

## THE “AGE OF PROGRESS”: 1871-1894

In the second half of the nineteenth century, European society was transformed by the Second Industrial Revolution, which brought material prosperity that created a sense of optimism. Many believed that advances in science and technology would cure the problems that had plagued Europe for centuries. Along with the Second Industrial Revolution came the growth of mass society, and with that came mass politics. Many governments became responsive to the ideas of liberalism, including extending political democracy and suffrage to a greater number of adult males. Governments also became more involved in the lives of their citizens; this fostered the concept of national identity, which would play an important role in the following century.

### KEY TERMS

anarchism	home rule	nationalities	Social Democratic Party (Germany)
cartels	<i>Kulturkampf</i>	problem	tariffs
depression	Marxism	Paris Commune	Third Republic
emigration	mass education	plutocracy	tariffs
evolutionary socialism	mass leisure	revisionism	the “Woman Question”
Georges-Eugene Haussmann	mass politics	Second Industrial Revolution	
	mass society		

### KEY CONCEPTS

- Political reforms led to the expansion of political democracy, with voting rights given to men throughout much of Europe. However, some European rulers resisted liberalism in order to maintain their power.
- Economic progress reached new heights during the Second Industrial Revolution. Breakthroughs in science and technology promoted new prosperity and an improved standard of living.
- The Age of Progress led to the emergence of mass society. Europeans witnessed transformations in social structures, gender roles, education, and leisure-time activities.

For a full discussion of the Second Industrial Revolution and the Age of Progress, see *Western Civilization*, 8th and 9th editions, Chapter 23.

## INDUSTRIAL PROSPERITY

### INDUSTRIAL GROWTH AND NEW PRODUCTS

The Second Industrial Revolution saw the invention of products that transformed not only industrial production, but also the world in which people lived. With the introduction of the Bessemer process in the 1860s, steel production increased tremendously. Soon steel was used in a variety of ways that influenced manufacturing.

Transportation was also affected by the increased use of steel as shipping and railroad industries incorporated steel in designing improved products. Advances in electricity were also revolutionary. By the end of the century, European cities enjoyed the benefits and convenience of electricity, which served as the primary source of energy used in lighting, transportation, and factory work.

New technology led to increased industrial production, forcing manufacturers to look for new markets. As overseas markets became saturated, nations turned to consumers at home. A dramatic rise in population, coupled with an increase in national incomes, provided businesses with domestic markets for their goods. Prices on goods declined as businesses incorporated improved technology along with cheaper transportation costs. Through various methods, manufacturers

stimulated consumer desire to own new products. The modern consumer economy was born.

Key to a strong national economy was the handling of foreign competition. Reliance on domestic markets led governments to enact protective tariffs that limited foreign competition. Furthermore, major industries formed cartels to control the perceived chaos associated with unbridled competition. In many countries, the steel, coal, and chemical industries worked together to stabilize the market by eliminating the competition.

By 1870, Germany had surpassed Great Britain as the leading industrial power of Europe. German industrialists were more open to innovation, and the German government encouraged the advancement of science and technology, fields that were vital to industry. British leaders, on the other hand, clung to the Victorian ideal of the amateur scientist. Not all of Europe experienced industrialization. Some nations continued to have agriculturally based economies. However, technological advances encouraged overproduction, which led to falling prices. This situation benefited large farmers at the expense of the smaller farmers, who could not keep up with the advances in science and technology.

## THE SECOND INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND WOMEN

Changes associated with the Second Industrial Revolution created job opportunities for women. Prior to the 1870s, most women who sought employment performed piecework in sweatshops. After 1870, however, white-collar jobs became available to them. As they expanded, industry and government needed secretaries and salesclerks, jobs that were appealing because they allowed women to escape the drudgery of the sweatshops. Prostitution proliferated when rural working-class girls and women who settled in urban areas faced uncertain job prospects.

## **THE WORKING CLASSES**

Trade unions emerged during the first half of the nineteenth century to help unemployed workers. In the second half of that century, industrial workers formed political parties and labor unions. In Germany, the German Social Democratic Party organized around the revolutionary ideals of Karl Marx, and by the eve of World War I, it was the largest party in Germany. Other European nations also had socialist political parties. Forming a loose association called the Second International, socialists all over Europe worked together for international action. Progress was impeded by divisions among groups. Orthodox Marxists remained strictly tied to the ideals of Karl Marx, but evolutionary socialists pursued a policy of revisionism, believing that Marxist thought needed to evolve with the times. Further, socialists had to contend with the rise of nationalism, which was widespread by the end of the nineteenth century. The conflict between the Marxist desire for international cooperation and fervent nationalism would come to a head at the outbreak of World War I, with nationalism becoming the clear choice of the masses.

During this period, radicals drifted away from Marxist socialism to the far more revolutionary anarchist movement. Led by extremists from across Europe, anarchists believed that traditional socialism was ill-suited to confront the capitalist system. They felt that only a movement dedicated to abolishing government could achieve a truly revolutionary society. As the century came to a close, anarchists turned to assassination as a tool to achieve their goals; despite the many prominent figures killed, revolution never materialized.

## **THE BIRTH OF MASS SOCIETY**

Fueled by an increase in population and the overall prosperity of the Second Industrial Revolution, a new mass society emerged after 1870. In the process, social behavior changed dramatically. Once insular and focused only on local matters, Europeans began to take an interest in regional and national affairs.

## **DEMOGRAPHICS**

Europe's population nearly doubled between 1850 and 1910. Initially this increase was the result of a rise in the birth rate, but toward the end of the century, it was caused by a decline in the death rate. Medical breakthroughs played an important role in enhancing overall health, and as Europe

grew more urbanized, gains came through such improvements in public health as safe water supplies and sewage disposal.

Industrial growth during the Second Industrial Revolution could not sustain the increased European population. Many rural poor migrated to urban centers seeking employment, but industrialized regions could accommodate only limited numbers. Those who could not find work looked across the Atlantic to North America, where there was a booming economy hungry for laborers. At the turn of the century, over one million Europeans left Europe annually. Many left to find work, but many – oppressed minorities – left expressly to flee Europe. Russian Jews constituted almost 12 percent of the total emigration to the United States during the early decades of the twentieth century.

The mass exodus of the rural population to Europe's urban centers is one of the most important phenomena of the nineteenth century. Cities across Europe grew at astronomic rates as people sought the opportunities modern industry afforded. Municipal governments redesigned the layouts of cities, tearing down medieval walls and alleyways and replacing them with parks and boulevards. Because working-class housing was overcrowded, unsanitary, and dangerous, municipal governments had to regulate housing, build working-class housing, and improve infrastructure to prevent the spread of disease.

Breakthroughs in transportation influenced all facets of mass society. People no longer had to live next to their places of employment, thus setting the stage for future suburbs. New forms of transportation also gave rise to the new mass leisure as urban residents could now travel to other sections of town (or even abroad) with little effort.

## **SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

The prosperity associated with the Second Industrial Revolution drove change within European society. The landed aristocracy and the powerful industrialists merged to form a new elite. A plutocracy of wealthy businessmen exerted its influence on the lives of most Europeans, including the aristocracy. By the end of the nineteenth century, wealth had shifted from the landed aristocracy to the upper middle class as income from the landed estates continued to decline. This led to an intermingling of the aristocracy and wealthy industrialists, including intermarriage.

The middle class was diverse, consisting of professionals and white-collar workers such as sales representatives and department store clerks. Because this social stratum was so large, the middle class was extremely influential, and its values, including the importance of hard work, dominated European society. Intent on improving their social status, members of the middle class were sticklers for proper social behavior.

Middle-class women in the late nineteenth century exerted great influence over gender relations. The Industrial Revolution gave rise to a clear separation of gender roles: men worked outside the home, leaving women in charge of many domestic matters. Most middleclass households employed

domestic servants, giving middle-class women time to focus on child care or engage in leisure activities. Working-class women often had to work, even after marriage. By the turn of the century, however, wages earned by husbands and grown children allowed many working-class women to follow the same domestic paths as their middle-class counterparts.

Mass education made a big difference in the lives of many Europeans. In the early nineteenth century, education had been mostly for the elite, with wealthy sons going off to universities to study Greek and Latin. As the century progressed, the role of education in European society evolved tremendously. Western governments wanted an educated population to serve the needs of the modern state.

As the franchise was granted to more adult males, it was necessary to make them educated voters. In addition, mass education fed the rise of nationalism by providing a unifying force that promoted national values. Increased literacy rates gave rise to newspapers, which used sensationalism to attract readers. In many European nations, adult illiteracy had been virtually eliminated by the turn of the century.

Economic prosperity, combined with new technology, opened a new era of mass leisure. Workers had the time and money to enjoy activities outside the home. Improved urban transportation allowed people to travel from their neighborhoods to athletic events, amusement parks, and dance halls. Trains ferried people to beaches beyond city limits. Organized athletics emerged toward the end of the nineteenth century, with associations forming to create rules and arrange competition. Professional sports became popular among urbanites who sought new loyalties amid an ever-changing urban environment. Tourism became an industry as more people could afford to travel abroad.

## THE NATIONAL STATE AND MASS POLITICS

### GREAT BRITAIN

During the second half of the nineteenth century, efforts were made to put liberalism into practice. This required expanding political democracy by extending voting rights for men and creating political parties. These efforts produced mass politics as more people were allowed to take part in the political process.

Great Britain led the way. By the 1870s, Britain had a thriving two-party system that encouraged reformers to push for the expansion of suffrage, and by 1884 nearly all adult males had the right to vote.

Women, however, did not receive suffrage rights until the twentieth century. The Redistribution Act made political representation more egalitarian by eliminating the outmoded political districts, and salaries for members of the House of Commons meant those of lesser means could hold public office. The British government's reform attempts did not extend to Ireland. Irish leaders began to call for home rule, but conservatives in Britain believed that granting Ireland any concessions would lead only to violence. Home rule for Ireland would not take place until the end of World War I.

### AP Tip

Strained relations between Ireland and Great Britain date back to the 1600s. The “Irish Question” refers to the dilemma the British government faced in granting the Irish political independence. Foremost was the situation in Ulster, where a significant proportion of the population was Protestant and wished to remain part of Great Britain. This issue would continue to plague Britain throughout the twentieth century.

### FRANCE

France struggled to establish a republican government. After its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, a provisional republican government was established, only to be dismissed by popular vote. Radical republicans responded by creating an independent government in Paris, the Commune, with support from many working-class men and women. The National Assembly refused to relinquish power and attacked the Commune and massacred thousands of Commune supporters. For decades, tensions would persist between the radical working class and the conservative middle class. Although a majority of the National Assembly favored a return to monarchy, their inability to agree on a king led to the solidification of the republic. The Constitution of 1875 marked the beginning of the Third Republic, which would last for the next sixty-five years.

### GERMANY

Like France, the old order in Germany wanted to maintain control of political institutions. Although Germany achieved unification, its society remained extremely divided. The German constitution provided for representation based on universal male suffrage; in reality, most political power remained in the hands of the chancellor and the emperor. As with France, the military had tremendous influence, acting as defender of the monarchy and the aristocracy.

Beginning in 1871, Otto von Bismarck was the most important figure in German politics, until his forced resignation in 1890. As chancellor, Bismarck accepted many liberal reforms in the name of centralization of German laws. He even aligned with liberal reformers to attack the Catholic Church through his program of *Kulturkampf*. By the end of the 1870s, however, Bismarck had abandoned liberal reforms in light of the perceived threat from a growing socialist movement. To attract workers from the socialist party, Bismarck initiated social-welfare legislation such as disability benefits and old-age pensions. His measures failed to diminish public desire for a socialist agenda. The new emperor, William II, replaced Bismarck in 1890, but the gulf between the German government and the socialists continued to widen.

### AUSTRIA-HUNGARY

With the creation of the Dual Monarchy in 1867, Austria instituted a parliamentary system of government. As with Germany, the Austrian emperor, Francis Joseph, ignored parliament and continued to appoint and dismiss his own

ministers. The many nationalities were a growing problem for the empire. Unable to please both the ethnic Germans and the national minorities, Francis Joseph tried to keep the empire together by emphasizing loyalty to the Catholic Church and expanding the imperial bureaucracy.

## **RUSSIA**

In Russia, the mere thought of liberal reform was dismissed as dangerous and harmful to imperial rule. The limited reforms that had been initiated by Alexander II were quickly overhauled after his assassination in 1881. His son, Alexander III, viewed his father's reforms as a mistake and worked to return power to the tsar. Both social reformers and revolutionaries were persecuted, and the powers of the local assemblies curtailed. Alexander initiated a program of Russification that banned all languages except Russian in schools. Alexander's many repressive measures alienated national groups. In 1894, Alexander III was succeeded by his son, Nicholas II, who continued his father's absolutist policies.

### **AP Tip**

One theme that runs throughout Russian history is the repression of dissenters. Dating back to the earliest tsars and continuing through the Soviet era, those who spoke out against the government often faced reprisal. Many dissenters were forced to go underground, where they plotted more radical actions.

As Europe entered the twentieth century, the social dynamics associated with the mass society joined with the politics of the new national states to create a growing sense of nationalism. This combination would sow the seeds for a rivalry among nations that would eventually lead to war.