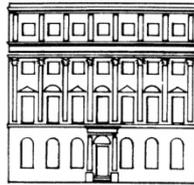


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ARTICLE

THE SHORT AND THE LONG TWENTIETH CENTURY: GERMAN AND EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES

ULRICH HERBERT

Fifteen years ago, a group of historians came together to discuss writing a history of Europe in the twentieth century in the form of coordinated national histories held together by common issues and transnational perspectives. We quickly realized that the relationship between national history and transnational processes is complicated, especially in Europe, and that it raises questions about both the historical processes themselves and the appropriate form for their historiography. Can anything like a specifically European history be written? What would hold it together beyond the topographical? To what extent does this apply to the twentieth century? What lines of interpretation would predominate and how would they manifest themselves?

One of the central questions from the outset was that of periodization. Since periodization is only the temporal expression of patterns of interpretation, it is always about the main categories and emphases of historical analysis. This article will present some of the results of this group's work, which has been published in nine volumes.¹ Despite all efforts to co-ordinate them, the individual volumes differ considerably due to the subject as well as to the authors – and certainly not all the authors would agree with all of my

This is the text of the 2019/20 Gerda Henckel Visiting Professor's inaugural lecture, delivered at the German Historical Institute London on 10 Dec. 2019.

¹ *Europäische Geschichte im 20. Jahrhundert*: Walter L. Bernecker, *Geschichte Spaniens im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 2010); Marie-Janine Calic, *Geschichte Jugoslawiens im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 2010), pub. in English as *A History of Yugoslavia* (West Lafayette, Ind. 2019); Franz-Josef Brüggemeier, *Geschichte Großbritanniens im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 2010); Włodzimierz Borodziej, *Geschichte Polens im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 2010); Hans Woller, *Geschichte*

remarks here. The result, however, is revealing and challenging, albeit, as always, somewhat subjective.

Contemporary history is the history of contemporaries. Their categories and evaluations are necessarily those of the period that contemporary history describes, and it often takes a long time for it to distance itself from them. Contemporary history concentrates on great political events—mostly belligerent or revolutionary—and divides the decades much like how other historians divide centuries: ‘From the Reformation to the Thirty Years War’—the sixteenth century; ‘From the French Revolution to the First World War’—the nineteenth century. Long-term shifts—economic, social, and cultural changes—usually reveal themselves much later because their effects are often imperceptible and not related to a single moment.

The history of the twentieth century in Europe and large parts of the world is marked by three events: the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the Second World War, and the fall of the Soviet empire in 1990–1. The formative significance of these events is beyond doubt. From them emerged the notion of the twentieth century in contrast to the ‘long nineteenth century’, which, from this perspective, lasted until 1914—from the French Revolution to the First World War. This was the bourgeois century, whose order was suddenly destroyed by the gunshots at Sarajevo. What followed was the ‘short century’ of catastrophes, of the world wars, and of the Cold War.

I. *The Great Acceleration*

In the historiography of twentieth-century Europe, the First World War has been seen as dividing two eras, and there are good reasons for regarding it as one of the most important turning-points in the continent’s modern history. From this perspective, it was only with

Italiens im 20. Jahrhundert (Munich, 2010); Dietmar Neutatz, *Träume und Alpträume: Eine Geschichte Russlands im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 2013); Ulrich Herbert, *Geschichte Deutschlands im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 2014), pub. in English as *A History of Twentieth-Century Germany* (Oxford, 2019); Jakob Tanner, *Geschichte der Schweiz im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 2015); Matthias Waechter, *Geschichte Frankreichs im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 2019).

the First World War that the nineteenth century really came to an end.

With the fall of Imperial Germany, the Habsburg monarchy also collapsed. A year earlier, the February revolution had put an end to the rule of the Russian Tsar, and the Ottoman empire was also about to disappear. The end of the war saw the collapse of four monarchically ruled empires, whose chief features were the dominant role of premodern forces, the prominent position of the military, and the oppression of national minorities.

Similarly, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 undoubtedly marked a watershed that would determine the face of the twentieth century almost until its conclusion. At the end of the First World War, a profound political and social dichotomy came about between the Western liberal capitalist states and communist Russia, which meant competition between the powers on a global scale. But that competition also manifested itself as a confrontation within the Western states between radical left-wing labour movements and the liberal, capitalist bourgeoisie: a worldwide antithesis between two powers in the structural form of social antagonism.

These new conditions laid the basis for several decades of dictatorship, civil war and revolution, expulsion and genocide, economic collapse, and political catastrophe—a period that ended in 1945 in Western Europe, but not until 1990 in Eastern Europe, with the collapse of the Soviet Union. In this sense, the First World War was, in the words of the American diplomat George F. Kennan, ‘the great seminal catastrophe of this century’.²

Other arguments, however, which I shall briefly outline, oppose the metaphor of the ‘short twentieth century’. For one thing, the unleashing of the First World War was connected with an attempt by three European military monarchies to revive their already obviously declining power and legitimacy. Since the end of the nineteenth century, the Russian, German, and Austro-Hungarian empires had been hard hit by the onslaught of nationalist movements and liberal forces aiming to achieve democracy and parliamentary rule. The power of these empires was clearly limited and their end could be foreseen. The First World War accelerated their decay, but did not bring it about.

² George F. Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order: Franco-Russian Relations, 1875–1890* (Princeton, 1979), 3.

Moreover, to define the twentieth century as running from 1917 to 1990 – that is, from the beginning to the end of communist rule in Russia – is to see the characteristic feature of the period as the conflict between communist and capitalist societies triggered by the October Revolution. The authoritarian and right-wing extremist regimes, by contrast, and National Socialism in particular, are perceived from this perspective as subordinate to the main contradiction. To see the antagonism between communism and bourgeois rule as the main conflict of the period is to endorse the communist view that fascism and National Socialism are variants of the capitalist order, and thus to suggest that the contradictions between ‘different forms of bourgeois rule’ – that is, between democracy and National Socialism – are of secondary significance. This would compel us to interpret the Nazi regime, its war against the Soviet Union, and the Holocaust as subordinate aspects of history, or as side effects of the conflict between East and West. In Ernst Nolte’s interpretation, this view turns the murder of the Jews into a kind of putative self-defence measure against Bolshevism on the part of the German bourgeoisie, standing for the European bourgeoisie.³

In order to avoid such a disastrously reductive approach, we must seek out the historical situation from which the twentieth-century movements driven by radical ideology originated, and go back to the period before the October Revolution and the First World War. The destabilization of European societies had begun with high industrialization and its associated fundamental social changes at the turn of the century. All the political mass movements that left such an indelible mark on the twentieth century began at that time. With the October Revolution, the conflict between capital and labour became the defining motif of the new century, but it had already taken shape in the final third of the previous one. The formation of the German workers’ movement as a programmatic and organizational response to this conflict was largely complete by the 1890s; the radical variant associated with the names of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht came only ten years later. At this time, anti-liberal and antisemitic radical nationalism also emerged, becoming a powerful movement long before the Bolshevik Revolution.

³ Ernst Nolte, *Der Europäische Bürgerkrieg 1917–1945: Nationalsozialismus und Bolschewismus* (Berlin, 1987), 524.

These processes occurred at different times in different European countries. In the United Kingdom, industrial society had been established since the middle of the nineteenth century, while in eastern central Europe this happened much later, and then mostly in isolated spots. The same was true of Russia. In the western European countries, by contrast, the transition from agrarian to industrial society came between the mid 1880s and 1914.

This largely follows existing interpretations. In his great study of the nineteenth century in Europe, Christopher Bayly stresses that even in Britain, the fundamental changes took place in the years after 1890. Bayly is here arguing against Arno Mayer and Hans-Ulrich Wehler, for example, who insist that the *ancien régime* lasted until 1914; and also against the majority of British historians, who emphasize the longevity of British imperialism and industrial society.⁴

Bayly, on the other hand, like others, such as Lothar Gall and most recently Ian Kershaw, sees the similarities between European countries in terms of economics, social structures, international relations, political discourse, art, and literature.⁵ Everywhere, Bayly writes, the twenty-five years before the First World War were a ‘melting pot of modernity’. Agrarian crisis, new imperialism, international co-operation, new nationalism, the crisis of liberalism: new, dramatic developments of great significance were beginning everywhere, which is why Bayly calls the last chapter of his book ‘The Great Acceleration: c.1890 to 1914’.⁶

This is consistent with the arguments in most of the volumes in our series. The twenty-five years before the First World War are seen as a period of intense change, unprecedented in scale and speed, which affected large sections of European societies directly, and almost all others indirectly, with long-term consequences extending into the last third of the twentieth century.

⁴ Christopher Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden, Mass., 2004); Arno Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War* (New York, 1981); Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte 1849–1914: Von der ‘Deutschen Doppelrevolution’ bis zum Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Munich, 1995).

⁵ Lothar Gall, *Von der ständischen zur bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Munich, 2012); Ian Kershaw, *To Hell and Back: Europe, 1914–1949* (New York, 2015).

⁶ Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World*, 451.

What was new compared with previous decades was that the trends inherent to modern industrial society in the most developed countries were no longer limited to specific groups and a few regions, but transformed the lives of almost all the people in these countries. These transformations all happened within a single generation and were more fundamental than ever before in history. They played out in processes of advanced industrialization, urbanization, and mass migration; the comprehensive mechanization and rationalization of all areas of life; scientization; and, above all, the triumph of the natural sciences. The latter competed with religion in making a comprehensive claim to explain the world. Finally, transformations also took place in mass culture and the mass public.

This dynamic of change was centred on the economically advanced countries of Western and central Europe. Between 1880 and 1914, around 35 to 40 per cent of the rural populations of Continental Europe west of Poland and north of the Balkans (in many regions more than 50 per cent) moved to the cities and formed the urban proletariat, with specific working and living conditions, and increasingly similar lifestyles.

In the eastern and southern countries, agricultural structures were still largely predominant and long-lived. Yet the pull of the modernization processes in Europe's large industrial countries also changed the societies of the periphery for good, especially in many of the sub-regions of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in the Polish regions, in later Czechoslovakia, and in what was to become Yugoslavia.

For the Western and central European regions, and to some extent also the Scandinavian countries, the most striking feature was the extraordinary speed of economic, social, and cultural change in these decades. The flight from the country to the city led to the loss of traditional religious values, a rapid change in gender and generational roles, and the destruction of traditional social hierarchies.

Restless activity, unprecedented politicization, and a myriad of political and social experiments were expressions of the feverish search for answers to new challenges. The political, social, and cultural movements that emerged in the following decades—some extremely radical—were attempts to respond to these challenges, which were perceived both as representing unprecedented progress, and as profound, existential crises within traditional societies. The fact that these new conditions and their inherent tendencies had

never been experienced before, and that no existing traditions or models had yet proved themselves, explains the intensity of these reactions, which can be understood in abstract terms as processes of seeking or learning.

In the political field, two varieties of radical criticism in the confrontation with the 'new world' (to borrow a common contemporary expression for these profound changes) emerged in the years before the First World War. They were based on the view that liberal bourgeois society had failed in the course of the change experienced in recent decades, and that a completely new version would have to be developed.

In abstract terms, the left and, later, its more extreme form, the radical left, drew on the categories of social inequality and internationalism, and declared the class system in general, and the working class in particular, to be the true subject of history. The radical right-wing counter-proposal, on the other hand, was based on the principle of descent and nationalism, and declared the *Volk* ('the people'), not the individual, to be the true subject of history, defining it in relation to culture and heritage.

Both sides believed that they could explain the crisis of bourgeois society with the help of these tools, and that they had recognized the underlying laws of history and nature. These ideological concepts suggested that any problems could be solved quickly if the required conditions were met. Their adherents were convinced that subscribing to such a doctrine of world explanation meant they were in harmony with the laws of nature and history. This gave their political practices their own peculiar dynamic, as well as their characteristic ruthlessness and brutality.

Above all, however, the political mass movements that originated in the industrialized countries also prevailed in the less industrialized regions on the periphery. Henceforth, and often mixed with regionally specific traditions, they shaped the political map on the left as well as on the right. This applied to Russia more than to any other country. In Russia, the dynamic growth in urban centres and the increased number of industrial workers, although relatively few in absolute terms, confronted a vast majority consisting of the traditional and isolated rural population.

Everywhere, however, the First World War was a radicalizing factor. It strengthened the conviction among both the Bolsheviks and

the extreme right in Europe that Western liberal society was coming to an end. But only in those countries that emerged defeated from the war—Germany, Austria, Russia, and Italy (which saw itself as a loser)—did radical, anti-liberal movements turn into brutal, ideological dictatorships. The conclusion that these countries drew from the experience of the war was that the impact of the new, industrialized world had proved so destructive, the only way to deal with it was by totalitarian means and violence.

For them, the world of liberal capitalism, by contrast, seemed weak and outdated, and this impression was reinforced by the world economic crisis. In the 1930s, only a minority of European states held on to democracy and the free market; all others, in some form, developed new right-wing dictatorships based on the Italian and German models.

National Socialism and Bolshevism as regimes, therefore, represented alternatives to the liberal capitalist path to modernity. Rather than being ‘anti-modern’ social formations, they provided alternative blueprints for the organization of the industrial world, in which the liberal triad of free economy, open society, and value-based universalism had been broken down in specific ways. Both should be seen as condensed responses to the dynamic of change since the onset of advanced industrialization at the turn of the century, radicalized by the experiences of the First World War and by confrontations with competing concepts of order.

II. *Climax: Industrial Society at its Peak*

The victory of the anti-Hitler coalition in 1945 put an end to one of these radical alternatives. This resulted in the complete delegitimization of the right-wing extremist counter-proposal, while the other radical alternative to the liberal system, Soviet communism, was considerably boosted by its co-operation with the West, its victorious war against Germany and, above all, by the USSR’s devastating losses. It also seemed to have a great future as a model for ordering the world. The Cold War—political and ideological antagonism on the world stage—formed the matrix of world history for the next forty years. In it, two concepts for ordering the industrial world that had emerged since the turn of the century confronted each other once again.

Paradoxically, as a result of the Second World War and its consequences, industrialism asserted itself as the dominant economic and social force across almost the whole of Europe, despite the devastating destruction wrought over the continent. As early as the 1920s and 1930s, the Soviet model had superimposed the principle of heavy industry and the industrial mass worker on to the traditions of the peasant economy by means of terror and mass violence. This allowed it to win the war against Nazi Germany. The violent transformation of the Soviet Union from an agrarian society into an industrial one within a single generation was henceforth regarded as a model for transforming 'backward' societies, not least in the decolonized countries of the Global South and, above all, in China. However, it also provided the model for the socialist economies in the countries of central and eastern Europe, including the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

In Western countries, too, widespread industrialism was a result of the war. In Nazi Germany during the last years of the war, more than 50 per cent of the workforce were industrial workers, almost half of them foreign forced labourers. The number of industrial workers was similarly high in Britain, and somewhat lower in France, Italy, and the Benelux countries. While this did not change immediately after the war, the number of people working in the primary sector fell rapidly in the following years, and the unskilled or semi-skilled industrial worker became the emblematic social figure.

Many contemporaries, however, were surprised that the liberal option prevailed in the now emerging West. In previous decades, it had been considered outdated in much of Europe and was believed to have been superseded by 'modern' dictatorial systems. Nevertheless, the superior military and economic power of the West, especially of the USA, resulting in its victory, had reactivated the principles of capitalist and democratic liberalism and made it attractive in a way that was inconceivable before the war.

Emergent industrialism in Europe peaked in the first half of the 1960s, when the share of gross national product generated by manufacturing industry lay between 45 and 55 per cent, with the highest levels in East and West Germany because of their considerable need to catch up as a result of war damage. In most western European countries, this orientation towards industry was reflected in a high proportion of unskilled and physical labour, relatively low numbers

of female employees, and the importance of trade unions. The traditional family model was still almost unrivalled in the mid 1960s, and the number of divorces was low. The same applied to education: at the beginning of the 1960s, the proportion of children attending secondary school was only slightly higher than before the war, although there were some differences across European countries. Two-thirds to three-quarters of adolescents received only a basic schooling of eight to nine years: 70 per cent in Italy, 55 per cent in Britain, and just under 60 per cent in Germany and France.

The first counter-tendency, however—one which expanded over the years—was already visible here. The service sector, with its increased demand for qualifications, began to grow, and the number of employees, and of women in employment, increased rapidly and significantly, as did improvements in educational attainment. At the end of the 1970s, the proportion of students with university entrance qualifications in the Federal Republic had risen from less than 7 per cent to almost 20 per cent. It was even higher in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Switzerland, as well as in France and Britain. This reflected the declining importance of unskilled mass labour and the trend towards higher vocational qualifications on a broader scale.

Nevertheless, the 1960s marked the climax of industrialism and of thinking in terms of the categories of industrial progress. Individual use of cars, the development of large motorway networks, and the construction of huge housing estates were expressions of an extraordinarily optimistic vision of the future—one which underpinned the considerable growth figures achieved mainly by industry for decades to come. Nothing marks this optimistic attitude towards progress as clearly as the euphoria about the peaceful use of nuclear energy. This raised hopes, not only among entrepreneurs but especially in workers' parties, that social hardship could, once and for all, come to an end in Europe, and, indeed, the whole world. At a party conference on the nuclear programme of the West German Social Democratic Party (SPD) in 1956, a party official declared: 'But if we succeed in using nuclear energy in a planned and meaningful way, we can increase the wealth of a people, reduce social tensions and even prevent wars.'⁷

⁷ Leo Brandt, *Die 2. industrielle Revolution* (Bonn, 1956), 3–6.

III. *Downfall: The Decade of Discontent*

The shock of the early 1970s, when the previously unchallenged position of industry and industrial mass labour as the basis of European societies began to slip, was all the more severe. The demand for industrial mass goods from the coal and steel industries had largely been satisfied. Oil replaced coal, and countries with lower wage levels were able to use simple technologies to produce goods much more cheaply than Europeans.

In Britain, the process of deindustrialization had already begun in the mid 1960s, and strongly impacted the coal and steel regions of Wales and central England. Coal mines were closed down, the shipbuilding industry was in decline, and the textile industry almost disappeared. With the oil price crisis of 1973–5, Britain's already difficult situation got worse. The 1970s was a decade of permanent crisis, peaking in the 'winter of discontent' of 1978–9, when unemployment figures rose to 1.6 million and the industrial system seemed to have come to an end. Similarly in France, Italy, the Scandinavian countries, and the Federal Republic, growth figures fell, unemployment increased, and the national debt rose.

It was, above all, a crisis of industry, especially heavy industry. In Germany, the number of people employed in industry fell by 1.4 million between 1973 and 1976; this affected mainly semi-skilled and unskilled workers, in some cases almost exclusively. Between 1970 and 1983, gross value added in mining fell by 42 per cent, in shipbuilding by 13 per cent, and in the iron and steel industry by 10 per cent.

In the large industrial regions of Europe, structural change brought about profound social and topographical changes. Whether in the English Midlands, northern France, southern Belgium, the Ruhr area, or the Saarland, abandoned factories, industrial wastelands, and desolate inner cities were to be seen everywhere. Municipalities ran into acute financial difficulty, and working-class districts near abandoned facilities were soon occupied largely by the unemployed and early retirees. Some cities lost more than a third of their population in under fifteen years. Others succeeded in establishing new industries and developing a new dynamic based largely

on the service industries, finance, and science—but this was a slow process. Most of the former coal and steel regions in western Europe and the USA, however, remained pockets of decay for decades.

It was a long time before it became clear that this was not an economic slowdown that would soon be replaced by an upturn, but a fundamental structural change—the beginning of an erosion of existing economic structures. This was the end not of the ‘boom’—that is, the European economic miracle of the post-war period—but of the classic industrial society based on heavy industry that had shaped Europe for more than eighty years.

As a consequence, a process of forced change began in western European societies, and individual governments took different steps to mitigate it. In France and Germany, a reduction in heavy industry, a change in the socio-political model of industrialism, an expansion of the service sector, and the promotion of new technologies were phased in and heavily subsidized by the state. The British government, by contrast, pushed through a reduction in the coal and steel industry, and especially in the mining industry, within a few years and established a model based on high tech and finance. A result of both models, however, was the radical dismantling of heavy industry, the disintegration of the old industrial regions, and the dissolution of the working class.

At the same time, the political, social, and cultural foundations of the older social formation also began to falter. That formation had its origins in the two decades before the turn of the century, and political disputes had concentrated on its form and order in the eight or so decades since. Even the Social Democratic and trade union configuration, which aimed for growth, progress, and Keynesian economic governance, and which had celebrated successes in previous years, was now clearly exhausted.

The break that the 1970s represented in the history of industrial societies becomes even clearer if we look at developments in the socialist states, where the strong focus on heavy industry in the post-war years had brought considerable success, but at the cost of neglecting other sectors of the economy. As early as the 1960s, it became apparent that, contrary to hopes and expectations, the technological gap between the socialist economies and the capitalist economies of the West was widening. Attempts to compensate for this by concentrating on future technologies led to a further deterior-

ration, especially in the consumer goods sector. From the late 1960s, this led to a marked increase in popular dissatisfaction that was particularly noticeable in Poland and Czechoslovakia. The attempt to compensate for these failures by increasing social benefits quickly reached its financial limits, especially since the gigantic military apparatus consumed most of the state's funds. The GDR, as well as Hungary and Poland, tried to plug the gap with loans from the West, to be repaid by increased exports. As a result, the Comecon countries' indebtedness to the West rose to hitherto unprecedented levels. As early as 1980, the economists of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) internally declared the GDR insolvent. From then on, it relied for its existence on loans drip-fed by the Federal Republic.

The structural crisis of heavy industry after the early 1970s hit the socialist states even harder than the Western ones, because their economic model had been geared almost exclusively to heavy industry. They were unable fundamentally to change this model, which was built on the industrial working class—not only economically, but also politically. At least after Leonid Brezhnev's death in 1982, the Soviet Union's economic decline could no longer be concealed, having reached proportions that could no longer be offset by the conventional means used by the Soviet state. The Soviet Union's economy was geared to mining and steel, and it was simply unable to switch to post-heavy industrial, technologically innovative economic forms. This became apparent as a result of Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms, which accelerated the Soviet economy's decline, ending in the collapse of the Soviet Union and its empire.

If we compare developments in the East and West, it becomes clear that the system of industrial order that had developed in the three decades before the First World War came to an end in the 1970s. But while the West, using methods that were sometimes harsh, was able to transform itself to such an extent that the capitalist economy could survive without a heavy industrial base, the Soviet, socialist part of the world was unable to do so. Without classic industry, there were no industrial workers; without industrial workers, there could be no socialism.

A comparison with China is illuminating here. The Chinese communists gave up communism, but retained power and continued their dictatorship on the basis of a technological capitalism that was both dynamic and brutal. The Soviet communists, on the other hand,

saw the decline of communism as a defeat and final collapse, and did not defend their power—or only very timidly. A Soviet Union without communism was unthinkable. The same applied to the GDR. In 1988, an East German official expressed it as follows: ‘What right can a capitalist GDR have to exist alongside a capitalist Federal Republic? None, of course.’⁸

IV. *Pre- or Post-? The Present*

If we regard the decades between 1890 and 1990, with all due caution, as a unit, then the question of how we should classify the period after 1990 remains open. There have been many attempts to find a label: postmodernism, post-industrialization, second modernity, for instance. All of these, however, differentiate themselves from previous industrial modernities and do not develop their own positive content. Other possible labels include the era of globalization, digitalization, or neo-liberalism. Let us leave the labelling to the specialists, the sociologists, for now, and instead look at the late 1980s and early 1990s from today’s perspective to identify what has changed.

The traditional working class, of course, has disappeared and been replaced by large groups forming an individualized precariat, especially in the service sector. The same applies to globalization, although the tendency towards regional dissolution has been apparent since the 1970s, albeit by no means on this scale. This includes transnational and transcontinental mass migration. Another change is the extent of the globally networked finance economy, culminating in the global financial crisis of 2008 that almost led the world into the abyss. There is also the ecological threat, to the extent that it is recognized as a threat to existence. Further, there is the privatization of functions that were previously the purview of the state—in general, the complex referred to by the fuzzy concept of ‘neo-liberalism’. Finally, there is social democracy’s loss of significance and the decline of trade unions in most countries. Here, the political impact of industrial structural change is tangible.

⁸ Otto Reinhold, speaking on Radio DDR, 19 Aug. 1989. Quoted in *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, 34 (1989), 1175.

The most visible changes are probably to be seen in the cultural sphere: the huge reduction in the importance of the traditional family; the greatly altered role attributions of the sexes, especially of women; and the large expansion of education, which already affects most societies. European societies are also much more diverse. This is nowhere more evident than in British cities like London; yet even in Germany, a quarter of the population now has a 'migration background', which includes descendants of families in which one or both parents are migrants. Directly connected with this are the enormous increase in xenophobic movements, the return of nationalism, the rise of radical right-wing groups, and the crisis of the classic democratic parties – not completely unknown thirty or forty years ago, but quite unthinkable on this scale.

All of these developments, which characterize the past thirty years, clearly reveal differences from previous decades, which already seem strange to us. These differences become even clearer when we look at the 1960s. We can scarcely remember the Cold War and the suppressed but constant fear of nuclear war, while the unquestioning exploitation of natural resources that was regarded as normal in those days is almost unimaginable today. That the air was bad and the rivers poisoned was once accepted as a sign of progress, as was the fact that in 1970, 21,000 people died in traffic accidents in the Federal Republic; today the figure is 3,500, with twice as many cars on the roads.

The circumstance that men controlled their wives' money was taken for granted, as was the fact that workers' children did not attend university. The life of a working-class family in French Lorraine, in the coal regions of northern England, or in the Ruhr area was economically better in 1960 than in 1920, but the basic structures were the same: long working hours, low wages, the father as sole breadwinner, the mother working outside the home only in an emergency. Workers led their lives largely in the proletarian milieu, which for generations was organized in social democratic, communist, or Catholic associations, in clear opposition to the middle-class world.

To conclude, looking at the long twentieth century – or, to be more precise, the period from the 1890s to the 1980s – we discover new connections: the links between the emergence of industrialized society and the great ideological dictatorships; the structural connections between fascism and communism as radical answers to the

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challenges of the industrial society; the similarities and differences between Western and socialist societies as two versions of industrialism; the relationship between economic and social structures; and changes in ways of life, traditions, and the relationship between the sexes. We understand why the 1968 movement took place precisely at the end of classical industrial society (and why it referred to the socialist labour movement as the only model for the future). We recognize that the fall of the Soviet empire was one consequence of the downfall of industrialism, and neo-liberalism another. We recognize a world that is still half-familiar, yet has perished. Our present is the time after, and we do not know how it will later be historically classified – as ‘pre-’ or ‘post-’.

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