

AN INTRODUCTION TO
CONTEMPORARY
HISTORY

Geoffrey Barraclough



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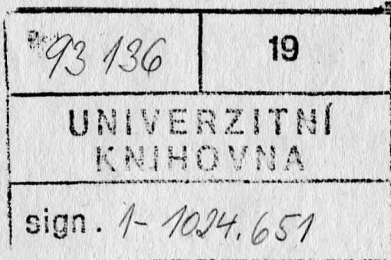
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I

THE NATURE OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

Structural Change and Qualitative Difference

WE live today in a world different, in almost all its basic preconditions, from the world in which Bismarck lived and died. How have these changes come about? What are the formative influences and qualitative differences which are the distinguishing marks of the contemporary era? It is with these questions that the present book is concerned, and for that reason I have called it an introduction to contemporary history. It is not an introduction in the familiar sense of providing an elementary narrative account of events in Europe and beyond Europe during the past sixty or seventy years. Merely to recount the course of events, even on a world-wide scale, is unlikely to result in a better understanding of the forces at play in the world today unless we are aware at the same time of the underlying structural changes. What we require first of all is a new framework and new terms of reference. It is these that the present book will seek to provide.

Our search will carry us along some unfamiliar, or less familiar, paths. Historians of the recent past have assumed for the most part that, if they explained the factors leading to the disintegration of the old world, they were automatically providing an explanation of how the new world emerged; and contemporary history has therefore consisted largely of accounts of the two world wars, the peace settlement of 1919, the rise of Fascism and National Socialism, and, since 1945, the conflict of the communist and the capitalist worlds. For reasons which will appear later, this line of approach seems to me inadequate, in

some ways perhaps even misleading. We shall be concerned here far more with the new world coming to life than with the old world that was dying, and we only need to look around us to see that some of the most characteristic features of the contemporary world have their origins in movements and developments that took place far away from Europe. One of the distinctive facts about contemporary history is that it is world history and that the forces shaping it cannot be understood unless we are prepared to adopt world-wide perspectives; and this means not merely supplementing our conventional view of the recent past by adding a few chapters on extra-European affairs, but re-examining and revising the whole structure of assumptions and preconceptions on which that view is based. Precisely because American, African, Chinese, Indian and other branches of extra-European history cut into the past at a different angle, they cut across the traditional lines; and this very fact casts doubt on the adequacy of the old patterns and suggests the need for a new ground-plan.

It will be one of the main contentions of this book that contemporary history is different, in quality and content, from what we know as 'modern' history. Looking back from the vantage-point of the present, we can see that the years between 1890, when Bismarck withdrew from the political scene, and 1961, when Kennedy took up office as President of the United States, were a watershed between two ages. On one side lies the contemporary era, which is still at its beginning, on the other there stretches back the long vista of 'modern' history with its three familiar peaks, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. It is with this great divide between two ages in the history of mankind that this book will chiefly be concerned; for it was then that the forces took shape which have moulded the contemporary world.

1

It must be said immediately that many historians – perhaps a majority of historians at the present time – would question the validity of the distinction I have drawn between 'modern' and 'contemporary' history and would deny the existence of a 'great divide' between the two. For this there are a number of reasons. One is the vague, indefinite, almost nebulous character of the concept 'contemporary', as it is commonly used. Another, which is more fundamental, is the tendency of historical writing today to emphasize the element of continuity in history. For most historians contemporary history does not constitute a separate period with distinctive characteristics of its own; they regard it rather as the most recent phase of a continuous process and, chary of admitting that it is different in kind or quality from earlier history, treat it simply as that part of 'modern' history which is nearest to us in time.

It is unnecessary to enter into a lengthy discussion of the reasons why I find this attitude difficult to accept.¹ In my view continuity is by no means the most conspicuous feature of history. Bertrand Russell once said that 'the universe is all spots and jumps',² and the impression I have of history is much the same. At every great turning-point of the past we are confronted by the fortuitous and the unforeseen, the new, the dynamic and the revolutionary; at such times, as Herbert Butterfield once pointed out, the ordinary arguments of causality are 'by no means sufficient in themselves to explain the next stage of the story, the next turn of events'.³ There is, in fact, little

1. They are briefly discussed in my book, *History in a Changing World* (Oxford, 1955), pp. 4 ff.

2. cf. Bertrand Russell, *The Scientific Outlook* (London, 1931), p. 98.

3. cf. H. Butterfield, *History and Human Relations* (London, 1951), p. 94.

difficulty in identifying moments when humanity swings out of its old paths on to a new plane, when it leaves the marked-out route and turns off in a new direction. One such time was the great social and intellectual upheaval at the turn of the eleventh and twelfth centuries which we so inadequately call the Investiture Contest; another, it is usually agreed, was the period of the Renaissance and Reformation. The first half of the twentieth century has all the marks of a similar period of revolutionary change and crisis. Here, again, we are led to one of the central problems in the writing of history – the problem of periodization – and it would take us too far to discuss the theoretical issues it raises. But if we view the fifty or sixty years beginning around 1890 from this standpoint, it is difficult to avoid certain important corollaries. The first is that the twentieth century cannot be regarded simply as a continuation of the nineteenth century, that ‘recent’ or ‘contemporary’ history is not merely the latter end of what we call ‘modern history’, the most recent phase of a period which, according to conventional divisions, began in western Europe with the Renaissance and the Reformation. And if this is true, it would seem to follow that the standards of measurement we apply to contemporary history should be different from those applied to earlier ages. What we should look out for as significant are the differences rather than the similarities, the elements of discontinuity rather than the elements of continuity. In short, contemporary history should be considered as a distinct period of time, with characteristics of its own which mark it off from the preceding period, in much the same way as what we call ‘medieval history’ is marked off – at any rate for most historians – from modern history.

If these propositions have any degree of validity, it would seem reasonable to conclude that one of the first tasks of historians concerned with recent history should be to establish its distinguishing features and its boundaries. In doing so we must, of course, beware of false categories

(that applies to all historical work); we must remember that all sorts of things last over from one period to another, just as all sorts of things regarded as ‘typically medieval’ persisted into Elizabethan England; and we should not expect to assign fixed dates to changes which, in the last analysis, are only changes in balance and perspective. But it still remains true that unless we keep our eyes alert for what is new and different, we shall all too easily miss the essential – namely, the sense of living in a new period. Only when we have the real gulf between the two periods fixed in our minds can we start building bridges across it.

It goes without saying that we can only consider contemporary history in this way when we are clear what we mean by the term ‘contemporary’. The study of contemporary history has undoubtedly suffered because of the vagueness of its content and the haziness of its limits. The word ‘contemporary’ inevitably means different things to different people; what is contemporary for me will not necessarily be contemporary for you. It is still possible to meet people who have conversed with Bismarck,¹ and (to mention but one personal recollection) my old colleague in Cambridge, G. G. Coulton, who died in 1947, was a schoolboy in France before the Franco-Prussian war, and still possessed his school uniform with *képi* and baggy *pantalon* trousers – a diminutive version of the uniform of the French infantryman of the day – which he got out of storage for my eldest son to try on.² On the other hand, there is already a generation in existence for which Hitler is just as much an historical figure as Napoleon or Julius Caesar. In short, ‘contemporary’ is a very elastic term, and to say – as is often done – that contemporary history is the history of the generation now living is an unsatisfactory definition

1. cf. Golo Mann, ‘Bismarck and Our Times’, *International Affairs*, vol. XXXVIII (1962), p. 3.

2. Coulton recounts his three terms in St Omer in *Fourscore Years* (Cambridge, 1943), pp. 39–47; it was in 1866–7.

for the simple reason that generations overlap. Furthermore, if contemporary history is regarded in this way, we are left with ever-changing boundaries and an ever-changing content, with a subject-matter that is in constant flux. For some people contemporary history starts in 1945, with perhaps a glance back to 1939; for others it is essentially the history of the inter-war years or, a little more widely, of the period from 1914 to 1945, and the years after 1945 belong to a phase which is not yet history. The German Institute of Contemporary History, for example, is concerned primarily with National Socialism, the origins of the National Socialist movement under the Weimar republic, and the resistance movements which National Socialism provoked,¹ and it is possible to find able and intelligent discussions of the practical problems of writing the history of contemporary events which ignore – clearly not accidentally – anything after the end of the Second World War.²

The problems involved not only in the writing but also in the conception of contemporary history have given rise, ever since 1918, to a long, contentious, and ultimately wearisome controversy.³ The very notion of contemporary history, it has been maintained, is a contradiction in terms. Before we can adopt a historical view we must stand at a certain distance from the happenings we are investigating. It is hard enough at all times to 'disengage' ourselves and look at the past dispassionately and with the

1. cf. H. Rothfels, 'Zeitgeschichte als Aufgabe', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 1 (1953), p. 8; the same attitude is adopted by B. Scheurig, *Einführung in die Zeitgeschichte* (Berlin, 1962), pp. 30–1.

2. cf. M. Bendiscioli, *Possibilità e limiti di una storia critica degli avvenimenti contemporanei* (Salerno, 1954).

3. It can be followed in the pages of the journal *History*, beginning with the controversy between E. Barker and A. F. Pollard in 1922 (vol. vii); there followed R. W. Seton-Watson's plea for the study of contemporary history (vol. xiv), renewed by G. B. Henderson in 1941 (vol. xxvi), and further contributions by David Thomson (vol. xxvii), Max Beloff (vol. xxx) and F. W. Pick (vol. xxxi).

critical eye of the historian. Is it possible at all in the case of events which bear so closely upon our own lives? It must be said immediately that I have no intention of entering into a discussion of these methodological questions.¹ Whatever may be the problems of writing contemporary history, the fact remains – as R. W. Seton-Watson long ago pointed out² – that, from the time of Thucydides onwards, much of the greatest history has been contemporary history. Indeed, if it is said – as historians sometimes say – that the idea of contemporary history is a newfangled notion introduced after 1918 to pander to the demands of a disillusioned public anxious to know what had gone wrong with the 'war to end all wars', it is not unfair to answer that what was newfangled was not a concept of history firmly anchored to the present but, on the contrary, the nineteenth-century notion of history as something dedicated entirely to the past. What is *zeitgebunden* – what, in other words, is a product of the identifiable circumstances of a particular time – is not the belief that contemporary events fall within the historian's ambit but the idea of history as an objective and scientific study of the past 'for its own sake'.³

On the other hand, it would be idle to deny that those who reject contemporary history on the ground that it is not a serious discipline are in practice frequently proved right. Much that claims to be contemporary history – whether written in Peking or Moscow, or in London or New York – turns out too often to be little more than propaganda or desultory comment on 'current affairs', reflecting usually an obsession with one aspect or another of the 'cold war'. The pitfalls to which such writing is liable are obvious. What prospect is there, for example, of

1. They are briefly reviewed by H. Rothfels, *Zeitgeschichtliche Betrachtungen* (Göttingen, 1959), pp. 12 ff.

2. *History*, vol. xiv (1929), p. 4.

3. This was demonstrated, with great verve and learning, in Fritz Ernst's brilliant article, 'Zeitgeschehen und Geschichtsschreibung', *Die Welt als Geschichte*, vol. xvii (1957), pp. 137–89.

assessing realistically the Castro revolution in Cuba if we consider it solely as a manifestation of 'international communism' and fail to relate it either to parallel movements in other parts of the underdeveloped world or to the long and tangled story of relations between the United States and Cuba since 1901? If it is to be of any lasting value, the analysis of contemporary events requires 'depth' no less – perhaps, indeed, a good deal more – than any other kind of history; our only hope of discerning the forces actually operative in the world around us is to range them firmly against the past. Unfortunately this is rarely done. When the Korean war broke out in 1950, for example, commentators treated it simply as an episode in the post-war conflict between the communist and the 'free' worlds and the fact that it was part of a far older struggle, reaching back almost exactly a century, for a dominating position in the western Pacific was passed over without so much as a word.¹ It should hardly need saying that a valid assessment must take both aspects into account; but we shall not get far, in the analysis of recent history, unless we realize that those 'aspects of communist history that form the usual subjects of contemporary writing' are for the most part 'important only as symbols', and that 'deeper historical trends, often forgotten amidst the crises and passions of the day', are usually of more 'lasting significance in explaining the march of men and events'.²

In the long run contemporary history can only justify its claim to be a serious intellectual discipline and more than a desultory and superficial review of the contemporary scene, if it sets out to clarify the basic structural changes which have shaped the modern world. These changes are fundamental because they fix the skeleton or framework within which political action takes place.

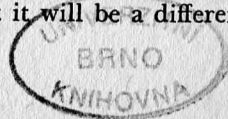
1. For a brief survey of the Korean question since 1864 see Lee In-sang, *La Corée et la politique des puissances* (Geneva, 1959).

2. cf. Ping-chia Kuo, *China. New Age and New Outlook* (2nd ed., Penguin Books, 1960), p. 9.

Examples of them are the changed position of Europe in the world, the emergence of the United States and the Soviet Union as 'super-powers', the breakdown (or transformation) of old imperialisms, British, French, and Dutch, the resurgence of Asia and Africa, the readjustment of relations between white and coloured peoples, the strategic or thermonuclear revolution. About all these subjects there is room for differences of opinion; everyone is free to make his own assessment of their significance. But we are justified in describing them as 'objective' trends, in the sense that, taken together, they give contemporary history a distinctive quality which marks it off from the preceding period. Furthermore, all require study and analysis in depth; they are parts of a process which can never be fully intelligible if it is taken out of its historical context.

In this respect contemporary history is no different in its requirements from other sorts of history. In other respects this is not the case. In particular, the causal or genetic approach, which has become traditional among historians writing under the influence of German historicism, is an unsuitable tool for the contemporary historian who is seeking to define the character of contemporary history and to establish criteria which mark it off from the preceding period. For him the important thing is not to demonstrate (what we all know) that the garment of Clio is a seamless web, but to distinguish the different patterns in which it is woven. A simple example will illustrate what this difference means in practice.

History of the traditional type starts at a given point in the past – the French Revolution, for example, or the Industrial Revolution, or the settlement of 1815 – and works systematically forward, tracing a continuous development along lines running forward from the chosen starting-point. Contemporary history follows – or should follow – an almost contrary procedure. Both methods may take us far back into the past, but it will be a different



past. Thus, in regard to the development of modern industrial society, the contemporary historian will be concerned less with the gradual extension of industrial processes from their conventional beginnings with Hargreaves's spinning-jenny, Arkwright's water-frame, Crompton's mule, Watts's steam-engine, and Cartwright's powerloom, than with the substantial differences between the 'first' and 'second' industrial revolutions; from his point of view the latter are more significant than the undeniable element of continuity linking the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries.¹ In the field of international political history the differences are no less clear. The historian who starts, for example, from the situation in 1815 and works forward step by step and stage by stage will almost inevitably concern himself mainly with Europe, since the problems which arose directly from the settlement of 1815 were primarily European problems. For him, therefore, the main issues will be German and Italian unification, the so-called 'Eastern Question', the impact of nationalism, particularly on the Habsburg and Ottoman empires, and perhaps pan-Slavism – questions which, through their interactions, culminated (or, it would be more accurate to say, seemed when looked at from this point of view to culminate) in the war of 1914 – and events in other parts of the world will tend to be regarded as peripheral, except in so far as they can be brought under the heading of 'European expansion'. The historian who takes his stand not in 1815 but in the present will see the same period in different proportions. His starting-point will be the global system of international politics in which we live today and his main concern will be to explain how it arose. Hence he will be just as interested in Oregon and the Amur as in Herzegovina and the Rhine, in the clash of imperialisms in central Asia and the western Pacific as in the Balkans or Africa, in the trans-Siberian railway as in the line from Berlin to Baghdad. Both will survey the same stretch of

1. I shall return to this point later; cf. below, p. 44.

the past, but they will do so with different objects in mind and different standards of judgement.

Although the contemporary historian will necessarily pay attention to different things, it does not follow that his approach need be shallower or his perspective shorter than that of other historians. For a proper understanding of the changeover from a European to a world-wide political system, which is one of the most evident characteristics of the contemporary era, we may, for example, be carried back as far as the Seven Years War, which has been described as 'the first world conflict of modern times'.¹ Or who again, when the Russian occupation of Berlin in 1945 was described as an unprecedented Slavonic advance to the west, paused to recollect that the Russians had already occupied Berlin in 1760? Evidently this is not contemporary history, any more than the campaigns of Suvorov's armies in Italy and Switzerland during the Napoleonic wars are contemporary history; but it is important to be aware of them and to take them into account, if we are to see recent events in perspective. To understand the position of Russia in Asia – which, like the expansion of the United States across the American continent to the Pacific, is one of the preconditions of the modern age – it may be necessary to look back, however briefly, to Yermak's Siberian campaigns in the early 1580s and the astounding advance across Asia which brought Russian explorers and adventurers to the Pacific coast by 1649. And, again, it would be foolish to expect to understand the policy of the United States today, without looking back beyond the 1890s and the Philippine and Cuban wars to the earlier phases of American imperialism which Professor van Alstyne has so brilliantly surveyed.²

These few examples are sufficient to show that contemporary history does not signify – as historians have

1. cf. S. F. Bemis, *The Diplomacy of the American Revolution* (2nd ed., Bloomington, 1957), p. 5.

2. cf. R. W. van Alstyne, *The Rising American Empire* (Oxford, 1960).

sometimes contemptuously implied – nothing more than scratching about on the surface of recent events and misinterpreting the recent past in the light of current ideologies. But they also show – which is fundamentally more important – why we cannot say that contemporary history ‘begins’ in 1945 or 1939, or 1917, or 1898, or at any other specific date we may choose. There is a good deal of evidence, which I shall bring forward later, the cumulative effect of which is to suggest that the years immediately before and after 1890 were an important turning-point; but we shall do well to beware of precise dates. *Contemporary history begins when the problems which are actual in the world today first take visible shape*; it begins with the changes which enable, or rather which compel us to say that we have moved into a new era – the sort of changes, as I have already suggested, which historians emphasize when they draw a dividing line between the Middle Ages and ‘modern’ history at the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Just as the roots of the changes which took place at the time of the Renaissance may lead back to the Italy of Frederick II, so the roots of the present may lie as far back as the eighteenth century; but that does not make it impossible to distinguish two ages or invalidate the distinction between them. On the other hand, it indicates that there was a long period of transition before the *ethos* of one period was superseded by the *ethos* of the other; and we shall, in fact, find in the following pages that we are involved in large degree in a transitional age in which two periods, the ‘contemporary’ and the ‘modern’, uneasily coexisted. It is only now that we seem to be drawing out of this transition into a world whose outline we cannot yet plot.

2

If we associate the concept of contemporary history, as I believe we should, with the onset of a new era, what label

should we put on it? The answer is that we shall be well advised at present to avoid a label altogether. It is true that the term ‘contemporary history’ is provisional and ambiguous, but it is also colourless; and at present, as we begin to emerge from a long period of transition, it is safer to stick to a colourless, if meaningless, appellation rather than to adopt one which is precise but inaccurate. When we can see more clearly the newly emerging constellation of forces it will be time to think of a term which more nearly represents the world in which we live.

It is true that there have already been a number of attempts to find a new formula, but none is entirely satisfactory. They have been made by historians who have perceived, quite correctly, how rickety the conventional threefold division of history into ‘ancient’, ‘medieval’ and ‘modern’ has become. In particular, it has been suggested that, just as the Mediterranean was succeeded by a European age, so now the European has been, or is being, succeeded by an Atlantic age.¹ This scheme, which implies that the central theme of contemporary history is the formation of an Atlantic community, is plausible and attractive; but there are three reasons why we may hesitate before endorsing it. First of all, it is more a political than a historical concept; it took shape as a projection backwards from the Atlantic Charter of 1941 and was not current, so far as I have been able to discover, among historians before the Second World War.² Secondly, the sequence ‘Mediterranean–European–Atlantic’ is as much a reflection of a European point of view as the sequence ‘ancient–medieval–modern’ which it is intended to replace,

1. cf. O. Halecki, *The Limits and Divisions of European History* (London, 1950), particularly pp. 29, 54, 60 f., 167 f.

2. Among those who gave it currency was the American political commentator, Walter Lippman; from him it passed, in 1945, to the historians, Carlton Hayes, Garrett Mattingly and Hale Bellot, after which it became a fairly widespread concept. For a short account of its lineage, cf. Cushing Strout, *The American Image of the Old World* (New York, 1963), pp. 221 ff.

and for that reason alone it is a dubious appellation for a period one of the most obvious characteristics of which has been a decline in European predominance and a shift of emphasis away from Europe. And, finally, although there is no reason to deny the existence of 'an historic Atlantic economy' of which the countries on the two seabords of the Atlantic are 'interdependent parts', it is clear beyond all reasonable doubt that the trend in recent times has been for this economic community to get weaker rather than stronger.¹ Careful investigation shows that it was in the period 1785-1825 that the economic bonds between western Europe and America were closest; thereafter they relaxed slowly until 1860, and after 1860 the slackening gathered pace.² Today, in spite of the Atlantic alliance, the two seabords of the Atlantic are economically 'more distant from each other than they were a century ago'; certainly - and from the present point of view significantly - 'the decade of the nineties' was 'the end of one epoch and the beginning of another' in the history of the Atlantic economy.³

It would thus seem that there is little justification, for the historian soberly considering the facts, for adopting the view that contemporary history is, in its broader outline, interchangeable with the story of the rise of a new 'Atlantic' era. Indeed, if we base our conclusions on the course of events since 1949, it would be just as easy and just as plausible to argue that the world was moving not into an Atlantic but into a Pacific age. The war in Korea,

1. This is the conclusion of J. Godechot and R. R. Palmer in their brilliant re-examination of the whole question, 'Le problème de l'Atlantique du XVIII^e au XX^e siècle', printed in vol. v of the *Relazioni* of the Tenth Congress of Historical Sciences (Florence, 1955), pp. 173-239.

2. *ibid.*, p. 199.

3. This is the conclusion of Brinley Thomas, *Migration and Economic Growth. A Study of Great Britain and the Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge, 1954), pp. 118, 235; cf. also Godechot and Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

the conflict in Vietnam, problems of Laos - issues which since 1945 have been nearer than anything that has happened in Europe to sparking off a Third World War - the long-drawn-out and unresolved question of Formosa, and the tensions in south-east Asia between Indonesia and Holland and Indonesia and Great Britain, quite apart from the stupendous transformation which has gone on in China since 1949: what, it may be thought, are these but evidence that the axis of world history, which the philosophers of the eighteenth century saw moving from east to west, has taken one further westward leap and completed the circle? But such metahistorical speculations, fascinating as they sometimes are, are better left aside. The simple fact is that we do not have sufficient knowledge to decide such issues. The new period which we call 'contemporary' or 'post-modern' is at its beginning and we cannot yet tell where its axis will ultimately lie. All the labels we put on periods are *ex post facto*; the character of an epoch can only be perceived by those looking back on it from outside. That is why we must be content for the present with a provisional name for the 'post-modern' period in which we live. On the other hand, precisely because we stand outside it and can look back over it from outside, we can see the period which we still call 'modern history' - the European age which Pannikar declared to have begun in 1498 and ended in 1947¹ - as a process with a beginning and an end; and the very fact that we are able to form some notion of the structure and character of this earlier period enables us to establish, by contrast and comparison, some at least of the differentiating features of the period that followed it. It is these features, as I understand them, that will be the subject of the following chapters.

1. cf. K. M. Pannikar, *Asia and Western Dominance* (London, 1953), p. 11.

It is true that no sharp line divides the period we call 'contemporary' from the period we call 'modern'. In this we can agree with the upholders of the doctrine of historical continuity. The new world grew to maturity in the shadow of the old. When we first become aware of it, towards the close of the nineteenth century, it is little more than an intermittent stirring in the womb of the old world; after 1918 it acquires a separate identity and an existence of its own; it advances towards maturity with unexpected speed after 1945; but it is only in the very recent past, beginning around 1955, that it has thrown off the old world's tutelage and asserted the inalienable right to decide its own destiny. Its history is therefore a good deal less than the whole history of the period involved – indeed in the early years it is only a very small part of that history – and this is a complicating factor to which we shall return. But if our object is to understand the origins of the age in which we live and the constituent elements which make it so different from the European-centred world of the nineteenth century, we shall hardly be wrong if we say that it is the part that matters most to us.

When we seek to isolate those strands in the history of the period which lead forward to the future, it soon becomes evident – no matter which particular line we choose to follow – that they converge with surprising regularity at the same approximate date. It is in the years immediately preceding and succeeding 1890 that most of the developments distinguishing 'contemporary' from 'modern' history first begin to be visible. No doubt it would be unwise to exaggerate the significance of this – or any other – date as a dividing-line between two periods; it is more like the line of a graph, representing a statistical average with a considerable margin of fluctuation on either side. Even so, it is too well substantiated to be

ignored. Before the nineteenth century had closed, new forces were bringing about fundamental changes at practically every level of living and in practically every quarter of the inhabited globe, and it is remarkable, if we examine the literature of the period, how many people were aware of the way things were moving. The ageing Burckhardt in Basel, the English journalist, W. T. Stead, with his vision of the 'Americanization of the world', Americans such as Brooks Adams, even Kipling in the sombre 'Recessional' he wrote for Queen Victoria's jubilee in 1897, are only a few of the more outstanding figures among a multitude who sensed the unsettling impact of new forces: their particular prognostications, the fears and hopes they attached to the changes going on around them, may have proved wrong, but their perception, often dim but sometimes acute, that the world was moving into a new epoch was not simply an illusion.

When we seek to identify the forces which set the new trends in motion, the factors which stand out are the industrial and social revolution in the later years of the nineteenth century and the 'new imperialism' which was so closely associated with it. The nature and impact of these interlocked movements, much debated in recent years, will be examined in the following chapter; here it is sufficient to say that it is only by distinguishing what was new and revolutionary in them – in other words, by emphasizing the differences between the 'first' and the 'second' industrial revolutions and between the 'old' and the 'new' imperialisms – that we can expect to measure the full consequences of their impact. It is also true, of course, that it was some time before these consequences became explicit. None of the changes we shall have to consider in the following pages – neither the transition from a European to a global pattern of international politics, nor the rise of 'mass democracy', nor the challenge to liberal values – was decisive in itself; none alone was sufficient to bring about the shift from one period to another. What was

decisive was their interaction. Only when the constellation of political forces, which was still confined to Europe in the days of Bismarck's ascendancy, became involved with other constellations of political forces in other parts of the world; only when the conflict between peoples and governments interlocked with the conflict of classes, which was still not the case in 1914; only when social and ideological movements cut across frontiers in a way (or at least to an extent) that was unknown in the period of national states: only then did it become clear beyond all dispute that a new period in the history of mankind had arrived.

It is from this point of view that the various events which have been picked out as milestones marking the stages in the transition from one epoch to another have to be considered. Among them the war of 1914-18, with the unprecedented dislocations that followed in its train, was the first. For contemporaries and later writers alike, no other event heralded more clearly the ending of an epoch. 'It is not the same world as it was last July,' the American ambassador in London told President Wilson in October 1914;¹ 'nothing is the same.' But though many were to echo his words, it is evident today that they exaggerated the speed of change. In the first place, the end of one epoch is not necessarily coincidental with the onset of another; there may be – and in fact there was – a period of confused and uncertain tendencies in between. In the second place, the recuperative powers of the old European-centred world were formidable. The war of 1914-18 brought into relief the hidden and unresolved tensions which had been gathering strength since the closing years of the nineteenth century; it weakened the framework of society and made it easier for new forces to make themselves felt. But few things are more remarkable than the speed with which after 1919 the threat of radical social upheaval was banished; and it only needed the withdrawal of the United

1. cf. B. J. Hendrick, *The Life and Letters of Walter Hines Page*, vol. III (London, 1925), p. 165.

States into isolation and the elimination of Soviet Russia by revolution and civil war to convince European statesmen that international politics had not, after all, departed substantially from their old pattern. The urge to return to 'normalcy' – an urge which revealed the vitality of the conservative forces stemming from the old world – was one of the most conspicuous features of the decade between 1919 and 1929.

It is obvious to us today that this hankering for a return to pre-1914 conditions and the belief, prevalent between 1925 and 1929, that it had been attained, were illusory. Whatever the appearances to the contrary, the world was in fact moving on. Although by 1925 most economic indexes had reached, if not overtaken, the level of 1913, the war had brought substantial and irreversible changes in the balance of economic power, and in relation to overall growth the countries which had taken the lead in the pre-war world – Germany, for example, the United Kingdom, France, and Belgium – were falling back.¹ The position in the field of international politics was much the same. Here the shift in balance was masked by the temporary absence of the United States and the Soviet Union, but it never ceased to be the underlying reality and it is difficult today to follow the calculations and manoeuvres of European diplomacy in the inter-war years – from the Little Entente of 1921 to the Non-Intervention Committee of 1936 – without experiencing a feeling of futility only matched, perhaps, by the futility of Athenian politics in the days of Alexander the Great. It was an 'era of illusions'.² But the illusions were a potent factor in the history of the period – particularly the illusion that Europe retained the dominant position it had claimed in pre-war days. One result, among many, was that those in charge of

1. cf. W. A. Lewis, *Economic Survey, 1919-1939* (London, 1949), pp. 34-5, 139.

2. The phrase is that of René Albrecht-Carrié, *A Diplomatic History of Europe* (London, 1958), p. 385; cf. also pp. 301-4.

British policy in the thirties were so obsessed by Mussolini and Hitler that they neglected Hirota and Konoye, and when in July 1937 the Japanese began the Second World War which brought the European empires crashing down, they did not realize that the Second World War had begun. Mao Tse-tung was quick to point out the illusion behind this attitude. Japanese policy, he said, was 'directed not only against China', but also against all those countries with interests on the Pacific ocean, and neither England nor the United States would be able to 'remain neutral'.¹ But his words fell on stony ground. The mental horizon of European statesmen – even of those who, like the English, had major interests outside Europe – were still circumscribed by the presuppositions of the old world and dominated by the belief that the only significant things going on as late as 1939 were the things going on in Europe.

No one concerned with the period since 1918 can afford to ignore the persistence of old ways of thought and the conservative resistance to change. In a full-scale history of the period they would loom large. Throughout the years of transition the breakthrough of the new was impeded by the retarding force of the old. At each milestone we can see, if we look back, that the old positions were being eroded and undermined. That is true of the year 1917 which more than one historian has picked out as the decisive

1. Mao's remarks were reported by Edgar Snow, *Red Star over China* (London, 1937), pp. 94, 102. 'We know', Mao continued, 'that not only north China but the lower Yangtze valley and our southern seaports are already included in the Japanese continental programme. Moreover, it is just as clear that the Japanese navy aspires to blockade the China seas and to seize the Philippines, Siam, Indo-China, Malaya and the Dutch East Indies. In the event of war, Japan will try to make them her strategic bases, cutting off Great Britain, France and America from China, and monopolizing the seas of the southern Pacific. These moves are included in Japan's plans of naval strategy, copies of which we have seen.'

turning-point;¹ it is even more clearly true of the slump of 1929. But even after 1945 there were strong 'restorative' tendencies at work and it was only the failure of these that gave the impetus for the decisive leap into a new world. The burying of the age-old Franco-German rivalry, the search for a new statute for western Europe, the recognition of the division between western and eastern Europe which this implied, the outcome of the Suez war of 1956 and Macmillan's 'wind of change' speech early in 1960, were all evidence of a desire to liquidate the old concern before it crashed down in bankruptcy. But more important in the long run was the fact that the issues which were now agitating the world were predominantly new issues, reflecting a situation that had not existed until a few years earlier. By the end of 1960 it may fairly be said that the long period of transition was over.

Even so, we must not think in terms of a clear-cut break. When the decisive changes began towards the close of the nineteenth century, they had done so in a world which, for all its expansiveness and in spite of symptoms of *fin de siècle* malaise, was securely anchored to two fixed points: the sovereign national state and a firmly established social order stabilized by a prosperous property-owning middle class. Both characteristics proved remarkably tenacious. They weathered the storms of two world wars, and are still factors to be reckoned with in the world of today. Concepts such as sovereignty, the national state, and a property-owning democracy, middle-class in structure though expanded by the absorption of large segments of the working class, have been carried over as components of a society essentially different from that of 1914, in much the same way as the Germanic societies of the early European middle ages incorporated elements taken over from Rome. It is possible that these are dying elements,

1. e.g. E. Hölzle, 'Formverwandlung der Geschichte Das Jahr 1917', *Saeculum*, vol. VI (1955), pp. 329-44; H. Rothfels, *Zeitgeschichtliche Betrachtungen* (Göttingen, 1959), p. 11.

mere survivals which will disappear in the course of a few generations, as most of the Roman inheritance eventually became obsolete in Frankish Gaul; it is possible that they will remain – transformed, no doubt, and adapted to new conditions, but powerful and active – as constituent elements of a new society. We do not know and it would be pointless to speculate. All we can say with certainty is that they exist as counterbalancing factors in the contemporary situation, as elements of continuity which offset the elements of discontinuity and change. They indicate – what any historian with experience of similar changes in the past would expect – that the world which has emerged is neither sharply cut off from the world out of which it emerged nor simply a continuation of it; it is a new world with roots in the old.

4

If the retarding influence of conservative forces fighting to preserve as much as possible of the old European-centred world was one factor affecting the process of transition, another factor was the disruption of the heart of Europe through the rivalries and conflicts of the European powers between 1914 and 1945. No aspect of recent history has been more fully discussed. For most European historians the disputes and rivalries that gathered momentum after 1905 marked the beginning of the great civil war in which Europe, caught in the toils of its own past, encompassed its own destruction, and it was the failure of Europe to solve its own problems – in particular, the long-standing problems of nationalism – that ushered in a new age.

No one would deny that this view of contemporary history, with its emphasis on Europe and on the continuity of developments within Europe, illuminates certain aspects of the history of the period. The real question is whether it is adequate as a key to the process of transition as a whole. The years between 1890 and 1960 confront us

with two interlocking processes, the end of one epoch and the beginning of another, and the conflicts of the European powers undoubtedly played a large part in the former. What we have to ask is whether historians who have made Europe the pivot of their story have not concentrated too exclusively on the old world that was dying and paid too little attention to the new world coming to life. It is no doubt true that, but for the wars which brought the old world crashing down, the birth of the new world would have been more protracted and difficult. Their course and outcome also throw light on the post-war situation in Europe. But as soon as we extend our view from Europe to Asia and Africa, the position is different. There, as we shall see,¹ the conflicts and rivalries of the European powers were a contributory factor; but they do not help us to understand the character of the new world which emerged after 1945, any more than they explain the origins and growth of the forces that shaped it during the preceding fifty years. An interpretation which concentrates on the European predicament, in short, is too narrow for a process which was world-wide; it may not be wrong within its own limits, but it is misleading in balance and perspective.

Nor shall we understand the course of events in Europe itself, if we dissociate it from the world-wide process of change which began around 1890. The European conflicts of the first half of the twentieth century were more than a continuation of earlier European conflicts. From the end of the nineteenth century Europe was involved simultaneously in the problems inherited from its own past and in a process of adaptation to a new world situation, and both aspects of its history must be taken into account. For this reason it is easy to place disproportionate emphasis on the unsolved problems of nationalism, as they had developed in Europe since 1815. These problems, particularly the growth of German nationalism, were one factor in the

1. cf. below, pp. 154 ff.

situation; but equally important was the awareness – prominent in the minds of writers such as Hans Delbrück, Rudolf Kjellén, Paul Rohrbach, and Friedrich Naumann – that the position of Europe in the world was changing and that it would be irretrievably lost unless something were done to restore it. We can see this conviction emerging and gathering strength – particularly but not exclusively in Germany – during the 1890s, as a response to the new imperialism of the period, and we can see also how it was caught up and identified with the realization of German national aims. But it was never simply an expression of German nationalism. Rather its foundation was the conviction that policies which aimed merely to defend established positions were fighting a losing battle, and that a more positive reaction was necessary. This reaction has been called ‘the last attempt to reorganize modern Europe’.¹ The form it took was an attempt to weld together in the heart of Europe the core of a German-dominated empire strong enough to compete on terms of equality with the other great world powers of the time, imperial Russia, the United States, and the British empire. Its outcome was the wars of 1914 and 1939.

We shall have more to say later of the way this German attempt to reshape Europe affected the transition from a European to a world-wide system of international politics.² Here it concerns us in so far as it throws light on the origins of those forces which were later to take shape as Fascism and National Socialism. These forces were a characteristic by-product of the old world in decline. In 1914 they were still far weaker than the forces stemming from the past, particularly the force of European nationalism. But the further disintegration proceeded, the more they gathered strength. Divided at first among a number of small eccentric splinter-groups at loggerheads with bourgeois society – the so-called ‘revolutionaries of the right’ or ‘right-wing radicals’, of whom Moeller van den

1. cf. Halecki, *op. cit.*, pp. 167, 182. 2. cf. below, pp. 111–16.

Bruck is perhaps the typical example¹ – they drew strength from the turmoil and distress in Europe after 1918, until finally, with the onset of depression in 1929 and the sharpening antagonism between capitalism and communism, they became a major political force. Resistance to Hitler from within Europe was incomparably weaker in 1939 than resistance to Germany had been in 1914. The reason was that the national spirit which had sustained Europe from 1914 to 1918 had lost its *élan* and Fascist ideas had won a following in most European countries. Their emergence clouded and complicated the central issues of the age. Henceforward we find ranged against the conservative forces fighting tenaciously to maintain the old European world not only those on the left intent on replacing it by a new society but also those on the extreme right whose object was to reshape Europe in a form better able to withstand the onslaught of revolutionary conditions; and between these poles there was room for an infinite variety of groupings and regroupings.

The temptation to treat the ensuing complications as the substance of contemporary history is very great. To do so would be to fail to see the wood for the trees. The impact of Fascism in its various forms multiplied the possibilities of tactical manoeuvre, but it is not clear how substantially it affected the transition from one epoch of history to another. So far as the world situation was concerned, the consequences of National Socialism and Fascism may be brought under three headings, all of them indirect. First, they divided the forces fighting to defend the old order and so weakened and eventually disrupted the delaying action which had been so effective a brake on radical change for ten years before 1929.

1. The early chapters of O. E. Schüddekopf, *Linke Leute von Rechts* (Stuttgart, 1960) contain an informative account of the ‘rebellion of the youth of Europe against tradition, convention and a petrified order’, and more specifically of the origins of right-wing radicalism in Germany; for Moeller van den Bruck, cf. pp. 35–7.

Secondly, they emerged during the 1930s as the most formidable challenge to the *status quo* – far more immediately dangerous than left-wing radicalism or colonial disaffection – with the result that they drove the other two alignments, the conservative right and the socialist (and communist) left, into a temporary alliance which was one main reason for the enhanced power exercised by the latter after 1945. And finally, by deflecting attention from other issues and focusing it on the 'Fascist threat' in Europe, they helped to accelerate change in other parts of the world. Thus the long series of concessions in the Far East resulting from British preoccupation with Mussolini in the Mediterranean and Hitler in Europe encouraged and facilitated the policies of Japan, which were to prove one of the most powerful solvents of the old order in Asia.

In all these ways Fascism and National Socialism, which claimed to be the only effective instruments for shoring up the old world – and which won mass support on that score – turned out, by a peculiar irony of history, to be instruments in its collapse. They played a part in the process of transition as factors forcing forward the march of events; but their positive contribution to the new world arising amidst the ruin of the old was small. It would be a superficial analogy, for example, to derive the 'guided democracy' of Indonesia or the 'basic democracy' of Pakistan from the Fascist corporate state or to attribute the political structure of Argentina after 1945 to Perón's visit to Italy between 1939 and 1941 rather than to see it in the context of the social changes in Latin America inaugurated by the Mexican revolution of 1910. If we wish to understand why, among the many possibilities opened up by the collapse of Germany and Japan in 1945, certain ones materialized and others did not – why, for example, the fall of Japan did not result in the restoration of the British, French and Dutch empires in eastern Asia – we must turn to developments which historians have too easily banished to the outer margins of history and which

are only now slowly finding their way back to the centre. Today it is evident that much we have been taught to regard as central is really peripheral and much that is usually brushed aside as peripheral had in it the seeds of the future. Looked at from the vantage-point of Dien Bien Phu, for example, Amritsar stands out with new and unaccustomed prominence among the events of 1919.

It is no doubt true that, down to 1945, the end of the old world was the most conspicuous aspect of recent history; it engrossed the attention of contemporaries and blinded them to the importance of other aspects. But it is the business of the historian, looking back over events from a distance, to take a wider view than contemporaries, to correct their perspectives, and to draw attention to developments whose long-term bearing they could not be expected to see. For the most part they have made little use of their opportunity; indeed it sometimes seems as though they are in danger of being frozen for ever in the patterns of thought of the years 1933–45. In part, no doubt, this is due to the fact that many historians are still emotionally involved in the death-agonies of the old world, which they feel more deeply than the birth-pangs of the new; it is due, also, to the fact that, until very recently, we were unable to stand outside the period of transition and look back over it as a whole. Today that is no longer the case. If, as I have tried to indicate, the long transition from one age to another is now over, if we can say that between 1955 and 1960 the world moved into a new historical period, with different dimensions and problems of its own, it should no longer be impossible to restore the balance between the old world which has passed and the new world which has emerged.

To do so is also a matter of urgent practical necessity. It would be dangerously misleading to assume that the phenomena of transition, which were the mark of the period 1918–56, will be characteristic of the new era. The rising generation will inevitably look back over the

twentieth century with different priorities from ours. Born into a world in which – as all present indications suggest – the major questions will not be European questions but the relationships between Europe, including Russia, and America and the peoples of Asia and Africa, they will find little relevance in many of the topics which engrossed the attention of the last generation. The study of contemporary history requires new perspectives and a new scale of values. We shall find more clues, for example, in Nkrumah's autobiography than in Eden's memoirs, more points of contact in the world of Mao and Nehru than in that of Coolidge and Baldwin; and it is important to remember that, while Mussolini and Hitler were prancing and posturing at the centre of the European stage, changes were going on in the wider world which contributed more fundamentally than they did to the shape of things to come. The tendency of historians to dwell on those aspects of the history of the period which have their roots in the old world sometimes seems to hamper rather than to further our understanding of the forces of change. Here we shall try to strike a different balance. We shall not forget that the end of one epoch and the birth of another were events happening simultaneously within the same contracting world; but it is with the new epoch growing to maturity in the shadow of the old that we shall be primarily concerned.

5

Every day that passes brings new indications that the long period of transition with which this book is primarily concerned has ended, and that the events of the very recent past belong to a new and unsurveyable phase of history. For that reason no attempt will be made to deal with them here, still less to forecast the shape of things to come. That does not mean that I am unaware that developments in many areas of the world have moved beyond the point –

roughly the end of the fifties – I have taken as a terminus; it means only that as yet they are hardly ready for historical appraisal. The sort of writing which attempts to wring the last ounce of meaning out of developments such as the ideological conflict between China and the U.S.S.R. or the political instability of newly emancipated Africa oversteps the limits of historical analysis; the range of possibilities is still so great that any attempt to discuss them is bound to be hypothetical and speculative.

If we wish to mark the opening of this new period – which is, of course, the period of 'contemporary' history in the strict sense of the word – the end of 1960 or the beginning of 1961 is as good a date as any and it is tempting to take the start of the Kennedy administration in the United States as a convenient point for registering the break. This was the first occasion on which decision-making at the highest level passed into the hands of a generation which had not been involved in politics before 1939 and which was not conditioned – in the way, for example, that Sir Anthony Eden's reactions had been conditioned in 1956 – by 'pre-war' attitudes and experience. Nevertheless it would be a mistake to pay too much attention to the personal factor. It was rather a question of cumulative trends which came to a head around the time of Kennedy's accession to power, and so far as his administration registered a change, it would be nearer the truth to regard it as a reflection rather than a cause of a new situation. By the end of 1960 changes which had been taking shape since the death of Stalin in 1953, had reached the stage of crystallization. At the same time, in every quarter of the globe, new problems had emerged which had little direct connexion with the problems of the period of transition.

Already by 1958, 'a turning-point in modern Asian history',¹ it was evident that international politics were operating in a new context. The 'cold war', which had

1. cf. M. Brecher, *The New States of Asia* (London, 1963), p. 73.

claimed first place from 1947 to the Suez war and the Hungarian revolt of 1956, ceased to be the dominant issue, and in the post-Suez and post-Hungary atmosphere of stalemate, a decisive shift of focus took place. Among other things, 'new local points of friction were coming into existence' which in the long run 'could not fail to influence wider alignments'.¹ In the communist *bloc*, the ideological controversy between China and the Soviet Union, simmering since 1957, came to a head in 1959.² In Asia the common front established at Bandung in 1955 gave way to territorial disputes between China, on the one hand, and India, Burma and Pakistan, on the other. In Africa, where 1958 was also 'a year of growing tension',³ the dismantling of European colonialism had hardly been completed before the economic and political problems of independence made themselves felt. In western Europe the Rome treaties of 1957 registered the conclusion of the first stage in the move towards new forms of regional integration. What was common to all these issues was that they marked the emergence of a new phase of history. At mid-century the world was still grappling with the problems of transition; ten years later it was settling down to a new pattern.

To discuss this new pattern in detail would require another and in many ways a very different book. Nevertheless it is not difficult to pick out some of the more obvious ways in which it differed from the old. The most conspicuous was the new prominence of China, unmistakably advancing towards the status of a world-power. More fundamental was the change in relations between the communist and non-communist worlds, a

1. For an admirable analysis of the new situation, cf. R. F. Wall in *Survey of International Affairs, 1956-1958* (London, 1962), pp. 400 f.

2. D. S. Zagoria, *The Sino-Soviet Conflict, 1956-1961* (Princeton, 1962).

3. cf. C. E. Carrington in *Survey of International Affairs, 1956-1958*, p. 444.

change due not to settlement of outstanding problems, but to the realization that the old issues were no longer the insistent issues, and that in any case there was no practical alternative, in the world as it was, to some form of co-existence. The result was an abatement of ideological strife and a growing impatience with ideologies which originated in the European past and were no longer congruent with the realities of a world which had ceased to be centred on Europe. The counterpart to this emancipation from the tyranny of outworn concepts was the appearance of 'neutralism' as a new political principle. The sudden, unexpected emergence of new problems in the aftermath of Asian and African emancipation – above all, the problems caused by the growing disparity between the industrialized and the underdeveloped countries – tended to cut across old alignments and to produce new divisions without parallel in the old world. And although, on the surface, the most striking feature of the new situation was the pullulation of new nationalisms, more significant of the rise of new patterns was the evidence of awareness that technological progress required larger groupings, and that the traditional national unit, which was another legacy of nineteenth-century Europe, was an inadequate basis for coping with the problems of technological society. The tendency to form new regional groupings was world-wide; it was at work not only in eastern and western Europe, where it was seen in the establishment of 'Comecon' and the western European common market, but also in Latin America, in the Arab world, and in Africa, where many of the newly emerging states 'adopted the federal idea even before full independence'.¹ Finally, there was a general realization that, so long as the existing thermo-nuclear balance of power continued to exist, the new patterns could not be altered in any substantial way by

1. cf. P. Calvocoressi, *World Order and New States* (London, 1962), p. 100.

recourse to war. Thus a world of great regional blocks seemed to be arising, different in almost all its preconditions from the world of nation-states of thirty or forty years earlier – a world in which communism and capitalism would figure more as alternative systems than as conflicting ideologies, and in which the great overriding issues, from which no one could contract out, would be the problems of poverty, backwardness, and overpopulation.

It is none of our business to try to depict the lines of development of this new world or the probable impact of other more fundamental changes. There is every likelihood that atomic energy, electronics, and automation will affect our lives even more fundamentally than the industrial revolution and the scientific changes at the close of the nineteenth century. As yet, however, we cannot hope to measure their impact and it would be unprofitable to attempt to do so. But it is only necessary to compare the world situation at mid-century and the world situation today to realize that we have crossed the threshold of a new age. In 1949, for example, the expansion of communism into China and eastern Europe could still be thought of as a temporary, reversible advance; when Dulles died ten years later it was clear that it was there to stay, and the hope of forcing it back, which was a dominant theme of the period from 1947 to 1958, had given way to speculation on the possibility of evolution within the communist world as the basis for a *modus vivendi*.

Such changes were more than superficial. They marked the starting-point of new lines of development leading into a new era. When communism, which down to 1939 had been confined as a political system to one country and to about eight per cent of the world's inhabitants, became the political system of almost one-third of the population of the globe, and when capitalism, which between the wars had directly or indirectly controlled nine-tenths of the world's surface, was reduced by the rise of the neutralist *bloc* to a minority position in the world as a whole and in

the United Nations – which was the case by 1960¹ – the old political framework was irretrievably shattered. It was not that the new ideas triumphed – for the most part they did not – but rather that the sheer attrition of events made it necessary to come to terms with new circumstances. Even then, of course, there was a residue of problems left over from the old world. But the balance had changed and the order of priorities was no longer the same. Nothing is more noticeable around 1958 than the liquidation of what, up to that time, had been regarded as the essential problems of the twentieth century. By comparison with the insistent problems of over-population and under-development in Asia and Africa, issues such as German unification fell into the background, and the permanence of the Oder-Neisse frontier was tacitly accepted. In this respect, as in many others, the new world seemed to be moving in directions almost the contrary of the old. The problems anchored in the European past were losing urgency, the values of the age of European nationalism were crumbling, and the focus of interest had passed from the Atlantic, where the North Atlantic Treaty Organization had become an almost meaningless survival, to the Pacific. In 1950 Asia and Africa had been continents at the end of colonialism; a decade later they had passed into the post-colonial age, and with the end of colonialism a new phase of world history had begun.

Whether this new phase represents an advance is not, of course, the relevant point. Many of the expectations bound up with the ending of colonialism were extravagant and unlikely to be fulfilled; and the long series of *coups*, beginning in Burma and Pakistan in 1958 and continuing in quick succession to the upheavals in Nigeria and Ghana

1. At the end of 1960 Adlai Stevenson admitted that, 'due to the admission of so many new countries, the United States and the western democracies no longer control the United Nations'; cf. R. B. Stebbins, *The United States in World Affairs, 1960* (New York, 1961), P. 357.

in 1966, only registered the intractability of the problems facing the ex-colonial peoples. The essential feature of the new age was that the world was integrated in a way it had never been before; and this meant that no people, however small and remote, could 'contract out'. A century ago the Taiping rebellion in China was a distant event, which left Englishmen and Europeans untouched; today what happens in Laos or Vietnam is as likely to spark off the Third (and last) World War as Balkan affairs were to initiate the chain of events leading to the First World War in 1914.

The new period, at the beginning of which we stand, is the product of basic changes in the structure of national and international society and in the balance of world forces. It is a period of readjustment on a continental scale, and its emblem is the mushroom cloud high above Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the nuclear pile in which the old certitudes were consumed for ever. It is also a period which has experienced a breakthrough in scientific knowledge and achievement, and an alliance between science and technology, which has the power to change for all time the material basis of our lives on a scale inconceivable only fifty years ago, but which at the same time has brought us face to face with the possibility of self-extinction. It is, in short, a period of explosive new dimensions, in which we have been carried with breathtaking speed to the frontiers of human existence and deposited in a world with unparalleled potentialities but also with sinister undercurrents of violence, irrationality, and inhumanity. The views we take of this new world may differ, and it is easy to speculate on the course of development it will follow; all we can safely say – with Valéry¹ – is that, if historical experience is anything to go by, the outcome will betray all expectations and falsify all predictions.

1. cf. Paul Valéry, *Collected Works*, vol. x (London, 1962), pp. 71, 113, 116, 126-7.

II

THE IMPACT OF TECHNICAL AND SCIENTIFIC ADVANCE

Industrialism and Imperialism as the Catalysts of a New World

WHEN we seek to pinpoint the structural changes which lie at the roots of contemporary society, we are carried back to the last decade of the nineteenth century; and there we come to a halt. Even the most resolute upholder of the theory of historical continuity cannot fail to be struck by the extent of the differences between the world in 1870 and the world in 1900. In England, where the industrial revolution had begun early and advanced in a steady progression, the fundamental nature of the changes after 1870 is less apparent than elsewhere; but once we extend our vision to cover the whole world, their revolutionary character is beyond dispute. Even in continental Europe, with perhaps the sole exception of Belgium, industrialization was a product of the last quarter rather than of the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century; it was a consequence, rather than a concomitant, of the 'railway age', which by 1870 had provided the continent with a new system of communications. Across the Atlantic the civil war had proved a major stimulus to industrialization; but it was after the ending of the civil war in 1865 and the uneasy post-war interlude spanned by the presidencies of General Grant (1868-76) that the great industrial expansion began which transformed beyond recognition the society de Tocqueville had known and described. When in 1869 the first railroad to span the American continent was completed at a remote spot in Utah, the United States 'ceased to be an Atlantic country