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## The Decline of Nationalistic History in the West, 1900-1970<sup>1</sup>

P. M. Kennedy

'The historian,' notes E. H. Carr, 'is ... a social phenomenon, both the product and the conscious or unconscious spokesman of the society to which he belongs; it is in this capacity that he approaches the facts of the historical past.'<sup>2</sup> This being the case, it is natural that, as the ideas and standards of one generation are modified by those of the next, so the outlook of its historians also changes. What was extolled by writers of previous ages, for example our country's Germanic institutions, is ignored today; equally, what our forebears left untouched, such as economic and social history, we now focus much attention upon. Such glaring and widespread changes of attitude cannot be explained by the penchant for 'revisionism' in which this particular discipline excels, or by reference to the individual historians: knowledge of their respective backgrounds, and particularly of contemporary social and political ideas, is also vital. To quote Carr again; 'Before you study the historian, study his historical and social environment.'

It is the intention of this paper to examine one of the most interesting developments in twentieth-century historiography, the decline of nationalistic history writing in the Western world, and to consider how far this has been related to that changing environment. The first problem of such an enquiry, which is of its nature so vast, is to define one's limits: what sort of historians should be covered, and what does one mean by nationalistic history? Basically, my concern will be with the *professional* academic historians, although the writings of others will be

<sup>1</sup> This article has benefited from the advice of Dr John A. Moses, who knows much more about German historiography than I and who kindly lent me two special unpublished lectures of his upon that subject.

<sup>2</sup> E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (Penguin ed. 1970), 35-44.

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considered when they begin to influence the teaching of history at the universities and schools. As for the word 'nationalism', the definition given by Webster's dictionary is preferred:

an attitude, feeling or belief characterised by a sense of national consciousness, an exaltation of one nation above all others, and an emphasis on loyalty to and the promotion of the culture and interests (as political independence) of one nation as opposed to subordinate areas or other nations and supranational groups.

Such an attitude was perhaps most easily evident in late nineteenth-century Germany, paradoxically the birthplace of modern 'scientific' historical scholarship. Even Ranke, despite his emphasis upon detailed and unbiased history writing, could not conceal his admiration for Prussia and the Hohenzollerns, while his *History of the Reformation* was very influential in making Luther into a national hero.<sup>3</sup> More noticeable still was a historian who made no claim to impartiality—Heinrich von Treitschke, whose works on German nineteenth-century history were a paean of praise to the Prussian conservative state and to the unified Reich that Bismarck had established. As Treitschke candidly put it to a friend: 'The teller of German history solves his task but half if he points out merely the flow of events and frankly draws his conclusions; he must also himself feel, and know how to arouse in the hearts of his readers . . . the joy of the Fatherland.'<sup>4</sup> In his endeavours to educate the German people about the struggle for their country's unity, his blatant partisanship earned him a certain amount of criticism from his colleagues, and it may be true to say, as a recent scholar has, that the greatness of Treitschke's *History of Germany in the Nineteenth Century* lies more in the field of literature than of History;<sup>5</sup> but there is no denying that his book was very popular, that it was regarded as the history of Germany, a gospel of German patriotism which was eagerly accepted by its readers, particularly among the middle classes.

Indeed, while recognizing the differences between the two, it is not difficult also to see the similarities between Treitschke and the

<sup>3</sup> H. E. Barnes, *A History of Historical Writing* (New York 1962 ed.), 210-II.

<sup>4</sup> A. Dorpalen, *Heinrich von Treitschke* (New Haven 1957), 205 ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

later National Socialists: in his books and articles and lectures, he revealed himself to be for war, for expansion, for political conservatism at home, for anti-semitism, for national glory, for colonies, and for a large navy. His praise of the state as 'the highest personality in historical life, which needed a maximum power for its self-realization', clearly represented an intellectual advocacy of dictatorship, or could at least be interpreted in that way. Militarists of the time were pleased to hear him preach that 'Only in war will a nation truly become a nation . . . if war was abolished, all movement, all development would cease'. Treitschke was inclined to grade the peoples of the earth in a strict racial order, and to entertain hostile feelings towards most foreign nations. France he held to be racked by corruption, republicanism, internal strife and decay; but for England he developed a particular antagonism as he sensed—or indeed anticipated—the challenge which the rapidly-growing young Germany was about to make to the mistress of the seas. In his lectures at the University of Berlin, he delighted his audiences by declaring that he hoped to see the day 'when a German army marches on London and cuts off the money of those pepper jobbers', so that the 'rapacious' British would no longer rule the waves. He was, in his later days, a firm advocate of German colonial and naval expansion, and it is not surprising to learn that two of his most devoted listeners were Class, the future head of the ultra-chauvinistic Pan-German League, and Admiral von Tirpitz, the future creator of the anti-British German battlefleet.<sup>6</sup>

Where Treitschke led, many other German historians followed. As Professor Fischer notes, people such as Max Lenz, Gustav Schmoller, Dietrich Schäfer, Hans Delbrück, Otto Hinze and many more

saw Germany fulfilling her 'world mission' by virtue of that 'fitting share of world power which human nature and higher Providence assign to the civilized peoples' which her army and navy would ensure for her. Against the cultural monopoly of the

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 228; H. Holborn, *A History of Modern Germany, 1840-1945* (New York 1969), 392; G. P. Gooch, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century* (London 1952 ed.), 138-46; L. L. Synder, *German Nationalism: the Tragedy of a People* (New York 1969 ed.), 141-52; F. Hertz, *Nationality in History and Politics* (London 1944), 397-405.



## CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

Anglo-Saxons and the 'Russo-Muscovite world', the German professors called for a policy which should make Germany's special political and cultural heritage safe.<sup>7</sup>

So obsessed were many of these writers with Germany's unique mission that they lost all sense of objectivity in describing their country's recent past; nor did they regain it in their attitude to contemporary world politics; most of these historians, including the young Meinecke, were enthusiastic supporters of German expansionism. Max Lenz advocated the use of force to obtain more substantial colonies, using the motto: 'He who is strong enough to demand something has not come too late after all!' Two hundred and seventy professors, including a large number of historians, are listed by Wolfgang Marienfeld as having contributed to the campaign for Tirpitz's greater navy, and few of them had any difficulty in writing war propaganda after 1914.<sup>8</sup>

THE HISTORICAL SCENE in imperial Germany was, of course, peculiar to that country; the circumstances of its recent national unification and the precarious external and internal balance, not to mention the longer-term influences of Herder, Hegel, and Ranke, made it in some respects unique. But nationalistic history writing was by no means exclusive to Germany in those years. In the United States many historians felt that 'America was cleaner, purer, less corrupt, and more in the way of God and godliness than the evil world which had been left behind in Europe'.<sup>9</sup> The most distinguished of them was George Bancroft, whose multi-volume *History of the United States from the Discovery of America* represented

the process of colonization as the flight of brave spirits from oppression, characterized the American Republic as a crusade of wholly virtuous and disinterested patriots in behalf of the liberties of civilized humanity, described the American Constitution as the creation of a group of unique mental giants, never before equalled

<sup>7</sup> F. Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (London 1967), 8-9.

<sup>8</sup> W. Marienfeld, *Wissenschaft und Schlachtflottenbau* (Beiheft 2 der *Marine Rundschau* (Frankfurt 1957)); John A. Moses, 'Pan-Germans and the German Professors 1914-1918', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, December 1969; Snyder, op. cit., 255-83.

<sup>9</sup> J. H. Plumb, *The Death of the Past* (London 1969), 85-86.

## DECLINE OF NATIONALISTIC HISTORY

and not to be matched at any later epoch, and regarded their work as even more notable than its makers.<sup>10</sup>

Bancroft's beliefs reinforced popular consciousness of the peculiar virtues of the United States, and were engraved in succeeding generations of school history books, by tradition crude and xenophobic in virtually all countries, with results which are still with us today: 'The damage done to sane perspective in American history by his works,' a later historian wrote, 'was almost incalculable, if not irreparable.'<sup>11</sup>

Bancroft was not an isolated individual in this respect; nationalistic writings were the rule rather than the exception. On the one hand there was the navalist Alfred T. Mahan and the popular philosopher-historian Fiske, whose works are a mixture of Whig and Aryan myth, and who enthusiastically supported the imperial expansion of the 1890s. On the other hand there were such respectable academic historians as Herbert Baxter Adams and John William Burgess, whose writings also reflected contemporary pride in Anglo-Saxon origins and racial superiority.<sup>12</sup>

Nor were British historians of this period any less inclined to boast of their country's achievements. They were given the lead in this earlier in the century by Macaulay, who wrote that the British were

the greatest and most highly civilized people that ever the world saw . . . which have spread their dominion over every quarter of the globe . . . which have carried the science of healing, the means of locomotion and correspondence, every mechanical art, every manufacture, everything that promotes the convenience of life, to a perfection which our ancestors would have thought magical; have produced a literature which may boast of works not inferior to the noblest which Greece has bequeathed to us; have discovered the laws which regulate the motions of the heavenly bodies, have speculated with exquisite subtlety on the operations of the human mind, have been the acknowledged leaders of the human race in the career of political improvement.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Barnes, op. cit., 229 ff.; Gooch, op. cit., 377-80.

<sup>11</sup> Barnes, op. cit., 232.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 232-34; F. Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation* (New York 1963), 238-47.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted by P. Geyl, *Debates with Historians* (Fontana ed. London 1970), 37.

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Froude, a very nationalistic disciple of Macaulay, wrote a *History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada*, an epic of English deliverance from 'the slavery of Rome', while Freeman led astray many a later historian by claiming to find the real origins of liberty in the German folk-moot, particularly in its English manifestations.<sup>14</sup> Some writers, carried away by imperialistic fervour, national myths, and a firm belief in Social Darwinism, equalled the Pan-Germans in their excess by the turn of the century: Professor Cramb felt that war was a purifier and a challenge for every growing nation, and that 'universal peace appears less as a dream than as a nightmare'.<sup>15</sup> William Cunningham, Archdeacon and economic historian, attacked anti-patriotism as a self-centred evil and lauded 'a consciousness of nationality'; while the equally famous Professor Sir William Ashley 'regarded the British Empire as "the mightiest of instruments for good" and the "fairest hope of humanity"'. Seeley, Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, advocated the use of patriotic history as part of his suggestion for the creation of a national church, through which 'patriotism should be inculcated, national history closely connected with morality, and civil duties carefully explained'.<sup>16</sup> Even Acton, a most careful and moderate writer, allowed some of his confidence to exude in such pieces as 'The History of Freedom in Christianity', in which he referred to those 'native qualities of perseverance, moderation, individuality and manly sense of duty, which gave the English race its supremacy in the stern art of labour, which has enabled us to thrive as no other can on inhospitable shores, and which . . . caused Napoleon to exclaim as he rode away from Waterloo, "It has always been the same since Crecy"'.<sup>17</sup>

A similar note of patriotic pride echoed throughout the Western world in this period. The great French historian Lavis

<sup>14</sup> Barnes, *op. cit.*, 190, 218-20.

<sup>15</sup> W. L. Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism* (New York 1965 ed.), 90-94; A. P. Thornton, *The Imperial Idea and its Enemies* (Papermac ed., London 1966), 102.

<sup>16</sup> B. Semmel, *Imperialism and Social Reform* (London 1960), 197, 207; R. T. Shannon, 'John Robert Seeley and the Idea of a National Church', in R. Robson, ed., *Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain* (London 1967).

<sup>17</sup> Lord Acton, 'The History of Freedom in Christianity', in his *Essays in the Liberal Interpretation of History*, ed. W. H. McNeill (London 1967), 299.

once composed an elementary school textbook, full of nationalistic sentiments and concluding with the words 'Vive la France!'. In the same strain wrote such compatriots as Hanotaux, Henri Martin, Michelet, and Barrès. In fact, Professor Barnes, in his *History of Historical Writing*, produces many examples of nationalistic historians among the peoples of Austria, Italy, Spain, Hungary, Poland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Bohemia, Scandinavia, the Balkans, and Russia. The impact of all these xenophobic and jingoistic writings upon mass opinion and nationalistic fervour, and their indirect influence upon the rivalries of the powers before the first world war, was considerable. Nor is it surprising to learn that many of these historians gave up all claim to objectivity when the war came by supporting their own government's biased propaganda campaigns: while Schäfer joined the Pan-Germans, Lavis was busy in France attacking any discussion of war aims and a compromise peace, and Headlam-Morley was organizing anti-German propaganda in Britain. America also produced chauvinistic writings from established historians; Thayer, Burr, Davis, McElroy, and Schmitt are good examples, and there was an open alliance between the United States government's propaganda service and the National Board for Historical Service.<sup>18</sup>

Nor did the influence of such people end there; their patriotic prejudices seeped downwards into the history textbooks used in the schools of all the Western powers, and thus the national myths were perpetuated.<sup>19</sup> Only recently has an effort been made to upgrade these textbooks, traditionally 40 years out of date, and this has become part of an international effort, following a Unesco pamphlet on the subject, which bluntly stated that 'the attitude of schools to the teaching of history is the acid test of the sincerity of their faith in the growth of international understanding'.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the results of this combined effort do not so far

<sup>18</sup> Barnes, *op. cit.*, 277 ff.

<sup>19</sup> Interesting examples of the concentration on famous 'national' figures of British history, and on pride in the empire, which were taught in state schools in the Dominions, can be found in S. G. Firth, 'Social Values in the New South Wales Primary School 1880-1914: An Analysis of school texts', in R. J. W. Selleck, ed., *Melbourne Studies in Education 1970* (Melbourne 1970).

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in C. L. Hannam, 'Prejudice and the Teaching of History', in M. Ballard, ed., *New Movements in the Study and Teaching of History* (London 1970), 26.



appear to have been very satisfactory, and it seems clear that many of the older nationalist and racial myths and prejudices still remain.<sup>21</sup>

ON THE OTHER HAND, in historical circles today the patriotic historian has virtually disappeared from the universities and research institutes of Western Europe and the United States. In fact, one can offer only a few isolated examples of writers whose pride in their country and its special virtues is in any way explicit. There is Arthur Bryant in England, whose recent work *The Protestant Island* might, as Plumb notes, 'have been written for the Victorian public school';<sup>22</sup> the late Gerhard Ritter in Germany, who so vigorously attacked the findings of the Fischer school concerning German responsibility for the outbreak of the first world war and thought these views 'politically dangerous' for the historical consciousness of modern German youth;<sup>23</sup> Walther Hubatsch, of whom Georg Iggers has tartly noted that he has attempted 'to justify the path of German history from the Great Elector to the invasion of Norway in 1940'.<sup>24</sup> In the United States, perhaps Professor-Admiral Samuel E. Morison could be offered as an example.

In contrast, there are a number of historians in the West, particularly in Germany and the United States, whose writings could be labelled 'anti-nationalistic', by which it is not meant that they are against the nation *per se*, but that they are deeply critical of the past (and usually also the present) policies of their governments, and believe that the patriotic ideologies, values, and ambitions of previous generations, which they see as often being humbug and concealing much calculated greed and ambition, should be discarded from their national life. First among these is Professor Fritz Fischer of Hamburg University, whose book on Germany's aims in the first world war has caused the biggest controversy in German historical circles for decades, not only

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-36; and the many classic examples in E. H. Dance, *History the Betrayer* (London 1960).

<sup>22</sup> Plumb, *op. cit.*, 42.

<sup>23</sup> John A. Moses, 'The War Aims of Imperial Germany: Professor Fritz Fischer and his Critics', in *University of Queensland Papers*, i, no. 4 (St Lucia 1968), 220-21.

<sup>24</sup> G. G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History* (Middleton, Conn. 1968), 259-60.

because of his treatment of the topic itself but also because of the implications for an understanding of the success of the National Socialist movement in the 1930s: in describing the expansionist, racist, and anti-democratic pressures at work in Imperial Germany, he has further contributed to the de-demonization of Hitler and to the theory that there has been more continuity in twentieth-century German history than had been previously allowed for.<sup>25</sup> By exposing the will to expansion in the governing and other circles of Wilhelmine Germany, Fischer has clearly rejected the idea that historians should present an 'acceptable' national image and has concentrated on a search for the truth as he sees it, however harsh it may be to his (German) readers' minds.

Fischer has been followed in this by many younger German historians, who have grown up in the post-1945 world with a painful awareness of their country's disastrous past and a determination to understand better the roots of this tragedy. Basically radical in outlook, they have not hesitated to criticize their country's previous actions where they have felt them to be in the wrong. Imanuel Geiss has written of 'Germany's overwhelming share in causing the First World War' and presents a very hostile account of the Wilhelmine political structure:

Behind that awe-inspiring structure of power and weakness, each strengthening the other, was that explosive bundle of ambitions, romantic nostalgia, resentments, fears and complexes that made up the German political neurosis in ever-new forms. On top of it were vain (Bülow) or mediocre (Bethmann Hollweg) political leaders and a near-neurotic Kaiser (followed after the interval of the Weimar Republic by the still more neurotic Führer). With his virtues and shortcomings, the Kaiser most perfectly embodied the German nation in hot pursuit of their elusive and self-destructive *fata morgana*, called 'equality' in terms of power.<sup>26</sup>

Other Germans have moved further into the past to search for the truth as they understand it. Helmuth Böhme's account of the founding of the German Empire pays far more attention to the activities of industrial pressure groups than to the vaguer concepts

<sup>25</sup> The controversy over Fischer's *Griff nach der Weltmacht* can best be followed in Dr Moses' 'War Aims of Imperial Germany', *loc. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> I. Geiss, ed., *July 1914* (London 1967), 369-70.



of patriotic solidarity; while Hans-Ulrich Wehler, in his study of Bismarck's colonial policy, has exposed what he sees as 'manipulated social imperialism' at work, and has attacked the total bankruptcy of the Bismarckian system of politics.<sup>27</sup>

In the United States, too, the reaction against patriotic history writing has been strong. It is led by the 'Wisconsin school' in particular, but many others are also concerned to reinterpret their past in a cool and often critical manner, to get rid of the nationalistic myths of the Bancroft era, and especially to look more closely at the motives and methods of the American rise to world power and its application. Far from seeing the colonial drive as a sudden series of hastily-contrived moves consequent upon the war with Spain, as 'the great aberration of 1898', historians such as Van Alstyne, LaFeber, and Williams are now stressing the continuity of American expansion, which is seen as a natural consequence of the industrial revolution.<sup>28</sup> LaFeber in particular points to the part played by business interests and pressure groups in the agitation for colonies and markets at the end of the nineteenth century. Williams, in his *Roots of the Modern American Empire*, offers the thesis that the American farmer's over-productivity led him to agitate for a world marketplace, a view which eventually captured the minds of the United States leaders, who thought in the same way in industrial terms and responded with an expansionist foreign policy. The appeals to manifest destiny are often portrayed as a cover-up for sordid commercial greed and political 'deals', and American imperialism is seen as a response to farming and industrial pressures and to the need to divert and avoid domestic discontents. Williams strongly attacks the illusory nature of 'the freedom of the marketplace', and the unwillingness of the nation's leaders to face up to the problems of a capitalist society. Equally forthright has been Gabriel Kolko, whose study of United States strategy during the

<sup>27</sup> H. Böhme, *Deutschlands Weg zur Grossmacht: Studien zum Verhältnis von Wirtschaft und Staat während der Reichsgründungszeit 1848-1881* (Cologne 1966); H. -U. Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus* (Cologne 1969).

<sup>28</sup> R. W. Van Alstyne, *The Rising American Empire* (New York 1960); W. LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion 1860-1898* (New York 1963); W. A. Williams, *The Roots of the Modern American Empire* (New York 1969). For a criticism of the Wisconsin school, see I. Umger, 'The "New Left" and American History: Some recent Trends in United States Historiography', *American Historical Review*, July 1967.

second world war has shown how the desire to expand (and often to create) American commercial and political influence throughout the globe was concealed beneath bland appeals to Allied solidarity and the fight against the Axis powers.<sup>29</sup>

The anti-nationalistic trend in historical writing has not been so noticeable in Britain, perhaps because it has had no National Socialist past or is fighting no Vietnam war over which liberal/radical circles can become angry and critical; perhaps also because its historians have long been busy attacking previous government policies, from Sir Edward Grey's deviousness before 1914 to the appeasement policy of the 1930s. But because some *political* involvement seems to be missing, British historians have tended merely to expose the truth rather than to make moral judgments. A. P. Thornton, who has surveyed the British imperial idea in a most myth-destroying manner, did allow himself to be severely critical of the Tories for being willing to provoke civil war over Ulster; but the conclusion of his book *The Imperial Idea and Its Enemies* is quite neutral and rather bland.<sup>30</sup> Robinson and Gallagher, who have pointed out in a most brilliant manner the British government's concern with the hard, cold realities of imperial strategy when annexing vast areas of Africa, also avoid either censure or praise.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, there is clearly a great difference between these writers and their predecessors. Nowadays no one of academic note in Britain takes the nationalistic line, several are critical of it at specific instances, and the majority are solely concerned with the truth of the matter and unworried by the fact that national myths might be destroyed or the national image tarnished as a result of their findings.

THE RAPIDITY AND EXTENT of the rejection of nationalistic history in the Western world in recent years makes it possibly even more difficult for the present-day observer to comprehend how such seemingly narrow-minded and chauvinistic attitudes could have been so widely accepted only 60 or 70 years ago. Yet, as mentioned before, the patriotic ideals towards which those writers strove are still with us today, in certain school textbooks, and also

<sup>29</sup> G. Kolko, *The Politics of War* (London 1969).

<sup>30</sup> Thornton, *op. cit.*, 132-34, 356.

<sup>31</sup> R. Robinson and J. Gallagher, with A. Denny, *Africa and the Victorians: the Official Mind of Imperialism* (London 1962).

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in the popular press and comics. Moreover, in newer states, which have not experienced the disenchantment of the West, nationalistic history is very strong. There is nothing unnatural about it, therefore; it may indeed be seen as representing a particular phase in a nation's development. It is also clear that, even so far as the great powers themselves were concerned, the nationalistic writings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were not without precedent. In fact, it could be argued that there has been a tendency within every nation and tribe until recent times to laud itself at the expense of its neighbours, an attitude stemming in the main from sheer ignorance and the lack of good communications. The militant anti-French feeling which permeated much of English society until around 1900 had its representatives in chroniclers and historians from the sixteenth century onwards; while writers such as Carlyle and Kingsley were 'unbendingly severe in their attitude toward "inferior" races outside the national pale'.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, as early as 1820 Thierry was writing: 'I may be mistaken, but I believe that our patriotism would gain a great deal both in selflessness and in steadfastness if the knowledge of history, and particularly of French history, were more widely diffused among us and were to become in a certain sense more popular.'<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, it seems clear also that the 'historical and social environment' of Europe and the United States in the late nineteenth century provided a sort of hothouse atmosphere for nationalistic writings of the most fervent kind, without which the works of such historians as Treitschke, Bancroft, Cramb and the rest cannot be fully understood. They all reflected, and often contributed to, a movement which, though stressing the peculiar virtues of one's own nation, was international in its scope, i.e. that tremendous outburst of expansionism and jingoism known as the 'new imperialism'. Western civilization had a long and venerable past, and was being extended with effortless superiority to all parts of the globe; its industrial revolutions had given the great powers untold economic and political advantages over other countries and peoples; in particular, the advanced state of marine technology and armaments had enabled them to reach out over-

<sup>32</sup> B. Semmel, *op. cit.*, 30.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in F. Stern, *The Varieties of History* (New York 1956), 67. See also on Michelet's chauvinism, 109-19.

seas and, once there, to conquer. By comparison, the rest of the world seemed to be in a sad state of decay, with Turkey, Egypt, China and the various Latin American republics racked by corruption, while the peoples of Africa, the Pacific, and most of Asia were assumed to be inherently incapable of ruling themselves and were thus taken over. Even a statesman such as Salisbury, always distrustful of jingoistic cant, believed that the world was divided into living and dying nations, the ones growing ever stronger, the others ever weaker.

Such ideas were inevitably linked up with the vague concepts of race and Social Darwinism, which were very much to the fore in this period. Stemming originally from Gobineau's *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Race* (1854), this noxious doctrine was taken up with fervour not only by political writers and historians, but also by leaders and statesmen such as Wilhelm II, Theodore Roosevelt, and Joseph Chamberlain. The misinterpretation of Darwin's *Descent of Man* gave this an enormous boost, and the phrases 'struggle for existence' and 'survival of the fittest' date from this time. Bagehot's essay, *Physics and Politics*, the Austrian Gumplowitz's *Struggle of Races*, Kidd's *Social Revolution*, and the Frenchman Laponge's *Natural Selections* all developed these ideas, which were perhaps best expressed by Professor Karl Pearson, who in the year 1900 wrote:

History shows me one way, and one way only, in which a state of civilization has been produced, namely, the struggle of race with race, and the survival of the physically and mentally fitter race . . . This dependence on the survival of the fitter race, terribly black as it may seem to some of you, gives the struggle for existence its redeeming features; it is the fiery crucible out of which comes the finer metal . . . the path of progress is strewn with the wreck of nations; traces are everywhere to be seen of the hecatombs of inferior races, and of victims who found not the narrow path to the greater perfection.<sup>34</sup>

While all this tended to separate the European nations and the United States from the rest of the world, there were other factors at work which split the great powers themselves. There was, in the first place, a great pride in the political advancement of one's

<sup>34</sup> Langer, *op. cit.*, 85-91.



own country, a consciousness of the superiority of the parliamentary or monarchical institutions of one's motherland which no other nations could approach. The British Parliament, the American Constitution, the newly-founded German political union, all offered something unique and unequalled to the world, and this was part of the special cultural heritage which caused the Germans, the French, the Anglo-Saxons and the rest to feel somewhat above their neighbours. Authors and readers alike believed that their country had a special mission, a manifest destiny, a God-ordained position, which distinguished it from the others. Curiously, few ever seemed to notice that the *others* felt exactly the same way about *themselves* too. As Gilbert Murray found:

In every nation of Europe from England and France to Russia and Turkey, in almost every nation in the world from the Americans to the Chinese and the Finns, the same whisper from below the threshold sounds incessantly in men's ears. 'We are the pick and flower of nations; the only nation that is really generous and brave and just. We are above all things qualified for governing others; we know how to keep them exactly in their place without weakness and without cruelty.'<sup>35</sup>

Added to this were the rivalries which so divided the great powers politically in this period and helped to emphasize the cultural, linguistic, and historical differences between them. Anglo-German trade rivalry was couched in terms suitable for a biological struggle between two species; the Polish and Balkan controversies were seen simply as a matter of race, and the conquest of the rest of the world as part of a special calling, shouldering the 'White Man's Burden', as Kipling put it when encouraging the United States to take the Philippines. Then, too, the age of mass literacy and the rise of a yellow press, chauvinistic in the extreme, intensified such feelings of dislike and rivalry. Monarchs and statesmen, as well as journalists, spoke scornfully of other races and nations, of their country's unique destiny, and of the 'might is right' concept; most quoted of all were the clichés of their thinkers and historians, of Treitschke and Chamberlain, of Mahan and Fiske and Cramb and Pearson and many others.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 96.

IN THE BACKGROUND to all this, however, another completely different line of historiography had been slowly developing from the middle of the nineteenth century—the Marxist-Liberal-Radical school of history, with its somewhat incongruously connected founding fathers, Marx and Cobden, the one predicting the collapse of Western capitalist society, the other preaching to cure its diseases. Their views made little headway against the patriotic school in academic and university circles until well into the twentieth century; most of the early exponents were political polemicists and journalists rather than professional historians and teachers; but since the legacy they left has gone from strength to strength in Western teaching circles generally, it is as well to consider its main features. It was, first of all, a direct challenge to the chauvinists by being *internationalist* in outlook: working class internationals, or a policy of free trade and liberalism, were its answers to jingoism, militarism, and the arms race. It was in the long run to be assisted by the steady growth of world communications and cooperation, as groups holding these views in different countries made contact with each other across national boundaries and discovered their common distaste for capitalist financiers and imperialist governments.

This school was particularly active in Britain and was producing important works even at the height of the pre-1914 wave of nationalist feeling. Hobson's famous book *Imperialism: A Study* (1902), in which the economic motives for colonial expansion were outlined, fiercely attacked the sordid greed of capitalists, jingoism, the yellow press, and the appeals to national glory. Brailsford's *The War of Steel and Gold* (1914) echoed this line, and insisted: 'Let a people once perceive for what purpose its patriotism is prostituted, and its resources, and the end is already in sight.'<sup>36</sup> There were many other examples of this pacifist, radical line of thinking: Angell's *The Great Illusion*; MacDonald's *Labour and the Empire*; Moral's agitation over the Congo. In the main, these men were interested in contemporary problems of international concern such as Morocco, Persia, the Congo, the naval race, the entente with reactionary Russia, military commitments to France, etc. They were particularly anxious to effect a

<sup>36</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, *Englishmen and Others* (London 1956), 76-77; B. Porter, *Critics of Empire: British Radical Attitudes to colonialism in Africa 1895-1914* (London 1968).



greater degree of control over Sir Edward Grey's 'secret' diplomacy, over the 'faceless' diplomats and officials who were taking the country along so ruinous a course. Their entire *Weltanschauung* implied a rejection of the nationalist fervour of Pearson and Cramb and Cunningham.<sup>37</sup>

The first world war itself gave an immense boost to British radical historiography. Organized into the Union of Democratic Control in August 1914, this selfsame group of writers continued their attacks on secret diplomacy, war aims, and imperialism.<sup>38</sup> It is doubtful whether they had much effect on the government's war policy, which was then influenced by such imperialists as Smuts, Milner, and Curzon; but their long-term influence upon nationalistic history writing after 1919 was immense. A disillusioned world had become far readier to accept the radical interpretations of imperialism and the origins of war. Interest in Hobson's *Imperialism* revived, and was reinforced by Leonard Woolf's *Empire and Commerce in Africa*, embodying theories which are still with us today. The key books on recent history at this time were Bertrand Russell's *Freedom and Organisation 1814-1914*; Lowes Dickinson's *International Anarchy*; G. P. Gooch's *History of Europe 1878-1914*; and Brailsford's *War of Steel and Gold*. All were written by members of the Union of Democratic Control; all were widely read and accepted almost completely in the English and American universities. As late as 1956, A. J. P. Taylor could write: 'The UDC version of events holds the field.' In the inter-war years it had a great ally, too, in Murray's League of Nations Union, which strove to introduce changes in the language and content of history textbooks in the schools.<sup>39</sup>

Today, the Marxist-Liberal-Radical school of historiography is stronger than ever, so strong perhaps that one forgets how recent

<sup>37</sup> Thornton, op. cit., 264-82; A. J. P. Taylor, *The Trouble Makers: Dissent over Foreign Policy 1792-1939* (London 1957); J. A. Murray, 'Foreign Policy Debated: Sir Edward Grey and his Critics, 1911-1912', in L. P. Wallace and W. C. Askew, eds., *Power, Public Opinion and Diplomacy: Essays in Honour of Eber Malcolm Carroll* (Durham, N. C. 1959).

<sup>38</sup> Taylor, *The Trouble Makers*, 132-66; and especially, M. Swartz, *The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics during the First World War* (Oxford 1971).

<sup>39</sup> Taylor, *The Trouble Makers*, 178; Thornton, op. cit., 290-313; R. Koebner and H. D. Schmidt, *Imperialism: the Story and Significance of a Political Word, 1840-1960* (Cambridge 1964), 271-72.

has been its entry into the temple of academic respectability. It is surely not too fanciful to see contemporary anti-nationalistic historians as being the international successors of the Marx-Cobden-Hobson tradition. Fischer, Geiss, and Bohme could be labelled radical liberals, and Wehler has gone on record as saying that history can gain more from a study of Marx than of Ranke. He is also a great admirer of Eckhart Kehr, that most brilliant radical historian of Weimar Germany. Williams, in a book called *The Great Evasion*, has also stressed Marx's relevance and the need to apply his findings to the study of America's future.<sup>40</sup> In Britain, such a prominent historian as Eric Hobsbawm writes from a Marxist standpoint, too.

It would be facile, however, to suggest that nationalistic historiography in the West was simply laughed out of court by the writings of a few radical critics in Britain and elsewhere: once again, the 'historical and social environment' needs to be examined. To begin with, the first world war profoundly altered the whole mental climate. As a result of that catastrophic conflict, there was a deflation of nationalistic ideals, partly because many perceived the damage which had been done by them, and partly because the old standards and confidence had gone; the cheery self-assurance of the Edwardian age gave way to anxiety about the future. Many historians retreated towards relativism, holding that there is no 'objective' historical truth at all, that one interpretation is as good as another, or that every interpretation is true in its own time and place. It is true that the fierce academic disputes in the inter-war years over 'war guilt' obscured to a certain extent the underlying trend away from nationalistic history; but many more historical legends were now coming under fire. Compare, for example, Bancroft's view of the American Revolution with the one put forward by Schuyler in 1932:

The revolt from England . . . was no spontaneous uprising of a whole people in behalf of human rights. It was, on the contrary, the work of an aggressive minority, capable of leadership and strong in organization, who managed to carry with them a more numerous body of less active persons. A large minority of the colonists, probably about one-third, detested the Revolution, remained loyal to the King and Empire, and suffered loss of

<sup>40</sup> W. A. Williams, *The Great Evasion* (Chicago 1964).

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property and every species of indignity at the hands of their exasperated and often envious neighbours.<sup>41</sup>

Then there were the cyclical systematizers, Spengler and Toynbee, who saw the past 'in terms of the rhythmic rise and fall of civilizations, explaining this process in terms of internal responses to a sequence of crises'.<sup>42</sup> Spengler's *Decline of the West*, reflecting Germany's defeat in the first world war and Europe's uncertain future, was full of pessimism and foreboding, a complete contrast to nineteenth-century confidence. Even if Toynbee, in *A Study of History*, was beginning to produce a more hopeful though mystical note at the end of his writings, he did at least put Europe in its place in world history; of the 21 full civilizations he detected and whose life-span he traced, only four had existed in Europe.

Also important was the acceptance in many quarters, if not of the marxist view of history, then of a very materialistically-based interpretation of history. For once such clichés as 'superior race', 'special national characteristics' and the like are set aside, and attention is turned instead to the growth of capitalism, the spread of commerce and the search for markets, the significance of iron and steel production for a nation's military capacity, then a good deal of commonsense is introduced into the explanations of why certain states triumph in battle or expand overseas; it is no longer the hand of God or manifest destiny, it is a question of numbers or a search for profit. Note, for example, Taylor's statistically-loaded analysis in his *Struggle for Mastery in Europe* of what it took to be a great power in the late nineteenth century; coal, iron, steel, chemicals, money and manpower were what was needed; without them, a special race or constitution was of little apparent use.<sup>43</sup> Significant, too, is Eric Hobsbawm's cold explanation of why the British became the first great industrial and trading nation. There is no mention of those 'native qualities of perseverance, moderation, individuality and manly sense of duty' which Acton had perceived. Instead, Hobsbawm points to the 'systematic aggressiveness' of the British government, which, greatly in-

<sup>41</sup> R. L. Schuyler, 'Some Political Idols', *Political Science Quarterly*, 1932, 5-6.

<sup>42</sup> D. Thomson, *The Aims of History* (London 1969), 24.

<sup>43</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918* (Oxford 1954), xxiv-xxxvi.

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fluenced by commercial pressure groups, emerged from the five great wars of the eighteenth century with 'the virtual monopoly among European powers of overseas colonies, and the virtual monopoly of world-wide naval power'. With this domination of the underdeveloped world, and the vast increase in British exports to it, the Industrial Revolution really got under way.<sup>44</sup>

IF THE ECONOMIC HISTORIANS were the first to disregard the accepted notion that history was concerned simply with 'past politics', many others followed. The growth of sociology and social anthropology, which did much to combat the idea of European 'superiority', was also instrumental in turning historical attention away from such national figures and symbols as kings and parliaments and battles. Rudé and Hobsbawm's study of the agrarian rising of 1830,<sup>45</sup> and of the general problems of crowd psychology in revolutions, is an example of this growing interest in the 'losers' in history, and in factors only vaguely connected with high politics and constitutions. Moreover, students of historical geography could point to the importance of rivers (and not just national spirit) in determining the boundaries of the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century, and could argue that it was probably more the weather than the English navy which brought about the defeat of the Spanish Armada. There was also intellectual history, and the history of science, both of which revealed that no one country could claim a monopoly of ideas or technological inventions—these were part of a far larger international tradition. Nor, it might be said, could Western civilization itself lay any special claim to scientific or cultural superiority in history; Dr Needham's books on *Science and Civilisation in China* have shown just how far ahead of Europe the Oriental world was until the eighteenth century.<sup>46</sup>

These new trends in history, and the parallel decline of nationalistic historiography in the West after 1919, were reinforced by the second world war, which itself was responsible for several newer

<sup>44</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire* (Pelican ed. 1969), 34-54.

<sup>45</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm and G. Rudé, *Captain Swing* (London 1969). On this general development see H. J. Perkin, 'Social History', in H. P. R. Finberg, ed., *Approaches to History* (London 1962); A. Marwick, *The Nature of History* (London 1970), 120-27.

<sup>46</sup> J. T. M. Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, 4 vols. (Cambridge 1954-65).



developments. One of these was the rejection of the myth of racial superiority, a direct result of the universal abhorrence at the excesses of the Nazis—excesses which were only taking the Darwinist, racist, and atavistic writings of the earlier age to their logical conclusion. The course of the war itself had also upset some of these racial theories; the Slavs crushed the Teutons, and the Japanese shattered the myth of European superiority in the East. One could no longer write that 'history shows' that one race was intrinsically better than the other; they all, it appeared, had their turn on the world's stage.

More impressive still was the dwarfing of Europe, another result of the second world war, although it would also be true to say that only the isolationism of the United States and Russia had obscured the fact that after 1919 Europe was no longer the real centre of power in the world.<sup>47</sup> Now, however, the truth was apparent to all, and a new word, 'superpower', was coined to express the special status of the two nations of continental proportions. Once again, the economic historians could point out that victory had lain with the big battalions, and that special national characteristics had proved to be irrelevant. After 1945 the once proud and independent nations of Europe were militarily and economically weak, split into two camps which clustered around their external protectors, unable to join effectively in either the nuclear arms race or the space race. Neither in France, nor in Germany, Britain, or Italy, was it a time for national self-confidence but rather for doubt and perplexity and worry. Indeed, historians such as Ritter and Meinecke and Carrington have confessed that the books which they had written or were planning to write before 1939 had to be radically altered to take into account the changes which the war had effected in their own assumptions and in the world in general.<sup>48</sup> More drastic still is the attitude of such 'contemporary' historians as Geoffrey Barraclough, who has declared that Europe is likely to become a colony, a backwater, and that 'the traditional Europe—the Europe of our history books, the Europe of Louis XIV and Napoleon and

<sup>47</sup> E. Fischer, *The Passing of the European Age* (Cambridge, Mass. 1943); G. Barraclough, *An Introduction to Contemporary History* (Pelican ed. 1967), 65–123.

<sup>48</sup> A. Marwick, op. cit., 176–77.

Bismarck—is dead and beyond resurrection, and we may disabuse our minds of the illusion that there is any special relevance, from the point of view of contemporary affairs, in studying such neolithic figures'.<sup>49</sup>

The decay of the colonial empires and the rise of the so-called 'Third World', factors connected to the previous two but distinct in themselves, are equally important. This development has, of course, undeniably led to the promotion of nationalistic histories in these newer states as they, like the English Whigs before them, sought for early signs of their national identity and institutions, or other claims to fame. In this respect, the recent 'black' interpretation of American history, and books such as E. E. Williams' *Capitalism and Slavery*, are worthy of notice. Apparently Ghana now teaches that the alphabet and the steam-engine were invented there, and the Syrian government has declared that 'to develop nationalism and nourish patriotism is the real aim of teaching history', an attitude which communist countries in general have adopted.<sup>50</sup> But in Europe and the United States such views, often reminiscent of the urgings of Treitschke and Seeley, have been discarded. There is instead a far greater appreciation that African, Asian, Pacific and Latin American peoples and their history have their own intrinsic value, that they can and should be studied for their own sake; and this was accompanied by some guilt feelings about how the rest of the world had been treated by the former imperialist nations. With the study of history becoming less Euro-centred, nationalistic history writing was naturally seen as more old-fashioned, more irrelevant, and less popular.

Finally, the second world war brought about a greater appreciation of chance in history, of the irrational man or the accidental occurrence, of developments outside the control of normal people and governments.<sup>51</sup> While this was partly due to such earlier events as the first world war and the great slump, it received its greatest boost from the career of Hitler—one of the best examples, despite the points made by A. J. P. Taylor, of the irrational and unpredictable in history. At any rate, the rational and self-confident attitude of the Victorians was now completely

<sup>49</sup> G. Barraclough, *History in a Changing World* (Oxford 1955), 203–20.

<sup>50</sup> Plumb, op. cit., 90–91; Dance, op. cit., 73.

<sup>51</sup> E. H. Carr, op. cit., 99–101.



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undermined, as was the idea of a divinely ordained national destiny. Chance, rather than certain built-in national virtues, had obviously played a great hand in past centuries too.

THE MULTIFARIOUS EFFECTS of the two world wars upon nationalistic historiography are easily discernible. Equally important, though more difficult to recognize and describe, was the changing social status of the teaching and university world. Certainly, the family backgrounds have altered considerably since the days of *von Ranke*, *von Treitschke*, *Lord Acton*, and the patrician writers of New England. Certainly, too, there has been a growing emphasis upon the professional techniques rather than the literary graces, of history, and a great expansion in detailed and objective research, leading to the discovery of evidence which exploded many a previously-held myth, such as the theory that the German folkmoor contained the true origins of liberty and self-rule, or the view that King John's barons were in any way defenders of democracy. Many of our childhood legends, such as Alfred burning the cakes or George Washington and the cherry tree, have suffered considerably in this re-scrutiny.<sup>52</sup> In any case, this detailed research into particular episodes was accompanied by the belief that historians were looking solely for the truth, that they were interested in the past for its own sake and did not see everything through Whig or national or other spectacles, but rather, followed Ranke's dictum that every historical event was 'immediate to God', should be judged in its own context, and should be understood 'as it actually happened'. Connected with this was the type of history writing practised by Sir Lewis Namier, particularly in his book *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III*, which showed the local interests, connections, and particularized ambitions of members of parliament, and revealed 'how small was the part played by the lofty political ideals which the Whig historians loved to bandy about'.<sup>53</sup> Transferred to other countries and periods, this analytical history often disclosed the special business or personal motives behind many a seemingly idealized policy and patriotic rallying-cry.

<sup>52</sup> On this, see R. Birley, *The Undergrowth of History; Some Traditional Stories of English History Reconsidered* (Historical Association pamphlet no. G. 30, reprinted London 1969).

<sup>53</sup> Marwick, *op. cit.*, 91.

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But the growing professionalism and 'democratization' of the historical world are perhaps merely reflections of far deeper trends in twentieth-century society, in particular of changes in the social function of education. Instead of regarding works of history as either literary masterpieces or as monographs written by one historian for his fellows only, it is now being increasingly asserted that this discipline has an important *functional* value for modern society. Indeed, much of the contemporary argument over history's status as a social science flows from this belief. There is also an awareness of, and growing feeling of responsibility for, the social effects of teaching this discipline.<sup>54</sup> Because of this, nationalistic historiography is regarded in the Western world with a cold eye, and efforts have been made in teaching circles to combat the harmful effects of chauvinistically-inclined books and comics. It is difficult to say exactly to what extent the writing and teaching of this subject has been altered by the changes in the social status of historians and in the social function of education, for very little has been written on this aspect; yet if we are to understand better the developments within history, this is surely one of the more important topics needing investigation. For a profession dedicated to examining the changing circumstances and background of historical developments, we have been unusually disinclined to scrutinize ourselves in such a manner; perhaps someone should 'Namierize' the historians, their inclinations and backgrounds, and what they think of their subject?

Until such investigations have been carried out, explanations of the almost complete disappearance of patriotic historiography in the West will necessarily be restricted to a discussion of general developments in the twentieth century, in particular of the rise of a radical school of history and of the effects of the two world wars. It is doubtful whether this will be sufficient or satisfactory. Nevertheless, even an investigation at this level of the changing styles and ideologies of Seeley and Treitschke on the one hand, and Fischer and Williams on the other, confirms one's view of the workings of history, which is not a static study, concerned merely with the accumulation of facts about the past, but a fluid one, reflecting the ever-changing world in which we live and one which, while rejecting relativism, is searching for a less biased, more objective understanding of man and society and the past. In this

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-19; and especially, C. L. Hannam, *passim*.



latter respect, it is also an imperfect discipline, striving after the two unattainable goals of impartiality and finality; for it must be admitted that today's anti-nationalistic historians exhibit some of the faults and weaknesses of their more chauvinistic forebears. Types of prejudice may change: the existence of prejudice remains. With regard to the decline of nationalistic history writing, however, one cannot help feeling that at least a considerable advance towards these goals has been made.

## The First World War and the 'Mittelstand': German Artisans and White-Collar Workers

Jürgen Kocka

If an attempt were made to analyse German society before 1914 in terms of a class structure whose primary criterion was the ownership and control of the means of production, it would be very difficult to place salaried employees, on the one hand, and artisans and small tradesmen on the other, within such a framework. In the writings of the day these two groups—along with most peasants, civil servants, and professional people—were frequently lumped together as the 'Mittelstand' (roughly, 'middle classes') to mark them off from those above and those below, from capital and wage-labour, from the ruling classes and the proletariat. The present essay deals with the socio-economic characteristics, the ideologies, and the social alliances of these middle groups, with their wartime development and resulting changes. Up to now only tentative efforts have been made to investigate the impact of the war on Germany's economic and social structure. For all too long pride of place has been given to military, political, and constitutional problems, in which economic and social history has played at best a mere supporting role. In particular, the growing middle strata, relatively silent but hard-hit by the war, have largely escaped the attention of historians.

According to the last pre-war occupational census (1907), there were about 2,000,000 salaried employees (*Angestellte*) as compared with 13,700,000 wage-earners (*Arbeiter*); i.e. for every 10 salaried employees there were approximately 70 wage-earners. Most of the employees (about 1,100,000) were employed in the service sector, and had in fact been there (to be sure, in very