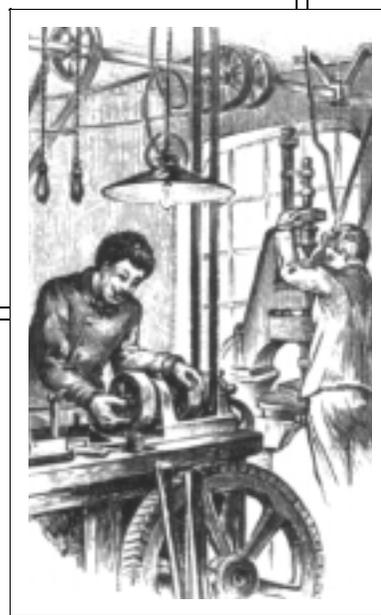
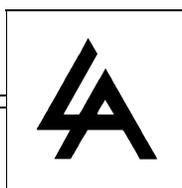




# THE SUCCESS OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND THE FAILURE OF POLITICAL REVOLUTIONS: HOW BRITAIN GOT LUCKY



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FINDLAY DUNACHIE

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1789 was a great year, and many thought the following years were better — “Bliss was it in that dawn ...” etc.<sup>1</sup> Not for the first time, or the last, was there the hope that a change of government would bring about improvement. Since it was all happening in France, the most populous and arguably the richest state in Western Europe, it was bound to be important. And what had to be done seemed so simple — to strike from the majority of the population the shackles which (to mix metaphors) prevented them from putting their talents to good use, and to remove the privileges from the parasitic nobles for much the same reason. There was even an example, if they wished to follow it, of what they should do, on the other side of the Channel. True, the English Revolution (of 1688, rather than 1642) had had somewhat different causes, but the result was very much what seemed desirable — a limited monarchy with the conduct of affairs in the hands of solid citizens, who could be changed for another bunch of solid citizens without the first lot risking their lives, or even their property.

## THE FRENCH REVOLUTION ...

Well, we know what happened. Perhaps it would have been too much to expect idealistic French intellectuals to lead a revolution that demanded anything less than Utopia, or even to keep their mouths shut in a competition between demagogues. Of the other European continental powers, Spain was torpid, as usual, while Austria, Prussia and Russia were preoccupied with digesting Poland between them. However, since they were all absolute monarchies, even though ruled by benevolent despots, they were bound to consider whether all the rhetoric might not make democracy infectious. A coalition mustered, then lumbered across the French border, at first with some success. Then things took off. The Revolution turned into a Great Patriotic War and the French discovered somewhat to their surprise that mass enthusiasm in the rank and file, together with the execution of a few generals to encourage the others, resulted in an unstoppable army and a series of victories. The politicians back home — all strictly amateurs, after all — inaugurated a blood-bath and exterminated each other like Kilkenny cats. Finally Napoleon came out on top and the attempt at the conquest of Europe got under way. In simplified form, this is what happened to the French Revolution.

## ... AND THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION — CIVILIZATION’S LIFT-OFF

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Channel ... Parliamentary reform, which was cautiously being suggested, went into cold

storage for forty years as Britain — or England, as everyone forgetfully called her — set doggedly to work to ensure that the balance of power resumed its sway. But almost unknown to its government another revolution had been running for some time. No one can pin its inauguration to a particular date; arguments of a chicken-and-egg nature continue about its origin.<sup>2</sup> Was population growth, for example, a cause or an effect? Fastidious intellectuals, repelled by the squalor of its smoke-shrouded birth and the outlandishness of its locality — could any good thing come from north of the Trent? — refused to be enchanted by its uncouth products and even more uncouth by-products. Those whose income came from the land regarded with hauteur those whose brass derived from a different kind of muck. But something unprecedented in the history of man was happening — civilization was achieving lift-off.

## WHY IN BRITAIN?

Why did the Industrial Revolution begin in Britain? Hypotheses can only be brought out and examined for plausibility, rather than tested by observation against apparent repetitions of anything similar to it in other countries at later times. After all, it is only necessary to demonstrate that something works once to promote its imitation, supposing the product is desirable. To produce cotton cloth, iron and steel and other products<sup>3</sup> on a large scale, employing numerous people in buildings called factories, seemed a very obvious thing to do once it had been done, but how had it been done in the first place?

## BRITAIN’S POLITICAL BACKGROUND

To answer this question a start must be made with a consideration of the political set-up. Complete anarchy, where the peasant cannot be certain that he will reap what he has sown, where it is questionable that goods dispatched will reach their destination or be paid for if they do, and where every man depends on his own right arm for his protection — such a state of affairs may be rare, but the measures taken to counteract it may stifle the initiative of the entrepreneur as well as that of the malefactor. Whether the threat of anarchy comes from the exterior or from the interior of a nation or state, or any other population unit (usually territorial), such a threat will ultimately generate the response of armed force. In the nature of things the use of such force is uncommon, its mere presence usually being sufficient. Wars are infrequent, and so are occasions when armed police surround a house.

## ENGLISH SUSPICION OF A STANDING ARMY

The historical period when the Industrial revolution was in its gestation or its infancy can for convenience be regarded as the eighteenth century. Almost all European states kept large standing armies. Prussia, indeed, may be regarded as an extreme example of why this was. Because it had little in the way of defensible frontiers, it had no real alternative to be other than a state in arms, organized for war, offensive or defensive. To a greater or lesser extent this was so for all states with land frontiers. An exception to this European rule was Britain, for two mutually reinforcing reasons. Any invader would have to tranship his army, and the best counter to this was a strong navy rather than a strong army. In tandem, as it were, members of the English House of Commons had, during the previous century, grown paranoid on the subject of a standing army. There was a nicely balanced simplicity about this, between ruler and ruled: how can the one get the money from the other to pay the soldiers? In a practical sense it was seen as a problem with a potential one-off solution; once the ruler got the soldiers, he could use them to get the money — and not just for an army. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, most continental governments (i.e. monarchs — “*l’Etat c’est moi*”) had achieved this position.

## PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT TRIUMPHS OVER ABSOLUTE MONARCHY

It was such a position that the House of Commons feared, consciously or unconsciously, in the run-up to the Civil War of 1642-49, when Charles I attempted to tax without Parliamentary legislation. Charles II, more cautious after the Restoration of 1660, probably had the same idea when he took money from Louis XIV, and one of the precipitating causes of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 was James II’s placing such army as he had outside London, in an attempt to overawe it. It was a last-ditch effort to establish an absolute monarchy in England;<sup>4</sup> from then on Parliament (and the Commons at that) held the purse-strings. It even became a little readier to find money for an army, though this was kept for much of its time abroad, on the Continent, in India or in the colonies. Paradoxically, as if to prove history’s lessons are rarely learnt, Parliament tried to use its North American army to collect taxes imposed without consent, bringing about the American Revolution.

## THE NAVAL SOLUTION — PROTECTION WITHOUT TYRANNY

The beauty of the situation, as it developed, was that Britain could have a *Navy* as strong as any monarch could wish, but this could hardly be used to collect taxes or, indeed, as a means for internal coercion of any kind. Perhaps that is why the famous “ship money” was collected by Charles I without protest for four years before Hampden, and others, suspected it was going to be used for something other than ships. A navy protected commerce, which pleased Parliament, and taxes could be levied on exports and imports, which pleased the monarch. The seamen who manned the merchant shipping, could, in one way or another, be transferred to the Royal Navy at need (perhaps the most famous such transfer — a voluntary one — became Captain Cook). By-products of this naval policy were the acquisition of colonies and those of other powers during a war, together with the destruction of their commerce, and, here and there in peacetime, the suppression of piracy.

## BRITAIN’S POLITICAL STABILITY

By the middle of the eighteenth century the British political system was stable, and this was a stability that had been *evolved*, not *devised*.<sup>5</sup> This is merely to state the obvious, yet to modern observers its ramshackle nature has perhaps not been

sufficiently associated with its strength. For the only way for a political system to attain stability is by endurance and continuity. The commonsense aphorism “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” can be paralleled by the political maxim, nowadays more honoured in the breach than in the observance “When it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change”.<sup>6</sup>

## ... AND ITS ENGLISH ORIGIN

It has to be pointed out that the ancestry of this mid-eighteenth century British constitution is certainly wholly English and that its development is associated with the undoubtedly fortunate course of English history which, in hindsight, manifests an extraordinary *linearity*, as if the country in some strange way knew where it was heading — a “pathetic fallacy”, of course, if ever there was one. This manifestation (or illusion, if one would rather put it that way) of political “progress” is the famous “Whig Interpretation of History”<sup>7</sup> now so very much not in vogue. We can, of course, smile at (but not forget) even earlier Interpretations, such as Milton’s “When God is decreeing some great work of reformation to be done, what does he then but reveal Himself, as His manner is, first to His Englishmen?”<sup>8</sup>

## ENGLAND’S “LUCK”

For us, however, to understand this “progress” it is necessary to remember the extremely good fortune England had, firstly in being a country difficult to invade, and secondly that by the thirteenth century a working Parliament had been established, recognizable in structure and more important in continuity, as the same as that of the eighteenth century and indeed of the one we have today.

## ENGLAND’S MONARCHY AND ENGLAND’S PARLIAMENT

All political systems have their difficulties, and monarchy is no exception. Its assets are nowadays perhaps less well known than its liabilities, which may be as well as it is these — weak kings, mad kings, bad kings, child kings — which we must remember when we consider crises in government. All these, when they occur, pose the threat of anarchy; rivals fight for the throne and over-mighty subjects attempt to grab more power than they should. Into this situation there now intrudes another element: Parliament. Though to trace its origins back to the Saxon Witangemote or even to the Magna Carta may seem somewhat fanciful, the assemblies set up as a result of the activities of Simon de Montfort thirty to fifty years after Magna Carta during the reign of Henry III (a weak, sometimes mad king) are certainly ancestral.

Parliament tended to emerge as a stronger body *after* a constitutional crisis (in early times synonymous with a crisis in the monarchy); as a result it came to be something of a safeguard against anarchy *during* it. Also, from the very first it was involved with the king’s need for money. Once Parliament was established, even a strong king, such as Henry III’s son Edward I, could find it useful, little realising what it would turn into. By a wonderful piece of typically English luck, the clergy — an important source of money — wriggled out of Parliament in order to tax itself, leaving that body secular (the bishops in the Lords were theoretically territorial magnates) and manageable. Over the centuries Parliament grew more and more important because of a number of constitutional accidents: the misbehaviour of Edward II (who was actually *deposed* by Parliament), the successive minorities of Edward III and Richard II, the need to legitimise the usurpation of Henry IV, and after the minority, weakness and madness of Henry VI, the further need to legitimise the usurpations of Edward IV, Richard III and finally, Henry VII. All this did not of course preclude a certain

amount of anarchy, the Wars of the Roses being the most notable, which wars by a happy accident eliminated some of the more powerful members of the House of Lords. Slowly, Parliament progressed from subservience, to restiveness, to opposition, with many an up and down in the process.

### THE SPECIAL CASE OF FEMALE MONARCHY IN ENGLAND

There is probably a special case to be made for the weakening effect of a period of *female* rule on the British monarchy. There were four Queens during the period we are considering: Mary I, Elizabeth I, Mary II and Anne. We can exclude Mary II, who resigned her powers totally to her husband William III,<sup>9</sup> died before him and so never reigned alone. There can be little doubt that James I (of England) had to pay more attention to Parliament than Henry VIII ever did, even though his predecessor Elizabeth had had a long and successful reign and is certainly the most popular monarch England has ever had. Similarly, it is arguable that, although George I attained the throne after Anne died in 1714 on the clear understanding that his constitutional position depended on Parliament, his powers would have been a good deal greater if, instead of Anne, he had succeeded William III, who would only have needed to reach the age of sixty five for this to happen; Marlborough, who was a few months older, lived until 1722.

The theory suggested here is that a woman monarch of this period interacted with an effective Parliament differently from the way a king did, abandoning perforce certain masculine psychological (not to mention physical) methods in favour of feminine ones. When a king then succeeded to the throne he discovered that the first had become obsolete while the second were not his to use. In European politics during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the trend on the Continent was towards Absolute Monarchy, while that in England and Britain was exactly the opposite. A woman head of state, whether by coincidence or not, whether as monarch or regent, even whether strong or weak, left the succession *more* powerful than before if a working Parliament was absent and *less* powerful if one was present.

### ENGLAND COMPARED WITH SCOTLAND

There is no need to look further than Scotland to find somewhere which had all the constitutional crises *without* a counterbalancing Parliament. Here Parliament so-called was little more than a branch of the administration.<sup>10</sup> All the monarchs, from James I to James VI (i.e. from 1406 to 1567), came to the throne as minors, and if they ever did succeed in establishing their power over their turbulent baronage, their early deaths undid their work, leaving their successors to start all over again. When Scotland finally took an interest in representative government, almost all its energies went into religion. Here at least it did have one piece of luck; it went Protestant and a compatible political union with England became a possibility.

### “WHO GOVERNED BRITAIN (IN 1760)?”

“Representative government” is not a totally inaccurate way of describing the eighteenth century British constitution, provided one remembers that those who were represented were the ruling class. A quotation, taken not quite at random from Sir Lewis Namier’s *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III*, gives an insight into how such representation might come about: “There was ... in the Cornish boroughs, an elaborate and quaint machinery for making Members of Parliament ... Twenty-one boroughs returned 42 Members; their total electorate was less than 1400 ...”<sup>11</sup> How on earth could one justify a system that recruited its politicians by such methods? Only by the fact that the system worked. That it did work can hardly be

denied since it managed successfully to conduct a war lasting, off and on, some twenty four years (1792-1815). Nor can the government ministers, with the exception of Pitt (who died in 1806) be regarded as charismatic, let alone the monarch, poor mad George, or his understudy the Prince Regent. Charismatic politicians — Burke, Fox and Sheridan — seem to have been too volatile to have been useful, whether they supported the war effort or not.

### GOVERNMENT NON-INTERVENTION

Perhaps enough has been set down to indicate to the reader that the eighteenth century British government was not well placed to interfere much in the lives of its citizens. True, the penal code was savage, but its ferocity was an index of its ineffectiveness; there was no police force — the English antipathy to a standing army subsumed such an internal law-enforcement mechanism. True, there *was* a highly developed and sophisticated legal system, whose purpose was to reinforce the *status quo*. Litigation was available for those who could afford it, but it must have been understood that the result was even more of a lottery than it is now.

### SOMNOLENCE AT THE UNIVERSITIES

Just in case anyone may believe that powerful intellectual forces were mobilising in the universities, we must remember the strictures of both Johnson<sup>12</sup> and Gibbon<sup>13</sup> with respect to Oxford (which refused an honorary doctorate to Adam Smith). They would doubtless have felt the same about Cambridge, nor, in 1773, was Dr. Johnson impressed by the Scottish Universities. St. Andrews was in decline, one of its three colleges having been abandoned and turned into a greenhouse, and the professors of Edinburgh and Glasgow were either too cautious to argue with him or too flippant.<sup>14</sup>

### THE CHURCH QUIESCENT SUPPORTS THE STATUS QUO

In neither country was the established Church a force for change, something not disturbed by the fact that all their ministers of religion were University graduates. The situation of English nonconformists was somewhat different. They were barred from Oxford and Cambridge (though not from Parliament). They did have their own schools and academies of higher education which were somewhat more vocationally oriented than those under the sway of the Church.

What can be said of contemporary religion is that it supported the *status quo* without being obscurantist (ecclesiastical control of censorship had not survived the Restoration, much less the Glorious Revolution). The age of the fanatics was long past; if millenarian sects existed, they were not making attempts to hasten the Day of Judgment. The Quakers had gone into business, where their well-known probity was an asset. Religion and science coexisted happily (Newton was as much preoccupied with the interpretation of the Book of Daniel as with gravitation). No one doubted any more that the earth went round the sun, but the theory of evolution was still over the horizon so there seemed no overpowering reasons for doubting the existence of God. What was more, John Wesley was evangelising the masses, at the same time, it is believed by some, weaning England off gin, both activities productive of steady workmen.

It is probably easier, from the present-day viewpoint, to underestimate, rather than to overestimate the influence of religion during this period. People believed, quite literally, that God was a factor in their lives of far more importance than any government could be. There were no social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, trauma-counsellors or agony aunts to turn to for help and advice. It is arguable that doctors did more harm

than good. The only mood-altering drugs available were alcohol and opium. The role of religion in providing a moral and psychological underpinning to people's lives must not be ignored, especially as it did *not* incite them to upset the *status quo*, as it had tended to do, as often as not, in the previous century.

### THE COMMERCIAL FOUNDATION

Long before it went into Industry, England had gone into Commerce (or, to use a term that has never quite lost its pejorative tone, Trade), a requisite step, for if Commerce is possible without Industry, Industry is quite impossible without Commerce. It is arguable that intellectual reflection on Commerce gives greater insight into the mechanism of the Industrial Revolution than contemplation of its products. It took longer for society to come to terms with the merchant, who did *not* produce anything himself, than with the industrialist, who did. Even less *persona grata* was the financier/moneylender/usurer who dealt in money alone, which intellectuals, beginning with Aristotle, were unable to recognise as a commodity. Without Trade (to find the customers) and Credit (to bridge the gap between finding them and selling to them) there would be no reason for anyone to produce the large quantities of goods generated by industrial processes.

### ADAM SMITH'S "INVISIBLE HAND"

The rationale of the Industrial Revolution (as hinted above) had in fact been laid down by Adam Smith before anyone noticed it was happening. He had claimed that when everyone worked as hard as possible in his own interest he, "led by an invisible hand",<sup>15</sup> benefited everyone else as well. This proposition was to some unbelievable. To others it was, if true, outrageous. To nobody was it morally uplifting. Keynes is supposed to have sneered that it was "the extraordinary belief that the nastiest of men for the nastiest of motives will somehow work for the benefit of all".<sup>16</sup> All of which omits, of course, the context in which the invisible hand operated.

### ... AND ITS CONTEXT

It has already been pointed out that this context depended very little, in Britain in general and in England in particular, on government coercion or intervention. Nothing could be more different from today's state of affairs, when regulations pour from government presses and everyone with a grievance expects it to be rectified at public expense. Yet somehow society held together without degenerating into chaos. There were moral sanctions which could be applied in a system where most people knew each other and each other's business. Some must undoubtedly have operated in ways of which the participants were unaware. Thus the stigma of illegitimacy worked hand-in-hand with postponement of marriage until a couple could afford to set up house, which in turn regulated the birth-rate. That the birth-rate could have been much higher is obvious from the fact that a woman's average age at marriage had remained at about twenty five for some two hundred years at least (the fantasy of Shakespeare's Juliet marrying at thirteen has done much to confuse the issue).<sup>17</sup>

### CAN WE KNOW WHAT WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER?

We must not, of course, fall into a panglossian state of mind about society in Britain in the mid-eighteenth century. All the same, if a time machine could transport us back into it, we might well hesitate over which aspects we should try to alter. A Health and Safety Executive would almost certainly have halted all progress in its tracks, not least from its recruitment of many able men to hamper the imaginative designs of the simi-

larly gifted. One shudders to think of what Luddism any Trade Union network would have wreaked. Though such anachronisms are inserted here to make the flesh creep, they are, in fact, mere end-results of what began later as some mild regulation of conditions of work and legitimization of workers' "combinations". Eighteenth century governments would be unable to enforce the enactment of either, nicely matching their reluctance to try to do anything of the sort. Perhaps *any* successful interference would have crushed the delicate plant that was to burgeon into the torrid jungle of industrialism. Who can say whether even such remote legal constraints as primogeniture or the indissolubility of marriage were not somehow involved in its growth, to say nothing of more obvious factors such as the lack of any tax on income or on wealth, rather than on expenditure.

### HUMAN SOCIETY AND THE STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE

It is important to realise that, as in nature, so for most of human history, the struggle for existence ensured that the poor, the weak, the very young and the handicapped were the first to succumb and, if not actually to succumb, to fail to breed. In a static population, net social mobility was *downwards*. As the population increased during the latter part of the eighteenth century and expanded enormously during the nineteenth, what particularly exercised contemporary observers (and impressed later historians) was the poverty and squalor in which so many people lived. What they failed to note was the fact that *larger total numbers* were living in *smaller areas*.

Men and women who in previous times would have failed to breed were now doing so. As before, those at the bottom lived precariously, subject to all the old vicissitudes of severe weather and bad harvests, together with some new ones such as greater vulnerability to epidemics and unemployment due to such overseas catastrophes as the Napoleonic Wars. All the same, it must be stressed: *the first product of economic success is an increase in population*. The powerfully distorting effect of modern social engineering did not operate at a time when the only form of social security was the nuclear family, and when children could earn their keep at quite an early age. Would-be social engineers such as Malthus<sup>18</sup> could only stand on the sidelines and wring their hands in anticipation of a catastrophe which in fact never happened, unaware of the system's built-in corrective devices which had been operating for centuries, or lacking confidence that they would continue to do so. Admittedly these devices worked over the long term and spectacular population crashes could occur, the largest being the Black Death and the most notorious the Irish famine. Interestingly, they did *not* happen where the pessimist might have expected them to, in the great modern industrial cities. In the last hundred years, famines, like other mass deaths, have had political rather than economic, let alone demographic, causes.

### MORE PEOPLE AS THE MEASURE OF THE STANDARD OF LIVING

The human population can be analysed, in its growth and behaviour, in biological terms suitable, *mutatis mutandis*, for any animal population. It is especially appropriate to do so in the early stages of the Industrial Revolution, because individuals at the base of society continued to behave as they did in preindustrial conditions, marrying and reproducing when they could expect to bring up a family, which meant under subsistence conditions — which at the time was a wage of seven shillings a week.

It is not surprising that in the growing towns large numbers could be found managing just to survive, in conditions of squalor which shocked middle class persons who observed and

wrote about it. The fact that there were now *more* poor than there had been before they could hardly regard as a good thing — how could two miserable people be better than one? Not surprisingly, the observers could not bring themselves to realise that the initial increase in the standard of living was being manifested as more *people*, rather than as more *things*. This misunderstanding they then compounded by the complaint that these people were being *exploited* by having to work to maintain their subsistence. Yet these same people would never have been born, or have survived, were it not for the very system that was now “exploiting” them. Something of the same attitude can be seen in the neo-Malthusian great and good of our own time as they contemplate the fecundity of the “Third World”. Even the realm of statistics, where the birth of a child is marked down as a minus and the birth of a calf as a plus, has been affected.<sup>19</sup>

### THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE FRENCH AND THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

It now time to contrast the operation of the two revolutions. The political one — in France — was set in motion by ideologues who thought they knew what they wanted and what they were doing. What they got was their own destruction, a military dictatorship and twentyfour years of war. The industrial one — in Britain — was initiated by an unknown conglomerate of inventors, businessmen and financiers, with politicians distinctly absent and political change held in abeyance. They had no aims beyond the simple ones that have motivated people at all times — to better their own condition.

Two systems could hardly have competed in better experimental conditions. At the end of the experimental period the result was plain to see. France, by its politics, had made enemies of every nation on the Continent. Britain, by its economy, had enabled those nations to liberate themselves. France, even when mobilizing her own resources (and those of her client-states and allies) behind a continental “Berlin Wall”, failed to build an industrial economy. Yet what did this continental super-state lack that Britain had — coal, iron, timber, water-power? Instead, Napoleon led her young men to their deaths in counterproductive conquests; since the young men were conscripts, it was a percentage of all classes that lost their lives. Even here, Britain had the advantage; *her* rank and file were more predominantly from the bottom of the social scale, most of them destined to be non-reproductive in any case (recall Wellington’s “scum of the earth, enlisted for drink”). The officer class were strictly volunteers and Wellington had little regard for their ability — or educability.<sup>20</sup>

#### ... BUT FRENCH REVOLUTIONS KEEP HAPPENING ...

The Bourbons who returned to France in 1814, and, after Napoleon’s Hundred Days, again in 1815, were said “to have learned nothing and forgotten nothing”, but the aphorism might have been applied to France as a whole. A revolution in 1830 got rid of the Bourbons; another in 1848, of the Citizen King Louis Philippe; another in 1851 — or was it a coup? — installed Napoleon’s nephew as Napoleon III. Just to make things worse after he lost the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 and abdicated, there was another revolution that *failed* (the Commune), put down with much bloodshed.

#### ... AND BRITISH REVOLUTIONS DON’T

Not only did Britain not have any revolutions; it grew more prosperous. This may have been a “bourgeois revolution”, but if so it was one unconnected with politics, which continued to be the province of the upper classes with centuries of inherited tradition of governing the country and the money to afford it

(M.P.s were not paid anything unless they were ministers until well into the twentieth century).<sup>21</sup>

### TWO HUNDRED YEARS OF UNLEARNT HISTORY

It may not be too much of an over-simplification to say that the unlearnt lesson of the history of the last two hundred years has been that political revolutions, indeed political theories, have been failures and, to a greater or lesser degree, resulted in human misery. Colossal examples have been the Communist revolutions in the Russian Empire and China (as revolutions) and Nationalism, Socialism and National-Socialism (as theory). Even democracy (“the worst form of government — except for any other” as Churchill put it) has its pitfalls. As long as a hundred years ago, a generation or so after it had been established in Britain (for men, at least), the historian W.E.H. Lecky noted that a democracy stood in danger of being bribed by demagogues with its own money or worse, the money of its political opponents.<sup>22</sup> It is also notoriously difficult to transplant.

### WHY THE POLITICAL PURSUIT? — POLITICIANS KEEP BUSY

So why does the process, this search for some political panacea, continue? Why is it always going to work properly *next* time? Once again we must examine our two systems.

The political system has developed *firstly* to regulate how a society works and how its members interact with each other (“internal relations”) and *secondly* to deal with other societies, similar or different (“external relations”). It is constantly at work because apparently something always needs to be done; indeed, there is quite a strong feeling that a politician should concentrate on politics and absolutely nothing else (a Platonic concept, as those who have read *The Republic* will realise).<sup>23</sup> Otherwise, what is he getting paid for? It can be seen at once that with the tasks defined above a political system can expand to include any aspect of life and no one can deny that this has been the trend everywhere, regardless of the philosophy on which the local system claims to be based.

#### ... BUT INDUSTRY DELIVERS THE GOODS

By contrast, the industrial system (increasingly allied with science) although it has to run in parallel with the local political system, operates in a manner which is at once more dispersed, pervasive and most important of all, continuous. Its “purpose” is to create a demand for goods or services in exchange for money. The public votes on its suggestions with its purse, or, more exactly, with its multitude of individual purses. Overwhelmingly, technological advance and the products it has brought have arisen from this source. People now own goods and use facilities which they could not have known even a few decades ago that they would ever want, let alone demand of any politician. Although it is true that some of these have been produced by or with state participation, most of what the *state* has interested itself in has been weaponry and its ramifications.

### POLITICS IS ABOUT DIVIDING UP THE CAKE ...

It here we reach the crux in the contrast between the two systems. From the time when political systems were evolved by communities and populations to deal with other ones and with their own members, the underlying assumption has been that total amount of resources available to be shared by members of a state, or between a state and its neighbours was a fixed quantity. For one to gain, another must lose. Every distribution involves a “Zero Sum Game”. There is a cake to be divided up. To this day there is enough of this attitude about for it to be almost dignified as an instinct. Even a child has a strong sense

of *meum*, if not of *tuum*. From a positive point of view, the whole notion of property rights has been built upon it.

### ... IF NECESSARY BY FIGHTING OVER IT

Clausewitz's dictum "War is merely the continuation of policy by other means"<sup>24</sup> puts succinctly the ultimate problem of international politics. Whereas *within* states legal systems evolved which prevented, to a greater or lesser extent, competition from degenerating into theft and murder, no legal systems existed *between* states — or none that were enforceable. Under such circumstances war could become endemic, and did. A study of the political systems devised or described by Plato and Aristotle, for example, indicate that the City State (the largest viable unit that either seemed to consider desirable) was an entity organized for the purpose of fighting its neighbours, a situation well borne out by the facts of their contemporary power politics. A similar situation developed in Northern Italy during the later Middle Ages. It cannot be an accident that in both cases inter-state competition was concurrent with products of high intellectual, literary and artistic merit, but the impact on the ordinary individual was severe risk to life, limb and property.

In theory, therefore, warfare results from competition for resources and living space. A well-known example is the Viking impact on Europe, which began as looting expeditions and continued as invasions, settlement and conquest. These were merely the last of aggressive mass-population movements which had impinged on Western Europe for centuries. Central and Southern Europe continued to experience them for centuries to come. It would be hard to think of any time, in history or (from the evidence available) prehistory, when some peoples were not trying to occupy space where others were living. Yet if this trend seems apparent when human behaviour is viewed at a distance, it dissolves when human motives are looked at up close and in detail, differing as they do considerably from straight acquisitiveness. The human aggressive instinct,<sup>25</sup> evolved (as in other species) to ensure that an individual got as much as he could that was going and then kept it, could be channelled into less obviously rational functions that would take us too much out of our way to investigate. Suffice it to say that they all come under the heading of "politics", with a subsection for "religion".

### INDUSTRY BAKES MORE CAKES INSTEAD

It must have taken some time for it to dawn on people's minds that the industrial process was increasing total wealth not just by multiples, but by orders of magnitude. However, even if and when this was perceived, it seemed less apparent that it was now no longer the case that what one person gained, another lost, that the whistle had been blown on the Zero Sum Game and that cakes were constantly being baked to satisfy anyone who wanted a slice.

### THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AS SOCIAL SOLUTION

With hindsight it can be stated that the outcome of the Industrial Revolution was that human beings no longer needed to go out and grab other people's possessions by force, but merely to settle down, work hard and exchange the considerable surplus they produced for something they wanted from the surplus someone else produced. How simple it all seems! Yet how hard to put into practice.

### ... THE ULTIMATE PRODUCT OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION

This, indeed, is the burden of Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*.<sup>26</sup> The way to achieve world peace and prosperity has been found: the market economy and democracy. If this statement seems breathtakingly simplistic and naive, consider the facts. Even the author's names are significant in this respect.

Whatever aspect of civilization we turn to, the overwhelming bulk of information on any subject is of Western origin and in a European language, preponderantly English. Science and technology are entirely Western products. The modes and attitudes of thought that have evolved with science are Western values. By a kind of evil irony, the most troublesome ideologies, nationalism and communism, are also of Western origin; indeed, Western civilization is the only culture whose own values and basis are, *as a traditional and tolerated feature of that culture*, open to systematic attack by its own members.

Perhaps it is also the only one whose problems are caused by its success and compassion rather than its failure and malevolence. For any species, the criterion for success has been numerical, something so abundantly accomplished by the human race that it is now touted as a problem, despite the fact that, overall, humanity has never been better fed or healthier. Nor have raw materials ever been cheaper,<sup>27</sup> a constant complaint of those countries which supply them. Indeed, concern has shifted from our own species to others. As for compassion, no civilization has worried more about its poor, disabled and disadvantaged. Many would not be alive but for the progress of techniques to enable them to survive or even to be born. Others are kept dependent by well-meaning measures that prevent them from working,<sup>28</sup> while children and criminals (quite often the same) are kept undisciplined from a concern for their "rights" or pending the discovery of the "underlying causes" of their behaviour.

### ... WHICH IS NOW WORLD CIVILIZATION

Like it or not, World Civilization is Western Civilization, and no self-denigration, no search in the mystic East, or up the Amazon or anywhere else, mentally or physically, is going to alter this fact. Any culture, past, present or (one is tempted to say) to come can be appreciated, studied, digested and, to a greater or lesser extent assimilated or rejected. This itself is a characteristic of our civilization and so also is the open competition between technologies, ideas, theories and, one has to add, values and virtues.

What emerges will be the product of millions of individual choices. Of course these will have to run the gauntlet of special interests, scare-stories and blandishments, price-wars and amazing free offers. The alternative, political control, also has to run the same gauntlet, with this difference, that those seeking to influence decisions have merely to persuade a Legislature, or a Government, instead of millions of individuals. Who, for example, is going to try to persuade everyone to stay away from the shops on Sunday, when they can lean on the Government to close them?

The problems remain enormous. Human nature is not lightly going to abandon its characteristics of aggression, territoriality and xenophobia, so useful in the past. Politicians will continue to remain convinced that they know better than we do what's good for us. Yet the solutions are to hand. And, we can say, with a small spark of pride (however much our contemporary culture tries to deny it us), they were evolved in these islands.

## NOTES

1. "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive/But to be young was very heaven." In *The Prelude* XI, 108, Wordsworth expresses his enthusiasm for the French Revolution. Ninety nine lines later comes his disillusionment with France though not with its principles: "Frenchmen had changed a war of self-defence/For one of conquest."
2. W.W. Rostow, *How It All Began*, Methuen, London, 1975, should be read for a number of insights.
3. Such as soap. It has been suggested (I cannot recall by whom) that the consumption of soap is a good index of a country's prosperity.
4. This is perhaps an exaggeration, but James was attempting to obtain far more political power than the English magnates could possibly be expected to concede.
5. For this, see J.H. Plumb, *The Growth of Political Stability in England 1675-1725*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1973.
6. Lord Falkland, most attractive of Cavaliers, in a speech to the Commons (he was a Scottish peer) in May 1641, against tampering with Episcopacy, found in draft amongst his papers after his death. There is doubt as to whether it was actually delivered. Both it and an earlier speech breathe reasonableness. For the full texts: J.A.R. Marriott, *The Life and Times of Lucius Cary Viscount Falkland*, Methuen, London, 1907. (For the quotation, p. 200.)
7. Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History*, Norton, New York and London, 1967. A polemic against certain historians (mostly unnamed) perceived by Butterfield as motivated to give past ideologies too much causation for present ones, particularly in connecting Protestantism with liberty. Thoroughly absorbed into modern thought.
8. Milton's *Areopagitica*, in Humphrey Milford, *Milton's Prose*, Oxford University Press (The World's Classics), London, New York, Toronto, 1942, p. 313. Milton really did believe that the Reformation, amongst other desirable spiritual innovations, having been first revealed to Wycliffe, had its roots in England.
9. Burnet, in his *History of His Own Time*, William Smith, London, 1838, p. 440, says he persuaded Mary to do this unambiguously, at a time when she was heiress presumptive, to strengthen her husband's constitutional position should she inherit the throne.
10. "This body bore very little resemblance to its English counterpart. Its work has not been made the subject of any authoritative modern study." David Mathew, *Scotland Under Charles I*, Eyre & Spottiswoode, London, 1955, p. 18. It was Cromwell who introduced parliamentary politics to a reluctantly grateful Scotland and after 1660 her parliament bore more resemblance to that of England.
11. Lewis Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III*, Macmillan, London, 1961, p. 299. Namier turned a microscope rather than a searchlight on the politicians of this period; his method reinforces Plumb's thesis of stability in politics, though at some time after it had been attained.
12. This is perhaps to draw too harsh a verdict from Boswell's reports. Johnson at Oxford suffered from chronic depression (melancholia) and poverty.
13. "I spent fourteen months at Magdalen College; they proved the fourteen months the most idle and unprofitable of my whole life." Gibbon, *Autobiography*, Dent (Everyman's Library), London, 1911, p. 44. There follow several pages of criticism of Oxford University.
14. Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, Friday, 29th October, 1773. However, it must be said that, from the evidence of Boswell and from his own *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, Johnson was well treated by academics, noblemen and the Scots in general. Johnson's general opinion of the intellectual level of Scottish Universities was not high: "The students, for the most part, go thither boys, and depart before they are men; they carry with them little fundamental knowledge, and therefore the superstructure cannot be lofty." For the decrepitude of St. Andrews, see Johnson's *Journey*, St. Andrews. His opinion of Scottish students follows his description of Glasgow. The many editions of Boswell's *Journal* and Johnson's *Journey* make it more convenient to refer to the date in the one and the place in the other for reference. Glasgow and Edinburgh Universities were, in fact, exceptions to the general academic lethargy. Joseph Black (1728-1799) the Chemistry Professor at Glasgow, collaborated usefully with James Watt. According to Adam Smith the Scottish were superior to the English (Oxbridge only) Universities because their lecturers had to earn their fees competitively instead of living on endowments (Ian Simpson Ross, *The Life of Adam Smith*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995, p. 259).
15. Adam Smith used the "invisible hand" metaphor only twice, once in *The Wealth of Nations* and once in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, perhaps not appreciating how well it could catch the popular imagination. It would be a sound bite now. For citations and discussions (there are too many editions of both works), J.Z. Muller, *Adam Smith in His Time and Ours: Designing the Decent Society*, The Free Press/Macmillan, New York, 1993, p. 86.
16. Sourceless citation by Enfield Senior in *The Oldie*, Dec. 1995, p. 17. Though I am suspicious of the attribution of this judgment to Keynes, who is supposed to have applied it to capitalism in general, I retain it as a convenient illustration of a type of conventional misunderstanding of Adam Smith.
17. For age at marriage (including Juliet's), Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost*, Methuen, London, p. 81ff.
18. In the last chapters of his *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, Reeves & Turner, London, 1872 (reprinted 1986; first edition 1798) Malthus emphasises the need to discourage marriage among the poor, pointing out that anything in the contemporary Poor Law that encouraged it only served to provide more people to starve. The fact that bastardy was kept low by social sanctions makes this a reasonable argument.
19. Un-tracked down observation by Peter Bauer.
20. Charles Oman, *Wellington's Army, 1809-1814*, Edward Arnold, London, 1913 (reprinted 1993). Wellington was almost certainly unjust in this respect, quick to blame, slow to praise, and neglectful of commending or promoting brave and energetic officers. His army feared and respected, but did not love him.
21. For the non-arrival of the bourgeois into power in Britain until the end of the 19th Century, and for an account of how Marx and Engels regularly got their predictions wrong, see Richard F. Hamilton, *The Bourgeois Epoch*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1991.
22. Of our pre-1832 Constitution Lecky writes in 1896: "No danger was deemed greater than that it should degenerate into a system of veiled confiscation — one class voting the taxes which another class was compelled to pay." *Democracy and Liberty*, Liberty Classics, Indianapolis, 1981, Vol.1, p. 2. Lecky shows a prescience in many of his prognostications, amply borne out by events of this century, e.g. government rentfixing — here foreshadowed by its interfering with Irish land rents.
23. This Platonic Society was to have non-hereditary castes, with Guardians having no other function than running the state (Book III §415).
24. In the Everyman's Library translation of Carl von Clausewitz's *On War*, David Campbell Publishers, London, 1993, p. 99. "War is diplomacy carried out by other means" seems to be the popular version and makes a better aphorism than Clausewitz's subheading.
25. It seems to be a belief within the Social Sciences that inconvenient human behaviour can be abolished by majority vote. Thus certain anthropologists issued the statement that "it is scientifically incorrect to say that war or any other violent behaviour is genetically programmed into our human nature". Supposedly, if enough anthropologists agreed, this would not necessarily stop wars, but "would give us one less excuse for having them"! For an account of the bizarre episode of the "Seville Declaration", see Robin Fox, "Anthropology's *Auto-da-Fé*" in *Encounter*, Sept-Oct 1989, pp. 58-64.
26. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1992. In *Trust*, ditto, 1995, the same author discusses the preconditions of "trust" that must underlie a successful capitalist (or indeed any other extended) society, comparing a number of cultures and subcultures. Why other cultures did not produce the original model is not discussed.
27. For information and discussion of the cost decline of raw materials, see *The Resourceful Earth, A Response to Global 2000* edited by Julian Simon and Herman Kahn, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1984; and *The State of Humanity*, ditto, 1995. Also for "problems" of population, food, forests, water, global warming, energy, nuclear power, the environment ...
28. Such as legislation to keep wages too high, directly (a minimum wage, the Social Chapter of the Maastricht Treaty) or indirectly (by giving trade unions unilateral privileges and immunities), or keep unemployment benefit too high (the "poverty trap", more correctly, the "welfare trap"). Keynes devised his system (though aware of its dangers) partly in an attempt to depress wages by inflation, since trade unions were too strong for actual cuts to be made. For this, see Richard Cockett, *Thinking the Unthinkable*, Harper Collins, London, 1994, p. 38.