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The 'short nineteenth century'

To the historian of modern Europe two features of the nineteenth century stand out particularly clearly. Firstly, the 'nineteenth century' may be better described as the 99 years from 1815 to 1914, for there is a coherence to the 1815–1914 period that the period 1801–1900 lacks. In 1815 one general European war ended, in 1914 another started; there was no war on such a scale between these two dates. Secondly, the period between 1815 and 1914 was an era of relative political calm which separated two stormier periods. Nothing in the nineteenth century matches the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon on the one side and the First World War, the Russian Revolution and the rise of fascism on the other. One cannot compare the Crimean War with Napoleon's Moscow campaign, the revolutions of 1848 with the 1917 October Revolution, Napoleon III with Napoleon Bonaparte or Bismarck with Hitler. If the 1820s to the 1880s, a period that is the essence of the nineteenth century, is considered its relative insignificance appears to be reinforced. This was the era when middle-class politicians, such as Thiers and Cavour, triumphed over such popular revolutionaries as the Paris communards and Garibaldi, when such revolutionaries as Mazzini and Marx failed to put their ideas into practice. It was the age of the bourgeoisie, of bankers, industrialists and government administrators who lack the interest and impact of figures like Napoleon, Lenin and Hitler.

And yet the 'short nineteenth century', as the period between the 1830s and the 1880s is sometimes called, should not be written off so quickly. It was a time of great importance in the history of Europe. During the 65 years from 1825 to 1890, Europe underwent a series of transformations. Consider just three contrasts:

- In 1825 there was just one railway track in Europe on which a steam engine ran: from Stockton to Darlington in north-eastern England. By 1890 there were almost 200,000 kilometres of railway lines across Europe. This contrast is important not just in itself but because of the impact the building of so much track had on European societies and economies.



The European railway system in 1850. The degree to which a country had industrialised can be gauged from the extent of its railways.

- In 1825 Europe was divided into around 60 states, the rulers of which were hereditary rulers. These individuals were sovereign in both senses of the word. Some, such as the king of Prussia, ruled over geographically separate territories; others, like the duke of Lucca in Italy, governed states that were only a few square kilometres in size, while some, such as the Austrian Habsburgs and the Russian Romanovs, were sovereign over huge areas. By 1890, however, Europe was in the process of being formed into fewer than 30 states, most based on the concept of common national identity (see Appendix A). The nation state was becoming the norm. By 1890 all European states had given the vote to adult males, a few to all adult males. The sovereignty of the monarch was giving way to the sovereignty of the people.

Hardly anyone at the time considered giving the vote to women. The conventional view was that a woman's place and role was different, that her very nature was different. Women were seen as dependent on and subordinate to men, almost as part of the natural order of things. Some women were starting to challenge this view, for example by fighting for the right to university education. A collective and more effective challenge did not emerge until after 1890.

- In 1825 most people in Europe lived in the countryside, working in agricultural and related occupations, often in a traditional form of subsistence farming. By 1890 many people lived in towns and cities, working in factories producing industrial goods. (Only in Britain and Germany did *most* of the population live in towns in 1890.) These towns and cities grew with great speed: in 1850 400,000 people lived in Berlin, by 1890 1,900,000. This great shift from countryside to town, repeated in all parts of Europe, had huge social consequences.

This period furthermore saw the emergence of two sets of ideas that would revolutionise the ways in which people across the globe viewed themselves:

- In 1831 a 22-year-old English scientist set sail for the Pacific, where he spent five years. In 1859 he published the conclusions that he had drawn from his journey in a book that shocked contemporary society. He was **Charles Darwin**, the book was *The origin of species*. The idea that shocked was the theory of evolution. It forced people to view the relationship between humans and animals, between humans and God, in a new light.
- In 1848 a 30-year-old German journalist published a short book which began: 'A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism'. Its publication went unnoticed at the time. However, *The communist manifesto* was to become the best-known of the writings of **Karl Marx**. As well as having a great political impact during the twentieth century, Marx's ideas

Charles Darwin

(1809-82), one of the great figures of natural science, developed the theory of natural selection to explain how animal life had evolved. His ideas are often summarised by the phrase 'the survival of the fittest', though it was a term he did not invent. His theories, when applied by others to human life, became known as Social Darwinism and were sometimes used to justify racist beliefs.

Karl Marx (1818-83)

was a German journalist and philosopher whose writings have had a profound impact on modern history. Best known for *The communist manifesto* (1848), which he co-authored with Frederick Engels, he also wrote prolifically on such contemporary events as Louis Napoleon's *coup* of 1851. For most of his adult life Marx lived in exile in London.

also had a wider intellectual effect. They made people rethink the place of economics. In a broad sense we are all Marxists now. Today economics is the social science that lies at the heart of government policy and public life.

The 'short nineteenth century' of European history was therefore a time of great importance to the modern world. The period was furthermore perhaps more significant in terms of its impact on ordinary people's lives than the era that preceded it. An incomplete list of important innovations of the time includes electro-magnetism, telephony, cheap newspapers, trade unions, state social insurance, mass education, the breech-loading gun, antiseptics, postal services and photography. Someone born in 1810 who lived until 1890 would have seen a transformation in their lives greater than their parents had experienced, especially if they were male, even if they were female. So what helped to bring about this transformation?

Forces for change

Demographic change

The population of Europe grew very rapidly during the nineteenth century: it is estimated that it more than doubled to 400 million by 1900. In addition, around 21 million Europeans emigrated, mainly to the Americas, during the last 30 years of the century alone. This sustained population increase, which occurred at a rate never experienced before or since, was bound to have great economic and social consequences. In the short term the living conditions of the labouring classes, the vast majority of people, was made worst. Many who had always been poor, struggling to survive, now became paupers, completely dependent upon the charity of others. This economic and social degradation helps explain elements of the revolutions of 1848–49. In the longer term, however, continued economic growth meant that enough job opportunities were provided, either in Europe or overseas, to avoid the many dangers of mass pauperism.

Yet because this demographic growth was concentrated among the poor, the ruling classes feared revolt by the uneducated masses, especially when they were congregated in towns. When this fear became reality in 1848, European governments eventually learnt their lesson and took various steps to prevent it from happening again.

Economic change

One reason why the doubling of Europe's population did not lead to the major problems predicted by **Thomas Malthus** was the ability of many companies to benefit from new technologies. The new railways not only brought

The Reverend **Thomas Malthus** (1766–1834) was the author of *An essay on population* (1798), which asserted that the growth in population would outstrip the growth in food supply; the two would be balanced only when famine, disease and war reduced the number of people. So far his ideas have proved mistaken on a global scale.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-78607-2 - Revolutions and Nationalities: Europe, 1825-90

Peter Browning

Excerpt

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A new railway viaduct and engine at Chantilly, France, photographed in 1855. The picture illustrates the ability of the Second Empire to cross natural obstacles to progress.

supplies of perishable foodstuffs to new towns more quickly than drovers or carters, they also stimulated demand for other industrial products, such as iron and steel. These industries in turn needed more workers to meet the new demand. Distance now ceased to protect isolated economies as they were opened up by railways and steamships. Even Marx, writing in *The communist manifesto*, could not but admire these developments:

The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all the preceding generations together. Subjection of nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalisation of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground – what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labour?

Social change

The economic change of industrialisation brought with it enormous social change. People seeking work moved from the countryside to towns in their hundreds of thousands. They worked in factories that were badly lit, poorly ventilated and dangerous, lived in houses that were overcrowded and walked unsanitary streets. It was several decades before governments did anything to improve these conditions. Meanwhile the workers, forced together, developed a shared sense of interest and identity. They were called the working class. Another term applied to them at the time, especially by Marx, was the proletariat. All they had was their labour.

On the outskirts of town, in larger, more comfortable houses, lived the workers' bosses, the middle class – or, in Marxist terms, the bourgeoisie. They owned the factories and machines, the property and capital. A class-based, industrial society was replacing the old, status-based, agrarian society. Marxists predicted that the conflict between the two classes would become so great that it would result in revolution. Others believed that the different class interests were not as important as common national or material interests and that they could thus be reconciled. Whichever was right, the growth of a class-based society was a major force for change.

Political change

Here the change was less the development of new ideas and more the working out of those which had emerged in the French Revolution. 'Liberty, equality, fraternity' were the watchwords of the French revolutionaries. Napoleonic armies had spread these ideas across most of Europe. The defeat of Napoleon between 1813 and 1815 gave the old order the chance to suppress them, but it could not eradicate them. Such repressive attempts only caused some to support them all the more, however, especially once the memories of the French Revolution began to fade.

Liberty

The concept of liberty usually took two forms: firstly, the freedom to do things, such as speak or write whatever you wanted to say, and, secondly, freedom from arbitrary government, from officials who ordered you around. The two forms were usually combined in demands for **constitutional government**. Such ideas appealed particularly to the new middle classes.

Equality

At this time equality usually meant political equality, although some argued for economic equality as well. Political equality envisaged everyone (or every adult male) having the same political rights. The right to vote was the most obvious form of political equality. It meant democracy, rule by the people rather than by monarchy or aristocracy. The idea alarmed Europe's kings and nobles. Most people were poor and ignorant. Those who considered themselves superior to the poor often thought that they were stupid, too, and therefore incapable of deciding how the country should be governed. Democracy was a dangerous idea for most of the nineteenth century.

Fraternity

The concept of fraternity took one of two forms: national or social. The brotherhood of nationalism was the unity gained from a shared history, usually strengthened by a sense of separation from neighbouring nationalities.

Constitutional government can be defined as government that is limited by a set of rules stating what it can do and to whom it is accountable. It usually includes a statement of the rights of the people that is often written down in a single document, like that in the USA in 1787 which became the model for many European liberals.

One significant statement of nationalism was made in 1807 by Johann Fichte, who wrote in his *Address to the German nation*:

It is only by means of the common characteristic of being German that we can avert the downfall of our nation which is threatened by its fusion with foreign peoples and win back again an individuality that is self-supporting and quite incapable of any dependence upon others.

A later example of nationalist sentiment was contained in Vincenzo Gioberti's *On the civil and moral primacy of Italians*, published in 1843:

What more beautiful image can be fed to an Italian soul than one of his homeland unified, strong, powerful, devoted to God, calm, confident in itself, respected and admired by other peoples? What more radiant future can be imagined for her? What bliss more desirable?

Nationalism took different forms as it appealed to different groups across Europe. Irish nationalism gained support from an essentially agrarian society, in part because of the religious differences between Catholic Ireland and Protestant Britain. In Greece, where the Orthodox Greeks were ruled by the Muslim Turks, religious factors were also predominant in creating feelings of national fraternity. For the Poles, a people without their own nation state, nationalism was primarily a movement of the landed gentry. In Germany it was mainly the middle classes, professional and business people, who were attracted to nationalism. Yet whatever its basis of support, nationalism would prove a very powerful force for change, both during the nineteenth century and later.

The other form of fraternity was socialism. The word was first used during the 1820s, when Robert Owen in England and Charles Fourier in France became critical of the reality of the emerging industrial society and argued that self-governing communities should be established. Within these – at least for Owen – it was envisaged that everyone would be equal, contributing to and benefiting from the work of the commune. Socialism thus combined fraternity with economic equality. Such a way of life soon received another label: communism. Although these early socialists were called Utopian because their ideas were seen as being unrealistic, by the 1840s Marx was developing a form of socialism or communism that he claimed was more scientific. As with nationalism, socialism was to prove a significant force in European history over the next century and beyond. Indeed, some politicians claimed to combine nationalism and socialism, one with devastating effect.

Military change

The 'long nineteenth century' (1789 to 1914) is often regarded as a time of peace. This view distorts the reality. Europeans continued to fight wars. It

was just that – with one brief exception – they managed to avoid waging a war involving more than two states. There was no general European war throughout the entire nineteenth century; Europeans instead fought short wars and brief campaigns. The number of such campaigns reaches a surprisingly high total (see Appendices B and C). This continual warfare encouraged innovation, the new technologies and methods of the industrial economy contributing to some significant changes in how wars were fought. Indeed, it can be argued that the nineteenth century witnessed a military revolution that was as significant as the Industrial Revolution. Four innovations were particularly important:

- Railways replaced horse and foot as the main means of transport. They enabled troops to be brought to the battlefield more quickly. The French were the first to use railways in this way, during the 1859 campaign in northern Italy. Travelling by railway, French forces reached the theatre of war in eleven days instead of the two months that it would previously have taken. The size of armies on the battlefield became larger. The army of 1,200,000 men that was raised by Prussia against France in 1870, for example, was twice the size of the army with which Napoleon had invaded Russia in 1812.
- The breech-loading rifle replaced the front-loading musket. Breech-loading meant that bullets were loaded at the base of the gun, not down the barrel. This allowed soldiers to reload without standing up. They were less vulnerable. They could reload more quickly. A breech-loader fired three shots to the musket's one. Furthermore, the development of the cylindrical bullet made better use of the rifled barrel than did the round musket ball, with the result that enemy soldiers could be killed even when they were up to 1 kilometre away. The same principles were applied to artillery cannon, too. And mass-production techniques ensured that these guns could be produced in huge quantities.
- The development of railways required changes in the organisation and tactics of armies. The rapid movement of large numbers of troops – and their supplies – required careful co-ordination in order to be effective; individual armies could not be given too much freedom. The idea of a general staff, a group of army generals responsible for co-ordinating military campaigns, became important. Members of the general staff did not need to be physically present on the battlefield. In 1866, for example, the Prussian general staff organised the first stages of the war against Austria from Berlin. In 1870, the French general staff failed to co-ordinate its various armies effectively, thereby putting their forces at a great disadvantage against Prussia. The result was a significant shift in the balance of national power in Europe.

- Larger armies equipped with weapons that were both easier to use and more sophisticated required disciplined and better-trained troops. **Conscription**, a feature of the Napoleonic wars, became increasingly essential. Some states began to insist that all adult males had to join the army for a few years to learn military skills and then had to spend some years in the reserves maintaining those skills. During the 1860s Prussia was the first to introduce such reforms and other states soon copied its example. States created national armies that in turn helped to create nation states.

Conscription is the policy that requires some or all adult males, usually aged around 18, to serve in a country's armed forces for several years, even in times of peace. Conscription was first introduced by France after 1789 and was applied by most continental powers during the nineteenth century (Britain, however, preferred to rely on volunteers).

Forces for continuity

It is important to appreciate that features which ensured continuity with the past – and the future – co-existed with forces for change within nineteenth-century Europe. Among such forces for continuity were state governments, the Catholic Church, the land-owning class and memories of the French Revolution.

State governments

The various state governments of Europe all worked to prevent change from overwhelming their countries. They were less concerned with economic change than with political change – that is, a shift in the distribution of power – although even economic developments eventually forced governments to act. In order to weaken the attraction of socialism, for example, they had to reduce the worst effects of industrialisation. Controls on factory conditions had therefore become commonplace by the late nineteenth century. Some states even began to provide welfare benefits for workers, Germany leading the way during the 1880s.

Sometimes governments opposed all political change, as was the case during the years immediately following the defeat of Napoleon. At other times they accepted lesser forms of change in order to avert greater upheavals, as was the case during the 1850s, when some governments introduced limited constitutions with the aim of preventing democratic government. Only once did the governments of Europe seem to lose their nerve, and that was in the spring of 1848, when they backed down in the face of demonstrations in the streets. They soon recovered their confidence, however, withdrawing the concessions that they had made and restoring order. Only rarely did a government encourage change; France under Napoleon III was one such country, and in 1870 both state and emperor paid the price for doing so.

Governments were powerless to prevent political change when it was instigated by other, more powerful governments. Although the small states of Germany did not want to surrender their independence to a united Germany

Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Protestantism are **the three main Christian churches**. 'Catholic' means 'universal', and the Catholic Church in Rome was the first to be established. The Orthodox Church was based in Byzantium (Constantinople, or today's Istanbul) and became the predominant church for most of eastern Europe. The Protestant churches split with Catholicism at the time of the Reformation and became strongest in northern Europe.

The syllabus of errors (1864)

[It is not true that]:

15 Every man is free to embrace and profess the religion he shall believe is true, guided by the light of reason.

18 Protestantism is nothing more than another form of the same true Christian religion, in which it is possible to be equally pleasing to God as in the Catholic Church.

23 The Roman Pontiffs and Ecumenical Councils have exceeded the limits of their power, have usurped the rights of princes and even committed errors in defining matters of faith and morals.

80 The Roman Pontiff can and ought to reconcile himself to, and agree with, progress, liberalism, and civilisation as lately introduced.

from 1866 to 1871, they had to give way to the superior force of Prussia. Similarly, from 1858 to 1860 the small states of Italy had to concede to Piedmont, which was backed by France.

The Catholic Church

Of the **three Christian churches** in Europe it was the Catholic Church that did the most to prevent change. It was a powerful religious force throughout much of southern and central Europe. Until 1860 it was also a considerable political force within Italy because it governed much of the centre of the country. In both respects the Catholic Church was on the side of order. When in the process of losing its power in Italy it declared itself against many forces for change in *The syllabus of errors* of 1864, in which 80 contemporary 'errors' were identified. The Catholic Church was not always against change, however: Pope Pius IX, who introduced *The syllabus of errors*, had supported some liberal reforms on becoming pope (see Chapter 3). Yet for all but a few years the papacy was a powerful force for conservatism.

The land-owning class

Although Europe was beginning to industrialise, it remained predominately agrarian. A small minority of individuals owned the majority of the land in each country, usually in the form of large estates. (France was the only major exception.) This land-owning group, which included the nobility or aristocracy, had a great influence on government, both national and local. It used its position to prevent change or, if change was unavoidable, to ensure that it took account of the interests of the landed class. The emancipation of Russian serfs is a classic example of this process in action. The landowners acted as a brake on change throughout the nineteenth century.

Memories of the French Revolution

It might seem strange to class the French Revolution as a force for continuity, but the stories and images associated with the French Revolution cast a long shadow over the nineteenth century. For the landed and propertied classes the French Revolution was a reminder of how dangerous radical ideas could be. Liberty had become the freedom to execute the king of France; equality had caused peasants to seize private property; fraternity had resulted in the guillotining of those whom the state declared to be the enemies of the people. The people of the French Revolution came to be regarded as a mob – emotional, irrational and dangerous.

The persistence of such images and perceptions did much to strengthen the will of governments against popular demands. Although governments on occasions initially gave in to protests on the streets, they did not do so for