

USA

**THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL POWER SERIES  
RENAISSANCE TO THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD**

Don Fenton

October 2016

**The Renaissance to the Modern World**

An overview of some of the factors involved in the political, economic, philosophical, historical, ideological, social, and ecological dynamics which led from the mediæval period to the modern world.

Course-notes are available for downloading from the web-site, or can be purchased from the office, and should (hopefully) be read before the commencement of the course.

## READING LIST

There are few titles which provide a general political/economic overview of world history of any value for this period which are available in the public library system. Course members are directed to the relevant *chapters* dealing with the period (roughly) 1500-2000 CE [AD] in books on particular *regions* rather than countries.

Channon, J., & Hudson, R., *The Penguin Atlas of Historical Russia*, Viking,  
Harmondsworth, 1995.

Ebrey, P.B., *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China*, University Press, Cambridge, 1996.

Mellersh, H.E.L., *The Chronology of World History*, Oxford, Helicon, 1995.

Thomson, D., *Europe Since Napoleon*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1966.

A very good book which is apparently no longer in the public library system, but which may be available on the on-line second-hand market is

Fernandez-Armesto, F., *The Times Guide to the Peoples of Europe*,  
Times Books, London, 1994.

## THE RENAISSANCE

The beginning of the Renaissance is frequently set, for convenience, at the discovery of the Americas: Cortez' expedition was the last gasp of the expansion of Latin Christendom on the mediæval model: no longer would colonization be driven by individual adventurers who were intent on carving out a domain for themselves. Henceforth colonization would have a different style and purpose: exploitation for the economic benefit of nation-states was to be the main motivating force.

At around the same time, the culmination of the rediscovery of the wealth and scope of Classical literature, in combination with increasing literacy and the invention of the printing press, brought a new human-centred, rather than God-centred, focus to European thought. Improved agricultural techniques provided England with an increasing surplus for trade, and the strong Low Countries and English economies attracted much of the wealth that Spain and Portugal wrested from their American and Far-Eastern conquests. Changes in the direction of the economic development of Europe during the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern periods tended to be set by the towns. The rise of anti-clericalism was fuelled by abuses (both real and perceived) in the Church and the objections of the rulers of nation-states to papal authority. The conflicts between local autonomy and national authority, and between national autonomy and internationalistic authority, were intense.

Religious opposition to a life with the major end of material gain diminished with the spread of Protestant religious beliefs which equated worldly success with industry, and hence godliness: the acquisition of wealth became approved social practice. Mediæval cloth-making in the Low Countries was essentially capitalistic, depending on a minute division of hourly-paid wage labour and the existence of an urban proletariat. Protestant religious beliefs gave a religious justification for capitalism which enabled capitalism to burst the social and ideological restrictions which had confined it to a minor rôle in the mediæval economy. Capitalism was inconsistent with the corporate structure and sense of community of the mediæval town: capitalism is concerned with unrestricted profit-making for the individual capitalist. The spread of Protestantism with its stress on direct personal communication between man and God undermined the power-structure of the Roman Church and left the individual personally responsible for his religion and morality. Economic change created social stresses, and the new orthodoxy resulted in the Protestant Inquisition which dwarfed the earlier "Spanish", or Catholic, Inquisition(s) in its random excesses. To greatly simplify some complex social issues, the Catholic Inquisition was concerned to suppress "heresy" and heretical teachings, whilst the Protestant Inquisition scourged social and behavioural deviance in support of a drive to conformity with the new middle-class values.

The growth of trade and industry created a significantly large class of manufacturers, bankers, merchants, and their employees who were neither tied to the land nor compatible with the guild system, with few definable (in mediæval terms) social rights or obligations. Capitalism is defined as the purchase by capital of free labour-power (the labourer must be free to sell his labour power where he pleases); that labour-power, in turn, produces more value than is given to it in wages, a process that can be traced back to the 11th century. As economic power became concentrated in the hands of traders and manufacturers, the strength of the aristocracy was eroded; with the internationalistic authority of both the Catholic Church and the nobility weakened, monarchs began (by appealing directly to the people in many cases) to concentrate political power in the nation-states. The nation-state had defined geographic boundaries, within which the ruler claimed the loyalty of, and legal jurisdiction over, its citizens, thus threatening the rights and privileges of the old order and the freedoms of the new.

In the mediæval period, the feudal lords and the towns had assumed effective political control over their own, effectively independent, areas; there were, at times, over ten thousand separate political units in France alone. With the support of the rising middle classes, the monarchs were able to (to some extent) dispense with the financial and military (but not political) support of the feudal barons and form strong, centralized, geographically-and-culturally-defined nation-states.

### **THE FORMATION OF THE NATION-STATE**

During the mediæval period, European society had been divided into classes rather than national groups; the aristocrats of any given country had more in common with the aristocracies of other countries (with which they intermarried) than with their own lower classes; the guild members of a trade in any given country often had more in common with followers of the same trade in another country than they did with neighbours who might follow other trades or occupations. The rural poor had a purely local (district) patriotism. The expansion of capital and the increasing economic importance of the middle classes, whose commerce was enhanced by peaceful conditions, and whose taxes freed the monarchs from dependence on the nobility for government and, to some extent, military service, enabled the monarchs to limit the local powers of the aristocracy and absorb the small feudal political units in nation-states.

The invention of gunpowder contributed to both the decline of the military importance of the nobility, whose castles could not stand cannon-fire, and to the rise of the nation-state, as the armaments industry was almost entirely at the service of the state. Heavy cannon enabled

monarchs to compel the obedience of their aristocracies. The privately owned armaments factories, the world's first heavy industries, are an indication of the important reciprocal relationship between capitalism and nation-states. Taxes on the profits of capital enabled the monarchs to finance state expenditure on the products of capital. Hand-held firearms deskilled the rank-and-file soldiery, who no longer needed a lifetime's training in weapons usage, and made conscripted soldiery (from persons with no previous weapons-training) a serious, rather than a last resort, military recourse. The armaments industry could hardly have existed without the buying-power of the monarchs of nation-states; the monarchs could not have created centralized nation-states without the armaments industry and the financial resources of the wealthy middle classes, amongst other factors.

National rivalries were further fuelled by antipathies between peoples who spoke different vernacular languages, and literatures began to be created in those vernaculars. Latin was replaced as the language of literature by local dialects which outstripped other dialects as they became the vehicles of literature, creating national languages. So the *Langue d'Oïl* became the common literary language of France, Castilian that of Spain, Florentine that of Italy, the London variant of Saxon that of England, and the dialect of Saxony that of Germany. National languages encouraged the growth of national feeling and patriotism, the formation of national cultures, and facilitated the centralization of government and territorial unification. In contrast, local languages – such as Cornish, Sard, or Catalanian, for example – persisted as a focus for local loyalties, whilst written Latin remained for long the language of international intellectual discourse.

Cores of power began to emerge. A core of power concentrates economic, political, social, and ideological power [including intellectual power]. Spain was the most powerful nation-state of the early Renaissance period, followed by France. England was further advanced along the road to national unity and centralized government than the other nations of Europe, partly because of its small size, its natural boundaries, and the strong governmental institutions and effective tax-system which had been established by William the Conqueror. The German king, an elective monarch chosen by the great magnates, was also the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Candidates for the throne were forced to make concessions to the electors, thus weakening the central power, which was further eroded by the efforts of the various German states to enhance their power at the expense of the Emperor's, and the political need to take account of the Papacy's position on various questions: Germany was not to become a nation-state until the late nineteenth century. Italy was fragmented into a large number of independent political units, and the territorial claims of the papacy, together

with the ambitions of the major European Powers, meant that Italy was also to remain divided until the late nineteenth century. Portugal was united against the threat of domination by Spain at an early date, engendering and fixing a sense of national patriotism.

During the mediæval period, Europe had been united by the ideological power of the Church, the ecclesiastical system of Church government and diplomacy, and the ecclesiastical system of taxation: it had been divided, socially, politically, militarily, and economically into thousands of independent units. The Renaissance saw the development of Europe into a multi-state system with a number of cores of power united by a common history and a common underlying culture.

The ideological power of the Roman Church came under challenge towards the end of the Mediæval Period. There had been numerous “heresies”, sometimes accompanied by peasant revolts, before then, but these seldom challenged the accepted place of the Church in the scheme of things, being largely confined to matters of doctrine, or such things as the poverty of the clergy: the right of the Church to govern the spiritual affairs of men, even when those affairs intruded into the political world, was seldom questioned. But William of Occam and Marsiglio of Padua asserted that the Church should be subordinate to the State, a notion that was to be taken up by Machiavelli. Martin Luther, in attempting to fight corruption within the Church, was finally drawn [or pushed?] into a fundamentalist position which denied papal authority and fostered nationalistic values. Henry VIII of England, a staunch and learned Catholic who had been intended for the Church, removed the English Church from papal authority on grounds which were at once religious and political: Protestant influences began to grow within the English Church despite opposition from Henry, who was no protestant. Protestant churches, bolstered by vernacular Bibles, espousing various forms of fundamentalist belief, Anabaptists, Calvinists, etc., began to spring up all over Europe: religious uniformity, the major factor unifying Europe, was gone. Religious warfare began.

Constant communication with Muslim sources, and the sack of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204, brought new works of Classical Greek literature to the West, and the threat to Constantinople (which finally fell to the Turks in 1453) encouraged a flood of refugees who carried their precious books with them: this substantial input of secular Greek thought, translated into vernacular languages, hit an increasingly literate Western Europe like a bombshell. The growth of humanism had been tolerated by the Church so long as the language of discourse was Latin or Greek: educated people such as Erasmus could attack the Church on doctrinal, moral, and theological grounds so long as such criticism remained confined to an educated élite. Translation of important Greek and Latin texts into vernacular

languages encouraged popular dissemination and discussion of controversial ideas. The publication of opinions critical of the Church in the vernacular brought forth a violent response from the Church: Luther's publication of a treatise in German marked his final break with the Papacy. However, the majority of humanists were appalled by the growth of Protestant belief and the loss of Christian unity, while the fundamentalist masses were hostile to educated opinion and debate, which demanded a lifetime's commitment to learning to understand: both the Catholic and Protestant Inquisitions targeted humanist thinkers, books were burned, and whole libraries destroyed.

Education became separated into two spheres: the Latin-and-Greek based education of the universities and the vernacular education of the common people. Schools for the teaching of elementary mathematics, arithmetic, and vernacular reading and writing sprang up all over Europe. Many of the teachers were virtually illiterate themselves, and many of the schools were co-operative self-help groups without teachers at all. Literacy rates, at least amongst the upper working and middle classes improved. Natural sciences, mathematics, and mechanics, where such disciplines were perceived to have immediate practical applications, flourished.

### **THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD**

Over the Mediæval period, the Arabic international trade system had united an area from Spain to China, by land and sea, in a complex trading network, which had enormous economic consequences for the transmission of ideas, goods, agricultural techniques, the introduction of new crops, and much more: a "world system". During this course we have sometimes had occasion to refer to "multi-state systems", such as those which existed in South-East China during the later Mediæval Period, Southern Arabia slightly earlier, in Classical Greece, the Indian sub-continent, and in the Mesopotamian basin before that. Multi-state systems are dynamic engines for change. When some of these multi-state systems are connected we have what is termed a "world system". From the Early Modern Period, Europe was a multi-state system, with each state being a core of power, each state being geographically large by the standards of the ancient world; the system as a whole possessed a core of power which varied according to the circumstances pertaining at the time. Spain, with its great wealth deriving from its colonies in the Americas, was the core of power which dominated Europe in the sixteenth century, closely followed by Portugal, and declining as Holland rose to dominance in the seventeenth century, with France always a major player in European affairs. This period also witnessed the build-up of economic power which brought Great Britain to its position of dominance in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The story of the rise of Europe to the position of a core of power which dominated the entire



“world system” is largely the story of the rise of Britain to the position of a core of power which dominated Europe.

British trade enjoyed a brief boom towards the end of the sixteenth century, and despite some crises in the early 17th century, entered a largely sustained boom period in 1675, accompanied and supported by an expansion of diplomatic activity which was supported by warships.

In the 17th century there began a change from field to crop rotation; new staples such as maize and potatoes were introduced from the Americas and horticulture developed rapidly; the average yield per acre was greatly increased and the population was both better-fed and able to expand. Estates grew larger, as the smaller landholders tended not have other sources of income and were hit by the land tax of the 18th century; the larger units provided economies of scale and more surplus per farmer. Agriculture also provided the raw materials for a variety of industries from baking through printing to tanning and brewing as well as soap-making and textiles.

In each industrial area there was a growth in the number and size of towns. Improved transportation widened the area from which the urban areas could draw supplies, permitting expansion and the urban concentration of industry. Although there was a tendency for industry to concentrate in certain areas (textiles where water was soft, or around sources of water-power, or at a junction of trade-routes) the corporate towns were avoided by nascent capitalists due to the restrictions imposed by the guilds on production, prices, and labour conditions: in the new towns, such restrictions were absent. The “putting-out” of work to farmers and their families avoided guild regulations and stimulated the division of labour, particularly in the textile industries. The development of the factory (although not yet widespread) enabled the unification of management and the further division of labour under one roof, together with increasing specialization. The growth of a mass consumption market - at first mostly rural, where the bulk of the population lived - that was able to exploit the labour of a displaced rural proletariat provide the stimulus to the economic take-off that occurred in Britain towards the end of the 18th century. The market was predominantly national-domestic.

By the end of the 17th century a well-organized market in foreign exchange had developed; despite variations in the quality of the various coinages and political hostilities, the international movement of funds for the payment of goods was greatly facilitated. The prevailing economic ideology of the period was mercantilism, which was evidenced politically in autocratic control of the economy for the purpose of achieving a favourable

balance of trade to the enrichment of the ruler and his kingdom, with which the common weal was identified. Within the state, economic growth could diffuse freely right across the nation, both geographically and hierarchically, without autocratic political control. In Britain, capitalism was diffused widely and organically throughout the social structure before the economic take-off of the late eighteenth century began. Agricultural growth took off about one hundred years earlier, and within fifty years had doubled the average disposable surplus. The raw numbers are misleading: yeomen's incomes increased by a factor of ten; labourer's incomes decreased in real terms, skilled workers made very moderate gains.

The concentration of ready cash and the organs of trade and finance in the city of London led to the economic dominance of the capital from at least the beginning of the 16th century, with the various provincial centres acting as specialist manufactories, functionally differentiated from the apex of the administrative hierarchy in the capital. The true beginning of the "industrial revolution" lies in the increase in manufactories and manufactures which began with the Restoration. Trade in manufactured goods was much more decentralized. Fairs persisted well into the 18th century, by which time they had come to specialize in the staple products of their regions, but weekly markets in the towns began to appropriate the fair-trade in response to an increasing population and improved communications. The chief highway was the sea. Access to the sea ports and many internal markets was cheapest for most goods by internal waterways where navigation was unimpeded by flashes, floodgates, and sluices. During the 17th century much improvement took place to make the rivers more suitable for transport; weirs were removed, beds deepened, banks strengthened, and locks constructed; routes were shortened by digging new channels. The canal systems of the late 18th century followed. Internal transportation benefited the landed aristocracy, who owned the land through which many of the rivers, canals and roads passed, and were able to charge tolls for their use; the aristocracy was also a major beneficiary of the new boom in agriculture. A system of turnpikes, roads where tolls were charged which were (in theory) used for road-maintenance, often did much to improve land transport. Such changes also took place on the Continent, but at a slower pace.

It is apparent that, over the course of History, the economic bases of cores of power rest on dynamic agricultural systems. The civilization of Egypt was based on irrigation agriculture; the civilization of Sumer and the cultures that succeeded it in Mesopotamia were based on irrigation agriculture; the civilizations of the Chinese region were based on irrigation agriculture; many of the various cultures and civilizations that variously arose and declined in Central Asia were based on irrigation agriculture; the Minoan and Greek civilizations were

based on the “Mediterranean triad” of wheat, the olive, and the vine; the rise of Macedonia was based on rich stock-and-grain-raising resources; Roman civilization was based on the exploitation of all the agricultural methods adapted to the various ecologies of the Empire and the production of fruits, vegetables, and herbs from all the lands to which they had access; the civilization of Western Europe, particularly in the north, during the mediæval period, was based on the mould-board plough, which enabled the exploitation of deep, heavy soils for the cultivation of grains, broadly speaking, including broad (fava) beans and field peas.

Although the Romans had cultivated vegetables and herbs extensively, this practice had greatly diminished, particularly in north-west Europe, and mediæval agriculture had been based on the production of staple crops: grains (including broad beans and field peas), vines, fruits, and domestic animals; hunting and gathering was of major importance for subsistence and the majority of vegetables and herbs were obtained in this way. Towards the close of the mediæval period the poorer arable lands went back to pasture and the village commons were increasingly acquired by the great landlords as sheep pasture, and more efficient methods of manuring, crop-rotation, and land-reclamation began to be introduced, incidentally depriving the agricultural poor of important means of subsistence.

The Early Modern Period was characterized by vastly improved methods of crop-rotation and the reintroduction of vegetable cultivation, with a consequent improvement in the general diet. Crops such as sugar cane (originally a Far Eastern plant) were introduced, at first, during the mediæval period, to the Mediterranean region and then between the colonial possessions of the various European nations, while such new staples as potatoes, maize, beans, and citrus and other fruits were introduced to Europe itself. Root crops such as turnips and beets (which originated in various parts of continental Europe) were originally used for animal fodder, while the tomato, chili, and eggplant, so typical a part of the “Mediterranean diet” of today did not come into general use until the nineteenth century. Agricultural produce imported from the Far East and the Americas, especially sugar, cotton, tobacco, and rice, became important to the European economy, while coffee, tea, and rum began to compete with beer and wine in the European diet.

Although full crop rotation using legumes to revive the soil was developed in Holland, it was in England that the agricultural revolution of the 17th and 18th centuries went furthest, due to a number of social factors. Firstly the enclosures had resulted in the elimination of smallholdings, making the size of farms more economic, increasing the free-labour pool: a larger property under one person’s control generated more agricultural surplus, and displaced the families which had depended on the commons’ resources to become members of a “free”

labour pool. Secondly, absentee landlordism, common over most of continental Europe, was rare in England where the farmer (even if an aristocrat) tended to live on, and take a direct interest in, his land. Horticulture, the cultivation of fruits, flowers, herbs and vegetables as cash crops, increased the economic viability of agricultural land and added valuable variety to the English and Dutch diets. Fodder crops enabled stock to be successfully kept alive over winter and improved the quality of meat; selective breeding also had an impact on improved quality of both crops and animals. Capitalist plantation-farming in the colonies, sugar tobacco, cotton, [and potatoes in Ireland and Eastern Europe] brought new staples onto the European market.

New industries arose, based on the new agricultural products, and further industries developed based on the products of those, while existing industries improved in both technical and economic efficiency. Cotton, for example, enabled a new textile industry to develop, and provided the populace with cheap, comfortable clothing which was easy to launder, thus raising the standard of cleanliness of the general population. However, the factory system resulted in overspecialization of occupations, so that jobs became increasingly boring and demeaning, and the heavy concentration of populations in slums resulted in poverty, disease, and inadequate urban housing. Large-scale capitalist production of alcoholic beverages, particularly spirits such as gin, rum and brandy, by their cheapness encouraged drunkenness on an unprecedented scale and tended to replace more wholesome and nutritious – and lower-alcohol - beverages such as beer, mead and wine in the national diet.

Technological improvements in shipbuilding, navigation, and armaments gave Europeans an effective dominance over most of the world, while within Europe the urban middle class began to effectively dominate society. England's middle class was socially and economically integrated with both the lower classes and the aristocracy. If Europe was emerging as the economic core of power of the world, England was emerging as the economic core of power of Europe.

Changes in military methods in the early modern period were of special significance. Basically, the Catholic powers continued to place heavy reliance on aristocratic cavalry in various forms, while the Protestant powers turned to citizen infantry forces of differing kinds. The English devotion to sport (mainly a Sunday afternoon activity), so puzzling to European eyes, played a strong rôle in Britain's rise to military dominance: from the obvious example of archery in the Late Mediaeval Period to the drilling of militia in the 17th century, we come to ball-games such as cricket, relying on steadiness, discipline, teamwork and skill for

success, which became popular, and taught the necessary skills for success in the set-piece battles of the 18th and early 19th centuries; later on, football in various forms encouraged the development of skills and tactics for use in the infantry charge.

Military technology continued to improve, with the overall advantage increasingly going to the more capitalist Protestant powers. Naval technology followed the same pattern, with the State-led supremacy of Spain and Portugal giving way to the ship-designs developed by the merchants of Holland and Britain. Western European ship-building had to invent designs capable of withstanding the pounding of the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean: these sturdy vessels, held together with iron nails, were strong enough to serve as platforms for cannon; naval vessels were essentially floating castles. When Western European ships came into conflict with Arab or local shipping in Eastern waters, these vessels, which were constructed from sewn planks and were insufficiently stable to mount heavy weaponry, were hopelessly outgunned by the Europeans.

The period was one of more-or-less constant hostilities, as the nation-states defined their boundaries, with religion, language, and culture, and the ambitions of the various monarchs all contributed to the hostilities. Private persons were rarely restricted in their movements or communications, although travel beyond the borders of one's own region became less common: science and technology were cosmopolitan. Latin was the language of written international intellectual discourse. Monarchs, whilst still depending to a large extent on the aristocracy to head military, civil, and legal administration, were largely dependent on the middle classes for administrative organization and taxation revenue, and parliaments, or bodies with some of the functions of parliaments, were called (as infrequently as possible) for the approval of the imposition of any new or extraordinary taxation, thus giving the capitalists a great deal of potential power. This is the period when the doctrine of the "divine right of kings" was promulgated, the notion that the king held his office by the will of God, and that any opposition to the king's rule and the king's will was impious, a notion quite contrary to the theory of mediæval kingship and in opposition to the traditional position of the Catholic church, which had always tended to favour elected monarchy, and had its origins in the ancient sacral nature of kingship. The notion of the divine right of kings was effectively quashed by the English revolution, which also spawned a number of proto-socialist and proto-anarchist movements against the domination of society by the wealthy few.

Protestantism, Liberalism, and Capitalism arose together in such close combination that some scholars still argue that these phenomena are inextricably intertwined. In Britain, the increasing infiltration of the Established Church by Protestants, combined with the irritation of the middle classes with their political restriction, resulted in a civil war which effectively, though not theoretically, established the supremacy of the parliament over the monarch. Protestants who disagreed with the established order in Britain, or who were fleeing wars or persecution on the European Continent, settled much of North America during this period, with important consequences for the future history of the entire world. North America was to become a largely Protestant, Liberal, Capitalist country with none of the aristocratic traditions, few of the rigid class distinctions, and free of the deep-seated political traditions which characterized Europe.

This period also marked a major change in the way in which people thought about politics and society and their place in it. Previously, people had interacted with society as members of a family, a group, or a community: the Protestant insistence on the individual and personal interaction between man and God; the capitalist insistence that the profit earned by personal endeavour should, without obligation, accrue to the person who earned that profit; and the discovery, by the explorers, of peoples who lived in simpler, even hunter-gatherer, societies, led to theories of politics based on a perception of the fundamental nature of man differing from the traditional Biblical view of man-in-society-in-the-service-of-God, theories which focused on man as an individual, and social relationships based on the interaction between individuals rather than the obligations of individuals to groups. The basis of this new notion was individual liberty.

The first of these thinkers was Thomas Hobbes, who wrote in Cromwellian times, when the view of the fundamental nature of man, as perceived by the early explorers and reinforced by the devastating wars which were racking Europe at the time, was extremely pessimistic. Hobbes proposed the notion of a social contract between individual people to accept the *absolute* authority of a sovereign (which means the government, whether monarchical or democratic) in order to protect their “lives and property”; the Church must be subject to the State: freedom lay “in the interstices of the law”; Hobbes’ thought, based on individual choice, led to a notion of liberalism which was not very liberal. John Locke, writing in the more optimistic time of the Restoration, when the nature of the “simple life” led by North American Indians and other peoples was idealized, proposed the notion of two social contracts: one between people to form a government, and another between the sovereign and

the people, to guarantee the individual's "life, liberty, and property". John Jacques Rousseau, working from personal experience of the Swiss Communes, promoted participatory democracy, and asserted that "man in a state of nature" was perfect, and had been corrupted by the invention of civil society: government itself was an evil; his "noble savage" has been a force in conceptions of both totalitarian and socialist thought ever since, but his basic thrust was an individualism which placed supreme value on the dignity of the individual and the sovereignty of the individual in the political process. Adam Smith, who wrote at the very beginning of the Industrial Revolution, attacked the principles of mercantilism, the mere accumulation of wealth, and proposed the benefits of "free trade", with appropriate government controls to ensure that trade really *was* "free". Liberalism, the first political ideology, had become a real force in the politics of nations.

### **IDEOLOGY**

The power of the European States over the rest of the world during the Early Modern Period depended on, an often very slim at first, technological superiority; but European technology was a dynamic competitive capitalist positive-feedback system which increasingly pushed European technology further and further ahead of the technologies of the rest of the world. The economic power of the European States, relative to each other, was dependent on the colonial territories which they were able to exploit in the rest of the world, and the efficiency of that exploitation. Simply put, colonies supplied raw materials for "home" manufactories and private consumers and were "captive" markets for "home"-produced goods. Britain had large and willing manpower resources to administer its colonial empire. So powerful was Britain that even the revolt and subsequent independence of the American colonies scarcely affected its standing within the European state-system.

The American Revolution was a Liberal-Capitalist-Protestant revolution against what remained of the old, traditional order in British society: the United States of America became a state whose political system was a spectrum of various strands of Liberal beliefs. In Europe, a new political ideology arose: Conservatism sought to defend what was perceived to be good about the old order on sound philosophical grounds; British Conservatism, with its concern for "the people" as partners in the social order as a whole and its "small government" ethos, was less extreme than Continental Conservatism, which tended towards totalitarianism, and emphasized the cause of obedience to state authority. The French Revolution, largely inspired by the American experience, was also a Middle-Class, Liberal revolution. The final defeat of Napoleon by Wellington at Waterloo, a battle "won on the playing fields of Eton"

(and the factories of the industrial cities), meant a temporary return to the old, traditional order, but Liberal political movements proliferated all over Europe and South America. Napoleon may have been a bogey-man to the British and European upper classes, but he was a hero to the middle classes, and also, to some extent, to the workers. During the Early Modern Period, the dominant model for political organization had been perceptions of ancient Rome: at first, under the absolute monarchs, the Roman Empire, and then, as with the infant American Republic, the Roman Republic; with the 19th century, the model became perceptions of democratic Athens. Revolutionary activity by Liberal activists, enraged by the conservative overthrow of Napoleonic reforms, proliferated all over Europe: 1848 was a year of Europe-wide revolutions against the “old order”. In Britain, where the Whigs, aristocratic Liberals and their middle-class supporters, were gaining increasing political power, the Industrial Revolution and the miseries of the industrial workforce created another reaction against Liberal Capitalism: Socialism, an ideology which also began to appear in various forms on the Continent. In the aftermath of Napoleon’s defeat, the Spanish colonies of South and Central America asserted their independence from the “home” countries in a series of Liberal revolutions, aided by a combination of veterans of the European wars and European, mainly British, capital.

These political ideologies, Liberalism, Conservatism, and Socialism, like the political ideologies which were to develop from them, were universalist in their claims. Possibly affected by the Mediæval experience of a universal Church, political ideologies asserted a universal, international, cross-cultural application of their principles. These principles were to be questioned, and even have their validity completely denied, in many parts of the world.

### **THE BALANCE OF POWER**

By the last quarter of the 19th century, with the unification of the German states into Germany and the Italian peninsula into Italy, the nation-states of Europe had been formed. During the 19th century, the concept of the “balance of power” came into being. Briefly, this meant, theoretically, that no given nation could be permitted to grow more powerful at the expense of its neighbours without the threat of an armed coalition of other states opposing its ambitions, as happened when Great Britain and France opposed Russian ambitions over Turkish territory. Great Britain, as the economic core of European civilization, with its vast military and naval power, and its empire “on which the sun never set”, was a foremost proponent of the notion of the “balance of power”. Prevented from competing with each other for territory in Europe, the European states made an effort to increase their economic



power by grabbing colonies in those areas of the world as yet unclaimed by European powers, mainly in Africa. The colonies provided raw materials for “home” factories, markets for the products of “home” factories, and trade between colonies was strictly controlled to the benefit of the “home” government and “home” capitalists. And all this time Russia was extending its mainland empire to the East. And all this time the United States of America were expanding their mainland territories, their population, and their economic infrastructure to the West. The American Civil War, fought on the issue of the sovereignty of States within a republic, was militarily and economically a rehearsal for the industry-based World War 1: capitalist industrialism won.

At the end of the nineteenth century, in the Far East, Japan was beginning to emerge from feudalism. China was disorganized by the pressures of the various “great powers”, internal dissension and civil war. We can usefully think of three “cores”, world-wide: Japan, with enormous labour and economic resources only on the brink of deployment, in the Far East; the U.S.A., an industrial giant more or less self-confined within its own territorial borders; and Europe, with Great Britain as its economic and military “core”, and Germany and France as powerful semi-peripheral states looking for an opportunity to achieve European dominance. Europe and the United States can be regarded together as forming a core of western industrialization which was able to drain the periphery, that is, most of the rest of the world, of economic resources to advance their own economies. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Britain, its industrial power already on the wane, largely due to the export of its technology and the reluctance of its capitalists to re-invest in new technology, was being challenged for economic dominance by Germany. The European balance of power was inherently unstable because it consisted of too many units of near-equal power and ambition. The balance tipped in 1914. The Russian Revolution of 1917, which was triggered by the strains imposed on the economy and the political structure by World War 1 and expressed a variety of wide dissatisfactions with the *status quo*, was captured by the Bolsheviks. The success of this variant of the Marxist version of Socialism was to dramatically affect the history of the rest of the century.

## **THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY**

The industrial and manpower resources of the U.S.A. became fully apparent during the 1st World War, and the United States, protected to a great extent by its sheer distance from Europe, became a major player on the world stage at the conclusion of the conflict. European, particularly British, economic interests were virtually driven out of the American

hemisphere, further weakening a British economy already shattered by the war. The Russian revolution had erected, in the U.S.S.R., a major ideological and economic challenge to western capitalism. Japan was succeeding in its bid to industrialize. The League of Nations, which many people hoped would be able to prevent further conflict, was hamstrung by the conservatism and nationalistic chauvinism of its members and the refusal of the United States of America to join. Political and economic problems at home, springing from the Great Depression, prevented the European allies from interfering in the resurgence of German economic and military strength. Again the balance of power was dangerously equal in Europe. Germany, stripped of its colonies at the conclusion of the First World War, attempted to expand its territories in Europe by uniting with the “Fatherland” the dispersed German populations, which had been scattered all over Eastern and Central Europe during the Mediaeval Period.

### **THE LATE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

The Second World War left Europe in ruins, powerless to prevent the colonies from asserting their independence, particularly as the United States, now the most powerful nation on earth, opposed colonialism (a political trade-off between the French and the USA allowed the French to hang-on to their colonies with disastrous results in Africa, especially Algeria, and “Indo-China”). Japanese successes in World War 11 had destroyed the dominant image of Europeans in South-East Asia, in particular, and stimulated a desire for independence. The wealth of the colonies, in raw materials and as markets for manufactured goods, may have led to a restoration of the pre-war status quo in Europe. Aid from the U.S.A. enabled capitalist Europe to rebuild its economies and, in the absence of “captive markets” for their goods the European states began to co-operate, forming a common market, an economic federation.

The U.S.A., industrially strengthened rather than weakened by the war, became the western world’s core of power. The economy of the United States was so powerful that it dominated most of the world without the need for physical control. The vast, and technologically-superior, armed forces of the United States gave them an almost unrivalled military power. The ideological power of western capitalism was derived from the industrial pre-eminence of the United States. The Russian Empire of the Tsars had, in the U.S.S.R., given way to a new totalitarian Russian Empire: political, military, economic, social, and ideological power over these vast territories was dominated by Russia, which was also able to form a buffer zone, a compliant periphery, between itself and capitalist Europe with states that had chosen to adopt

communist, rather than capitalist, political and economic systems in the post-war period. A variant form of “communism” united China and began to rebuild it as a modern nation-state. The former European colonies and “protectorates” began to gain independence as Nation-States. These new nation-states frequently possessed artificial borders that had been imposed by the European powers, borders which often split some cultural units between different “countries” (Kurds between Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and the southern U.S.S.R.), whilst frequently enclosing traditional enemies within the borders of a “nation”, as often happened in Africa. Migration, both voluntary and forced, during the colonial period had frequently resulted in substantial non-native populations inhabiting states where their presence created political problems (Indians in Fiji and parts of Africa; Chinese in Malaysia, and, more recently, French in New Caledonia, etc.). To complicate matters further, the core nations maintained their economic dominance of the periphery. Giant multi-national corporations, mostly based in the U.S.A., so large, diversified, and wealthy that they are largely independent of the control of governments or even their own shareholders, became major players on the international stage; cross-shareholding between companies ensures a non-government international capitalist power-bloc. The “cold war” between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. initiated a long period of stable, if tense, relations between the major powers, until the economic and ideological pressure of western capitalism finally broke the hold of Russia over its empire. Communist and left-tending governments all over the world collapsed with a speed that left even the International Relations specialists gasping, although they had long been expecting such an event, prompting silly pronouncements that “socialism/Marxism is dead”.