Impact of Ideologies or "Isms" on Europe

The mindset of Western civilization was challenged in the first half of the nineteenth century by the appearance of new thought systems. Moving beyond the Enlightenment.

men sought to catalog, classify, and categorize their thoughts and beliefs. Several systems of thought acted as agents of change in the nineteenth century, some continuing into the twentieth century to change and redefine the modern world.

Liberalism

The theory of liberalism was the first in the history of Western thought to teach that the individual is a self-sufficient being, whose freedom and well-being are the sole reasons for the existence of society. Liberalism was more closely connected to the spirit and outlook of the Enlightenment than to other "isms" of the early nineteenth century. While the general principles and attitudes associated with liberalism varied considerably from country to country, liberals tended to come from the middle classes or bourgeoisie, and favored increased liberty for their class and, indirectly, for the masses of people, as long as the latter did not in turn ask for so much freedom that they endangered the security of the middle class. Liberalism was reformist and political rather than revolutionary.

Characteristics

Liberals held that individuals were entitled to seek their freedom in the face of arbitrary or tyrannical restrictions imposed upon them. Humans had certain natural rights, and governments should protect them. These rights included the right to own property, freedom of speech, freedom from excessive punishment, freedom of worship, and freedom of assembly.

Liberals further argued that these rights were best guaranteed by a written constitution, with careful definition of the limits to which governmental actions could go. Examples include the American *Declaration of Independence* (1776) and the French *Declaration of Rights of Man* (1789).

Another view of liberalism was presented by individuals who came to be known as the Utilitarians. Their founder, Jeremy Bentham, held the pleasure-pain principle as the key idea – that humans were ordained to avoid pain and to seek pleasure. He equated pleasure with good, pain with evil. The good or bad of any act individual, or group, was found by balancing the pleasure

against pain it caused. Thus, one came to test the utility of any proposed law or institution, that is, "the greatest happiness of the greatest number."

Liberals advocated economic individualism (that is, *laissez-faire* capitalism), heralded by Adam Smith in his 1776 masterpiece, *Wealth of Nations*. They regarded free enterprise as the most productive economy, and the one that allowed for the greatest measure of individual choice.

Economic inequality will exist and is acceptable, liberals held, because it does not detract from the individual's moral dignity, nor does it conflict with equality of opportunity and equality before the law.

Economic liberalism claimed to be based on the realities of a new industrial era. The "classical economists" (Thomas Malthus and David Ricardo) taught that there were inescapable forces at work – competition, the pressure of population growth, the iron law of wages, and the law of supply and demand – in accordance with which economic life must function. It was the duty of government to remove any obstacle to the smooth operation of these natural forces.

On the international level, liberals supported the balance-of-power system and free trade, because each track allowed individual nations the opportunity to determine its own course of action.

Liberals believed in the pluralistic society, as long as it did not block progress. War and revolutionary change, they argued disrupted progress and enlarged the power of government.

Education was an indispensable prerequisite to individual responsibility and self-government. Until later in the century, most liberals felt that the vote and other civic rights depended on one's stake in society and one's abilities to understand public affairs, which boiled down to the need to own property (especially land) and to be educated.

Early Nineteenth Century Advocates of Liberalism

In England, liberals included political economists. Utilitarians, and individuals like Thomas Babington Macaulay and John Stuart Mill; in France, Benjamin Constant Victor Cousin, Jean Baptiste Say, and Alexis de Tocqueville; in Germany, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Friedrich List, Karl von Rotteck, and Karl Theodor Welcker.

Impact

Liberalism contributed to the various revolutionary movements of the early nineteenth century. It found concrete expression in over ten constitutions secured between 1815 and 1848 in states of the German

Confederation. Its power was demonstrated in the reform measures that successive British governments adopted during these same decades. It affected German student organizations and permeated Prussian public life.

Alexis de Tocqueville spoke for many liberals when he warned against the masses' passion for equality, and their willingness to sacrifice political liberty in order to improve their material well-being. These fears were not without foundation. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the masses have often shown themselves willing to trade freedom for authority, order, economic security, and national power. For instance, laws passed in the United States since the 9/11 terrorism attacks reflect the willingness of citizens to sacrifice liberty for security.

Nationalism

The regenerative force of liberal thought in early nineteenth century Europe was revealed in the explosive force of nationalism. Nationalism raised the level of consciousness of people having a common language, common soil, common traditions, a common history, a common culture, and a shared human experience, to seek political unity around an identity of what or who constitutes the nation. The French revolutionary era roused and made militant often dormant nationalist germs not only in conquering France, but also in conquered or threatened Spain. Austria. Germany. Poland, and Russia.

Characteristics

Early nationalist sentiment was romantic, exuberant, and cosmopolitan, as opposed to the more intense, hate-filled nationalism of the latter half of the nineteenth century.

The breakdown of society's traditional loyalties to church, dynasties, and region began during the eighteenth century. Impelled by revolutionary dogma, nationalists advocated new loyalties-that people possessed the supreme power (sovereignty) of the nation and were, therefore, the true nation united by common language, culture, history, and so on. Only then would people develop the sense of pride, tradition, and common purpose that would come to characterize modern nationalism.

Nationalism, conceived as loyalty to one's nation, did not originate in the early nineteenth century. People had been fighting for, and living and dying for, their countries for ages (and still are today). It wasn't until the early nineteenth century that this feeling evolved into something more intense and more demanding than it had been. The focus of the loyalty changed from

dynastic self-interest to individual self-interest as part of a greater collective consciousness.

Impact

Nationalist writers examined the language, literature, and folkways of their people, thereby stimulating nationalist feelings. Emphasizing the history and culture of all European peoples tended to reinforce and glorify national sentiment.

Most early nineteenth-century nationalist leaders adopted the ideas of the German philosopher-historian, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), who is regarded as the father of modern nationalism.

Herder taught that every person is unique and possesses a distinct national character, or *Volksgeist*, which evolved over many centuries: no one culture or person is superior to any other: and all national groups are parts of that greater whole, humanity.

Herder's doctrine of the indestructible *Volksgeist* led to a belief that every nation had the right to become a sovereign state encompassing all members of the same nationality. Since most western states contained people of many different nationalities, and few states contained all the members of anyone nationality, nationalism came to imply, for radicals, the overthrow of almost every existing government.

Evaluation

Because of its inherently revolutionary tenets, nationalism was suppressed by the established authorities. Yet it flourished in Germany, where conservative and reactionary nationalists competed with a more liberal nationalism associated with intellectuals like Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Georg Wilhelm Hegel, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and Leopold von Ranke. In eastern Europe, conservative nationalists stressed the value of their unique customs and folkways, while western nationalists demanded liberal political reforms. The influence of the Italian nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini and the French nationalist Jules Michelet in stimulating nationalist feeling in the West was a key ingredient.

It should be noted that there was always a fundamental conflict between liberalism and nationalism. Liberals were rationalists who demanded objectivity in studying society and history, while nationalists relied on emotion and would do anything to exalt the nation, even subvert individual rights. By the late nineteenth century, nationalism was promoting

competition and warfare between peoples and threatening to douse liberal ideas of reason and freedom.

Socialism

With the chief beneficiary of industrialism being the new middle class, the increasing misery of the working classes disturbed the conscience of concerned liberal thinkers (Bentham and Mill), who proposed a modification of the concept of laissez-faire economics. Other socially aware thinkers, observing the injustice and inefficiencies of capitalistic society, began to define the social question in terms of equality and the means to be followed in order to secure this goal. As cures for the social evils of industrialism were laid out in detail, the emerging dogma came to be called socialism.

Characteristics

Since biblical times, men have worried about social justice, but it was not until the nineteenth century that it possessed a broader intellectual base and a greater popular support than it had enjoyed in the past. The difficulty with the existing system, according to social critics, was that it permitted wealth to be concentrated in the hands of small elite of persons and deprived workers of a just share in what was rightfully theirs. A social mechanism had to be developed so that a just distribution of society's wealth could be attained. The result was a variety of approaches.

The Utopian Socialists (from *Utopia*, Thomas More's ideal of society; see Chapter 2) were the earliest to propose an equitable solution to improve the distribution of society's wealth. While they endorsed the productive capacity of industrialism, they denounced its mismanagement. Society was to be organized as a community rather than a clash of competing, selfish individuals. All the goods a person needed could be produced in one community.

Generally, Utopians advocated some kind of harmonious society, some form of model community, social workshops, or the like, where the ruthless qualities of an individualistic capitalism would disappear.

Utopian ideas were generally regarded as idealistic and visionary, with no practical application. With little popular support from the political establishment or the working classes, the movement failed to produce any substantial solution to the social question. Leading Utopians were Henri de Saint-Simon (1760-1825), Charles Fourier (1772-1837), Robert Owen (1771-1858), and Louis Blanc (1811-1882).

Anarchists rejected industrialism and the dominance of government. Auguste Blanqui (1805-1881) advocated terrorism as a means to end capitalism and the state. Pierre Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865) attacked the principle of private property because it denied justice to the common people.

Christian Socialism began in England circa 1848. Believing that the evils of industrialism would be ended by following Christian principles, the advocates of this doctrine tried to bridge the gap between the antireligious drift of socialism and the need for Christian social justice for workers. The best-known Christian Socialist was the novelist Charles Kingsley (1814-1875), whose writings exposed the social evils of industrialism. Later, in Austria, Christian Socialism took a sinister, racist turn.

"Scientific" Socialism, or Marxism, was the creation of Karl Marx (1818-1883), a German scholar who, with the help of Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), intended to replace utopian hopes and dreams with a brutal, militant blueprint for socialist working-class success. The principal works of this revolutionary school of socialism were *The Communist Manifesto* and *Das Kapital* (Capital).

The theory of dialectical materialism enabled Marx to explain history. By borrowing Hegel's dialectic (discussed earlier), substituting materialism and realism in place of Hegel's idealism, and inverting the methodological process, Marx was able to justify his theoretical conclusions.

Marxism formulated key propositions:

1. The economic interpretation of history, that is, all history has been determined by economic factors (mainly who controls the means of production and distribution).
2. The class struggle, that is, throughout history, there has been a struggle between rich and poor, or exploiters and the exploited.
3. The theory of surplus value, that is, the true value of a product is labor and since the worker receives a small portion of his just labor price, the difference is surplus value. "stolen" from him by the capitalist.
4. Socialism is inevitable, that is, capitalism contains the seeds of its own demise (overproduction, unemployment, and so on): the rich grow richer, the poor poorer, until the gap between classes (proletariat and bourgeoisie) is so great that workers will rise up in revolt and overthrow the bourgeoisie to install a "dictatorship of the proletariat:' As modern capitalism is dismantled, the creation of a classless society guided by the principle

"From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs" will take place.

Evaluation

Ideologies (isms) are interpretations of the world from a particular viewpoint. They are, or imply, programs of action, and thrive where belief in general standards and norms has broken down. The proliferation of thought systems, and movements based on them, after 1815 suggests that the basic division of society at that time was between those who accepted the implications of the intellectual, economic, and political revolutions of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and those who did not. Polarization in ideology was the result.