Francia. Forschungen zur westeuropäischen Geschichte
Herausgegeben vom Deutschen Historischen Institut Paris
(Institut historique allemand)
Band 20/3 (1993)

DOI: 10.11588/fr.1993.3.58444

Rechtshinweis

Bitte beachten Sie, dass das Digitalisat urheberrechtlich geschützt ist. Erlaubt ist aber das Lesen, das Ausdrucken des Textes, das Herunterladen, das Speichern der Daten auf einem eigenen Datenträger soweit die vorgenannten Handlungen ausschließlich zu privaten und nicht-kommerziellen Zwecken erfolgen. Eine darüber hinausgehende unerlaubte Verwendung, Reproduktion oder Weitergabe einzelner Inhalte oder Bilder können sowohl zivil- als auch strafrechtlich verfolgt werden.

Forschungsgeschichte und Methodendiskussion

GORDON D. CLACK

REVOLUTION IN MODERN EUROPE

Revolution has been one of the most conspicuous features of European history in the modern period: to be exact, in the late modern period, inaugurated by the French Revolution[1]. This proposition is so obvious as to be incontrovertible. This essay represents an attempt to formulate some conclusions about this important topic, on the basis of the two hundred years of evidence that we now have before us; to suggest what it is about this period that has made it so susceptible to this form of political activity; to make some more precise demarcation of the epoch to which it characteristically belongs; and to suggest with what group or groups in society it is to be associated.

Our starting point – approaching the subject from a strictly European angle[2] – must inevitably be the French Revolution: the foundation episode of the late modern period, and the exemplar of all the revolutions that were to follow it. The word ›exemplar‹ is not lightly used. Its use is meant to convey that salient features of subsequent revolutions can already be found in the French Revolution[3]. In particular, attention will be drawn to the role of the middle class. For the past century and a half, it has become a commonplace of historical interpretation to associate the French Revolution with the bourgeoisie, as the directing force within it and as its principal beneficiary. It is not the intention of this essay to dispute the essential justice of this interpretation. None the less, some qualification is necessary. Cobban pointed out a generation ago[4] the dangers inherent in the old-fashioned Marxist stereotype of the Revolution as ›the overthrow of feudalism by the bourgeoisie‹ – if by the bourgeoisie is meant the capitalist class of industry and business. The ›revolutionary bourgeoisie‹ of the Third Estate in the Estates General were of the middle or lower bourgeoisie, of the professions, rather than of business; characteristically, they were lawyers – which very often meant administrative officials, men who were qualified for the administrative posts they held by reason of having had a legal training[5]. This quality of belonging to the middle or lower echelons of their class is

1 The same generalization could be applied to the world as a whole, in which case one should modify the periodization slightly and speak of the period inaugurated by the American and French Revolutions.

2 This essay is written from the standpoint of a Europeanist. This is not to say that the rest of the world is being written off as having no connection with the topic; in fact occasional reference will be made to other continents, and similarities or affinities pointed out where appropriate. This is possible because one of the characteristics of the late modern period has been, in many important respects – political, ideological, economic –, the Europeanization or westernization of the globe.

3 More superficially, the French Revolution was their exemplar in that it is safe to say that, without it, none of the others would have occurred.

4 In his The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution, Cambridge, 1964.

5 The social composition of the Revolutionary assemblies is spelt out by COBBAN in ›The myth of the French Revolution‹ (in his Aspects of the French Revolution, London 1968).

crucial[6]. Under the ancien régime, the very rich bourgeoisie – those who had made a fortune from the tax farm, or from finance or banking – could acquire titles and be assimilated to the nobility, to the extent of themselves or their children intermarrying with them; by the later eighteenth century, the very rich of all backgrounds were merging into a single upper class[7]. Purchase could open virtually all doors. This facility did not exist for those who made a more modest living from the law or the other professions. It was the *lesser* bourgeoisie who were discontented, because for them the old cliché of the ancien régime blocking the channels of social advancement for the bourgeoisie did hold true. Their mediocre financial status prevented their rising socially, in a situation in which one needed to be a noble – of whatever provenance – in order to hold high office, in the state or the Church[8]. It is on this particular social group, and its particular problems, that our attention will henceforth be focused, in our discussion of the Revolution and intermittently throughout the rest of this essay; for it seems to us that this group, or groups analogous to it in other historical situations, has a crucial explanatory role to play in accounting for the revolutionary phenomenon in modern history. As an all-embracing term to designate this group, or these groups, over two centuries of historical experience – and in default of a better term –, it will be called the marginal class. The implications of this concept of marginality will be developed in the course of this essay.

The marginal class in pre-Revolutionary France – the stratum of the bourgeoisie that was socially ambitious but financially depressed – wanted advancement for itself, particularly in terms of public life and political influence, but found its course blocked by the entrenched monopolistic position of the nobility and its allies in the emergent plutocracy. In this situation, however, it could not simply admit that it was acting in its own interests, in the pursuit of jobs and influence for itself. In its quarrel with the ancien régime, it needed all the allies it could muster, and hence needed to give its campaign and its arguments the widest possible appeal. It attained this object by taking up the more combative elements in the philosophy of the Enlightenment, which had already set the intellectual tone in France during the previous generation and had diffused an atmosphere of criticism. It espoused the ideology of social justice, of the rights of man, of liberty, equality and fraternity. In this way it made the cause of the poor and dispossessed its own, so that what has subsequently, and very plausibly, been seen by historians as essentially a revolution of the bourgeoisie has been represented by its apologists as a movement of the common people[9]. In pointing this out, it is not intended to allege that the ideals thus adopted were merely a cynical cover for selfish ambition. Individuals might vary in their motives, in the emphasis they gave to different aspects or in the intensity

6 The quality of social mediocrity or marginality can equally be traced in the radical curés in the First Estate.

7 A point made by J. McManners in his essay on France in A. Goodwin (ed.), The European Nobility in the Eighteenth Century, London 1953 (2nd edn. 1967).

8 This characteristic of mediocre economic status giving rise to social and political discontent among a group who might otherwise entertain social ambitions for themselves can also be found among the lesser nobility, or hobereaux, who in the last phase of the ancien régime also voiced grievances. Discontent among the nobility, including this element, led to the *révolte nobiliaire,* the aristocratic ›pre-Revolution‹ that precipitated the Revolution proper. Among the lesser nobility, however, dissatisfaction was of a precisely opposite character to that felt by the middling or lesser bourgeoisie. They resented rich commoners intruding on noble preserves of office-holding. They were thus reactionary, in defending entrenched noble privileges, not revolutionary, in spite of superficial appearances to the contrary in 1787–9.

9 The common people were present, no doubt – it was their numbers and enthusiasm that carried the day on many a revolutionary *journée* – but it is the underlying tendency and ultimate effects of the Revolution that are at issue here. A revolution that enthroned the principle of equality of opportunity – which inevitably meant opportunity for those who could avail themselves of it, viz. the exponents of the middle-class values of education, industry, perseverance and thrift – could not but be in essence a revolution of the middle class.

with which they pursued them. In other words, many of the Revolutionary bourgeois may well have believed their own rhetorical professions[10]. At all events, their espousal of progressive ideology set the tone for the political orientation of the marginal class in modern society, which, it will be argued, has been the revolutionary class. It placed them politically on the Left, as the proponents of change or of movement in opposition to the status quo, and thus made them – depending on the circumstances – more or less revolutionary.

The situation of the marginal class in pre-Revolutionary France – its aspirations, its frustration and its revolutionary response – is best summed up in a saying of Danton: ›The old régime drove us to it [revolution] by giving us a good education without opening any opportunity for our talents[11].‹ This might serve as a text for all our subsequent discussion of revolutionary or quasi-revolutionary movements, groups or even individuals.

That this interpretation of the place and function of the marginal class in the Revolution is valid might seem to be borne out by the result of that movement, if one accepts the admirably clear and concise formulation of Cobban. The Revolution, Cobban says, meant the moving up into the higher echelons of office-holding of the professional bourgeoisie, hitherto held down on the lower rungs[12]. This was the significance of ›the career open to the talents‹. No doubt there was still more to the Revolution than that, but this is the essential point for our present purpose.

One further aspect should be emphasized. That is the role of intellectuals in the revolutionary movement[13]. Indeed, the relation between the two was so close, the overlap between them so great, that they may almost be said to have merged into each other indistinguishably – this too we shall see as a recurrent feature. ›Intellectuals‹ is here used in a somewhat loose sense to mean people of education – enough education to obtain professional qualifications and to discharge the duties of a professional position – and, crucially, people who were involved with ideas, who were aware of public issues and public controversies, and who had what they believed was an informed opinion and contribution to make. Such considerations would, of course, impel them the more strongly towards a politicized stance, since they felt that their legitimate aspiration of political participation was being denied by the ancien régime. The result was to create an oppositional intellectual movement that, as mentioned, fastened on the ideology of the Enlightenment. Intellectuals were the marginal class par excellence: educated, intensely involved with ideas and words and able to wield and manipulate them, yet whose social and financial status was uncertain and precarious – especially in the atmosphere of the clumsy, inefficient yet no doubt sufficiently irksome ancien régime. They were those who, by reason of their position, were at once most likely to become radical and best able to undertake agitation. It was they who prepared the Revolution, in what was perhaps the most crucial area of all, the intellectual – by undermining the values and the self-confidence of the ancien régime[14].

10 They might not have functioned as well if they had not. Even if ideals or beliefs are often objectively a cloak for self-interest, to suppose that therefore their proponents do not subjectively believe in them is to fall into the Namierite error.

11 Quoted in J. M. WALLACE-HADRILL and J. MCMANNERS (eds.), France: Government and Society, London 1957, p. 182; E. N. WILLIAMS, The Ancien Régime in Europe, London 1970, p. 197.

12 See his ›The Myth of the French Revolution‹ (see n. 5).

13 Intellectuals in a narrow or strictly professional sense were not prominent in the Estates General, where there were five professors and teachers (lay and clerical) and four literary men and scientists. In the Convention, however, the numbers in these categories went up sharply, to 33 and 19 respectively (the latter comprising 14 writers or journalists, two artists, one scientist, and two persons connected with the stage). COBBAN (see n. 5). It will be seen, however, that ›intellectuals‹ is used in this essay in a broader sense that would embrace a much larger number.

14 A generation later, Metternich opined that the Revolution was prepared on the intellectual front long before it actually broke out. See his ›Confession of faith‹ to Alexander I (1820) in M. WALKER (ed.),

From this discussion of some aspects of the French Revolution, it will be obvious that a pivotal role is being attributed to what has been termed the marginal class. In the subsequent course of this essay, the hypothesis will be developed that a similar significance can be ascribed to the same or to an analogous group in ›revolutionary‹ situations in other societies. In the fight, initiated by the French Revolution, against the ancien régime and its social restrictions throughout Europe in the succeeding century, the quality of marginality can repeatedly be identified as crucial among the boldest and most active opponents of the status quo. It goes without saying that the nobility would be found aligned on the side of the ancien régime, for they were its principal beneficiaries – and they had the warning of the French Revolution always before them. The very rich of all classes, one can aver, tend to be conservative in all situations – for they have so much to defend, or to lose –, even if some of them may tentatively have harboured moderate constitutionalist notions – stopping well short, however, of radicalism or upheaval. The poor, whether of town or country, in the pre-industrial society with which we are still dealing, were too submerged in the toil of their daily lives, and too lacking in education, to have time or inclination for political agitation; besides, their mental formation was still largely in the hands of that highly conservative institution, the Church. So we are left with the middling and lower members of the middle classes, as the group the mediocrity of whose social position would give them an incentive to try to improve it, and who at the same time had the intelligence, the education and the organizational know-how to be able to do something to this end – in a word, political agitation. An attempt will be made to see how far forward in time this group can realistically be postulated as the revolutionary or potentially revolutionary element in modern European history.

Before leaving the period of the French Revolution, however, and moving on to the nineteenth century, it is worth while glancing at the contemporaries of the Revolution, its disciples and imitators in other contries, the so-called foreign ›Jacobins‹. Briefly, it is suggested that their social composition will be found to be similar to that of the French revolutionaries. Their fortunes were very different, because the situation of their countries was widely different, from that of the French – in their homelands, the ancien régime was still overwhelmingly strong, the middle class correspondingly weak, and that accounts for their failure[15]. None the less, the revealing feature of the appeal of radical ideas and radical actions to an intelligent and restive element is unmistakably present[16].

The Napoleonic period was a period of repression, in France and other countries – as in the Habsburg Monarchy after the Jacobin trials. Napoleon conserved the essential gains of the Revolution – principally ›the career open to the talents‹, as he himself avowed – but determined that there should be no further progress along the radical path; for that reason he regarded the French Jacobins as his deadliest enemies, and treated them accordingly. In the Restoration

Metternich's Europe, London 1968, pp. 116–17. On the subversive oppositional literature of the late ancien régime, see also J. Meyer, Noblesses et pouvoirs dans l'Europe de l'Ancien Régime, Paris 1973, pp. 106ff.

15 Some of them surfaced later as collaborators with the French during the French occupation of their countries.

16 The Austrian and Hungarian Jacobins can be taken as a case in point. They represented that enlightened element in the society of the Habsburg Monarchy that had first been stimulated by the radical policies of Joseph II, and then repelled by his despotism. In their tantalizing situation, the success of the French Revolution must have appeared as a beacon of hope – precisely at the time when the Revolution provoked a period of thoroughgoing reaction on the part of the ancien régime. This is what led to the Jacobin ›conspiracy‹ and the subsequent trials (1794). The Austrian and Hungarian Jacobins were mostly intellectuals and army officers. Ignácz Joseph von Martinovics was professor of physics at the university of Lemberg till 1790. Franz Hebenstreit was a lieutenant of the Vienna garrison. See E. Wangermann, From Joseph II to the Jacobin Trials, London 1959.

period, after his fall, the revolutionary movement in Europe blossomed in its classic form. This was the epoch of the recurrent revolutionary outbreaks that marked those years, in waves that swept over most of Europe, in 1820–21, 1830–31 and above all, and most famously, in 1848; the epoch of secret societies, of the Carbonari and the Decembrists, of insurrections and barricades, of Mazzini and Blanqui. If any period of European history can aptly be called the ›age of revolution‹, it is surely this one – not least because the *image* of revolution, in terms of popular uprising, the people in arms, barricades, red flags, etc., was imprinted on the public consciousness at this time, to such an extent that it is hardly yet extinct[17]. At the same time, behind and overshadowing the events of this period was the French Revolution of 1789, to whose example the revolutionaries of the Restoration, and not just in France, were very consciously indebted; so that it is legitimate to link the eighteenth-century model or prototype with its imitations or successors in the first half of the nineteenth, in one connected ›age of revolution‹, broken only by the period of temporarily successful counterrevolution in the epoch of Napoleon[18]. The popular element in the numerous uprisings is of course undeniable, and was indeed crucial: this was part of the legacy of the Revolution of 1789, that it was the strong arm of the inflamed people that would bring down an unpopular regime. Here again, however, as with the French Revolution, a distinction has to be made between leaders and followers. Any insurrection, to have any hope of success, needed direction by an educated minority that had some sense of where things were going, and what might be the outcome in terms of positive political changes. It is this element of leaders or directors on whom it is proposed to focus attention, because it is they who may most justly be called revolutionaries – having by this time a conception of revolution not merely as a spontaneous outburst, but as a regular instrument of political change that might be deliberately applied.

In 1820 Metternich described the revolutionaries with whom he was contending as ›paid State officials, men of letters, lawyers, and the individuals charged with public education‹[19]. This description is extremely interesting, because it could hardly point the finger more directly at precisely those middle-class elements that we have been suggesting were crucially implicated in revolutionary endeavours from 1789 onwards. Metternich's words seem to foreshadow the composition of the Frankfurt Parliament, which met in 1848 to seek to put paid to a generation of work by him in Germany – that assembly with its 157 civil servants (›paid State officials‹), 36 writers and journalists (›men of letters‹), 130 lawyers (not to mention 119 judges and public prosecutors), and 123 university or school teachers (›the individuals charged with public education‹), out of a total body of 799[20].

There is one group missing from Metternich's analysis, whose inclusion, however, would by no means be incompatible with it: army officers[21]. This omission is rectified by Irene Collins in her Revolutionaries in Europe 1815–1848[22], which provides a comprehensive account of the revolutionary elements of the Restoration. The central importance of army officers in revolutionary action is characteristic of this period, as of no other in the mainstream

17 The classic visual representation of the revolutionary phenomenon – and the visual or pictorial element is all-important in the context, because it conveys a memorable image – is Delacroix's painting Liberty leading the people, 28 July 1830, often reproduced.

18 E. J. Hobsbawm's title The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789–1848, London 1962, conveys this idea exactly.

19 In his ›Confession of Faith‹, cited above (see n. 14).

20 Details from E. Eyck, The Frankfurt Parliament 1848–1849, London 1968, p. 95.

21 Metternich's omission of them may be due to the fact that, when he wrote, the era of military pronunciamentos by revolutionary officers was only just beginning – the first was Riego's in Spain in 1820 – and consequently this form of revolutionary action, uncharacteristic of mainstream European political history, was not yet as conspicuous as it afterwards temporarily became.

22 Historical Association pamphlet, London, 1974; rev. edn. 1984.

of European history[23]. The causes of their discontent are not far to seek. After a quarter of a century of almost incessant wars, a prolonged period of peace ensued, in which the great powers of the Congress of Vienna determined not to go to war again – there was no war between any of them till 1854. The inevitable result was that, in spite of short local wars or campaigns, there was a state of chronic underemployment among army officers. Moreover, their chances of promotion were blocked by the coming of peace, whereas, during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, the frequent deaths of senior officers had opened the avenues of promotion for their subordinates. These restricted prospects, with restricted remuneration, would have been felt particularly acutely by career soldiers, i.e. those who were in the army for a living – as opposed to rich noble amateurs who officered fashionable regiments. We are back among the marginal middle class of hard-pressed professional men. Probably also some account should be taken of the oppressive sense of anticlimax that followed the Napoleonic episode – the famous *mal du siècle* of the early nineteenth century. There is also the simple fact that, in a period of prolonged peace, with only minor military operations, armies do not need to be as large, and consequently not as many officers are needed – which must have presented many with the prospect of living on half pay. It is to be supposed that the officer corps in all countries had become much inflated during the Napoleonic wars, to officer the enlarged armies – and then suddenly the armies shrank, and no similar large-scale and prolonged wars occurred for forty years, indeed – if prolongation is looked for – for a century. For these reasons discontent seems to have been widespread among officers, who were often prominent, indeed to be found playing an initiating role, in the revolutionary outbreaks of the 1820s[24].

Still more central to the radical manifestations of the Restoration – from the Wartburg festival in 1817 to 1848 itself – were university students and recent graduates. Metternich mentioned among his radical enemies ›the individuals charged with public education‹: he cannot have overlooked the fact that these individuals had an audience for their (to his mind) subversive ideas in the students who sat at their feet, and indeed he took cognizance of the German universities as the nursery of radical ideas in the Karlsbad Decrees, which he inspired. The connection between students and political radicalism was thus established that has gone on to become one of the most familiar features of the modern world, in all continents. Here, it is suggested, can be found one of the most essential elements in the ›marginal class‹ that we have been discussing, and one that provides a link, through many diverse circumstances and many different countries, between the radicals of the classic ›age of revolution‹ and those of more recent times – one that establishes the essential unity of the revolutionary phenomenon.

Apart from the influence of ideas in their own right, the students of the Restoration found

23 The same might be said of the prevalence of secret societies, usually in a masonic guise, which was not unconnected with the heavy representation of military men in revolutionary activities.

24 The situation may not have been absolutely unprecedented. It has been mentioned that some of the Austrian ›Jacobins‹ were officers. In their case, lack of employment cannot have been the trouble: war (with revolutionary France!) broke out in 1792, and before that there had been Joseph II's Turkish war. However, these things need not have obviated professional grievances. The ›Jacobins‹ appear to have been of the rank of captain or below; Hebenstreit was not a noble. It may not be fanciful to postulate resentment against higher ranks being bagged by rich court nobles. – It can of course be argued that a period of prolonged peace, with an absence of long-drawn-out wars in Europe, obtained after 1871, and there was no recurrence of the phenomenon of military sedition, even in Russia, where autocracy continued unabated, having been relaxed elsewhere. However, even if one discounts the importance of the colonial wars of some powers, there was not necessarily a lack of employment for officers, albeit in peacetime. The period between 1871 and the First World War was the time when the policy of universal military conscription took hold on all the Continental powers: there was work for officers here, in the mass conscript armies. In the period after 1815, it would have been the opposite phenomenon, of military contraction, that would have occasioned professional demoralization and *mal du siècle*.

unfavourable features in their situation that predisposed them to be discontented and hence to be on the side of change. In many cases, their prospects were indifferent. Without wealth or noble connections, the best in terms of employment that many of them could hope for after graduation was a minor administrative post in one of the German petty states, where they were therefore destined to spend their career vegetating[25]. It is not to be wondered at that in these circumstances the liberal message of national unification – and hence the possibility of a public career on a much larger stage – and parliamentary government – holding out to all the possibility of rising to the limit of one's abilities through recommending oneself to one's fellow citizens by one's political skills – should have had a powerful appeal.

For some students there may have lain in wait the spectre of no employment at all after graduation. Whether the number of students in Europe in this period actually rose, beyond the number of suitable employment vacancies available to receive them after they had finished their studies, is something on which it is surprisingly difficult to find out concrete information. One clue may be found in the number of universities founded in Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century[26]: it would seem, on the face of it, undeniable that an expansion occurred here. It should be borne in mind, however, that during the period of the French Revolution, some universities had foundered as a result of the revolutionary attack on ancien-régime corporations – had suffered abolition or expropriation –, and it is not clear whether the new foundations did more than repair the losses. Moreover, some of the new creations were in fact refoundations of institutions of considerably earlier date. Another complication is that an increase in the number of student places could occur even if there was no net increase in the number of universities, through the expansion of existing institutions. However, the hypothesis is here propounded that, in one way or another, there was an expansion in the number of students in this period. In that case, graduate unemployment, or the prospect of it, could have been a problem that embittered the lives of this generation of newly educated people, *if* the number of jobs, in public administration or in the professions, did not increase in the same proportion. Here might be found a well of social discontent that acted as a motor of the political unrest of the period, and that would help to account for the prominent participation of students – over and above the influence of ideas. One of the purposes of this essay is to suggest links in the revolutionary movement over time, between the eighteenth and the twentieth century. In what has just been said about the universities of the Restoration it is easy to catch a premonitory glimpse of the situation in British higher education in the 1960s. At all events, for the purposes of our thesis it hardly needs underlining that no better representative than students could be found of the educated class, of uncertain status and prospects, to whom an important political role is being attributed[27].

25 A point made by L. C. B. SEAMAN in From Vienna to Versailles, London 1955, chap. 6, ›1815–1848: The Age of Frustration‹.

26 Universities founded in this period were: Dorpat (Tartu) (1802), Vilnius (1802), Kazan (1804), Kharkov (1804), Berlin (1810), Breslau (1811), Oslo (1811), Ghent (1815), Liège (1815), Lemberg (Lvov) (1816), Louvain (1817), Bonn (1818), Warsaw (1818), St. Petersburg (1819), Munich (1826), Helsinki (1828), Zürich (1833), Berne (1834), Brussels (1834), Kiev (1835), Athens (1837). Dorpat, Vilnius, Ghent, Liège, Lemberg, Louvain, Bonn, Munich and Helsinki were refoundations, revivals, replacements for older universities, or transfers from another site. Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1970 edn, art. university; Appendix X, ›List of European universities founded prior to 1900‹, in W. L. LANGER (ed.), An Encyclopedia of World History, 5th edn. London 1972, pp. 1372–3; The World of Learning, 40th edn. London 1990. Reference works are not always consistent with one another in the data they give, especially dates.

27 It seems incontrovertible that an expansion of student numbers did occur over the nineteenth century as a whole, as a result of the great expansion of public education, itself due to the greatly increased involvement of government in the field. One may take the case of Russia: there were 1700 university students in 1825, 4600 in 1848, 29000 in the 1890s (including students in other institutions of higher education). To see where these students were being recruited, one may note that there were

There is one other social group that needs to be singled out in our account of the revolutionary elements of the Restoration. The French Revolution had left as part of its legacy a tradition of radical political commitment among the petty bourgeoisie in Paris and other French cities. These people were artisans and shopkeepers, men of some small property and of economic and personal independence. Crucially, they were also of some education, enough to be politically aware, nourishing their interest on the reading of newspapers in cafés, to which they were habituated, and at home with political discussion. They stood for the interests of the small man against the rich, and were robust in the defence of what they conceived to be their interests. They formed a sizable section of the common people that had a degree of political consciousness found nowhere else, perhaps, in Europe among their class: this was an effect of the Great Revolution, in which they had figured under the name of sans-culottes. They constituted an intensely political community, loquacious, excitable and disputatious. Perhaps the nearest parallel in present-day European societies is to be found among the Greeks. These successors of the sans-culottes were a volatile element in French political culture, especially in Paris, where they were most influential and where, as a result of the Revolution and centralization, everything decisive in French politics happened. Just as in the Revolution of 1789, they are to be found as the elite element among the masses in subsequent political confrontations with government, those who could be relied on to give a lead and to act with political acumen, dash and decision. It is not far-fetched to assimilate these people, in at least some respects, to the ›marginal‹ class we have been discussing. They were not ›proletarian‹, they stood on the borders of social classes, neither rich nor poor, they were educated enough to be political – and they were marginal also in that their betwixt-and-between social position was surely an uneasy one, and they were threatened by the imminent advance of modern large-scale industry and big business.

When they were faced by the conservative governments of France in the period of the constitutional monarchy, between 1815 and 1848, their role could sometimes be decisive. In the tradition of 1789, they were commonly looking for a confrontation, and in 1830 and again in 1848 they were given their chance – on both occasions, in differing degrees, as a result of the actions of the government itself. In 1848 the role of the National Guard, the middle-class militia in which they, like other property-owners, were represented, was crucial, in that it was unwilling to defend the regime on 23 February against the onset of revolution[28]. This outcome is to be associated with the political disaffection of the petite bourgeoisie as a result of the refusal of the July Monarchy to extend the franchise[29].

In seeking to account, in social terms, for the political unrest of the Restoration in Europe, we must not omit mention of an element that can hardly be called a social class, whose numbers were minuscule yet whose influence was out of proportion to its numbers (as was indeed its intention). For this period saw the emergence of the professional revolutionary – the man who made a career of seeking to foment revolution, by means of propaganda, agitation

7700 students in secondary schools in 1825, 18 900 in 1848, 224 000 in the 1890s (with a further great expansion up to the First World War). M. T. Florinsky, Russia: A Short History, 2nd edn. London 1969, pp. 267, 286, 315, 355. These increased numbers are of course far greater than would be accounted for by an increase merely proportionate to the increase in population. They are the more significant in that the intelligentsia was the recruiting ground for the revolutionary movement from the reign of Alexander II onwards. If, as will be argued, there was a falling off in specifically revolutionary activity in western and central Europe after 1871, in Russia after that date it flourished. It seems reasonable to regard it as symptomatic of frustration at the lack of the political opportunities of a free society – in short, the classic post-1815 revolutionary syndrome –, because in Russia, unlike other countries, there was still an autocracy in place to contend with. The above figures explain where the revolutionary and terrorist movement drew its strength from.

28 See R. Price, The French Second Republic, London 1972, pp. 92–3.

29 J. Droz, Europe between Revolutions 1815–1848, London 1967, p. 126.

and organization, who aspired to seize the initiative in a revolutionary situation once it had developed, and whose activities, given the autocratic atmosphere of the Restoration, were necessarily clandestine and conspiratorial. Professional revolutionaries were perhaps not as numerous, as widespread or as influential as was supposed in the more alarmist fantasies of the governments of the Restoration and their police, but their importance cannot be discounted altogether: they were part and parcel of the political culture of the period. They belong squarely to the revolutionary tradition as it developed *after* the French Revolution. Their exemplar was Babeuf, whose ›Conspiracy of the Equals‹ to overthrow the French government was detected in 1796 and who was consequently executed. Babeuf epitomizes many of the ›marginal‹ features that we have been describing, with the combination of marginal socioeconomic status – the son of a déclassé *gabelou*, and without formal education, he graduated from being a servant to being a professional exploiter of feudal rights *(commissaire à terrier)* – and the fact of being an intellectual (for he was a journalist, and was able to frame a programme for how the communistic society he envisaged should be organized). He was also, as regards the means by which he intended to realize his aims, a conspirator. This was the hallmark of the revolutionary movement after 1795, when the failure of the *journées* of Germinal and Prairial and the disarming of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine seemed to mark the end of the mass popular uprising as a viable revolutionary scenario, and inspired recourse to conspiracy and attempted coup d'état by a hard core of dedicated militants in the face of repression by a victorious reactionary regime. Babeuf, then, though he failed in practice, was the originator of this new model of revolutionary action, but it did not get into its stride till the Restoration, when Babeuf's confederate and historian, or myth-maker, Buonarroti, emerged from Napoleonic custody to become its presiding genius. It was Buonarroti who established those norms of ideological orientation, of lifestyle and of activity that have enabled him to be called ›the first professional revolutionist‹[30]. His most important disciple was Blanqui, who, during almost half a century, carried forward his techniques of the organization of a revolutionary elite or vanguard in the form of a secret society, and of insurrection and coup d'état as the means of obtaining power. It is unlikely that any of the revolutions of 1848 were directly provoked by the practitioners of the tradition of Babeuf in the various countries, but in some cases they might not have got as far as they did if there had not been men on hand who knew how to exploit the situation, and if the idea of insurrection had not been sedulously kept alive. Nor should the influence of *buonarrotismo* be overlooked on that more famous, and more reputable, revolutionary of the period, Mazzini. Though he was the rival of Buonarroti and the enemy of his Francocentric tendency, and in theory eschewed conspiracy in favour of publicity, in practice his organizational methods and his conception of gaining power had much in common with that tradition. It may be added, to bring these men into relation with the overall social thesis that we are expounding, that Buonarroti was by birth an Italian nobleman, though déraciné by expatriation and déclassé by imprisonment and poverty; while Blanqui and Mazzini were both of good middle-class origin.

The revolutions of 1848 were the apogee of the revolutionary elements we have been describing. It is of course undeniable that they did not make the revolutions alone: that there was a popular element in the disturbances, the crowds of angry men in the streets who toppled, or at least shook, the existing governments – though we would deny them an initiating role, or even one directed to conscious political ends: that role belonged to the radical minority, who already knew what they wanted from the situation. None the less, the popular participation in the revolutions of 1848 is unmistakable, and needs to be accounted for, if we are to maintain the distinction between the crowd and the consciously revolutionary minority, between those who were waiting for a lead and those who gave it. Here, the

30 Title of the biographical study of Buonarroti by E. L. Eisenstein (Cambridge, Mass. 1959).

economic circumstances of Europe in the late 1840s no doubt need to be taken into account. If we are to have a correct understanding of *popular* revolution in 1848, however, we must analyze carefully the economic situation that gave rise to discontent. There was undoubtedly a depression that affected industry; but the greater part of the continent at that time was still agrarian, though there was a developing industrial sector; therefore the depression in agriculture that began in 1846 was quantitatively of greater importance – was crucial, indeed, in triggering the industrial depression. The point that is being made is that the European economic crisis of the late 1840s by no stretch of the imagination took place in an industrial society. The revolutions of 1848 were revolutions of the cities, and some of these cities contained an element of modern industry, but the events in the cities took place against a backdrop of an immense agricultural hinterland, and even such industry as there was was recent, precocious, and did not support a mature working class. The most one can say is that some cities of Continental Europe were industrializing, but these were not necessarily the ones where revolution occurred in 1848.

The point needs elaboration. European society in 1848 bears the hallmark, not of an industrial, but of an underindustrialized society, whose economic problems were symptomatic not of the presence of industry, but of its absence. Like a Third World country today, it faced the problems posed by a fast-growing population[31], against the background of an inefficient traditional agriculture (carried on by a workforce that in eastern Europe was still largely tied to the land) that could ill support it, and with an incipient industrial sector that was by no means large enough to provide employment for all the burgeoning masses, though the cities provided a magnet for an influx of countryfolk, with or without the hope of work[32]. The inevitable results would be unemployment, or underemployment, and social discontent and instability, especially among the hordes of impoverished, uprooted, disoriented rural immigrants in the cities. The economic depression of the late 1840s would be the last straw. All these things would provide a fertile field for political agitators – chiefly in the cities, which were within the range of their activity: as has been said already, it was in the cities that revolution occurred. It will be noted that it is the economic *immaturity* of Continental Europe in 1848, in terms of industrialization and modernization, that is being emphasized. Among the seats of revolution in that year, Rome and Naples were not industrial towns – in the sense of towns characterized by modern machine-powered industry in large factories –, Paris, Vienna and Berlin only marginally so[33]. Far from being a prototypical ›revolution of the proletariat‹,

31 The dramatic increase in European population in the nineteenth century should not be overlooked as, in some respects, the motor of the history of the century. The average annual rate of increase between 1800 and 1850 was ten per thousand, and from 1850 to 1900 9.6 per thousand. M. R. REINHARD and A. ARMENGAUD, Histoire générale de la population mondiale, Paris 1961, pp. 229, 237. By way of comparison, in the early 1980s the annual rate of increase in Europe (excluding the USSR) was slightly more than three per thousand.

32 The mushroom growth of some European cities in the first half of the nineteenth century needs to be commented on. For example, the population of Vienna increased by 45 per cent between 1827 and 1847. C. A. MACARTNEY, The Habsburg Empire 1790–1918, London 1968, p. 276 n. One can easily imagine the overcrowding and slums that would result – problems that could only be compounded by economic depression. The volatile nature of big European cities in the mid-nineteenth century hardly needs further explanation.

33 The population of Berlin had more than doubled in the preceding generation. One quarter of the population was engaged in industry, i.e. was a working class in the modern sense (W. CARR, A History of Germany 1815–1945, London 1969, p. 42). In contrast, the archaic economic character of a city like Rome is striking. The economic policy, if such it can be called, of the papal government was positively reactionary. The French, during the brief period that followed the annexation of Rome to the French Empire in 1809, had got as far as abolishing guilds. Pius IX, however, after the revolution of 1848–9, in 1852 restored the corporate organization of economic life in the form of the *Università*. E. E. Y. HALES, Pio nono, London 1954, p. 162. The papal government in the Restoration period forbade the

the revolutions of 1848 seem to us rather to reflect a *crise des subsistances*, a food crisis, of the traditional (ancien-régime) type – not unlike that which had preceded the French Revolution of 1789. In that case they were a malady of a *pre-industrial* society. It hardly needs pointing out that the only genuinely industrial country in Europe in 1848, Great Britain, did not experience revolution in that year (the great Chartist demonstration does not qualify for the name). The *crise des subsistances* of the late 1840s was the last of the traditional type, before, after mid-century, free trade, the extension of railways as the means of transport, and eventually the opening up of new sources of supply made food crises a thing of the past.

The point can be developed, with the aid of a historical parallel. Revolution was not unprecedented in some of the European cities we have been discussing, for all their archaic economic character – and it is not only Paris that is being alluded to. If we look further back into the early modern period, the spectacle of the *émeutes* of the mid-seventeenth century, such as Masaniello's revolt in Naples, is surely suggestive. It is surprising that a parallel seems not to have been drawn between the mid-seventeenth-century revolts and the French Revolution and the revolutions of 1848 – for all, it is suggested, took place in what were essentially (in the mid-seventeenth century wholly) pre-industrial societies. The parallel with the 1848 revolutions, therefore, is to be found not so much in twentieth-century revolutions, which we shall go on to discuss, as in revolts in earlier centuries – with whose socioeconomic character Europe in 1848 had more in common. It is of course true that Continental Europe in 1848 contained within itself the beginnings of modern industrial development, which cannot be said of the mid-seventeenth century or even of 1789. One may therefore, if one wishes, modify the above statement to take account of the fact that some cities in 1848 were industrializing. Even so, there was probably a qualitative difference between cities of northern or central Europe and cities of southern Europe, of the Mediterranean, though both were equally the scene of revolution. The southern European cities of 1848 still had much in common with the Paris of 1789 and with the London of the Gordon riots (1780). Still more striking, if this interpretation of their character and stage of development is correct, they probably still had much in common with the urban situation of the mid-seventeenth century[34]. And even in the northern European cities in 1848, though, as has been mentioned, they had a minority industrial sector, the political troubles that overtook them in that year were, with hindsight, not such as might have been predicted of a mature industrial working class, such as was already in existence in the factory towns of Great Britain. The disturbances of 1848 seem rather to have been associated with crowds of rural immigrants, recent arrivals from the countryside who still retained its patterns of behaviour and its outlook, and who were far from being settled industrial workers, already habituated to the routine of the factory system; indeed, their disorderliness in 1848 rather reflects their *lack* of habituation to such routine. All this, as has been suggested already, appears symptomatic of overpopulation in a pre-industrial society – hence, rural overpopulation –, which that society by its very nature has not yet enough industry to absorb in regular employment.

It seems worth while to say this because these observations, taken in conjunction with what has been said already about the marginal class, seem to us to throw light on the nature of modern European revolution at its most characteristic moment. It is the more necessary to make these points because it appears to us that the truth about this subject has been obscured by the Marxist interpretation of this movement – formulated at the very time when these events were taking place, and supposedly on the basis of them. The very obvious contempo-

introduction of railways into the Papal States. D. Richards, An Illustrated History of Modern Europe 1789–1984, 7th edn. Harlow 1985, p. 122.

34 Naples in the nineteenth century provides a good example of a city with (by the standards of the time) a very large population – about 400 000 in 1800, making it the third most populous city in Europe – yet with an absence of modern industry.

rary phenomenon of revolution seemed to any enquiring mind to need explanation, and moreover to need to be accounted for in social terms – the nineteenth century already thought in these terms. Marx took upon himself to identify the social ›class‹ most directly implicated in the revolutions of the day, and responsible for them, and – on the basis of his observation of France – concluded that the revolutionary class was the proletariat, the working class. This class had been named only a generation before by Robert Owen, who referred in 1813 to ›the poor and working classes of Great Britain and Ireland‹. It had been the object of much sociological study in France and England in the 1840s. Marx grasped that the French Revolution of 1789 had been a revolution of the bourgeoisie – not a novel proposition even then. He went on to deduce that this class was the capitalist class, i.e. the owners of commerce and industry in a modern economy. We have seen already that this description does not hold good of the bourgeoisie of the French Revolution, who were not ›capitalists‹ in this sense, not being directly connected with business and not being very rich. But Marx concluded that the bourgeoisie, in the sense that he attributed to it, was the moving spirit in the revolutionary movement initiated in 1789 and that was in full swing in 1848. But in France, as a result of the Great Revolution, it was already victorious – the July Monarchy had been in the nature of a joint stock company on behalf of the bourgeoisie –, and consequently Nemesis was at hand, in the shape of the next class to appear in the revolutionary progression that the bourgeoisie had unwittingly unleashed. This class was the working class, who would be to the bourgeois capitalist order what the bourgeoisie had been to the ancien régime. The working class would carry through a further and final revolution that would end for ever the form of social organization based on classes. Marx believed that he saw this scenario already being sketched out in embryo before his eyes, in the shape of the events in France in 1848–9. The proletariat had already appeared upon the stage of history as the revolutionary class of the next epoch.

From what has been said already, it will be evident that it is by no means inconsistent with the thesis of this essay to regard the bourgeoisie as the revolutionary class of the ›age of revolution‹ – if by the bourgeoisie one means one particular segment of the bourgeoisie, the ›marginal‹ middle class, or that particular bourgeoisie among a sheaf of social groups subsumed under that term. But it will be equally obvious that no role of any importance is being attributed to the ›proletariat‹, in the sense of the modern industrial working class, either in 1848 or at any other time so far mentioned. It has been stressed that the turbulent populace of 1848 was not a working class in that sense, because of the comparative industrial retardation of most of the Continent. As has been mentioned, there was no particular connection in 1848 between the presence of a modern-type ›proletariat‹, in those fairly isolated places where modern industry existed, and the incidence of revolutionary disturbances. The one country in Europe in 1848 that had a substantial industrial working class was Britain, and Britain during the ›age of revolution‹ had no revolutionary movement – for the simple fact that she already had a constitutional system of government, it was possible to agitate peacefully for parliamentary reform (as was the case with the Chartists), and it was not a question of opposing and overthrowing an intransigent autocracy, as in most Continental countries. The revolutionary French urban populace was not a proletariat, but a class of handicraftsmen and master craftsmen in traditional trades, such as the highly volatile *canuts*, or silk workers, of Lyon[35]. But Marx, in writing about France in 1848–9, referred to the urban populace as the proletariat. As Roger Price points out[36], he is here using that term in a different sense from that which it normally carries in Marxist discourse; for it is being applied to a group that was not, according to the orthodox Marxist conception, a proletariat – its members should rather be called, in Marxian terminology, petty bourgeois. Thus Marx, through a conspicuous error or failure in

35 See Hobsbawm (see n. 18) p. 122.
36 The French Second Republic (see n. 28) p. 7.

analysis and definition of the French situation, would seem to have arrived at a misleading conception of the role of the working class in contemporary revolution. This was big with consequences for the future, for careless extrapolation could lead to the application of the misconceived model of ›proletarian revolution‹ to other countries that were economically still less advanced than France. Still more important, a misconception was created regarding the revolutionary potential of the working class. During the rest of this essay, the thesis will be developed that not only was the working class not the revolutionary class of 1848, in France or elsewhere – for in most places it existed hardly or not at all – but that subsequently it failed to emerge as the revolutionary class, in spite of Marx's prognostication. The problem of Marxists during the past century has been to square the non-appearance of the ›revolution of the proletariat‹ in advanced countries with Marx's prophecy to that effect. The problem becomes more comprehensible if we suppose that the prophecy was based on a misreading of the situation in France in 1848–9.

It is not altogether hard to understand the origin of Marx's apparent confusion on the point. France, which was before him as his model, was politically the most advanced country in Europe – had been since 1789 – but it was not economically the most advanced. That distinction belonged to Britain. Marx was in effect trying to marry French political development with British economic development. The two did not fit. There was no necessary connection between industrialization and revolution. Indeed, as we shall go on to argue, the two things were opposite and incompatible tendencies.

We have argued with sufficient force that the French popular militants of 1848 were not proletarians, but artisans. One might, if one wished, go on to take issue with the term *proletariat*. There is no doubt a difference between a factory worker – this is what *proletarian* is taken to mean – and an artisan: the first is an employee (for wages), the second is self-employed; the first works in a factory, a large establishment in which hundreds of people may be employed, the second works in a workshop, in which the workforce may not exceed half a dozen. But it is surely mistaken to speak as if workers had nothing – nothing, that is, except their labour, which they live by selling (that is what is implied in ›proletariat‹). A skilled worker, such as a miner, if he has nothing else has his skill, which is a marketable commodity, though the extent of its marketability may vary with the economic climate. It is hard to see what markedly differentiates such people from ›petty bourgeois‹ artisans, whose petty-bourgeois status is held to derive from their possession of their skill and their tools. The ›proletariat‹ should properly mean unskilled labourers. But once one narrows the concept of the working class in this way, the hypothetical unity of the ›working-class movement‹ is shattered. Indeed, the working-class movement, in Britain for example, is unthinkable without the miners. In the face of such difficulties, it is not surprising that the term ›proletariat‹ seems never really to have caught on among the socialist movement in Britain, and ›working class‹ seems to be preferred. Once ›workers‹ is taken to comprehend the British Labour party's ›producers by hand or by brain‹, the term can be used to include practically anyone who works for a living, and it loses all analytic precision and force.

It is one of the propositions of this essay that the period from 1789 to 1848 in Europe was indeed an ›age of revolution‹; and that it culminated in the revolutions of 1848. This is not to say, of course, that there have been no revolutions in European history subsequently: there have been, and they will be noticed in due course. But it is argued that they are separate and detached from what can be termed the ›classic‹ age of revolution – detached not least in time, because after the 1848 revolutions, and but for the Paris Commune of 1871, to which reference will be made in a moment, there were no further revolutions in Europe till the twentieth century. There was thus, it is suggested, if not a cessation then at least a falling off of revolutionary activity after the mid-nineteenth century. An attempt will be made to explain this, and also to account for the apparent revival of the revolutionary phenomenon in the early

twentieth century. But first of all, it may be pointed out that a decline in revolution after mid-century is perhaps, with hindsight, not altogether surprising. The revolutions of 1848 mostly failed. It is not astonishing that they should have done so, if one accepts the assumption that they were the work of an unsettled minority in society, whose status was marginal. In that event, the weight of the inert or conservative majority of what was still a pre-modern society – once mobilized against the ›reds‹, as happened in France – would be effective in quashing them. In more mundane terms, the revolutions failed once the counterrevolutionary elements had recovered their grip on the traditional levers of power, especially the armed forces. The revolutions of 1848, therefore, were not the prelude to an era of successful revolution, indefinitely prolonged. Things did change after 1848, but not necessarily in the ways the revolutionaries would have wished. 1848 was rather an end than a beginning.

That still leaves the Paris Commune of 1871 – an undeniably major revolutionary outbreak. It is suggested that it is to be seen as the detached last act of the drama of 1789 to 1848, whose occurrence was due to the exceptional strength of the revolutionary tradition in France and to the exceptional circumstances resulting from the Franco-Prussian War. There is something atavistic about the Paris Commune. This is not surprising if it is considered in the light of what has recently been said about the social composition of the revolutionary personnel of 1848 – for the socioeconomic profile of Paris in 1871 was not essentially different from that in 1848. Some industrialization of the modern type had taken place during the Second Empire, but the traditional picture of a working populace employed in an artisanate of small trades still held good as regards the majority[37]. Its ideological outlook and its political activism were clearly pretty much as they had been in earlier generations. This, it may be suggested, accounts not only for the occurrence of the Commune, but for its failure. Its approach was becoming outdated in the circumstances of a changing era (which will be described shortly), just as the economic basis of the social group that sustained it was being eroded by the advance of modern industry.

The Paris Commune was, then, it is suggested, the last act of a drama that began in 1789. Never after that did the radical populace of Paris, marshalled by the ever-active minority of *meneurs,* emerge into the streets to play a revolutionary role. The tradition of popular revolution waned after that time, along with the historical epoch that had given birth to it. What was true of France, where this tradition properly belonged, was equally true of the rest of Europe, at least its western and central parts, where the tradition of 1848 found no repetition in the succeeding epoch. In short, there were no further revolutions, at least till the twentieth century. How are we to account for this sea change in the political culture of Europe?

The answer must be found in the long-term and underlying political and social tendencies of the period. We must first revert to the obvious but very important fact that the revolutions of the first half of the nineteenth century had been directed against what were felt to be repressive autocratic regimes. They reflected the stirrings of the middle classes in favour of constitutional government and the related social opportunities and freedoms that went with it. It is a striking paradox that, as has been pointed out, the revolutions of 1848, the culmination of this movement, largely failed – yet were followed, in the succeeding period, by a rolling back of

37 The occupations of Communards may be noted. Of 36309, arrested, 4794 (13,2%) were workers in iron, 4680 (12,9%) workers in stone, 3240 (8,9%) in wood, 2228 (6,1%) in leather, 1241 (3,4%) in book manufacture. Total 16183 (44,5%). A further 4074 (11,2%) were labourers *(journaliers).* J. ROUGERIE, Paris libre 1871, Paris 1971, p. 259. One notes the workers in the traditional trades of stone, wood, and leather; and in book manufacture – a traditional Parisian luxury trade. Industrial enterprises in Paris at that time had each on average four employees. ROUGERIE, p. 12.

absolutism conducted by the ostensibly victorious conservative regimes themselves[38]. The progress of constitutional government, the goal of the defeated revolutionaries, can be charted in the diffusion of grants of constitutions through Europe. Thus, Piedmont, having become a constitutional monarchy in 1848, remained one after the revolution, and extended the same system to united Italy in 1861. Prussia obtained a constitution in 1850. The Habsburg Monarchy finally became a constitutional state in 1860. These constitutions were far from democratic, but at least they registered that absolutism had gone for good: the principle of parliamentary government had been conceded. France retained the universal (which was taken to mean manhood) suffrage that she had won in 1848. Germany adopted the same advanced principle in 1867–71. It is hardly necessary to point out that, once the point for which the revolutionaries of 1848 had fought had been conceded, the need for revolution ceased to be felt. Agitation for a greater measure of democracy might still be felt to be necessary, but from now on it could take place peacefully within the new political structures. Thus the governments of the ancien régime at last learnt the lesson of how Great Britain – a constitutional state all along – had avoided revolution.

It would be something of an oversimplification to suggest that the grant of constitutional government alone defuzed all the tensions of the age of revolution. It was, however, the most important single step. It opened the opportunity of a political and indeed a ministerial career to able and ambitious members of the middle classes. Much, however, went with it, in the general restructuring of European polities that took place at this time – for constitutionalism was the central component of the modernization of the state that even conservative governments saw to be necessary. A free press was an essential concomitant of a liberal political system – here again Britain had led the way, and here again a new range of career opportunities would be opened up for those with the education and the literary skills to avail themselves of them. The expansion of the responsibilities of the state in the nineteenth century gave rise to a need for an enlarged corps of civil servants, and the aspirations of the middle class would be appeased by the concession of the principle of entrance and promotion according to merit – one need think only of the reform of the British civil service in the mid-nineteenth century. As an aspect of the same development, the assumption by the state of responsibility for public and popular education, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century, provided very numerous opportunities of employment for those who had obtained enough education to become teachers. In view of what has been said about dissatisfaction among those with adequate education but meagre career prospects, the importance of these developments in drawing the sting of discontent from extensive sections of society can be readily grasped. Less directly attributable to the action of the state, but not unconnected with it as part of the process of modernization, was the economic expansion that occurred in the more advanced countries of Europe in the second half of the century, as the ancien régime in economics at last broke down as it was – albeit partially – doing in politics. Opportunities for employment and enrichment would present themselves here, to the enterprising and well trained, and some energy may thereby have been redirected that might otherwise have gone into politics – easing the pressure that might have resulted from too great an inrush of aspirants to a public career.

The last point, concerning economic development, is hardly less important than the coming of constitutional government in explaining the greater political stability of the second half of the nineteenth century. It was not merely that greater prosperity would remove or at least attenuate the extremes of poverty and economic discontent that had been crucial, perhaps, before 1848 in inflaming the urban populace that had provided the physical force behind

38 Not without some pressure from below, as with the Garibaldian movement in Italy in 1860, and the patriotic resistance of Hungary that helped to forge the new constitutional arrangements of the Habsburg Monarchy.

middle-class revolutionaries. The whole economic order in Europe, at least in western and central Europe, was changing, with the onset of industrialization, which got under way after 1850 and especially after 1870 – more or less coinciding with the political reforms. This, it is here argued, had a decisive effect in making European society, and with it its polity, more rather than less stable. If the social strains of Europe in the first half of the century had been largely due to the effects of rapid population growth on a society still stagnating in a pre-industrial economic condition, the industrial take-off in the second half of the century would have cured this malaise, as well as a host of potential political ills. The first phase of industrialization is labour-intensive: its appetite for labour is insatiable, and this would have the effect of absorbing the hordes of hitherto unemployed or underemployed and disaffected plebeians who had been such an unstable element in the cities of 1848 – who had formed, in fact, ›the crowd‹. Moreover, the industrial system from its inception instilled, by reason of the necessary regularity and synchronization of its processes, a far more disciplined attitude to work than had obtained under the more casual ancien régime. The novelty of the weekly wage-packet might, according to the Marxists, signify the enserfment of the worker to the new industrial feudalism: on the other hand, it assured him, except in times of depression, of a regularity of remuneration that gave him a stake, however modest, in the new economic system. These things, coupled with the accessibility of popular education that came into being about the same period, must have gone a long way towards creating a more orderly and more thoughtful urban populace – a modern industrial working class, more, not less, orderly than the pre-industrial urban populace (of which the Neapolitan lazzaroni were an extreme example). An industrial society, it has emerged, is more, not less, stable than a pre-industrial one, of the sort that existed in the age of revolution down to 1848. Moreover, in the second half of the nineteenth century workingmen commonly became voters for the first time, as a result of the political reforms that have been described, and thus acquired in another way a stake in society, which enabled them to organize themselves politically, in a manner far different from their earlier threatened marginalization. They were able to organize themselves economically as well, through the legalization of trade unions, which dates from this period and which, though limited and partial, and interrupted by setbacks like Bismarck's anti-socialist legislation, provided a new focus for working-class aspirations. Of course social peace did not come overnight, and could still be endangered, as in England in 1911–12, but one ventures to suggest that these were problems of a society that was different in character from Continental Europe during the age of revolution. With the passing of one form of society passed also, it is suggested, a tradition of recent European political history, that of popular revolution – of revolutionary violence, precisely at the time when Georges Sorel was pontificating about it. The political emancipation of the working class did more than anything else to obviate the need and the likelihood of revolution. Marx seems dimly to have apprehended this, in his caustic response to the inception of the – theoretically revolutionary but in practice parliamentary – German Social Democratic party.

It may appositely be objected at this point that, even if the period after the mid-nineteenth century inaugurated a new era in the political and economic history of Europe, revolution did not thereby cease altogether as a historical occurrence. This fact has already been admitted, and it is time to try to weigh the realities of the phenomenon. For the moment we shall confine our attention to western and central Europe. Of course Russia cannot be omitted indefinitely, but it is felt that she is sui generis, as in her historical development in general, and requires to be dealt with separately in due course.

What then of the crop of revolutions that occurred in central Europe in 1918–19? – the fall of the monarchies in Germany and Austria-Hungary, the Spartacist rising in Germany, the Soviet republic in Bavaria, the communist regime in Hungary. First of all, the coincidence of these various outbreaks is significant in itself, and gives an important clue to their nature. They

all occurred in defeated powers of the First World War, at or shortly after the end of that war, when the crushing reality and realization of defeat burst upon them. While it is undeniable that Germany, and to a lesser extent Austria, were mature industrial societies – modern societies – in 1918, by no stretch of the imagination could it be argued that the circumstances they faced in 1918 were part of the normal pattern of experience of an industrial society. They were societies stretched to breaking point by the exertions and privations of a gigantic war, unprecedented in scale and in the demands it made upon the peoples, with the virtual mobilization of civilian society, and by defeat in that war. The parallel, it seems to us, is with what happened in Paris in 1871, after the siege, and the loss of the Franco-Prussian War. In these cases, the intolerable strains imposed on a civilian population, on which itself war had been waged, by the hardships of an ultimately unsuccessful war, erupted in revolution. If one distinguishes the *émeute* of 4 September 1870 in Paris, with the proclamation of the republic, from the subsequent Commune, the parallel with 1918 becomes still closer. These were revolts against a government or regime discredited by defeat in war, and led to its overthrow. The revolutions of 1918 in Germany and Austria-Hungary brought about the final disappearance of the remains of the political ancien régime in those countries. It was in the nature of the regimes that they should have gone with at least a show of violence – though in the event they put up practically no resistance. They were authoritarian, non-parliamentary, for all their current constitutional trappings, and, unlike a democratic government, could not be peacefully voted out of office as the penalty for their failure in war. Reduced to their most basic features, the revolutions of 1918 were little more than a matter of street demonstrations, leading to a change of the name of the regime, as had been the French ›revolution‹ of 1870. They were far from being a profound and lasting upheaval of society in all its aspects. It is true that the more radical elements in society tried to carry the ostensible revolution further to a thoroughgoing transformation – as with the Paris Commune of 1871, so with the communist attempts in Berlin, Bavaria and Hungary. But these attempts, like the Paris Commune before them, failed – were defeated, and, except in Hungary, solely by counterrevolutionary forces from within the society, without external help. It is fairly obvious that the communist revolutions of 1919 were imitations of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, and, occurring in a different society, and conducted by a minority without an extensive base in their country, they were defeated without much difficulty. In Germany and Austria in 1918, as in France in 1870, ›revolution‹ led not to socialism, but to a republic and liberal democracy.

It is hard to resist the conclusion that there were yet further similarities between 1918 and 1870, and indeed features linking them both with 1848 and further back. The idea that popular revolution, in the form of militant crowds demonstrating in the streets, was an efficacious means of effecting political change clearly still had some force in 1918; this was of course a central part of the legacy of 1848 and 1789. But then the idea of popular revolution in this form had been kept alive since 1871 by the influence of Marxism, to which the socialist parties that emerged – as a result of the new mass franchise – in Continental European countries after that date intellectually subscribed. Marx, quite apart from his economic theories (derived ostensibly from his study of Britain), consecrated this model of revolutionary action by his comments on the Paris Commune. Does this mean, however, that the tradition of revolution was still alive in 1918 – or rather the myth of revolution? Certainly nothing made revolutionary manifestations likely to occur more than did the belief that they might yet occur. By 1918 there is a suspicion that people are going through the motions of revolution according to a formula. This would seem to be true also of 1870 and indeed 1848. There seems to be a spiritual link between the ›balcony revolutionists‹ of the first half of the nineteenth century and Philipp Scheidemann on the balcony of the Reichstag on 9 November 1918.

Yet in other ways 1918 and 1870–71 were surely quite different from 1848, 1830, 1820, or 1789. The factor of defeat in war, already emphasized, was conspicuously absent from the revolutionary situations of 1848 and earlier. Economic hardship may have played a part in

arousing popular discontent in 1848, 1830 and 1789, but the situation then was different in kind from the political and social breakdown precipitated by a catastrophic war. In that case, our model will hold good of a society after the mid-nineteenth century that was different from what had preceded it, and that somehow had ceased to be liable to revolution on the traditional pattern. Hence, it is argued, the events of the early twentieth century were not a prolongation of the age of revolution, but an atypical episode caused by exceptional circumstances of national crisis, from which not even a mature modern society was immune. From this point of view, the French revolution of 1870–71 is transitional – on the one hand the belated last act of the age of revolution, on the other a harbinger of changed conditions, as the failure of the Commune seems to suggest.

For, it is argued, one will look in vain for a resumption of the tradition of popular revolution in western or central Europe after 1871 *in normal* (i.e. peacetime) *circumstances*. This does not mean that after that date there was no political instability in some places, but it is more likely to be found on the periphery than in the mature industrial core. Thus with the troubled political traditions of Spain. The insurrection at Barcelona in 1909 might seem to have many of the features of popular revolution. But Spain or Catalonia cannot be regarded as typical of Europe at that time. Catalonia was an industrializing society, and thus would fit our model of an immature or imperfectly industrialized society that we have suggested as the matrix of revolution in the first half of the nineteenth century. Moreover, the working-class movement in Catalonia was not Marxist, but anarcho-syndicalist – this made it distinctive not only in Spain, but in Europe. To this distinctive creed it allied the highly traditional, pre-modern feature of anticlericalism, on the model stemming from the French Revolution (and before that from the Enlightenment), and part of the legacy of the Left in Latin countries. To all this should be added the peculiar political traditions of Spain, characterized by intransigence (a word of Spanish origin)[39].

The point that is being broached is that revolution, in the sense of the proletarian uprising forecast by Marx, has not happened in the 140 years since he first prophesied it. Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto identified the bourgeoisie as the greatest revolutionary force in history hitherto. They also argued that the working class was destined to supersede it on the stage of history through a subsequent and final revolution. They were not alone in believing or fearing that a revolution of the working class was at hand. Many contemporary observers believed that the current form of economic organization, based on the seemingly intractable antagonism of capital and labour, was bound to eventuate in violent social dissolution. Such fears were crystallized by the spectacle of the Paris Commune, which, though defeated, seemed – as the supposed agent of the shadowy and sinister International – to portend the arrival on the European scene of socialism in a fearful shape[40]. But these fears proved groundless, at least for another half-century. Marx and Engels died without seeing the revolution. The socialism that did emerge in European politics settled practically from the outset into the routine of respectable parliamentarism and trade unionism. The Paris Commune was an end rather than a beginning. As has been argued already, the advent of industrial society in the developed parts of Europe did not make revolution inevitable, but – rather the opposite – spelt the end of a transitional and unstable pre-industrial period in which

39 Before leaving the Iberian Peninsula, it may be noted that the revolution in Portugal in 1910 was in fact a military – to be exact, a naval – coup. The Portuguese revolution of 1974 was similarly a military putsch. Portugal, like the rest of southern Europe (excluding Italy, since 1820–21), has partaken of the tradition of a politicized army that intervenes in politics – a tradition that is familiar from Latin America and, more recently, the Third World. But it is surely a misnomer to refer to military coups indiscriminately as revolutions.

40 See the ›Communist‹ letter of the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, 2 August 1871.

revolution had indeed been a recurrent feature. The reasons for this have been suggested above. The Marxist prediction of revolution, as an explosion of economic discontent in an industrial society, was falsified; because economic discontent, instead of intensifying to the point of an acute polarization of classes, was alleviated through the growing enrichment of society and the beginnings of the redistribution of affluence; and because the political route of reformism was by this time open as an alternative to violence. The tendency of capitalist society has been towards greater, not less, equality; towards the raising of the standard of life of the great majority, not their immiserization. These trends were already apparent, even to some Marxists, by the end of the nineteenth century, when they were remarked by Bernstein and the revisionists, and conclusions deduced approximating to what has just been said.

It may be added, in parenthesis, that the Marxists seem always to have overestimated the importance of economic factors in provoking revolution. In taking 1848 and the preceding period as their model, they overlooked the preeminence of political issues in the revolutions of that time – politics pure and simple, with a neglect of economics, in the best bourgeois liberal manner. Economic factors may have had an influence in 1848 in creating mass unrest and thus destabilizing the polity, but politics were given pride of place among the demands of the middle-class leaders of revolution. The Marxists supposed that economic demands could be given primacy, and indeed would need to be given it if the revolutionary cause was to appeal to the working class. In the event, economic demands proved capable of political formulation through parliamentary means. In any case, that people rebel from economic causes in anything but a negative and incoherent manner is highly disputable. This is historically how peasants have behaved, not industrial workers in modern society.

If ›proletarian‹ revolution has failed to occur, does that not leave the middle class – stranded, as it were, on the stage of history, without a successor – as the latest revolutionary class yet to appear in the historical progression? One of the theses of this essay is that revolution in the modern period can indeed be associated with the middle class, and all the social groups so far discussed in connection with revolution can, in one way or another, be assigned to the middle class. If this is correct, it ought surely, taken in conjunction with the revisionist propositions outlined above, to lead to the model of proletarian revolution being questioned, if not abandoned altogether as a figment of the ideological imagination. The revisionists initially failed to convert the majority of their movement to their views, but there can be little doubt that, given the accumulating weight of evidence from contemporary society, in the long run their views would have prevailed. That they did not do so seems to us due to one historical fact: the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. That event, it seems to us, gave a new lease of life to the orthodox Marxist model of proletarian revolution, by seeming to validate it, so that it prolonged for three quarters of a century the popularity of a defective theory. With this as our cue, we must at length move on to discuss the problem of revolution in Russia in the twentieth century.

There are three episodes with which we have to deal, the revolutions of 1905, of February 1917 and of October 1917. Of these, the last in particular seemed to western Marxists the realization of the long-cherished revolutionary prediction; so it was claimed to be by the Bolsheviks who carried it out. It is intended to cast doubt on this analysis, on grounds, indeed, that must by now be sufficiently familiar to students of Marxism and of Soviet history. Russia in the early twentieth century was not an industrial country. It was an underdeveloped country, still very predominantly agrarian, with a nascent industrial sector. It would seem, then, to have had much in common with the type of society that existed in Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century, during what we are agreed on calling the age of revolution. It is suggested, on the basis of the evidence of that period, that a pre-industrial society, prone to certain stresses, above all, perhaps, those resulting from a rapidly increasing population, with a minority urban sector containing an unsettled and volatile urban populace with, at best, an

immature working class, and confronted by an unsympathetic and unaccommodating autocracy, is particularly likely to be the scene of revolution. This, broadly speaking, was the situation in Europe between 1789 and 1848 (or 1871): does it not fairly describe the situation in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century? Russia alone, it will be recalled, of all the important countries, was by the beginning of the twentieth century the only one that had not yet introduced constitutional government. To the above destabilizing factors must be added one more that we have seen was present in 1871 and 1918: defeat in war, which in the case of Russia was crucial in both 1905 and 1917. If one is prepared to argue that the proponents of liberal constitutionalism in Russia at that time were representatives of an as yet marginal middle class – marginal because of the marginality of their economic and political position in what Marxists miscall a ›feudal‹ society –, the concordance of the Russian situation with that of western and central Europe in the mid-nineteenth century will be pretty nearly made out.

But if all this was so, how are we to describe, or account for, the Bolshevik revolution? First of all, we can dismiss the proposition that it was the ›revolution of the working class‹ predicted by Marx. This was how it was presented by its authors, and this interpretation was accepted by western intellectuals for the next two generations – no doubt largely because they wanted to believe it. But proletarian revolution, if it occurred at all, should have occurred in a mature industrial society, and it has already been made clear that Russia in 1917 was no such society. It has just been argued that Russia had more in common with Europe in 1848 – only in Russia the revolutionaries were more effective and more successful in obtaining and retaining power. That Russia experienced the Bolshevik revolution – whereas the communist revolutions in central Europe were conspicuously unsuccessful – indicates that that event is to be associated with circumstances peculiar to Russia, and that the Russian situation was different from that of developed Europe. The whole Russian political experience has been different from that of the rest of Europe. As has been pointed out already, Russia alone of the important countries remained an autocracy after the middle third of the nineteenth century. This would have tended to prolong the ›Restoration‹ political climate of the country, and with the autocracy and the police state, characteristic of that period, would inevitably have gone the professional revolutionaries. Whereas, as has been described, violent revolution declined markedly or disappeared altogether in western and central Europe after 1871, essentially because of the introduction of constitutional government, in Russia the old antagonists, autocracy and revolutionaries, remained in a chronic state of confrontation. The result was that Russia alone retained, into the twentieth century, a revolutionary movement tempered by long trials and more professional and more expert than any that had preceded it. Here, more than anywhere else, the tradition of Babeuf came into its own: the tradition of the professional revolutionary, who could act without popular participation, to whom indeed in many ways popular revolution was an untidy irrelevance, whose key to success was organization – the organization of the revolutionary cadres –, and whose efforts were directed solely and singlemindedly to one end, the seizure of power. The bifurcation of the revolutionary tradition here became apparent, into the strand of popular revolution, which withered in its historical setting after 1871, and the strand of the professional revolutionary. The latter thus, through the drying up of the other, inherited the whole tradition, and was able to pass himself off as its representative. It hardly needs pointing out that professional revolutionaries were by definition a minority, and thus accord with our model of revolutionaries as a minority element.

Lenin was the heir of the Babouvist tradition, and perfected its technique. In his hands the revolutionary organization, which in earlier generations had been a secret society, became the ›party‹ – not a party in the sense of a political association participating in ›party politics‹ within a constitutional system, but an organization with a hierarchic and cellular structure, its members sworn, like members of a church, to a single inflexible ideology, and its ultimate object being the seizure of power by means of a coup d'état, which would be followed by the imposition of a revolutionary dictatorship. All this was perfectly in line with the programme

of Babeuf and indeed of Mazzini; the model of the revolutionary dictatorship was ultimately owed to Robespierre and the Jacobins; only some of the terminology was updated, so that the revolutionary dictatorship became the ›dictatorship of the proletariat‹. Equally in keeping with Babeuf's thought, the revolution – the introduction of a communist society – was to follow the seizure of power; but – again thanks to terminological sleight of hand – in Lenin's case the seizure of power was retrospectively called ›the revolution‹ (the October Revolution), notwithstanding that the real revolution was the one subsequently wrought upon Russian society by Lenin and then Stalin. But enough of the trappings of popular revolution – the well-worn image of ›the people in arms‹ – were presented to convince Lenin's western sympathizers that this was the real thing[41]. In this way an organization claiming to be Marxist could claim to have successfully carried through a revolution – which was therefore presumably the Marxist revolution foretold by the prophet; the venerable traditions of 1848 were apparently subsumed in it, seemingly validating Marx's supposition that the revolution, when it came, would be much like 1848; the revolution of the proletariat could be held to have occurred, in spite of the fact that the working class in Russia was a minority sector, and a very recent and precocious one, in an unstable society, the rate of whose development in its different sectors was very uneven; and Babeuf could be relegated to the history books. The failure of the supposed Marxist revolution in Russia to reproduce itself in western countries, in spite of the promptings of the subsequently created Communist parties, might have seemed to indicate the singularity of the Russian situation, and the deviation of the Bolshevik Revolution from the orthodox Marxist scenario. This was not, however, the conclusion drawn by the Left in western countries, who preferred to believe that the theory of historical development that they had espoused had been validated by history, in spite of incidental disagreeable features.

The history of the Left in western countries since 1917 has largely been the history of the slow evaporation of that belief, in the face of the realities of the Soviet system and the continued failure of proletarian revolution to occur in developed countries. The revival of Marxism in the universities of the western world in the 1960s may have delayed but many not have reversed the process. On the other hand, in the two generations after the Bolshevik Revolution Leninism went from strength to strength, though the successful ›revolutions‹ it sponsored occurred in the unlikeliest places, viz. undeveloped countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Notwithstanding the outlandish setting, the success of Leninism in these cases is not altogether surprising, given that it is essentially a technique for obtaining power, and as such can operate in any society and any historical epoch. It is not part of our task in the present context to elaborate the conditions for revolution in the twentieth century in what has become known as the Third World. But it may tentatively be advanced that conditions in those countries – underdeveloped, undergoing the effects of a population explosion (reflected especially in rapid and prodigious urban growth), destabilized by the impact of incipient industrialization in certain sectors – may not be dissimilar to those in Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century. Added to this should perhaps be, as the raw material for revolutionary cadres, disaffected members of the tenuous lower strata of the westernized elite, recipients of a western-style education but without a position or prospects commensurate with their ambitions – a marginal class.

This brings us back to our central concept of marginality as a key factor in forming the personnel of revolutionary movements. It is suggested that in the twentieth century, since the Russian Revolution, the marginal character of revolutionary or quasi-revolutionary elements in western society has become more and more pronounced. The working class in western

41 How much of the image of the Bolshevik Revolution has been shaped by the clever propaganda of the scene of the storming of the Winter Palace in Eisenstein's film »October«?

countries having failed to carry out its predicted revolution, the revolutionary class must be sought elsewhere. Marxism in the west since the 1960s has become more and more explicit in appealing to marginal groups as its constituency – that is, essentially, groups that find themselves a minority in society as a result of some distinguishing singularity, and find their consequent situation disagreeable or disadvantageous. Such groups are feminists, ethnic minorities, and homosexuals. There is one common feature that draws together the politically radicalized members of these groups, and that is the quality of being ›intellectuals‹, in the loose sense defined earlier: having had enough education to be susceptible to the appeal of an ideology, especially an ideology that seems to offer a comprehensive explanation and solution of the plight of the disinherited. It is not surprising, therefore, that there is an extensive overlap between these radicalized individuals and students (whom we have earlier seen as a characteristic radical group of the ›age of revolution‹) – put more simply, they are often the same people. The expansion of higher education in the 1960s coincided with the intellectual resurgence of Marxism mentioned a short time ago, and the latter, while in part a result of the former, came at an opportune time to offer an explanation and a cure for the perplexities of the newly educated. Those who find that education does not by itself open all doors, that a degree is a devalued commodity, and that consequently their prospects are less eligible than they have been led to expect may find themselves in a situation not dissimilar to that of students of the Restoration[42].

These remarks may serve to underline one of our central theses, that revolution is the work of a minority, no matter what springs of widely diffused popular discontent it may tap. The minority status of revolutionaries is nowhere more graphically illustrated than in western countries at the present day, with, at the extreme, the resort of revolutionary groups to terrorism. Here, the popular component in revolution has been dispensed with altogether: it is on the majority that the revolutionary factions seek to impose their will. But the rhetoric of popular revolution, of proletarianism, is retained, as if they were a mass movement. Far from being a modern perversion of an authentic tradition, this may indicate that rhetoric has been rhetoric all along, even if it has not always been the property of so narrow a sectarian exclusiveness.

The mention a moment ago of student radicalism as a vehicle for revolutionary passions conveniently brings on mention of the United States; for it was in the United States in the 1960s that the most recent wave of student radicalism began, and there, perhaps, it most effectively impinged on public affairs. The United States has been absent from our discussion so far, because this essay is primarily about Europe. None the less, it is appropriate to bring it in at this point, because it exemplifies some of the points we wish to make. Revolutionary or pseudo-revolutionary activism as a preserve of students – hence of a minority, and a middle-class minority at that – highlights an aspect very germane to our thesis. At the same time, the case of the United States illustrates other angles. One of these is the absence of revolution – that is, successful revolution – from a mature industrial society. The United States is the most industrialized country of all, but, though a state that owes its origin to revolution, it has never faced even remotely the prospect of a working-class revolution. It is in the United States that capitalism has undergone its fullest and most characteristic development, which has been in precisely the opposite direction to that predicted by Marx. Again, the United States seems to illustrate the effects of the absence of an essential contributor to the genesis of revolution, a

42 In discussing marginal groups in present-day western society, it may not be inapposite to propose for inclusion among them the working class, in the sense of the working class of traditional heavy industry. With the decline of that sector of the economy, it might be argued that that class has been marginalized. Certainly, while never having been a majority of the working population, those employed in manufacturing industry in Britain have latterly been reduced to a point where they now compose less than twenty per cent of the workforce.

tradition of revolution. This must of course be qualified to take account of 1775; but a revolution for national independence has subsequently served as a basis for national solidarity and patriotism, and is to be differentiated from a revolution against a native oppressor or class enemy. A founding revolution is a once-for-all affair, and cannot be repeated. In Europe, on the other hand, 1789 set a pattern that was to be followed or imitated for 130 years. The most important factor giving rise to revolution has been the fact that revolution has occurred already: therefore a precedent and a model exists; it has been proved that the tyranny of the status quo can be broken. In short, a revolutionary tradition is set up. This was strongest in France, but communicated itself to the rest of Europe by example and imitation. In fact, imitation – conscious imitation – was an essential ingredient. Tocqueville observed this in France in 1848: »... the quality of imitation was so obvious that the terrible originality of the facts remained hidden. ... The men of the first revolution were still alive in everybody's mind, their deeds and their words fresh in the memory. And everything I saw that day was plainly stamped with the imprint of such memories; the whole time I had the feeling that we had staged a play about the French Revolution, rather than that we were continuing it[43].«

It may be thought that the last phase of this pattern of mimesis was played out in Paris in 1968.

Having brought revolution down to the efforts of its epigoni in our own day, it is time for us to recapitulate the main heads of our thesis. The first point we would stress is that revolution, as understood in Europe in the century following the French Revolution, is a phenomenon of pre-industrial society – or in some cases, one may wish to say, an immature industrial society; and that it ceased with industrialization, or the advent of mature industrial society – that is, after about 1870. Second, the revolutionary class in modern society is the marginal class of those of considerable education but modest socio-economic position, who seek to better their situation by attacking the existing order of society in the name of ›progressive‹ ideals. This class is, in the nature of things, a minority. Thus revolution is always the work of a minority.

Spelt out in this way, these propositions can be glossed as follows. The term ›marginal‹ is always relative. Thus it may apply to different groups in different societies. But there is always a connotation of minority status, whether derived from social factors or from ethnic or religious ones – one thinks, in connection with our exploration of the matrices of political radicalism, of Jews in Imperial Russia or Irish in Great Britain. Moreover, marginalization can in the course of time overtake groups or institutions that have hitherto been ›ins‹ rather than ›outs‹. The result will be political radicalization. One can cite the churches in western countries at the present day, which, having been during the nineteenth century the most consistent supporters of political reaction, have now – as a result, it is suggested, of their drastic loss of influence and importance in present-day society – swung in the opposite direction. Revolution occurs, just as military coups occur, where it is part of the political culture. As was said a short time ago, the most important thing in giving rise to it is the fact that a tradition of it exists. Revolution became part of the political culture of Europe for about a century after the French Revolution. Even after the actuality faltered, the concept remained programmed into the culture at the ideological level for another century in the form of Marxism[44]. For historical reasons that have been outlined, it was associated, indeed identified, with a mass uprising of the very poor, the proletariat. In fact, this was a misconception. Poverty does not of itself give rise to revolution. If that were so, there would be revolution in India tomorrow. If the very poor rebel, it is in the manner in which peasants rebel, whose

43 Recollections, London 1970, p. 53.

44 There is in fact no more intrinsic reason that existence should advance by means of revolutionary breaks or a dialectical progression than that it should remain locked in the never-ending circularity of the ›wheel of life‹. The former is merely a nineteenth-century western concept.

outlook remains intensely conservative or merely anarchic but not consciously progressive. Their revolt might be against their lord or the provincial governor or urban merchants or moneylenders, but in favour of the ›good tsar‹. Revolt with consciously progressive aims is a symptom of a political culture that has become impregnated with the idea of revolution. The influence of ideas is thus all-important. This in turn indicates that those who are receptive to ideas – the educated or semi-educated – are most likely to be susceptible to the appeal of revolution, or some radicalism that is a watered-down version of it. We are back with the marginal class.

As to the cessation of revolution in mature industrial society, it has been argued that this form of society is more orderly and law-abiding than the transitional society that preceded it, and than ancien-régime society before that. The bulk of the population have become petty bourgeois in their outlook and habits. This is not to say that instability could not recur in a decaying – a post-industrial? – society. Moreover, it has been suggested that unrest is likely to subside if the extent of suitable employment keeps pace with, or exceeds, the number of educated people in search of it. Late modern society has been prolific of appointments requiring literacy or clerical skills (and latterly, computing skills); this has no doubt helped to offset the effects of the contraction of traditional industry. But in a situation where the number of qualified people outran the number of jobs, a destabilizing element could reappear.

In this, as in so many other respects, this essay has been concerned with the problems of the middle class. If any class in modern history is to be called revolutionary, it is in our opinion this one, in its various gradations and manifestations. It may be suggested that there is some factor of instability or malaise at the heart of this class, which is the ultimate explanation of much of what has been described in this essay. It is the unease of the class in the middle, of the socially mobile (therefore in movement, and therefore unstable), of the not yet arrived; of those who live in perpetual anxiety of being ground between the upper and nether millstones. A class whose economic basis – the basis of capitalism – is technological change and innovation cannot know stability for long. Let us note the words of Carroll Quigley: »... psychic insecurity became the keynote of the new middle-class outlook. It still is. ... for the middle class, the general goal of medieval man to seek future salvation in the hereafter was secularized to an effort to seek future security in this world by acquisition of wealth and its accompanying power and social prestige. ... At its basis is psychic insecurity founded on lack of secure social status. ...«[45]

It may seem startling and an oversimplification to attribute revolution in the modern world to the psychic insecurity of the middle class. None the less, it is a possibility that bears pondering, and not nearly enough attention has been given to it by historians or social scientists.

That *middle-class angst* is a reality will not be questioned by anyone who has worked at a British university during the past decade. But can it seriously be argued that this is the whole answer to the problem of revolution in the modern period? This would not be a right note on which to conclude. Plausible as it may be to those of us who think in these terms, it leaves something out. Revolution was not merely the work of neurotics, of crabbed conspirators, of Burke's ›political metaphysicians‹. Was there no element of courage in the face of overwhelmingly strong tyranny, of just indignation at inequity, oppression and obscurantism, of love of one's country? Was the classic nineteenth-century liberal preoccupation with freedom devoid of force or meaning? The twentieth-century *marxisant* denigrators of ›bourgeois‹ liberalism as a mere cloak for class interest have come close to arguing this. But to do so is to devalue a revolutionary like the heroic and selfless Garibaldi, who, incidentally, probably never in his life felt angst, middle-class or other.

45 Tragedy and Hope: A History of the World in our Time, New York and London 1966; 2nd printing 1974, pp. 1235, 1236, 1237.

These reservations should come the more readily to our minds in that, in our own day, revolution has made an unexpected comeback in Europe, in the events of 1989 in central and eastern Europe. 1848 seemed to live again in the streets of the capitals of central and eastern Europe, only this time the outcome was happier. These events should give us an insight into what revolution has often been about. They in no way discredit our thesis that revolution does not occur in modern liberal society: they tend to confirm it, for they were revolts against dictatorship, in countries that had been arbitrarily and artificially severed from the west at the end of the Second World War. They were revolts against oppression, against misrule, against the reign of the bureaucrat, the secret policeman and the party ideologue (successor of the priest), and for national independence. They transcended class and united whole peoples. At this spectacle, academic analysis puts down its pen and falls into respectful silence.

Bayerische
Staatsbibliothek
München