and in spite of every obstacle, there grew up around the railways a coal and iron industry. As early as 1833 Marx had predicted this outcome:

When once you have introduced machinery into the locomotion of a country possessing coal and iron, you are unable to withhold it from its fabrication. You cannot maintain a network of railways over an immense country without introducing all those processes necessary to meet the immediate and current wants of railway locomotion, and out of which there must grow the application of machinery, to those branches of industry not immediately connected with railways. The railway system will therefore become, in India, truly the forerunner of modern industry.

The railway not only transformed things, it transformed people. It created an industrial middle class and an industrial working class. It bound the whole country into an economic unity it had never before possessed and gave it the beginnings of a political unity. It made possible for the first time a real struggle for national independence.

And while it did this, it made the retention of India ever more necessary for British imperialism. Besides being a great market for articles of consumption India became a market for the products of heavy industry, for the means of production, and a field for the export of capital. Hundreds of millions of pounds were poured into the railways, mines, roads and other works and tens of millions were drawn out every year as interest upon these loans. India became the centre and keystone of the whole economic and financial fabric of the empire.

## **2 Canada and Australia**

The character of the development of both Canada and Australia has been determined mainly by their geographical situation and features. Canada can hardly be said to exist at all as a geographical entity. It is a northward extension of the USA, a fringe of fertile land sharing the qualities of the United States territory to the south of it, and shading off gradually into

the cold Arctic wastes. With one exception all its natural outlets are to the south towards the USA rather than east or west towards the sea.

The one exception, the St Lawrence River, was, however, of decisive importance because at the time when the American colonies won their independence the St Lawrence basin was the only settled area, the west and centre of the continent being occupied only by nomadic Indians. Canada was at this time inhabited by French settlers whose only contacts with their southern neighbours were those of war. Consequently, when the United States revolted, Canada remained an English colony and the two countries expanded westward along parallel and independent lines.

After the war of American independence, some 40,000 people, the United Empire loyalists, who had supported England and wished to remain under English rule, crossed the frontier into Canada. Some went to the coast provinces, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and others to Ontario north of the Great Lakes. The French, though still in a majority, were thus surrounded. For administrative purposes, Canada was divided into two provinces, Upper Canada, mainly English, and Lower Canada, or Quebec, mainly French.

During the next thirty years there was a steady flow of immigrants from England and the population increased rapidly. But the administration was carried out by the distant, bureaucratic and inefficient Colonial Office in Downing Street, and Lord Durham in his report of 1839, had to draw a striking picture of the contrast between the development of Canada and the USA:

On the British side of the line, with the exception of a few favoured spots where some approach to American prosperity is apparent, all seems waste and desolate ... The ancient city of Montreal, which is naturally the commercial capital of the Canadas, will not bear comparison in any respect with Buffalo, which is a creation of yesterday ... A widely scattered population, poor, and apparently unenterprising, though hardy and industrious ... drawing little more than a rude subsistence from ill-cultivated land, and seemingly incapable of improving their condition, present the most instructive contrast to their enterprising and thriving neighbours ...

In 1837 there were rebellions among both French and English

colonists. The two rebellions were quite independent, but both were the result of misgovernment from Downing Street. That in Upper Canada was in part anti-clerical, one of the main grievances being the setting aside of much of the best land for the endowment of a Church which had no active existence and to which few of the settlers belonged. Both risings were soon crushed, but they caused much alarm to the British government, which feared Canada was about to go the same way as the United States. The result was the Durham Commission and a report which advised the granting of dominion Home Rule to Canada. At the same time, political power was placed in the hands of the English settlers by uniting the provinces of Upper and Lower Canada, thus putting the French, who were in a majority in Lower Canada, in a minority for the composite province.

As the century went on, wheat became more and more the most important Canadian product. The wheat-lands lay far in the centre of the country where they could only be properly developed either as a minor part of the great American wheat belt of which they formed the northern extremity or by the construction of an east-west railway linking the central provinces to the Atlantic. The first of these alternatives would have meant linking Canada dangerously closely to the United States. In 1871, too, the new province of British Columbia agreed to join the dominion only on condition that such a line was built within ten years. The Canadian Pacific Railway was thus at least as much a political as an economic undertaking. It was the only means of giving the strung-out settlements an artificial unity and preventing their absorption into the United States.

For some years the building of the railway was delayed by scandals of graft and inefficiency which involved the resignation of two governments. It has to a large extent served its political purpose, but it has required constant subsidies to make up losses on working. The opening of the Panama Canal lessened the economic importance of the CPR because it has now become more profitable to send many classes of goods by sea from British Columbia to England rather than overland by way of the East coast. In recent years the most striking fact of Canadian history has been the steady penetration of the country by American capital, which now greatly exceeds that of

Britain. On the other hand, Britain remains the most important market for Canadian products, which, besides wheat, now include fish, furs, timber and timber pulp, the latter having become of great importance with the growth of the newspaper industry.

Unlike Canada, Australia is at the end of the world, right off all the main trade routes. Consequently, it was the last continent to be discovered and developed, and its development was very slow until it had become of sufficient importance in itself to be the terminus of regular trade routes to and from the old world. This isolation was no disadvantage for the first use to which Australia was put, that of a convict settlement. Between 1786 and 1840, thousands of the worst and the best English people were transported there.<sup>1</sup> In spite of the brutal treatment, many of them became self-supporting farmers and artisans when their sentences expired. Others escaped into the interior to become bandits and bushrangers.

Originally there had been a scheme for the creation of a country of small farms, on which the convicts might settle after their release. This plan, however, was presently abandoned in favour of one advocated by a pushing business-man, MacArthur, for the formation of huge sheep ranches. These were planned deliberately on a large scale during and after the Napoleonic wars when the West Riding factories had great difficulty in obtaining sufficient supplies of wool. Vast tracts of land were made over to rich capitalists who owned tens and hundreds of thousands of sheep. These 'squatters', drawn from the same class as the government officials, soon became a powerful native aristocracy, and bitter conflicts grew up between them and the poorer settlers who found much of the best land appropriated by the squatters who often owned more than they were able to use.

The problem for the ruling class was to find labourers enough in a country where land was to be had for nothing. E.G. Wakefield, the apostle of 'systematic colonisation' and of the doctrine that poverty in England was best cured by the wholesale shipment of the wealth-producing class to the ends of the earth, complained bitterly that:

Where land is very cheap and all men are free, where everyone

<sup>1</sup> See page 319.

who so pleases can easily obtain a piece of land for himself, not only is labour very dear, as respects the labourer's share of the produce, but the difficulty is to obtain combined labour at any price.

This unhappy state of affairs – where, as Marx put it:

The wage labourer of today is tomorrow an independent peasant or artisan, working for himself. He vanishes from the labour market but not into the workhouse ... The labourer loses along with the relation of dependence, also the sentiment of dependence on the abstemious capitalist

– had the effect of retarding the accumulation of capital and of preventing it from flowing freely into the new colony.

Wakefield and his friends devised an ingenious scheme to counter this. The idea was to put an end to the free grants of land to the colonists and, instead, to sell it at as high a price as possible. In this way settlers without capital would have to work for some years before they could hope to own any land. The product of the sales was to be used to subsidise more emigration, and so a continuous stream of labourers would pour in to replace those who became independent. In time the price of land would rise and the price of labour would fall till the colony became a genuinely civilised country with a fully established capitalism. He was so successful that the free grant of land was restricted in 1831 and abolished in 1840, but one of the effects of this was to divert a large part of the stream of emigrants from the British colonies to the USA. The Wakefield system was most fully applied to New Zealand, where the first settlements were made about 1837 by his New Zealand Association.

The struggle of the mass of the Australian colonists against the squatters and the government came to a head in 1854 with what may be regarded as the last act of the drama of Chartism and of the European revolutions of 1848. The discovery of gold at Ballarat in 1851 attracted thousands of diggers from all over Europe, and among them were many old revolutionaries from England, Ireland, Germany, France and Italy. The squatters who saw in these immigrants a menace to their vast holdings of land, and found that the rush to the goldfields made it hard to obtain shepherds and sheep shearers used their

influence with the government to have heavy taxes and all kinds of irksome police restrictions placed upon them. A Gold Diggers' Union was formed which put forward, along with economic demands, a democratic political programme almost identical with that of the Chartists. This programme was, in fact, actually won to a very considerable extent, which accounts for the early development in Australia of an advanced form of political democracy and of the trade union and labour movement.

The government was forced to reduce taxation, which took the form of heavy payments for a licence without which no one was allowed to dig for gold, but accompanied this reduction with an intensified police repression which soon drove the miners to armed revolt. They proclaimed an Australian Republic and fortified themselves behind the Eureka Stockade. On Sunday 3 December 1854, they were surprised by a military force and routed, between thirty and forty being killed. The struggle of the miners aroused so much enthusiasm throughout the country that the government were unable to carry out their plans for a wholesale repression. Instead, they were forced to reduce the taxation to a nominal sum and to abandon the police restrictions upon the miners. In 1858 a new constitution with universal manhood franchise was conceded, and in the election which followed, Peter Lalor, who had been the leader of the revolt and was wounded at the storming of the Eureka Stockade, was elected with a huge vote.

The gold deposits gave out after a few years, but the population continued to increase from about 200,000 in 1840 to 2,308,000 in 1881. Sheep farming and mining continued to be important, but with the growth of railways considerable industries developed, so that more than half the inhabitants are concentrated in the five largest towns. The main lines of conflict are between British and American capital and between the Australian masses and the foreign bankers and bond-holders with whose capital Australian development was financed and who take a heavy yearly toll of interest.

### 3 Egypt

The story of British dealings in Egypt is worth telling in some detail, not only because of its intrinsic importance but because it contains in the most concentrated form the whole essence of imperialist method. What took centuries in India was here crowded into little more than a generation, while the compact and unified character of the country, the valley of a single great river, enables the whole scene to be realised at a glance.

From the time of the Mohammedan conquest in the seventh century to the beginning of the nineteenth, there were few fundamental changes in Egypt. New dynasties arose, trade routes came into being and declined, but the unchanging basis of peasant cultivation dependent upon the annual cycle of the Nile remained unaltered. Napoleon came and departed, the Turkish empire crumbled away, leaving Egypt virtually independent under its khedive. Almost as shadowy as the authority of the Turkish sultan in Egypt was that exercised by the khedive over the vast territory of the Sudan and the even remoter Somali coast.

In the 1850s came the project of the Suez Canal, and European capitalists began to turn their attention to the Nile valley. The canal was opened in 1869. Much of the capital was French, but the khedive Ismail had subscribed nearly half of the shares. At once Egypt became the key to the most important waterway in the world. Britain was more vitally concerned with the control of the Suez than France because the canal was on the main route to India. At the same time, the development of important cotton plantations in Egypt, to which a powerful impetus had been given by the American Civil War, was another reason for British interest in this region, since Britain was the chief importer of cotton and the plantations had been developed largely with British capital.

Naturally, therefore, when Ismail began, in the 1860s and 70s, to introduce Western improvements, it was to London that he turned for the capital that did not exist in his own country. These were merry years. In little more than a decade 900 miles of railways, hundreds of bridges, thousands of miles of canals and telegraphs, costly docks at Suez and Alexandria were built.

The operations proved almost boundlessly profitable to British bankers and industrialists. First of all loans had to be

raised. Between 1864 and 1873 four great loans amounted to over £52,500,000, raised at heavy rates of interest. But Egypt received only £35,400,000 of this sum, the rest going to the London financiers as commission and expenses. This was only the beginning since almost all the money raised was at once paid over to British contractors, who in their turn made vast profits. Thus, the harbour works at Alexandria, for which the Egyptian Government paid £2,500,000, realised a profit of £1,100,000 for the contractors. By 1876 the indebtedness of Egypt was about £80,000,000, and the interest on this sum was £6,000,000 a year out of a total state revenue of £10,000,000, all of which had to be screwed out of a peasant population of about eight million, cultivating less than five and a half million acres of land. In 1875, the khedive was forced to sell his shares in the Suez Canal, which were bought by the British government through the Rothschilds.

Year by year, as loan was piled upon loan, the country became more and more bankrupt. The peasants, who benefited least by the new railways and docks, were bled white to pay the foreign bond-holders. In 1878 there was cattle plague and famine and it was clear that a crisis was at hand. The Egyptian state machine was breaking down and it was time for Britain, as the representative of the financiers, to step in and protect their interests. A strong agitation compelled the khedive Ismail to grant a constitution, and a nationalist party, openly anti-foreign, began to gain support. This was too much for the British, who had Ismail deposed and replaced by the more subservient Tewfik. The nationalist movement continued to grow, led by Arabi and other army officers. In 1881 they seized power and established a government determined to resist foreign encroachments.

Britain and France sent warships to Alexandria, where they organised a 'massacre' of Christians, mostly Greeks and Armenians, by hired Bedouin assassins, as a pretext for intervention. But the antagonisms between the different European Powers made immediate action impossible. A conference was held in June 1882, at which Britain, France, Italy, Germany, Russia and Austria agreed not to seek any 'territorial advantage, nor any concession of any exclusive privilege', except, according to British addendum, 'in case of special emergency'.



On 11 July the British created their 'special emergency' by bombarding the forts of Alexandria on the excuse that they were being repaired by the Egyptians. An army was landed which defeated Arabi's forces at Tel-el-Kebir, and by the end of September the British were in full military control of the whole country. The most solemn assurances were of course given that the occupation was only temporary and would end when order was restored. For the next twenty-five years the real ruler of Egypt was Sir Evelyn Baring (of Baring Brothers the bankers, later Lord Cromer) whose official post was that of Consul-General. Before describing the policy on which Baring reorganised Egypt in the interests of high finance, it is necessary to outline the events by which British rule was extended to the Sudan.

The Sudan, stretching south from Egypt almost to the equator, was important not only for its fertility and natural riches but because the upper reaches of the Nile pass through it and whoever controls the Sudan also controls Egypt. Towards the end of the century it became of special value to Britain as a link in the chain of territory which it was hoped would extend right across Africa from Egypt to the Cape.<sup>1</sup>

About 1880 a religious nationalist movement under Mahommed Ahmed, better known as the Mahdi, spread over the whole country. From Dafur in the West to Suakim on the Red Sea and south to the great lakes, the Egyptian garrisons were swept away. In 1883 an Egyptian army which had been sent up the Nile against the Mahdi under Colonel Hicks was entirely destroyed. Only Khartoum remained in Egyptian hands, and the large garrison there was threatened.

Sir Evelyn Baring and the majority of the British Cabinet, including Gladstone who was Prime Minister at the time, decided that the Sudan must be abandoned for the moment. A powerful minority, working in close harmony with Lord Wolseley and other leading army officers, thought otherwise. Making use of a stunt journalist, W. T. Stead, they whipped up an intense and apparently spontaneous agitation to have General Gordon sent to Khartoum to organise the withdrawal of the garrison, though he had publicly declared his opposition to this policy. Baring's protests were overruled and Gordon

<sup>1</sup> See page 417.

arrived at Khartoum in February 1884.

Instead of proceeding with the evacuation as he had been instructed to do, he allowed himself to be besieged, apparently with the idea of blackmailing the government into sending a relief force, defeating the Mahdi and reconquering the Sudan. A relief force was sent, after much delay, but it did not arrive till 28 January 1885, two days after Khartoum had fallen and Gordon had been killed. The expedition then returned, since the re-conquest of the Sudan was impracticable till after the reorganisation of Egypt had been completed. But British imperialism gained something more immediately useful than a new province, it gained a saint and martyr. The very peculiarities which had made Gordon an imperfect instrument when alive, his naïve piety, his indiscipline and his contempt for convention, made him all the more suitable for canonisation, since the vein of sentimentality running through the British ruling class would have prevented their accepting a saint who was not also something of a simpleton.

For twelve years the Sudan was abandoned. During this time much happened: the position in Egypt had been consolidated, Britain, France and Italy were penetrating the Somali Coast, Abyssinia and Uganda, the vision of Rhodes of a British empire running unbroken from north to south was being embodied in the settlement of Rhodesia. And, in opposition to this, the French were planning an east to west block which would cut across the British somewhere on the upper Nile.

Then, on 1 March 1896, the first Italian attempt to conquer Abyssinia was shattered at Adowa. Adowa was more than a defeat for Italy. Indirectly it was a defeat for Britain, Italy's ally in East Africa, and a victory for France which had been supplying Abyssinia with arms and posing as its only genuine friend, with the object of using that country as a base from which to conquer the Sudan and turn the flank of the British. Adowa meant that the way was now clear for such an attempt.

Within a week the British government had decided to begin the invasion of the Sudan. General Kitchener, with a powerful Anglo-Egyptian army, moved slowly up the Nile, consolidating every step and building a railway as he advanced. In September 1898 Khartoum was re-taken after the Sudanese had been routed in a bloody battle at Omdurman. Soon after, the victorious army encountered a handful of French soldiers who had

occupied Fashoda, still higher up the river. For a short time, war between France and Britain seemed likely, but the French gave way, partly because their rivals were in effective military occupation of the Sudan but more because they dared not risk a war of which a hostile Germany might take advantage.

The finance of the conquest was somewhat peculiar. Egypt had to pay two-thirds of the £2,500,000 bill, and for years after paid the heaviest part of the cost of administration. But the profits from the exploitation of the new province went entirely to British capitalism. Railways and other works were constructed on the same terms as those in Egypt, and the Sudan soon became a producer of fine quality cotton. The highest point of co-operation between the British government and the cotton planters was reached in the case of the Sudan Plantations Syndicate, of which the ex-Prime Minister Asquith was one of the directors. Over a large area in which an irrigation scheme was carried out all the land was forcibly rented by the government from its Sudanese owners at 2s. an acre, and then re-allotted to the original peasant occupiers on condition that one-third of each holding of thirty acres was used for cotton growing. The cultivator was allowed 40 per cent of the proceeds of the cotton crop and the remaining 60 per cent was divided between the syndicate and the government. It is not, perhaps, surprising that for the first eight years of its working the syndicate made an average profit of 25 per cent. Besides being a cotton-growing area, the Sudan became an important and steady market for the products of British heavy industry.

The principle on which Baring ruled Egypt during the twenty-five years of his consulship was that 'the interests of the bond-holders and those of the Egyptian people were identical'. In practice this meant that the surplus for export must be increased so that the charges on loans could be regularly met. By 1907 cotton exports had increased from £8,000,000 a year to about £30,000,000. As the proportion of land under cotton rose, food had to be imported for a population previously self-supporting. Thus the peasants provided two new sets of profits, one for the exporters of cotton and one for the importers of wheat. While the total productivity of the country rose, they received a steadily diminishing proportion of the value of their crops.

Egypt was governed by a bureaucracy entirely under British control, and for a long time organised opposition was impossible. In 1906, however, a particularly gross example of misrule in the judicial massacre at Denshawai provided the spark which set ablaze the smouldering discontent and a new nationalist movement began to develop. Under pressure of this movement small concessions had to be made but the First World War, during which Egypt became a point of first-class strategic importance, provided an opportunity for even stricter control. Egypt was placed under martial law, her nominal connection with the Turkish empire was at last broken, a rigid censorship was imposed and nearly a million peasants and workers were conscripted for war service in spite of the most specific pledges that this would not be done.

After the war the nationalist agitation was resumed. In 1919 there were widespread riots and strikes in course of which over one thousand Egyptians were killed. After a struggle lasting for more than a decade Britain was forced to grant Egypt a nominal independence, in which the reality of British rule was preserved, first by a strong military occupation of the Suez Canal zone and secondly by the continued occupation of the Sudan. The great irrigation works which have been constructed on the upper Nile make it possible for Egypt's vital water supply to be interrupted at any time, and it has therefore always been a prime demand of the Egyptian nationalists that the whole Nile valley should be united under a single independent regime.

#### **4 Tropical and South Africa**

Profitable as the slave trade proved during the eighteenth century, its suppression in the nineteenth century was even more profitable. While slaves were the only important export from West Africa, no attempts were made to penetrate the interior. Instead, the coast tribes were armed and encouraged to raid inland and bring their captives to some half a dozen trading ports for sale and shipment.

The result was a never-ending series of tribal wars and the devastation of immense areas.<sup>1</sup> While some eight million Africans were sold into America during the period of the slave

trade, it has been estimated that at least forty million more were killed in the wars and raids or died on the voyage.

The British government prohibited the slave trade which was ceasing to be economic for West Indies sugar plantations in 1807, but it was not till 1834 that slavery was abolished in the empire. The area chiefly affected was the West Indies where the sugar plantations employed great quantities of slave labour. The planters received £20,000,000 in compensation for the loss of their slaves, but the production of sugar declined considerably. By a curious irony, the abolition of slavery here stimulated the African slave trade, because the production of sugar in Cuba and Brazil, where slavery still continued, developed rapidly and created a new demand for labour.

For more than a generation the British navy was actively employed on the African coast, hunting down slavers of the smaller nationalities, and it was in the course of these activities that the foundation of British power in West Africa was laid. It was soon discovered that this area could produce palm oil, cocoa and other valuable foodstuffs and raw materials and an extensive trade grew up, spirits and firearms being among the main articles of barter. The Ashanti country, forming the hinterland to the Gold Coast Colony, was found to be rich in gold and was accordingly conquered in a long series of wars which only ended in 1900.

A little to the East, the much more important colony of Nigeria was extended from the settlement at Lagos, founded in 1862 for the suppression of the slave trade. The exploitation of the country was left to the Royal Niger Company, one of those latter-day chartered companies which became the favourable instrument for British expansion in Africa during the last twenty years of the nineteenth century. Acting with government support, and usually including in their directorate members of governing circles, these companies were able to work quietly without involving the home authorities officially and to do many things a government could not have done without much opposition. The usual procedure was for them to consolidate their hold over their selected area till the point was reached at which the government could buy them out and

<sup>1</sup> It is probably to these wars that the elements of brutality, fear and superstition in African culture, of which so much has been alleged, are mainly attributable.

assume direct control. So the territory of the Royal Niger Company was taken over in 1900 and its representative Lord Lugard became the first governor. The most important of the other companies were the British East Africa Company and the British South Africa Company.

Because of its climate West Africa was unsuitable for the establishment of plantations under direct European control. A peculiar system of indirect exploitation was therefore evolved by which the native peasant cultivators sell their products to British merchants: as the trade is almost a monopoly of the great Lever combine (palm oil is used among other things for the manufacture of soap and margarine) the price paid to the cultivators is only a fraction, at one time during the war of 1914-18 no more than one eighth, of what their produce would fetch in England. In return, very high prices are charged for the cotton cloth and other articles which are sold to the natives. Recently the advance of tropical medicine has made West Africa safer for European settlers and there are signs that this system is giving way to a more direct exploitation, plantations and factories beginning to be established.

The abolition of slavery had important results also in South Africa, where the close of the Napoleonic wars left Britain as the ruler of a community of Dutch farmers, the Boers. For Britain the Cape Colony was only important as a point of call on the way to India, and the Boers soon complained bitterly of official neglect and misgovernment. When slavery was abolished in 1834 they believed that they had been cheated out of a large part of the compensation due to them, and two years later thousands of them began the 'Great Trek' northwards to form independent republics outside the regions claimed by the British.

The situation was complicated by a great southward movement of the exceptionally well organised and warlike Kaffir tribes, the Zulus and others, who drove out the more peaceful Hottentots and for a number of years contended on almost equal terms with Boers and British. The result was, that in their conflicts with the Kaffirs, the British were drawn into the interior, outflanking and surrounding the Boers. The latter were kept by the Kaffir wars in the constant exercise of arms, and the final destruction of the Zulu state by the British in 1879 made a further conflict between Boers and British almost

inevitable. The Zulu war had been made the occasion for the annexation of the Boer Transvaal Republic, which remained under British rule till the Boers regained their independence by the victory of Majuba Hill in 1881.

Then came the era of Cecil Rhodes and the great plan for an 'all red' block stretching from Cairo to the Cape. The British South Africa Company was formed in 1889 for the development of Rhodesia, and in a few years British Africa had been extended as far north as Nyasaland and the shores of Lake Tanganyika. At the same time Kitchener was pressing south through the Sudan, and the Cape-Cairo scheme, which Rhodes proposed to complete with a railway, seemed within measurable distance of accomplishment. But such a line could never be regarded as secure so long as the two armed and hostile Boer republics, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, remained in being on its flank. Nor could the British hold onto Rhodesia and Nyasaland, for these areas were only easily to be reached from the South.

This is one half, the political and strategical half, of the reason for the Boer war. The other half was the discovery of deposits of diamonds and gold, far greater than any others in the world, at Kimberley and Johannesburg. Kimberley lay just outside the frontier of the Orange Free State, Johannesburg lay well within the Transvaal. Rhodes interested himself in both diamonds and gold from the beginning. By 1887 he was the head of the De Beers Mining Company, and in 1890 he combined with Barney Barnato and Alfred Beit to monopolise the whole South African diamond output. Within a few years his Goldfields of South Africa Limited had secured almost as complete a grip on the great Witwatersrand gold reef. When Rhodes became Prime Minister of the Cape Colony his power seemed almost unbounded.

Thousands of miners, speculators and adventurers of all kinds poured into Johannesburg, forming a cosmopolitan community alien and highly distasteful to the conservative Boer farmers. They found the patriarchal Boer state quite unsuited for the free growth of capitalist enterprise, while the Boers regarded these Uitlanders as fit only to be taxed and obstinately kept political power entirely in their own hands. It was intolerable to Rhodes and his supporters, who included Joseph Chamberlain, later recognised as the leader of the imperialist

section of the British bourgeoisie, that the world's richest gold deposits should be left in the possession of a handful of Boer farmers.

Events moved rapidly. In 1895 Rhodes prepared for a rising of Uitlanders in Johannesburg, supported by an invasion of the Transvaal led by his henchman Dr Jameson. The preparations were badly bungled and Jameson started on his raid before the conspirators in Johannesburg were ready to act. He was rounded up and surrendered ingloriously with his whole force. When he was handed over to the British authorities to be dealt with, he received an almost nominal punishment, and Rhodes, whom everyone knew to be behind the raid, got off altogether. The Boers, realising that war was only a question of time, began to arm as rapidly as possible.

In 1899 the refusal of the Uitlanders' demand for the franchise was seized upon by the British government as a pretext for interference in the Transvaal, and war began in October. The Boers soon proved to be excellent if undisciplined soldiers. Trained sharpshooters, who used cavalry as a means to increase the mobility of their forces and not, as the British still did, for charges upon prepared positions, in which a mounted man was merely a larger target, their strength lay in defence and in guerrilla raids. In attack they were weak, and this weakness involved them in sieges of Ladysmith, Kimberley and Mafeking which they were incapable of pushing to a conclusion. In these sieges and in beating off relieving columns, their whole force was pinned down and they lost the natural advantage which their superior mobility gave them.

The British, badly led, badly equipped and entirely unprepared for the kind of fighting that had to be done, suffered heavy losses in a series of unsuccessful frontal attacks. But the Boers failed to advance into the Cape Colony, where many farmers of Dutch origin were prepared to join them, and in February 1900, by the one really well-executed movement of the war, the British were able to turn the flank of the Boer army covering Kimberley and to surround and capture it at Paardeburg. Blomfontein and Pretoria were occupied with little difficulty, and the first phase of the war was over.

There followed two years of irregular warfare on the grand scale, in which the Boer leaders, Botha, De Wet and Delarey,



repeatedly outwitted the slow-moving, heavily-loaded British regulars. Only by the wholesale destruction of the Boer farm-houses and the herding of the women and children into concentration camps where thousands died of disease, was the resistance worn down. Even so, the Boers were able to make peace in May 1902 on terms which Lord Milner, British high commissioner at the Cape, who had done everything possible to make war inevitable in the beginning, had refused to consider a year earlier.

Boers and British together were only a small white minority in the middle of a negro population, and for this reason once the supremacy of British imperialism had been established, it was necessary to do all that was possible to conciliate the defeated. The Boers received dominion Home Rule in 1906 and in 1909 the Union of South Africa was constituted. Wherever differences might exist, and they continued to be considerable, the great bulk of the white population was united on the fundamental point of preserving their position as a ruling race exploiting a subject coloured population. So far as the treatment of the Africans was concerned there was little to choose between Boers and British and the natives remain today over-taxed, underpaid, herded into reserves and compounds and kept in a state not far removed from actual slavery.

The suppression of the slave trade played a big part in the conquest of the third area to be considered in this section, the group of colonies and protectorates which make up British East Africa. Here during the 1880s the coast was occupied by a number of small Arab states, carrying on an extensive trade with the fertile and well-populated negro hinterland.

In 1886 Britain and Germany came to an agreement for the partitioning of the whole area, and, as usual, the actual pioneering was handed out to the British East Africa Company. On the excuse that the Arabs were carrying on a trade in slaves, which was certainly the case, troops were sent to East Africa and in a few years, and apparently by accident, the whole coast area had been conquered. The next step was to invade Uganda, the richest and most civilised part of the interior and one in which missionaries had been very busy for some years. When the government showed some reluctance to pay for the building of a railway from the coast into Uganda the company

raised a great agitation in which the press and the churches co-operated enthusiastically. The government gave way and within a couple of years had taken over the administration of Uganda and Kenya from the company.

The conquest of East Africa was linked with the operations of Rhodes and his South Africa company to the south, and with the opening up of the Sudan to the north. The last stage in this conquest was not reached till after the First World War when Britain secured the mandate for German East Africa, later known as Tanganyika. In this way the scheme of Rhodes for a continuous British belt from north to south was at last carried out, but the construction of the Cape-Cairo railway is still far from complete.

Much of the higher land in East Africa, and especially in Kenya, is well suited for white settlement, and the British conquest was followed by the wholesale appropriation of the land from its African owners. In Kenya all the land was declared forfeit as early as 1898. The best land was given or sold to European planters and the natives confined to small and overcrowded reserves with inferior soil. Only in Uganda are they allowed to retain the legal ownership of any portion of the land. Not only were the natives herded into reserves, but in some cases these reserves were later taken from them when, because of the discovery of minerals or for any other reason, they became of value to the Europeans.

Since plantations are useless without a supply of labour, the next step was to force the natives out of their reserves to become wage earners. This is done by imposing direct taxes which have to be paid in cash and are too heavy to be paid by the sale of surplus produce from the overcrowded reserves. In many cases these taxes amount to as much as one-sixth of what a man can earn for a full year's work. It was openly admitted by the governor of Kenya in 1913 that taxation was regarded by the government as the only possible method of compelling the natives to leave their reserves for the purpose of seeking work. When this method has failed to produce enough labourers, it has been supplemented from time to time by actual forced labour.

East Africa now exports considerable quantities of coffee, cotton, wheat, maize and rubber, and, like most of the other colonial possessions which have been referred to in this

chapter, provides a good market for the products of British heavy industry.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The emergence of independent African states during the last few years in former British colonial territories has considerably modified the situation described above. What is said should be taken as describing the state of things up to the outbreak of the Second World War.

## XVI ORIGINS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

### 1 Imperialism

The last chapter traced the growth of British power in a number of different parts of the world: it is now possible to draw together the threads and present a picture of the process as a whole, to show how colonial expansion was part only of a development that was transforming the economic structure of British capitalism. First something should be said of the extent of this expansion. In the earlier part of the nineteenth century, attention was confined mainly to India. Then came the drive into the hinterland of Canada and Australia and the settlement of New Zealand, and lastly the division of Africa and the Pacific islands among the European powers. In 1860 the colonial possessions of Britain covered about 2,500,000 square miles with 145,000,000 inhabitants; in 1880 the area was 7,700,000 square miles with 268,000,000 inhabitants and in 1899 11,600,000 with 345,000,000. By this last date the division of the world among the great colonising powers was almost completed.

The age of imperialism had begun, and British economy had acquired a new basis. Instead of the old and now vanishing industrial monopoly by which Britain had enjoyed the position of workshop of the world, there was a narrower but more complete colonial monopoly, an extension of British state power over vast 'backward' regions of the earth and the deliberate use of this state power to secure exclusive rights not so much for the export of articles of consumption as of the means of production and of capital. We have traced this development in India, Egypt and elsewhere, and it is because of its importance that the connection between the colonies and British heavy industry has been stressed perhaps to the point of monotony.

The word imperialism has so often been used loosely that Lenin's very exact definition may be profitably recalled. Imperialism, in his view, is a stage of capitalist development which has the five following essential economic features:

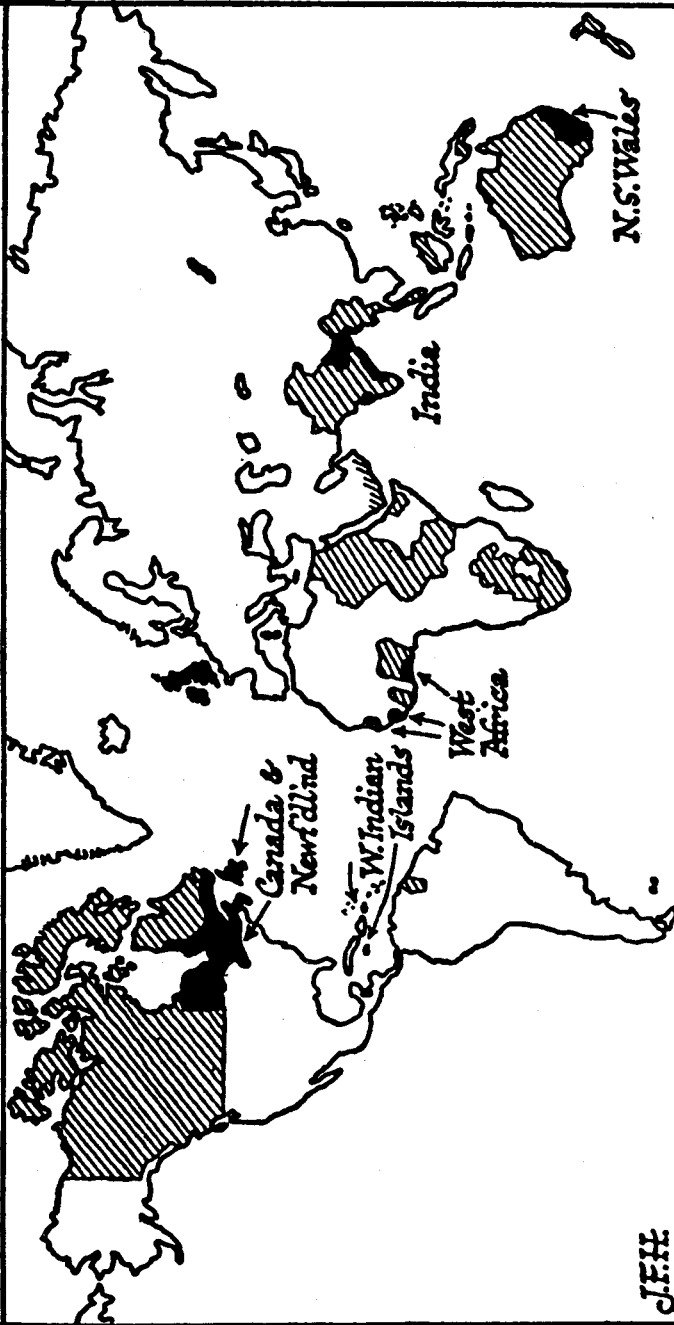
1. The concentration of production and capital, developed to such a high stage that it has created monopolies which play a decisive role in economic life.
2. The merging of bank capital with industrial capital and the creation on the basis of this 'finance capital' of a financial oligarchy.
3. The export of capital as distinguished from the export of commodities, becomes of particularly great importance.
4. International monopoly combines of capitalists are formed which divide up the world.
5. The territorial division of the world by the greatest capitalist powers is completed.

It should be added that Lenin dated the arrival of imperialism as a world-wide-phenomenon at about 1900.

The key feature of imperialism is monopoly, and in Britain monopoly developed strongly from the closing years of the nineteenth century. This was especially the case in the iron and steel industries, in shipping and ship building, in some new industries like the manufacture of chemicals, soap and margarine and in the case of the railways and banks. Thus, such firms as Armstrong Whitworth, Dorman, Long and Co. and Vickers occupied a dominating position in the heavy industries. The Anglo-American Atlantic Shipping Trust was formed by banker Morgan with a capital of £34,000,000. Levers and Brunner Mond held the germs of the great Unilever combine and of ICI.

By about 1900 the scores of competing railway companies which had sprung up chaotically during the great period of rail construction had been reduced to about a dozen, and between these working agreements existed which paved the way for the further amalgamation into four large companies. In the same way, private banks were being absorbed into vast joint stock concerns with hundreds of branches all over the country. Barclays Bank was founded in this way in 1896 and soon a small number of such banks controlled all but an infinitesimal proportion of the business of the country. This was of the

# The GROWTH of EMPIRE—



British possessions at end of 18<sup>th</sup> century      at end of 19<sup>th</sup>

greatest importance at a time when transactions were more and more carried out on a credit basis.

The movement towards monopoly was less marked in the older export industries, especially textiles, and in coal mining except in South Wales. These industries remained relatively backward, with many small enterprises working with insufficient capital, out-of-date plant and methods which made it difficult for them to compete in mass production with the rival industries of Germany and the United States.

Almost as important a feature of imperialism as monopoly, and one which in Britain came earlier, was the export of capital, in the form both of loans and investments. We have seen how this export worked out in practice in Egypt in the 1880s, and at the same time similar developments were taking place in India, China, South America and in all the less industrialised parts of the world. The export of capital was linked with territorial expansion both as cause and effect. British investments provided excuses for annexation, and when a territory had been annexed British state power was used as a means of furthering the monopoly interests of the London bondlords.

Thus it was after 1900, when the division of the earth among the principal powers was virtually complete, that the export of capital became most rapid. By 1900 the total amount of British investments abroad was about £2,000,000,000 from which a yearly income of £100,000,000 was drawn.

By the year 1914 both capital and income were approximately doubled. An enormous proportion of this sum was invested in railways. The economist Sir George Paish estimated that in 1909 British investments in foreign railways totalled not less than £1,700,000,000 and that the income from these investments was divided in the proportion of six to five between the empire (including Egypt) and the rest of the world. Outside the empire, the largest investments were in South America and especially in the Argentine.

The interest on these investments, paid mainly in food-stuffs and raw materials, now far exceeded the profit derived from Britain's foreign trade. Britain became to an ever-increasing extent a parasitic usurer State and the interests of the bondholders became the determining factor in her foreign politics. There was a relative decline of industry, illustrated, for example, by the decrease in the proportion of the population

employed in the basic industries from 25 per cent in 1851 to 15 per cent in 1901, with a corresponding increase in the proportion employed in distribution, commerce, domestic service and the luxury trades.

Large scale unemployment became a regular feature, and in the years before the war the number of unemployed was seldom much below a million. Another striking sign of decay was the growing frequency of cyclical crises.

One such crisis occurred in 1902-4, a second in 1908-9, while a third was developing rapidly in 1914 and was only cut short by the outbreak of war.

The concentration of capital meant not only an increase in the size of enterprises but a vast increase in the number of purely passive shareholders. The typical capitalist was now no longer a factory owner running his own business and making a definite contribution of his own knowledge and energy to industry, but a shareholder drawing dividends and contributing nothing but his capital. In this way, the effective control of huge masses of capital came into the hands of a very small number of individuals whose actual holdings were relatively small. A network of interlocking directorships linked up all sorts of ostensibly independent concerns, and what was perhaps more important, led to an interpenetration of finance capital with industrial capital which concentrated an increasing power in the hands of the bankers.

Another symptom of the parasitism of British capitalism in these years was the slow progress of British industry as compared with that of its principal rivals, Germany and the USA. These three countries took different paths to imperialism, though the final effect was similar in all cases.

While Britain began with territorial expansion and the export of capital and only passed on to the monopoly stage late and unevenly, the United States with a vast and fairly uniform hinterland in which to expand, began with the establishment of an internal monopoly (the Standard Oil Trust was organised as early as 1882) and only began to appear as a colonial power and an exporter of capital after the Spanish-American war of 1898. Germany, with neither colonies nor hinterland, set out on an attack on the world market on the basis of a deliberate regimentation of home industry, and developed monopoly production to a considerable extent in the form of state



capitalism. Again, while in Britain, depending traditionally upon her export trade and needing to import quantities of food and raw materials, monopoly production developed out of free trade and competition leading to the gradual elimination of small and inefficient enterprises, in Germany and the USA it developed behind an elaborate screen of protective tariffs.

Britain was first on the scene but soon found herself out-distanced. The following tables show clearly what happened in the key industries of coal and iron.<sup>1</sup>

*Coal production, millions of tons*

	1860	1880	1900	1913
Britain	83.3	149.5	228.8	292.0
Germany	17.0	60.0	149.8	277.3
USA	15.4	71.6	244.6	517.0

*Iron and steel production, millions of tons*

	1870-74 average	1900-04 average	1913
Britain	6.9	13.5	17.9
Germany	2.1	16.2	27.4
USA	2.3	29.8	30.0

The main reason for this relative decline was the existence of the British empire and the opportunities it afforded the investment of capital at an unusually high rate of profit. British industry was old-established and old-fashioned in many respects, and could only have beaten off its challengers by a thorough reconstruction. But while foreign investment offered its super-profits, there was no possibility of this reconstruction being undertaken. While the loss of the old nineteenth-century industrial monopoly was inevitable, it is also true that the

<sup>1</sup> The invention of the internal combustion engine made oil a new centre for imperialist conflict. Oil production was from the start a monopoly affair, and the USA took and never lost, the lead. Oil not only helped to lead to war, but, with the motor, the tank and the aeroplane, has revolutionised its technique.

capital that might have been spent in developing British industry to meet the new conditions was used to a considerable extent in equipping potential rivals.

Beyond this, the early industrial development of Britain became itself a serious handicap. French, American and German industry had to develop in competition with already established British industries, and could only do so by greater efficiency and new technological methods. Where Britain had once led the world in technology, she now began to be content to rely on her established position, and in field after field British industry became backward and conservative. There was a strong tendency to rely on out of date but still serviceable plant and methods rather than face the heavy capital expenditure involved in modernisation. New industries abroad, on the other hand, naturally started with the most modern equipment available. So in engineering, Britain became during the nineteenth century, as she still remains, a good generation behind the USA in mass production methods, while in the production of synthetic dyes, though the original impetus came from a British invention in 1856, the initiative passed to Germany and this proved the basis for building up the great chemical industry there. A similar picture could be drawn for textiles, mining, and the other main industries: the overall result was that Britain lost ground steadily to her newer rivals in the markets of the world.

During the age of colonial expansion, that is, roughly up to 1900, Britain had been most frequently in conflict with France, the next most active colonising power. From that date the main rival became Germany, which, left well behind in the race for colonies, began to penetrate what the British bourgeoisie had long been accustomed to regard as their own markets. The United States, which had the making of an even more dangerous rival, did not fully enter world politics till the war of 1914-18, though from about 1900 they began to make progress at the expense of British traders in South America. The reason for their late appearance was that they had not yet exhausted the possibilities of exploiting their own internal resources and those of Mexico, Central America and the West Indies which had fallen within their sphere of influence.

The partitioning of the world had been completed, not without conflicts and the threat of more which failed

to materialise, by 1900. Britain and France had secured the richest booty, both in Africa, Asia and Australasia. Germany and Italy, latecomers, had to be content with small and less desirable pickings. In the Far East Russia and Japan eyed one another, preparing to do battle for Korea and Manchuria.

It was becoming clear that the existing division of spoils could not be permanent: it had been made on the basis of the relative strength of the European powers far back in the nineteenth century and no longer corresponded to realities. This was true above all of the division as between Britain and Germany. In the period before the war, it was around certain backward but not strictly colonial areas that Anglo-German rivalry centred. Such were the Balkans, where the German share of trade increased from 18.1 per cent to 29.2 per cent while that of Britain fell from 24 per cent to 14.9 per cent, South America, where German trade rose from 16 per cent to 19 per cent while British trade fell from 31 per cent to 28 per cent, and the slowly decaying Turkish empire. Even within the British empire, Germany was gaining ground at the expense of Britain.

Since there were no longer any unappropriated territories of any importance left, the redivision of the world could only be effected by war, and war on a gigantic scale since this was a question in which all of the great powers were deeply concerned. It is in the zig-zag path by which this war was reached that the main interest of the history of the years between 1900 and 1914 lies.

## **2 Triple Alliance, Triple Entente**

British foreign policy during the greater part of the nineteenth Century was, as we have seen,<sup>1</sup> dictated primarily by a desire to avoid closer relations with other European powers and to concentrate upon colonial aggression. We have now to trace the abandonment of this policy and the linking up of Britain with one of the two great groups into which Europe was divided by

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIII, Section 3.

1914. The story of the formation of these groups goes back at least to 1870, when France was defeated by Prussia. It is a story of complicated and shameless intrigues, of alliances made and repudiated or undermined by other conflicting alliances, a tangle of secret treaties of which possibly all have not come to light even now. It cannot be told here in detail, but a few leading lines can be traced with a fair confidence.

The field was occupied by four main powers – Germany, Russia, France and Austria-Hungary – with Italy as a much less considerable fifth. After the Franco-Prussian war in which Germany annexed Alsace and Lorraine and exacted a heavy war indemnity, relations between these two powers were almost uniformly hostile. The French government was determined, at the first favourable opportunity, upon a war of revenge. German policy, consequently, was directed towards keeping France isolated, since it was clear that she was no match for Germany without allies. The relations of the other powers were much less straightforward.

The German chancellor, Bismarck, wished to maintain an alliance with both Austria and Russia, and for a number of years did manage this feat. Even after the 'Three Emperors' Alliance' lapsed in 1887, the connection between Germany and Russia was kept up for three years longer by a secret treaty of whose existence Bismarck's Austrian allies were unaware. The Dual Alliance between Germany and Austria was expanded into a Triple Alliance by the adhesion of Italy in 1882.

In the long run, however, it was not possible for Germany to preserve the alliance with both Austria and Russia, since these powers were deeply committed to fundamentally opposed policies in South-eastern Europe. Even Bismarck would probably have found the task beyond him, and his fall was followed almost at once by a military alliance between France and Russia. The twenty years' isolation of France was thus ended, while Germany found in Austria an ally more reliable and less independent than Russia was ever likely to be. The two central powers were drawn closer together by the menace of Russia, which they imagined, as everyone did before 1914, was more formidable than was really the case, giving too much weight to the vast manpower and too little to the corruption and inefficiency of the Russian state.

So far, Britain had remained outside either grouping,

though some tentative efforts were made towards an Anglo-German agreement by both governments from about 1890. It is worth noting that the Tories were more disposed to consider an alliance with Germany than were the Liberals, probably because they were the party most directly connected with colonial enterprises and in this field had frequently encountered French opposition.

It was the last and most acute of these colonial conflicts which was indirectly responsible for the beginnings of the Anglo-French entente. Their humiliation at Fashoda in 1899 convinced the French government that they were doomed to impotence so long as they were working in opposition to both Britain and Germany. They were forced to choose which they would have for an enemy, just as Germany had been forced to choose between Austria and Russia as allies. Then came the Boer war, revealing to the British Government its dangerous isolation and setting it to look around for an ally in Europe. The first approach was made to Germany, but Germany put too high a price upon her friendship. Negotiations broke off in a torrent of abuse from the press and politicians of both countries and the way was now clear for an alliance with France.

Characteristically, this was concluded over the body of a colonial victim. Morocco, in which prospectors were beginning to find indications of valuable minerals, was obviously ripe for conquest by some European power. It was also a plum which no power would willingly see go to another without some adequate compensation. So in 1904 France recognised the 'special interests' of Britain in Egypt, while Britain, in rather guarded but perfectly well understood language, promised France a free hand in Morocco.<sup>1</sup> So much was stated: what was implied was that either country would give the other the fullest support against any third power which attempted to put in a claim to Egypt or Morocco.

This understanding came into play in 1911, when France having discovered or created the amount of disorder in

<sup>1</sup>The treaty stated that France had 'no intention of altering the political status of Morocco', a formula which in the dealings of civilised with barbarous states is the invariable prelude to annexation. See pp. 410-411 and pp. 434-435.

Morocco necessary as an excuse, marched in and seized the capital, Fez. Germany then demanded compensation in French Congo and backed her demand by sending gunboats to the Moroccan port of Agadir. The British government made it clear, through the mouth of the one-time pacifist, Lloyd George, that France would be supported, to the point of war if necessary. War was indeed very close, but neither side was quite ready and a compromise was reached by which the French kept Morocco and Germany was allotted a much smaller slice of the Congo than had originally been claimed.

Even before the new Anglo-French entente had developed fully, relations with Germany had become more definitely hostile and this hostility found expression in a suicidal naval race.<sup>1</sup> German naval construction began in earnest in 1895, and the challenge was instantly taken up. In 1904 the extreme jingo, Lord Fisher, was appointed First Sea Lord, and he commenced a complete rearrangement of naval forces aimed ostentatiously against Germany. The main fighting fleet was withdrawn from the Mediterranean and concentrated in the North Sea. In private conversations, Fisher was actually urging that the Germany navy should be surprised and destroyed ('Copenhagened' was the phrase used) in its home ports without even a declaration of war. When reports of this leaked out, they did little to convince Germany of the peaceful intentions of Britain.

Two years later, in 1906, the launching of the *Dreadnought*, carrying a dozen twelve-inch guns instead of the customary four, made all existing battleships so much scrap iron. The government proposed to build four of these monsters each year, but for various reasons construction fell short of this number in three successive years. In 1909 an extraordinary agitation with the slogan, 'We want eight and we won't wait,' was successful in sweeping the government off its feet. There were startling 'revelations' containing horrifying details about German naval construction which later proved to be quite unfounded and to have been deliberately circulated by agents of certain armament firms. The gutter press, with Northcliffe's *Daily Mail*

<sup>1</sup> It is significant that the first conflict between Britain and Germany arose over concessions for building a Turkish railway in 1892.

in the van, worked up an invasion scare that was none the less effective because it flew in the face of every political and military possibility. The result of the scare was a greatly increased naval budget and a notable advance in the psychological preparation of the peoples on both sides of the North Sea for war.

While this naval race was going on, Lord Haldane initiated a thorough overhaul of the British army. Territorials were substituted as a mass reserve force in place of the much less efficient volunteers, but the main purpose of the reforms was to create an army of 100,000 that could be mobilised instantly for service in France. The British government refused to conclude any definite military alliance, but the British and French General Staffs held a series of discussions in which a joint plan of campaign was elaborated. As early as 1905 arrangements had been made for the sending of an expeditionary force to France. These staff talks, by which Britain was in fact committed to give military support to France, were carried on in such secrecy that they were unknown even to the majority of the Cabinet,<sup>1</sup> a striking example of the way in which the bureaucratic machine in a modern capitalist state becomes independent of the democratic institutions which are supposed to control it.

The tie-up was completed by the equally secret and even more binding Naval Agreement. By this, the French fleet was concentrated in the Mediterranean and the British in the North Sea, both powers undertaking to look after the other's interests in the areas dominated by their respective fleets. This agreement obviously made it impossible for Britain not to take part in any war between Germany and France.

An understanding between Britain and Russia, though it was the inevitable result of the changed relations with France and Germany, took longer to achieve. A deep and traditional antagonism existed in Central Asia and the Near East, and in 1902 Britain had concluded an alliance with Japan. During the Russo-Japanese war relations became very strained and there seemed a possibility that Russia might drift back into the

<sup>1</sup> At least three members of the Cabinet, Asquith, Grey and Haldane appear to have been aware of these talks. On the technical side, Sir Henry Wilson, Chief of General Staff, bears the heaviest responsibility. Captain Liddell Hart speaks of the talks as 'a rope round the neck of British policy'.

German camp. Yet the British alliance with Japan had the curious effect of making it easier for Britain to come to terms with Russia because it reinsured her position in Asia. Similarly, the weakness of Russia after the war with Japan and the 1905 Revolution made her less feared and more anxious to find allies. The French government was only too anxious to play the part of go-between, and the first sign of the new relationship was the floating of a loan in London by the tsarist government, a loan which gave it the means to stamp out the Revolution. An Anglo-Russian entente was concluded in 1907, and in the next year Edward VII and the tsar Nicholas met at Reval to cement the alliance.

Edward deserves some attention as a symbolic figure, the perfectly typical monarch of the new era of monopoly capitalism. It would be hard to say whether his strongly French sympathies were derived from his appreciation of Paris as a centre of pleasure or a centre of moneylending: at any rate, his prejudices have historical importance because they happened to run strongly in the same direction as the current of the times. His most intimate friends were jingos like Fisher and Lord Esher and the most vulgar and disreputable finance magnates. Of one of these, E. Wingfield-Stratford, in his book *The Victorian Aftermath*, remarks: 'It would be difficult to compute what Edward owed to the friendship of Sir Earnest Cassel, but such a computation if made would be most suitably recorded on cash-ruled paper.' In return, Edward made use of the Reval visit to exert his influence in the matter of a loan which Sir Ernest was floating in Russia behind the backs of the British government.

The entente needed only one thing more, a sacrificial victim, and this was readily forthcoming in Persia. By a treaty signed in 1907 Britain and Russia guaranteed the independence and integrity of Persia and divided it into three zones, the South-east falling to Britain, the North to Russia and the rest being left as a kind of neutral territory. In 1909 a democratic revolution took place in Persia, the shah was deposed, and a real effort was made to introduce a measure of order and good government. This was not at all to the liking of Persia's overlords, and a Russian army proceeded, with some assistance from Britain in the South, to restore order, the shah and the blessings of European domination.



As in the case of Morocco, the partitioning of Persia was intended not only to let Russia and Britain in but to keep Germany out. Up to this time, neither Britain nor Russia had had a point of direct territorial conflict with Germany, but now this, the one thing needed to make a world war absolutely certain, was added to the existing economic and naval rivalry. Germany, having failed in the earlier colonial race, was attempting to stake out a claim in the Near East, which the decay of the Turkish empire made into one vast danger zone stretching from Bosnia to Bagdad.

The assassination at Sarajevo was in a sense an accident, but it was not an accident that the whole train of events from 1908 to 1914 had its seat in this area. Here all the great powers except France had direct interests of one sort or another, and the savage little States which had arisen on the fringe of the Turkish empire proved to be excellent instruments of imperialist policy.

### **3 Internal Crisis, 1906-1914**

In the General Election of 1906 the Tories, who had been in office, except for one short interval, since 1866, were swept out by an overwhelming popular vote. During their period of power the Sudan and East Africa had been overrun and the Boer republics defeated. But the exhausting and inglorious anti-climax to the Boer war had robbed them of any credit that they might have claimed for this achievement. A reaction set in as the people discovered how little they gained from these much advertised colonial triumphs. At home the organised working class had been thoroughly roused by the threat to trade unionism in the Taff Vale judgement. Internally, the Tory Party was split on the question of tariffs. Chamberlain and the other advanced imperialists saw that the logical development of the empire was towards a tariff-protected unit: another section of the party clung to free trade, while its leader Balfour was afraid to commit himself too far in either direction.

The result was that while the Liberals were able to raise the bogey of dear food, the Tories were not in a position to put forward a consistent and determined protectionist case. In any case, the widespread and carefully fostered belief that the long

period of prosperity that followed the repeal of the Corn Laws was the result of free trade was still so strong as to make the idea of tariffs unpopular. From a combination of all these causes the Liberals secured a record majority, capturing all the industrial areas with the exception of Chamberlain's stronghold of the Birmingham district. Chamberlain's success here, in strong contrast to the debacle elsewhere, ensured the dominance of the Protectionist group within the Tory Party.

Alongside the Liberals there was for the first time a compact body of twenty-nine members of the new Labour Party. Besides these, a number of trade union candidates had been returned as Liberals and many of the Liberal and radical MPs from the industrial areas were uneasily aware of the pledges they had made to their constituents, in particular to secure legislation to reverse the Taff Vale judgement. One of the first actions of the new parliament was to pass a Trade Disputes Act far more favourable to the workers than the government had originally intended. It is the one and only indisputable victory to the credit of the Labour Party in these years.

Nevertheless, the Liberals were faced with something quite new, a political opposition party on its left. True this party was as yet small and moderate in its demands, but the more intelligent Liberal tacticians saw in it a menace that could only be held in check by the most careful demagoguery. It was the existence of this Labour group, and still more of the changed feeling in the country which lay behind it, that was the true reason for the series of social reforms associated with the name of Lloyd George.

Lloyd George, a Welsh solicitor with the authentic chapel eloquence and a complete absence of scruples, had earned a reputation as a radical by his opposition to the Boer war. His main asset between 1906 and 1914 seems to have been his capacity for starting hares, for diverting attention towards all sorts of minor issues and minor enemies – the Lords, the landowners, the church or the brewers – and away from the questions of prices and wages with which the masses were more profoundly concerned. Certainly the social reforms of the pre-war years, some of them not without their own value, dealt with almost everything except these questions.

The first was an old age pension scheme, providing a pension of 5s. a week for people over seventy whose income did

not exceed £21 a year. This was followed by a Town Planning Act sponsored by John Burns, Health and Unemployment Insurance Acts and finally an Agricultural Charter, launched with unlimited thunder against the landlords, but in fact completely ineffective.

Whatever the other effects of these reforms may have been they succeeded in one of their main aims, that of taking the sting out of the parliamentary Labour Party. From 1906 to 1914, in a time of great and increasing class conflicts, the Labour Party was content to form a mere radical appendage to Liberalism, mildly critical of details but never venturing upon an independent policy or dreaming of taking any action which might endanger the life of the government. One occasion on which they did become really angry was when Edward VII neglected to invite some of their leading members to an official reception at Buckingham Palace.

Lloyd Georgism, being in essence an effort to buy off the working class, was naturally somewhat expensive. The vast programme of armaments on which the Liberal government speedily embarked was even more so. The figures in the following table speak eloquently of the rapid growth of the state apparatus in the epoch of imperialism:

Average

	1873-5	1905-7	1911
Total Budget	£68,700,000	£134,000,000	£163,000,000
Army and navy	£25,300,000	£59,800,000	£73,300,000

In the beginning of 1909 Lloyd George, newly promoted to the post of Chancellor of the Exchequer, had to find the then huge sum of £16,000,000 in new taxation. Out of this dilemma he forged a subtle offensive weapon to score off the Tory House of Lords and to revive the waning popularity of the Liberal government as the defender of the people against aristocratic privilege.

In the earlier sessions of parliament the Lords had rejected or mutilated a series of Liberal measures, in themselves of no great importance and of doubtful popularity. Now Lloyd George introduced a budget which deliberately included taxes calculated to enrage every section of the Lords from the landowners to the brewers. The House of Lords walked

straight into the trap by rejecting the Budget, an act for which there was no historic precedent. Having been presented with what appeared to be a first class election issue, the Liberals went to the country in January 1910 on the slogan of 'Peers versus People'.

The result, from their point of view, was somewhat disappointing. The Tories gained a large number of seats and when parliament reassembled they and the Liberals were in roughly equal numbers, the balance being held by the Labour and Irish nationalist groups. A second election later in the year left the distribution of parties almost unchanged. The Liberals were able to force their budget through the House of Lords, but only by securing the support of the Irish with a promise to introduce a Home Rule Bill.

The conflict with the Lords ended with a Parliament Act which deprived the upper house of its power to veto money Bills and restricted their veto on other Bills by a provision that a measure passed through the House of Commons in three successive sessions should become law in spite of having been rejected by the House of Lords. The more intelligent Tories were not dissatisfied by this compromise which regularised the powers of the House of Lords at the same time as it limited them.

The elections of 1910 were fought amid what seemed to the Liberal politicians an extraordinary indifference on the part of the people as a whole. Neither the Lloyd George reforms nor the struggle against the Lords appeared to arouse the expected enthusiasm. The main reason was that by 1910 the conditions of the workers had become appreciably worse than they were in 1900 and Liberalism had entirely failed to provide a remedy.

From the middle of the nineteenth century to the nineties, prices had tended to fall, with the development of machine production and especially since the application of machinery to agriculture in America and elsewhere. Then the tide turned. There was a rapid rise in prices between 1895 and 1900 which continued somewhat more slowly from 1900 to 1906 and very rapidly after 1906. It has been estimated that 'the purchasing power of 20s. in the hands of a working-class housewife in 1895 went down to 18s. 5d. in 1900, to 17s. 11d. in 1905, to 16s. 11d. in 1910 and to 14s. 7d. in 1914.'

For this rise in prices there were several reasons, of which the

chief was probably the gigantic increase in the output of gold which followed the discovery of the Rand gold reef. It will be noted that the two periods of sharpest increase were that following upon the first discovery of the reef and that after 1905 when the conquest of the Transvaal had had time to take effect. The expenditure of all great powers upon arms, the increase of tariffs and the general development of monopoly were all contributing causes. The rise took place in a period of prosperity, that is, in a period of increasing profits. Between 1893 and 1908, according to the calculation of Chiozza Money, profits increased by 29.5 per cent but nominal wages only by 12 per cent. Thus while profits were rising faster than prices, real wages were decreasing by roughly the same proportion and it was the slow perception of this fact, the realisation of the workers that they were growing poorer just at the time their employers were growing richer, which accounts for the bitterness of the great strike struggles of the early years of the present century. No such open class antagonism had been seen in Britain since the time of the Chartists.

The strike movement had both its origin and its strength in the rank and file. The parliamentary Labour Party was left far behind, and the trade union leaders were either driven into action or found themselves without followers or authority. Local and spontaneous outbursts led to the formulation of national programmes, demands for a minimum wage or for reduced hours. Strikes for union recognition were common. In the last years before the war the movement began to evolve a political programme, as for example in the demand of the miners for nationalisation, crude in some of its details but far in advance of that of the Labour Party. The movement was cut short by the outbreak of war before it had time to reach its full height, but there are indications at least that it was developing towards a conscious struggle for power. It is probable that only the war prevented a general strike which would have raised directly the question of revolution.

As early as 1905 there was an important strike among the miners of South Wales, always an area marked by a peculiar militancy, and, most significantly, the coalfield where monopoly organisation had made the greatest strides. This was followed by strikes among railwaymen, cotton spinners, engineers and the miners of Northumberland and Durham.

By 1910 the struggle was in full swing. A strike of the miners in the Cambrian Combine which lasted from November into August 1911 was marked by furious skirmishing in Tonypany and Penycraig and was only defeated because of the weakness of Federation leadership. It brought to the front a new group of militants in South Wales and gave the inspiration for the national coal strike of 1912.

The next section to move into action were the dockers and seamen. In June there were strikes at Southampton and at Hull, where there was considerable rioting. A month later the Manchester dockers and carters came out, and almost immediately this dispute was settled, the great London dock strike began, tying up the whole Thames from Brentford to the Medway. Thousands of tons of goods rotted on the wharves and not a load could be moved without a permit from the strike committee. The determination of the dockers quickly made the government abandon their idea of clearing the docks by military force and the strike ended with the concession of most of the demands, including a wage of 8d. an hour.

While London was in the grip of the dock strike, Tom Mann was in Liverpool and Manchester helping to organise an unofficial strike that soon broadened into a national rail strike for the recognition of the union and the abandonment of compulsory arbitration. Government intervention imposed a compromise settlement which did not prevent further outbreaks in 1912.

1912 saw the first national miners' strike and a further London dock strike against the victimisation of trade unionists. The struggle took a somewhat different turn in 1913. There were few large strikes, that in Dublin being by far the most important, but a record number of small, local disputes. It was a year of pause and of the gathering of forces. In 1914 the upward movement was resumed and was accompanied by two significant or organisational advances. First was the formation of a Triple Alliance of miners, railwaymen and transport workers, each pledged to turn out in support of the others' demands. In the existing state of feeling this made a general strike in the near future a virtual certainty. The second was the growth of the shop stewards' movement among the engineers, a movement reflecting most closely the mood of the rank and file and one which took a leading position during the war years

when the official trade union machine had been handed over to the government.

The struggles of 1910 to 1914 ended the fall in real wages and brought a flood of recruits into the unions. In four years the membership rose from 2,369,067 to 3,918,809.

This movement of the working class was not the only awkward problem facing the Liberal government. Another was the campaign led by the Pankhursts for the extension of the franchise to women. Beginning about 1906, it was met from the start by a quite sadistic police and governmental repression. In the earlier stages the methods adopted were legal and non-violent – the interruption of meetings, demonstrations, buttonholing of Cabinet ministers, and so forth. Even so, many arrests were made and when the arrested suffragettes went on hunger strike brutal methods of forcible feeding were applied, amounting in many cases to torture and culminating in the notorious 'Cat and Mouse' Act. The sufferings endured as a result of these methods only led to an intensification of the campaign, and additional tactics, such as breaking of windows and arson were presently adopted. Eventually the government proposed to introduce a Reform Bill, to which, they suggested, an amendment could be added extending the franchise to women. The suffragettes declared this to be a trick, and rightly, because when such an amendment was moved, it was rejected as being out of order. The campaign was thus still in full swing when war broke out in 1914, upon which it was suspended.

Much more serious was the question of Ireland. In return for the support of the Irish nationalists the government introduced in 1912 a Home Rule Bill which gave Ireland a measure of independence considerably less than that enjoyed by the dominions. The Bill was rejected by the House of Lords, and the two years that had to elapse before it could become law were used by the Tories in open preparations for civil war. The key point in the dispute was the future of Ulster, the north-east portion of Ireland which had a fanatically Protestant population largely Scottish in origin. More important, Belfast, with its shipbuilding and flax industries, was the principal stronghold of British imperialism in Ireland.

Irish nationalists claimed that Ireland was a nation, single and indivisible, and that no English parliament had the right to partition it. The Ulster Protestants, professing a passionate

loyalty that did not prevent them from contemplating the securing of aid from Germany, claimed that no English parliament had the right to place them under the rule of the Catholics of the South. The dispute at last narrowed down to the two border counties of Fermanagh and Tyrone, but the Tories continued a reckless treason-mongering which grew bolder at each indication of the cowardice of the Liberals. A Solemn Covenant, a warmed-up version of the seventeenth-century original,<sup>1</sup> was signed by thousands of Ulstermen, who undertook to use 'all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland'. A large body of volunteers was raised, and the movement was led by Sir Edward Carson and an English barrister, F. E. Smith, both of whom were later appointed to seats in the Cabinet. In England Bonar Law and the Tory leaders openly pledged their support to the rebels and incited the army to acts of disobedience and mutiny. Speeches made by responsible Tories at this time provide the material for a whole handbook of sedition.

The climax was reached when the Army officers stationed at the Curragh threatened to resign in a body before they would carry out orders to move against the volunteers. In this action they were encouraged by the very highest military authorities including Sir Henry Wilson who was himself an Ulsterman. This was on 19 March 1914. A month later a cargo of 35,000 German rifles and 3,000,000 rounds of ammunition was run into Larne under the nose of the British navy in a ship whose name, with the historical romanticism so typical of the Orangeman, had been changed for the occasion from *Fanny* to *Mountjoy*.<sup>2</sup>

Of the Curragh mutiny, and the Tory rebellion generally, Lenin wrote at the time:

The Liberal government was completely overwhelmed by the rebellion of the landlords, who stood at the head of the Army. The Liberals were accustomed to console themselves with constitutional illusions and phrases about the law, and closed their eyes to the real relation of forces, to the class struggle.

And this real relation of forces was and remains such that, owing

<sup>1</sup> See page 188.

<sup>2</sup> The original *Mountjoy* was the ship which broke through the boom across the harbour at Derry when the Protestants were besieged there by the Catholic Jacobites in 1689.



to the cowardice of the bourgeoisie, a number of *pre-bourgeois*, medieval, landlord institutions and privileges have been preserved.

In order to suppress the rebellion of the aristocratic officers, the Liberal Government ought to have appealed to the people, to the masses, to the proletariat, but this is exactly what the 'enlightened' Liberal bourgeoisie were more afraid of than anything else in the world. And so *in fact* the Government made *concessions* to the mutinous officers, persuaded them to withdraw their resignations and gave them *written guarantees* that troops would not be used against Ulster ...

21 March 1914 will mark a world-historical turning point, when the noble landlords of England, smashing the English constitution and the English law to atoms, gave an excellent lesson in the class struggle.

In the South of Ireland the challenge from Ulster had been taken up by the formation in 1913 of the Irish Volunteers. Events received a new turn from the Dublin dock strike of this year, when the Dublin employers embarked upon a deliberate attempt to smash the militant Irish Transport Workers' Union. In this struggle the police reached new heights of savagery, two workers being beaten to death and hundreds injured. In spite of the enthusiastic support they received from English trade unionists the strikers were defeated, but the defeat left an invaluable legacy in Connolly's Citizen Army.

Created as a workers' defence force at a time when the police were acting as a private army of the employers, it remained in being afterwards and drew gradually closer to the left wing of the nationalist volunteers. Connolly understood what few socialists except Lenin understood at this time, the relation of the class struggle to the national struggle of a colonial people. He saw in the Irish workers and peasants the true heirs of the tradition of Wolfe Tone and the Fenians, and that only in a workers' and peasants' republic would the people of Ireland be really free. By his arguments and his practice he communicated this belief to the best elements in the Irish Republican Brotherhood, men like Pearse and Tom Clarke.

But while the brotherhood had taken the initiative in the formation of the volunteers, the success of the movement attracted the notice of Redmond and his followers who saw nothing more in it than a useful bargaining counter in the parliamentary game. The conflict which resulted led inevitably

to a complete split on the outbreak of the war.

Like the Ulster Volunteers, the nationalists set about obtaining arms, but in striking contrast to the immunity which the former enjoyed was the attempt of the police and troops to intercept a cargo landed at Howth on 26 July. The attempt failed, but later in the day the troops fired on an unarmed crowd at Bachelor's Walk, killing three and wounding thirty-eight. This incident set all Southern Ireland ablaze, and since the negotiations about Ulster had finally broken down, there seemed no alternative to civil war.

Civil war in Ireland, and, less close but more ominous, the rising tide of labour unrest with the possibility of a general strike, set the bourgeoisie a problem to which no solution was apparent. Further, the support given to the Dublin strikers, which only the most strenuous efforts of the trade union officials had prevented from issuing in sympathetic strike action, suggested the even more terrifying prospect of a merging of the two dangers, of a struggle for the liberation of Ireland, supported by a general strike in England.

Nor was such a situation peculiar to Britain. In India and Egypt the national movements were making rapid progress. The Russian people were recovering from the defeats of 1905 and 1906 and a revolutionary crisis seemed to be approaching. The Caillaux scandal in France threatened to have even graver consequences than the Dreyfus case, while the terrible burden of armaments had brought that country within measurable distance of bankruptcy. In Germany the Social Democrats were gaining hundreds of thousands of new adherents every year.

There was, in fact, hardly an important country to which a foreign war did not promise an easy if ultimately costly way out of internal difficulties which seemed to have no other solution. The war of 1914 was no doubt the inevitable result of the general situation created by world imperialism, but these internal difficulties must after all be reckoned among its symptoms and dictated to a very considerable extent the precise moment for the outbreak of war.

## **4 The Road to Sarajevo**

A great deal of time and energy has been wasted in attempts to fix the responsibility for the First World War upon this or that state or politician. Arguments about the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia; the exact date of mobilisation of the respective armies and so forth have a certain academic interest, but they cannot affect the main fact, which was that for more than a decade Europe had been divided into two rival imperialist groups, each heavily armed and seeking to expand at the expense of the other. It may even be true that none of the states concerned 'wanted' war: it is certainly true that none of them wanted war if they could achieve their objects without. What is more important is that without exception they were pursuing policies of which war was the inevitable outcome.

War was the result of the imperialist monopoly stage of capitalist development, but it is possible to single out more precisely points of conflict around which the general politics of the imperialist epoch turned. One, as we have seen, was the trade rivalry between Britain and Germany, which took the form of British attempts to shut Germany out of the colonial and semi-colonial areas and a counter attempt by Germany to break through the British ring by a thrust to the South-east through the Balkans and Turkey.

A second was the Franco-German economic struggle, based on the fact that in Eastern France there were large deposits of iron but little coal, and in Western Germany much coal but little iron. The industrialists of both powers hoped to unite the whole area under their own control as the result of a victorious war. Third, the ambition of Russia to control the straits connecting the Black Sea and the Mediterranean was in direct conflict with Germany's eastward drive while Russian influence in the Balkans was constantly exerted to disrupt the Austrian empire with its large Slav and Roumanian populations.

The situation was embittered by the pace at which preparations for war were pushed ahead, every increase by one group leading to corresponding or greater increases by the other. The German-British naval race has already been mentioned. On land, the competition was no less keen. France and Russia increased the peace strength of their armies from 1,470,000 in 1899 to 1,813,000 in 1907 and to 2,239,000 in

1914. The corresponding figures for Austria and Germany were 950,000, 1,011,000 and 1,239,000. In the last ten years before the war the cost of the French and Russian armies was £842,000,000 and that of the German and Austrian £682,000,000. It will be noted that these figures give no support to the myth that the central powers made a long-prepared attack upon peaceful and unarmed neighbours.

In the last years the pace became killing. Germany raised a capital levy of £50,000,000 in 1913 for special military expenditure. At the same time France raised the period of military service from two to three years and Russia raised hers by six months. Both Britain and Germany speeded up their naval programmes. It was clear that war was very close, if only because the financial experts of all countries were of the opinion that the current expenditure on armaments could not be maintained without serious risk of bankruptcy.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the years before 1914 were punctuated by a series of crises any one of which might have led to a general war. Such were the disputes over Morocco in 1905-6 and in 1911, over Bosnia in 1908, over Tripoli in 1911 and over the Balkan wars of 1912. In each of these crises the difficulties were overcome, but only at the cost of creating new stresses and less easily resolved conflicts.

It will be observed that two of the three major points at issue turned upon the Balkans, and, while it is not true that the Balkan question was the main cause of the war, it was here that the greatest possibilities of diplomatic aggravation existed, and it is to this area that we must turn for the war's immediate causes. And, increasingly, Serbia became the focus of all disturbance till this barbarous little state acquired an eminence in European politics out of all proportion to its population or importance.

For this there were two reasons. First the spinal cord of Germany's eastern design, vital to her development as an imperialist power, was the railway to Constantinople, part of a projected Berlin to Baghdad route that would ensure the vassalage of Turkey and ultimately threaten the British and Russian positions in Persia and India. This route passed through Serbia, and so long as Serbia was under Russian control an essential link was missing. In the second place, Serbia became the weapon with which Russia was working for

the disruption of the Austrian empire. The conflict developed slowly in the early years of the century and was precipitated by the murder of the pro-Austrian king Alexander by supporters of the Russian party. This was followed in 1905 by an economic war between Austria and Serbia. In 1908 Austria annexed the nominally Turkish province of Bosnia which she had administered since 1879 but which had a population predominantly Serbian. Russia was forced to acquiesce by a threat of war in which Austria had the backing of Germany. The seizure of Tripoli by Italy in 1911, by revealing the full weakness of Turkey, made it easy for Russia to organise an alliance of the Balkan states, whose first object was the reconquest of the remaining provinces of Turkey in Europe but which it was hoped later to turn against Austria.

After a short war the Balkan allies were victorious and Serbia proposed to take as her share the northern part of Albania, while most of Macedonia was allotted to Bulgaria. Austria then intervened and insisted on the formation of an independent Albanian state. Serbia demanded compensation in Macedonia, a demand which Austria privately encouraged Bulgaria to resist. In the second Balkan war the Bulgarians were defeated and lost a large part of their conquests.

The result was a new Balkan grouping, in which Serbia remained as the instrument of Russia while Bulgaria and Turkey entered into a loose alliance with the central powers. Germany in particular emerged as the 'protector' of Islam, a role extremely embarrassing to Britain with her millions of Moslem subjects in India and Africa. In 1913 the reorganisation of the Turkish army was undertaken by German military experts. Serbia, with Russian support, began to prepare for the seizure of Bosnia by means of an armed rising to be supported by an invasion. Pashitch, the Serbian Prime Minister, is reported on good authority to have declared at the Bucharest conference which followed the second Balkan war, 'The first game is won; now we must prepare for the second, against Austria.'

An intensified campaign of terrorism was launched, in which a number of Austrian officials were murdered, and the shooting of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne, at Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, was not an isolated incident but only the climax of a series of outrages.

There can be little doubt that the assassination was prepared with the knowledge of the Serbian authorities or that it was welcomed by the Austrian government as an opportunity to settle accounts with Serbia. It is only when the Sarajevo incident is seen in its place in the whole series of Balkan events that the severity of the Austrian ultimatum and the stubborn refusal of Austria to accept any compromise terms becomes understandable. We have also seen what reasons Germany had to make the fullest use of the case with which the Serbian terrorists had presented her.

The position of Russia was equally simple: to allow Serbia to be crushed was to allow Germany a free road to Constantinople, to give up all her hopes of securing the Straits and all her plans for the disruption of Austria. There was no alternative between war and the abandonment of her struggle with the central powers for the domination of Eastern Europe. France had no direct interest in the question at issue in the Balkans, but was completely tied to Russia. To allow Russia to fight alone meant complete isolation in Europe whatever the result of the war, a possibility which the French government was not prepared to risk on any account. So the train ran from point to point, till the European powder magazine, so zealously crammed with explosives by the labour of a generation, went up in one vast roar.

In England the Sarajevo murder attracted little attention at first. To the ordinary man it was only another example of Balkan savagery, while even the government appears to have been too preoccupied with the crisis in Ireland to appreciate its full significance. As the days passed and the threat of a European war grew louder the overwhelming mass of the British people remained indifferent: Serbia was not popular and it was extremely difficult to persuade anyone that it was necessary to go to war on her behalf.

Difficult or not, it had to be done once it became clear that France was going to be involved, if only because the Anglo-French military and naval arrangements, of which the people knew nothing, were in fact as binding as any formal treaty. They were kept in the dark right up to the end. Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, solemnly announced in the House of Commons on 11 June:

If war arose between European Powers, there were no unpublished

agreements which would restrict or hamper the freedom of the Government or of Parliament to decide whether or not Great Britain should participate in a war. That remains as true today as it was a year ago. No such negotiations are in progress and none are likely to be entered upon so far as I can judge.

It was a statement outstandingly untruthful and misleading even by the standards of British Liberalism, since Sir Edward knew, what was concealed even from the House of Commons, that Britain was pledged to protect the North coast of France from naval attack in the event of war.

The attitude of the government in the days before the war could hardly have been more calculated to make its outbreak certain. France and Russia knew that Britain would intervene on their behalf. Germany was allowed to believe that there was at least a good chance of Britain remaining neutral. Whatever may have been the intention behind this attitude, its result was to encourage both sides to stand out stubbornly for terms that could not possibly be conceded.

In the last few days events moved with extraordinary speed. Just at one moment it appeared that Germany was becoming alarmed at the prospect of war. Italy and Rumania were clearly not going to carry out their treaty obligations and even their neutrality might have to be bought with territorial concessions. But the chance passed, since the rulers of Austria and Russia were now set upon war. Russia mobilised on 31 July, Germany and France on 1 August, and, under modern conditions, mobilisation was equivalent to a declaration of war.

In Britain, in spite of an intense war campaign in the jingo press, the great mass of working class and liberal opinion was in favour of peace. The government, however, had already made its choice. As early as 29 July the British Grand Fleet had sailed for its war stations in the North Sea. On 2 August Grey informed the French Ambassador:

I am instructed to give an assurance that, if the German Fleet comes into the Channel or through the North Sea, to undertake hostile operations against the French coasts or shipping, the British Fleet will give all the protection in its power.

Under these circumstances the invasion of Belgium came as a veritable godsend, enabling the government to disguise a war

of imperialist robbery as a war for the upholding of treaty rights and the defence of small nations. It was even possible to extend to Serbia a little of the heroic glow with which Belgium was speedily invested. In fact, the treaty guaranteeing Belgian neutrality had long been obsolete; Belgium had been drawn into the Franco-British orbit and for years the French, British and Belgian general staffs had been drawing up plans in the certainty that France and Belgium would form a single battlefield. Further, plans had been made for the landing of British troops on the Belgian coast, and it is as certain as anything can be that even if German troops had not entered Belgian territory at the beginning of August, allied troops would have done so before its end.

All this was carefully hidden from the British people in 1914, when on 4 August an ultimatum was sent to Germany demanding the withdrawal of her troops from Belgian soil. At midnight, no reply having been received, the two countries entered upon a formal state of war.



## XVII WORLD WAR: WORLD CRISIS

### 1 The First World War

Years before hostilities began, the rival military experts had prepared their plans of campaign. The Germans proposed to concentrate all their forces for a flanking march through Belgium, along and beyond the Meuse, and so to avoid the strong line of forts with which the Alsace-Lorraine border was defended. On this part of their front they decided to stand on the defensive, and, as the plan was originally drafted, even thought of retiring towards the Rhine. In the East, too, they were to be on the defensive, counting on the slowness of Russian mobilisation and allowing the Austrians to bear the brunt of the first encounters. The main army, after passing through Belgium, was to sweep round in a vast semi-circle, moving to the west and south of Paris and eventually coming into the rear of the French armies massed along the fortress line from Verdun to Belfort.

The French plan, viewed in retrospect, might seem to have been designed with the purpose of ensuring a German victory. Their General Staff had full warning of the German scheme, but a curious psychological blindness made them ignore it, because to admit it would have meant to revise their own plan, and this was based rather on political and sentimental than upon military considerations.

The frontier north of the Ardennes was left virtually unguarded, while a fierce, and it was hoped, decisive offensive was to be launched into Lorraine. The basis of this hope was an intense and almost mystical belief in the virtue of attack, and above all of French troops in attack, which permeated their military circles in the decade before 1914.

The French plan was tried in August 1914 with disastrous results: the German plan only failed because it was weakened

before the outbreak of war and not persisted in after it. By degrees the southern wing of the German army was strengthened at the expense of the northern offensive wing. When the war began, the advance through Belgium was carried through according to time-table up to a point. Then Moltke, the German commander, attempted a sudden change of plan, abandoning the sweep round Paris for an attempt to surround the French centre, pushed up into a salient at Verdun. To do this the direction of the advance had to be changed over a wide front, and it was this change, and the confusion resulting, which gave the opportunity for the successful counter-attack known as the Battle of the Marne. At the same time, the offensive had been weakened by the detachment of several divisions to the Russian front, where they arrived just too late to play any effective part in the victory of Tannenberg.

The Battle of the Marne, little more than a skirmish by the standards of slaughter set by later battles, was nevertheless the turning point of the whole war. It made a quick German victory impossible and gave time for the great but slowly mobilised material resources of the British empire to have their effect, and for the naval blockade to cut off the supply of necessary imports. After the Marne, the Western Front settled down to a vast and prolonged siege warfare, after a preliminary stage in which a series of attempted outflanking movements carried the line of battle up to the coast. For three years both sides made repeated and costly, but quite unsuccessful, efforts to break through this trench barrier by frontal attacks. New weapons, such as tanks and poison gas were used, but not on a large enough scale to be really effective. Such attempts were the Battles of Loos and Arras and in Champagne in 1915, of Verdun and the Somme in 1916 and of Ypres in 1917.

The Western Front was, however, only one of many theatres of war. In the East the Russians had some successes against Austrian armies, but their badly armed and led troops proved quite incapable of holding their own against the superior weapons and organisation of the Germans and they suffered immense losses. The closing of the Baltic and Black Seas made it impossible for the British to supply any significant quantities of war materials and Russian heavy industry was unable to meet the strain of a large-scale modern war. The key to the situation lay, therefore, in the Dardanelles. If they were forced Turkey

would be driven out of the war, arms could be sent to Russia in exchange for the wheat of the Ukraine, and, in all probability, Bulgaria, Greece and Roumania would have entered the war immediately on what would have been apparently the winning side. Incidentally, there would probably have been no Russian revolution in 1917.

Until February or March 1915 the Dardanelles lay wide open, but both British and French High Commands were so obsessed with the belief that they could break through in the West that they would not release the forces needed. When the decision was at last taken for an attack, the Turks were given full warning by a naval bombardment followed by a long pause. The landings that were made on the Gallipoli peninsula on 25 April found the defenders just too strong, and, though points on the peninsula were held till December, repeated attempts to break through were driven back with heavy losses. By one of the strangest ironies of history, the tsarist government refused to co-operate, for the political reason that they wanted to take Constantinople for themselves and did not wish to see it captured if the British were to have a hand in the operation. No doubt they remembered the remarkable British tendency not to relinquish territory once occupied, but by their passivity they sealed their own fate.

While these attempts were being made to open the way into the Black Sea, the Russian armies were being relentlessly pounded in Poland and Galicia, losing 750,000 prisoners and countless dead and wounded. In September, when the effects of these defeats had become clear and it was obvious that the attack on the Dardanelles had failed, Bulgaria joined the central powers and Serbia was overrun by a joint attack which opened direct communications between Germany and Turkey. 1915 closed with the balance considerably in Germany's favour: against a series of military successes there was little to be placed but the effects of the naval blockade, intensified by an unusually bad harvest.

It was as a counter to this blockade that Germany began the first submarine campaign towards the end of 1915. This was abandoned in April 1916 after protests from the USA, but it had the unintended effect of making the American government less inclined to object to the high-handed way in which the British blockade was enforced. It was the tightening of this

blockade in 1916 that led to a renewed and much more successful submarine offensive in June, after the indecisive Battle of Jutland. In January 1917 368,000 tons of shipping were sunk and in February it was announced that all ships, neutral or otherwise, might be attacked without warning.

This declaration provided the official ground for the entry of the USA into the war. A much more weighty reason was the fact that the Allies had been supplied with vast quantities of munitions and war materials of all kinds on credit and that it had become clear that if Germany were victorious, as seemed likely, these debts could never be collected.

War was declared on 6 April 1917, but it was six months before an American army was ready to take any active part. Nevertheless it was obvious that more than ever it was essential for Germany to seek a quick decision. The effects of the blockade, however, had been somewhat lessened by the conquest of the wheatlands and oil wells of Roumania in the autumn of 1916.

Almost at the same time at which America was entering the war, revolution began in Russia. The March revolution was the work of two opposed forces temporarily combined: the masses who were tired of the pointless slaughter of the war and the bourgeoisie who wished to carry it on more efficiently than the corrupt tsarist bureaucracy was able to do. The revolutionary government tried to drive the army into another doomed offensive, but meanwhile the soldiers were streaming home and in November the Bolsheviks, with their simple and popular programme of 'Peace, Land and Bread' were able to seize power and set up a government of revolutionary socialists.

The first action of the new government was to issue an appeal to all the powers at war for the conclusion of a negotiated peace without annexations or indemnities. The appeal was coldly ignored, and, as far as possible, kept from the knowledge of the peoples. The Bolsheviks then signed an armistice and began negotiations for a separate peace which was finally signed at Brest-Litovsk on 3 March 1918.

The governments were not prepared for peace, but the Russian revolution began at once to work on the minds and affections of the soldiers and workers all over Europe. Its repercussions in England will be dealt with in the next section. In France there was a widespread demand for peace and there

were mutinies in the army which at one time involved no fewer than sixteen army corps. Desertions rose to the alarming figure of 21,000 in the year 1917. In Germany there was a serious naval mutiny led by revolutionary socialists and a series of strikes. Over a million workers took part in a general strike in January.

In 1918, therefore, the problem before all the governments was whether the war could be won in the field before the wrath of the people at home had overwhelmed both war and governments. For Germany, where opposition was growing most rapidly and the people were suffering from famine because of the blockade, the urgency was increased by the appearance of the first contingents of American troops in France. The ending of war with Russia released a number of divisions for the Western Front and the British army had been almost destroyed in the crazy offensive of the autumn of 1917, when 400,000 men were sacrificed in an attempt to break through in the swamps around Ypres. For a few months the Germans could count on a numerical superiority in the West, though it was less pronounced than that previously enjoyed by the allies.

In March a surprise attack broke through the weakly held line of the British Fifth Army between Arras and the Oise and the gap was only closed with the greatest difficulty. A second attack in April between Ypres and La Bassée and a third in May on the Aisne, while meeting with considerable success, failed to achieve decisive results. The attacks dwindled away and there were no more reserves left to replace the wastage of men and materials. On the other side of the line, American troops were now arriving at the rate of 300,000 a month. On 8 August a series of counter-attacks in force began which gained ground rapidly, driving the German armies from position after position and inflicting heavy losses, though they were able to maintain an unbroken front. Elsewhere the collapse was even more startling. Turkey, Bulgaria and Austria were driven to conclude an armistice and Germany was threatened with an invasion from the South which there were no forces available to meet.

Early in November revolution broke out in Germany. The sailors at Kiel, when ordered to put out into the North Sea, refused to sail and set up soviets in the ports. Their envoys

scattered widely over the country and everywhere the news of their success was the signal for revolt. In Berlin Liebknecht's powerful influence was already stirring the people to action. On 6 November German delegates left Berlin to ask for an armistice: on the 9th the kaiser abdicated and a republic was set up with the right wing Social Democrat Ebert as president.

The terms of the armistice were little better than an unconditional surrender, but the majority of the German people undoubtedly believed that the peace would finally be made on the basis of President Wilson's famous 'Fourteen Points', a draft settlement which he had published in January as being in his opinion fair and reasonable. These 'Points' included the freedom of the seas, general disarmament, 'an impartial adjustment of all colonial claims' and, by omission, they appeared to imply that there were to be no annexations or indemnities.

The enunciation of this programme, together with other statements of a similar character made since America's entry into the war, had had a great effect upon the peoples of the Allied nations. They did not know of the network of secret treaties and understandings – many of them mutually contradictory – by which their governments had in anticipation divided the spoils. At a time when the fine phrases that had served to glorify the commencement of the war were wearing thin, Wilson's programme had come to invest the struggle with a new halo of idealism and had helped to revive the belief that the war was being fought in defence of justice and democracy. The ruling classes were quite prepared to encourage this belief. It received its death blow when the wrangling at the Versailles peace conference brought into the light the real objectives, the openly imperialist aims of the bourgeoisie of the conquering powers.

## **2 The Home Front**

Like its fellow members of the Second International the British Labour Party surrendered completely to the government and the ruling class upon the outbreak of war. In 1910, when the danger of a war of the kind which broke out in 1914 was already apparent, the International at its Basle Congress had

passed a resolution in which all the Socialist Parties affirmed that in the case of war it was

their duty to intervene in favour of its speedy termination and with all their powers to utilise the political and economic crisis created by the war to arouse the people and thereby to hasten the downfall of capitalist class rule.

On the very eve of war the terms of this pledge were re-affirmed at a huge Trafalgar Square demonstration where Keir Hardie and Arthur Henderson were among the speakers. Similar demonstrations were held in many big towns.

But before the end of August the Labour Party had decided to support the government's recruiting campaign, and, far from attempting to 'arouse the people' the Labour Party and the Trade Union Congress decided:

That an immediate effort be made to terminate all existing disputes, whether strikes or lock-outs, and wherever new points of difficulty arise during the war a serious attempt should be made by all concerned to reach an amicable settlement before resorting to strikes or lock-outs.

These capitulations left the workers leaderless and bewildered and did perhaps more than anything else to convince them of the correctness of the official propaganda about the character of the war. Of all the European socialist parties only the Bolsheviks carried on the struggle against war on revolutionary lines. Elsewhere such opposition was confined to small groups and to individuals like Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in Germany, Connolly in Ireland and John McLean in Scotland. In England opposition to the war often took the peculiar form of pacifism.

The resolution quoted above was soon strengthened by direct agreements with the government for the prevention of strikes and by the surrender of trade union safeguards that had taken generations of struggle to secure. Compulsory arbitration was enforced and strikes were declared illegal in a number of industries. Under the Defence of the Realm Act a complete censorship was imposed which confined the left press to propaganda of the most general kind and even then left it open

to frequent attacks and suppression. Later when the Liberal government was replaced by a 'National' coalition, leading members of the Labour Party, including Henderson and Clynes, became members of these governments alongside Churchill, Lloyd George, Carson and Bonar Law.

The surrender of the trade union machinery into the hands of the government facilitated the making over of the whole economy of the country for war. Government control was established over shipping and railways and over the raw materials most important for war purposes, such as cotton, iron and steel. A large measure of state capitalism accelerated the progress towards monopoly and the concentration of capital noted already as one of the features of imperialism. Great trusts and combines, especially in the metal and chemical (i.e., explosives and poison gas) industries were fostered by the super-profits earned by the largest concerns. Capital was freely watered and a large proportion of the profits, in order to avoid taxation, were used for the construction of new plants and factories which in many cases were of little use in time of peace. Other factories were constructed by the government and sold after the war to the combines for a fraction of the original cost.

The war thus gave industry an artificial prosperity which prepared the way for the great depression which followed. The transition from boom to slump was all the more acute because the industrial production of the war years was concentrated upon goods of no general utility and was based upon credit. Nearly £7,000,000,000 was added to the national debt between 1914 and 1918, leaving a permanent burden upon industry which became relatively heavier as prices fell from the heights to which wartime inflation raised them. The general effect of the war was therefore to increase the concentration of British capitalism without increasing its efficiency or real strength.

During the first few months of the war strikes almost ceased, prices rose rapidly, while wages lagged far behind. There was considerable unemployment till recruiting and the needs of war industries had cancelled out the effects of the initial dislocation. In February new signs of life appeared in the great engineering centre of the Clyde, under the leadership of the shop stewards' movement which had taken the position left empty by the official union leadership. The wartime strikes were at first entirely unpolitical, that is, they were directed not



against the war but against economic grievances. Later, when the struggle against conscription, which was introduced by instalments between the autumn of 1915 and the spring of 1916, began, and, even more, after the Russian revolution, they took on a more political character. From the start, however, many of the leaders like McLean, were avowed revolutionaries and anti-militarists.

The February strikes on the Clyde won from the Government a wage advance of 1d. an hour. They also inspired it to pass the Munitions Act, by which a number of industries were proclaimed as war industries and strikes in them made illegal. The Act was challenged successfully in July 1915 by 200,000 miners in South Wales who struck for a week and won a new agreement.

The Clyde continued to be the main centre of agitation. The shop stewards had organised themselves into a body called the Clyde Workers' Committee which rapidly became the spokesman for the whole area. A rent strike, supported by well-timed industrial action, put an end to the worst exactions of the Glasgow landlords and forced the government to pass a Rent Restriction Act. All through 1915 there were constant strikes which neither government nor union officials could prevent. Early in 1916, and largely owing to weaknesses within the committee, the Government was able to intervene. The committee's paper the *Worker* was suppressed, and the most active leaders of the agitation were deported to other areas or imprisoned, John McLean receiving a sentence of three years. From this time Sheffield became the main storm centre.

In November 10,000 men struck successfully to secure the release of a worker who had been conscripted into the army. The greatest strike of all took place in May, 1917 when 250,000 engineers from almost every centre in England ceased work in protest against the dilution of labour and a proposed extension of conscription. The government arrested the strike leaders and the breaking away of some of the less strongly organised towns led to defeat after a struggle lasting two weeks.

By this time the news of the Russian revolution had become known everywhere, and great mass meetings and demonstrations left no doubt as to the sympathy of the British workers. So strong was this that at a convention held at Leeds in the beginning of June, 1,150 delegates were present

representing every section of the labour movement. More remarkable still was the spectacle of MacDonald and Snowden taking a leading part in the proceedings and helping to pass resolutions in favour of the setting up of workmen's and soldiers' councils (which people in Britain were just beginning to learn to call soviets) all over the country. Another indication of the changed feelings of the people was Henderson's decision that the time had come when it was wise for him to resign from the war Cabinet. The reactionaries, who had been able to retain control at the Leeds convention by a cleverly calculated shift to the left, remained strong enough to prevent its decisions being carried out, and when the Bolsheviks seized power in November they adopted an openly hostile attitude to the new Soviet republic. Among the rank and file support continued to grow, though it had little opportunity to take any practical form till after the armistice. The shop stewards' movement was, however, active in propaganda to secure support for the Bolshevik appeal for peace.

In 1919 there was widespread opposition to the action of Lloyd George's government in sending an expedition to Archangel against the Bolsheviks. In many cases soldiers ordered to this new front mutinied and refused, and there were even mutinies among the troops already there. The formation of a national 'Hands off Russia' committee forced the government to withdraw its forces and cease from direct intervention. It continued to support with money and supplies the White armies who were fighting against the soviet government in many parts of Russia.

This indirect intervention reached its highest point when Poland was encouraged to invade Russia in 1920. The British workers replied by setting up Councils of Action, and the refusal of the London dockers to load the S.S. *Jolly George* with munitions for Poland caught the imagination of the whole country and carried the agitation to its greater heights. In August, when the Poles were being driven back, Lloyd George threatened the Soviet government with war unless their troops withdrew. Immediately this threat became known a special conference of the Labour Party and the TUC met and decided in favour of a general strike to prevent war. Lloyd George at once abandoned his attitude and advised the Poles to make peace.

In Ireland the reaction to the war was somewhat different. While Redmond and the bourgeois nationalists supported England and turned themselves into recruiting agents, the left wing of the volunteers and Connolly opposed the war and prepared for an armed rising. They were ready, if necessary, to seek German aid as the United Irishmen had sought that of France. At the same time, Connolly had no illusions about German imperialism, and his attitude was crystallised in the famous slogan: 'We serve neither King nor Kaiser, but Ireland.'

Within the volunteers there were further differences, one section led by Pearse wishing to strike as early as possible and a second following MacNeill preferring to remain passive in the hope of extorting concessions after the war. The differences reached such a pitch that when a rising was decided upon at Easter 1916, MacNeill sent out a countermanding order with the result that the rebel forces were completely disorganised. Even so, and although the rising was almost confined to Dublin, it took 20,000 troops a week to suppress it. Pearse, Connolly and most of the other leaders were taken prisoner and executed.

The crushing of the Easter Rising proved to be the beginning rather than the end of the rebellion in Ireland. During the next two years the labour and national movements grew steadily. In 1918 an attempt to extend conscription to Ireland was defeated by a general strike. The new movement developed, however, largely under the leadership of the Sinn Féin Party, a bourgeois nationalist organisation that was opposed to English rule but had taken no part in the 1916 rebellion. The Sinn Féin leaders were careful to prevent any class or agrarian element from intruding itself into the guerrilla war which lasted from 1919 to 1921. For this reason a gap was made between the masses and the leadership of the rebellion and the way was opened for the treaty of December 1921 by which the Free State was set up. The essence of the treaty was that the dominant sections of the Irish bourgeoisie were granted certain, for them, valuable concessions by the English government, and, in return, undertook the task of suppressing the genuine movement of revolt among the workers and peasants, which was showing signs of growing out of control and was as dangerous to them as to the English.

The end of the war came at a time when the situation was full

of anxiety for the government. Opposition to war and sympathy for the Russian revolution were increasing. The shop stewards were perfecting a national organisation. A serious naval mutiny was only just prevented by concession, and, in September, the London police struck for higher wages. It was this general unrest, generally felt and much more serious than the surface reactions indicate, that impelled the Labour Party to prepare its first avowedly socialist programme, *Labour and the New Social Order*. It was true that its socialism was extremely vague and remote, but it served as a focus and at the same time as a distraction from the universal desire of the people for a different life.

No sooner was the war ended than a regular epidemic of mutinies broke out in the army. The first began at Shoreham only two days after the armistice and before long the revolt had spread to scores of camps in France and all over the South of England. The most determined units were hastily demobilised and the political inexperience of the leaders prevented the mutinies from having more than local success, but they caused the greatest alarm in the ranks of the government.

No one sensed the changed atmosphere better than Lloyd George, with his almost uncanny capacity for gauging the temper of the masses. His appreciation of the danger of revolution is shown by a memorandum, drawn up a little later, in which he declared:

Europe is filled with revolutionary ideas. A feeling not of depression, but of passion and revolt reigns in the breasts of the working class against the conditions that prevailed before the war. The whole existing system, political, social and economic, is regarded with distrust by the whole population of Europe.

It was this sense of urgency which led him to seek a snap decision in the khaki election of 1918, held while the soldiers were still in the main unable to vote and thousands of the newly enfranchised electors were not yet on the register. He prepared a programme in which social demagoguery (houses for all and a land fit for heroes) was blended with a more deliberately evil attempt to turn the existing unrest into hatred of Germany. Under these conditions an overwhelming success was inevitable, though the Labour Party polled two and a quarter million

votes and returned fifty-seven members. Lloyd George obtained his majority, and, with it, what could be construed as a mandate for the crazy and disastrous Versailles settlement.

With the ending of the war and, above all, with the establishment of the first socialist state in the Soviet Union, Britain, like the world as a whole, enters a new historical epoch. The age of imperialism begins to pass into the age of the general crisis of capitalism and of the transition from capitalism to socialism. With the problems and events of this new epoch it would be impossible for this book to deal adequately without becoming quite different in scope and character, but I hope that, by giving some account of preceding events, it will have made some contribution to making them more understandable.

## A NOTE ABOUT BOOKS

In earlier editions of this book I did not attempt anything in the nature of a formal bibliography, believing that a short list of books for additional reading with a few comments on them and reasons for their selection would be more helpful to the general reader and more in keeping with the character and purpose of my book. Since then I have received so many requests for a more extended bibliography that I have decided to substitute this for the previous list. After all, for anyone who wishes to consult this old list, it will probably not be too difficult to find a copy of one of the editions which contain it, and the new, but still very short, bibliography may be useful to those who make my *People's History* the starting-off point for a serious study of the subject.

May I add a warning for the beginner. The inclusion of any book in the bibliography that follows does not mean that I guarantee the correctness of everything found in it: far from it. Most of them are written by non-Marxist historians, with a standpoint which I believe to be quite mistaken. Even granting their complete good faith, this means that both their selection of facts and their judgements based upon those facts will be affected. Nevertheless, we have to go to them for many of the facts we need, always remembering that a book is like any other kind of tool in that its use has to be learnt.

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