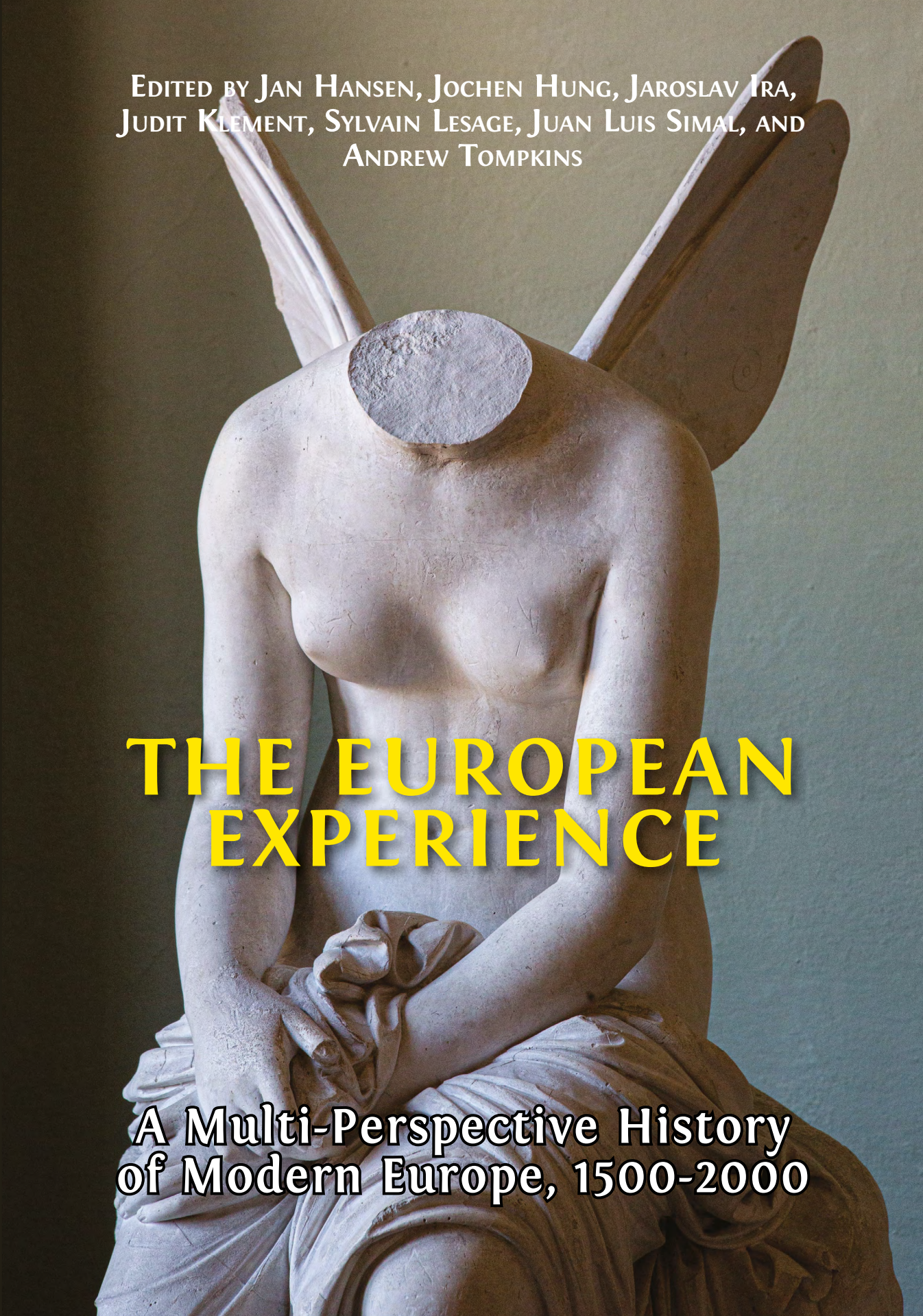
Edited by Jan Hansen, Jochen Hung, Jaroslav Ira, Judit Klement, Sylvain Lesage, Juan Luis Simal, and Andrew Tompkins



The European Experience

A Multi-Perspective History of Modern Europe, 1500-2000

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4.2.2 Social Engineering and Welfare in Modern History (ca. 1800–1900)

Claire Barillé, Julia Moses, Gábor Sonkoly, and Heike Wieters

Introduction

The long nineteenth century saw a dramatic shift in European social landscapes. Industrialisation, mass migration within Europe and overseas, urbanisation, and an explosion in population numbers brought new social problems and suggested new solutions. Alongside these structural changes came significant demographic, social, and cultural developments. Family sizes gradually decreased, leading by the end of the century to anxieties in some countries about population decline, and large family networks became more scattered as individuals left home in search of new opportunity. Meanwhile, workers began to turn to each other for support more and more, organising in trade unions and other associations to demand more rights at work and in retirement. Social commentators also called for new action to address the woes they associated with modernity: urban squalor, injured workers, broken families, and indigent poor. Some turned to philanthropic organisations and the Church as a bastion of charity and humanity, while others urged a greater role for the state as a protector of individuals, individuals who increasingly saw themselves as citizens worthy of social rights. And yet others turned instead to each other, seeking out new utopian living arrangements in small collectives. Regardless of where people looked for answers to social questions, many—including individuals, organisations and governments—agreed that something needed to be done to address them: that is, to engineer society in one way or another.

These developments were, of course, uneven over time and space across Europe. Industrialisation and urbanisation took place at different times and in different ways throughout the continent, meaning that the kinds of social problems experienced by different regions, cities, and countries were varied.

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Expectations about what society should look like also differed over time and across Europe; what seemed like an ideal social policy in one country might make little headway—or even be outright condemned—in another. Nonetheless, many of the experiences with social engineering and welfare were common across Europe, not least because people travelled across borders, and so did their ideas.

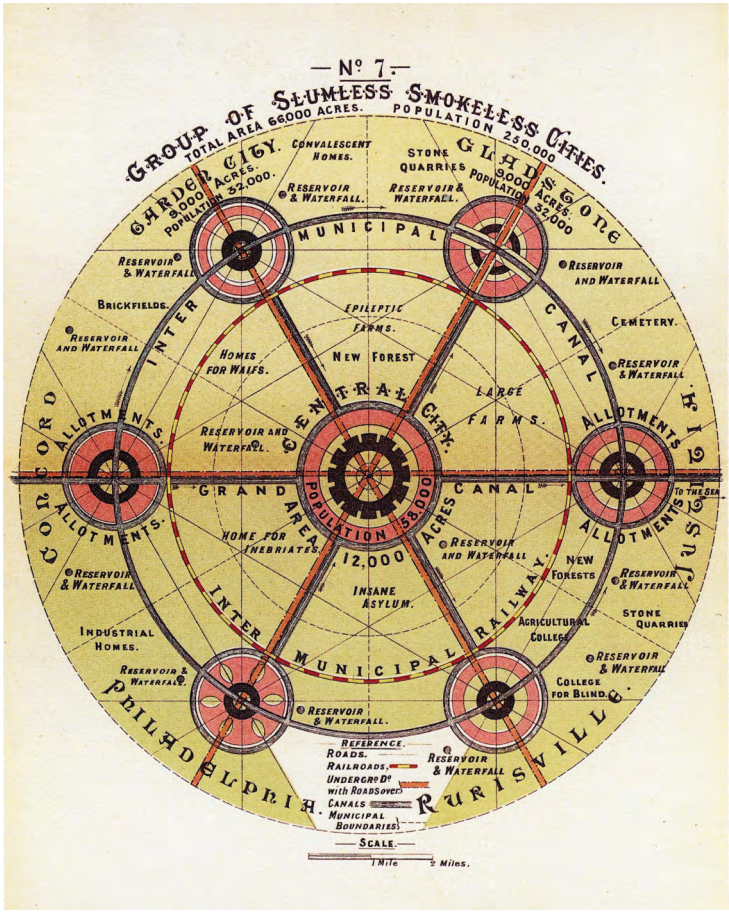

Fig. 1: Ebenezer Howard, "Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform" (from: London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co, 1898), Public Domain, Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Diagram_No.7_(Howard,_Ebenezer,_To-morrow.).jpg. As a response to the crowded and dirty conditions of many European cities (specifically London) at the turn of the eighteenth century, Howard proposed a city model that would combine the most favored elements of urban and rural living. In his Garden City Movement, Howard organised a concept in which radial streets and ample green space would create a network for independent but adjacent urban communities that would altogether compose the greater metropolitan area.

Urbanisation and Urban Planning

Urbanisation was one of the most significant experiences for Europeans in the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, every tenth

European person lived in a city, but by 1900, every third European dwelled in an urban settlement. This unprecedented growth increased the European urban population from less than 20 million to 110 million people. The proportion of urban population and the scale of its growth in absolute terms differed from one region to the other: England and the Low Countries were the most urbanised territories, whereas Southeastern Europe, Scandinavia, and Switzerland remained the least urbanised. London, as the first city with more than one million inhabitants in the 1800s, remained the largest city in the nineteenth century with a population above five million by 1900. Paris was the first continental city that reached the population of one million in the 1830s, followed by Berlin, Istanbul, Saint Petersburg, Moscow, and Vienna in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Urbanisation as a demographic process did not only take place in these large cities, but also in medium-sized and smaller cities and towns, which together gradually established an urban hierarchy on an increasing proportion of the territory of Europe. Nineteenth-century urban planning was characterised by the question of how to handle this spectacular migration to urban settings, which required urgent solutions in an increasingly complex and coherent urban system, in which the exchange of information was accelerating very fast. In the late nineteenth century, the concrete embodiments of the shared and/or imposed norms of urban planning varied from the easily perceptible institutions of central power in France (city halls, courts of law, post offices and schools) to similar railway stations in the cities of Austria-Hungary, as well as the monuments to great personalities mushrooming all over Europe.

Nineteenth-century cities were the products of accelerated industrialisation and commercialisation, and they necessitated systematic management. Providing that systematic management stretched the representative capacity and the regulative power of now-outdated, eighteenth-century governing institutions to its limits. Although the institutionalisation of professional urban planning began only at the very end of the nineteenth century with the publishing of Ebenezer Howard's book about the Garden City movement (1898) and the foundation of the first Town and City Planning Association (1899) in the United Kingdom, the history of pre-professional urban planning can be traced back through significant interventions of urban renewal and through initiatives to create liveable industrial settlements (see Figure 1).

One of the major challenges for the fast-growing cities was the transformation of cramped medieval cores and street structures into large arteries of boulevards and avenues, which were suitable not only for operating the increasing inner traffic, but also for linking urban transport networks to the extended national ones. Important examples of such reconstruction were renewals designed in London (1848–1865), Paris (1853–1869), Vienna

(1857–1865) and Brussels (1867–1871) as well as in Ildefonso Cerdá's plans for Barcelona (1859). The demolition of the old city walls allowed for the construction of boulevards (such as the *Viali* in Florence, 1865) or green belts (such as the *Planty Park* in Kraków, 1822–1830).

Baron Haussmann's neo-conservative reconstruction of Paris (in which some 27,000 buildings were destroyed and some 100,000 rebuilt) became not only a model of efficient traffic management (i.e., boulevards connecting train stations) and empire aesthetics (i.e., splendid views of monumental buildings), but also that of the political control over the revolutionary urban crowds, who could defend themselves less easily against the shots of the artillery in the widened avenues and boulevards. Whereas renewed urban centres with new buildings and a new system of streets were immediately occupied by the new bourgeois class, the sordid situation of the areas inhabited by the working class remained mostly unaddressed before the Garden City movement. The ideologies and the experimental settlements of the Utopian thinkers, such as Charles Fourier's *Phalanstères* and Robert Owen's cooperative movement, which proposed inspiring solutions to the social evils of capitalist society, could reach out to very few poor city-dwellers (see also Chapter 7.1.2).

Labour and Class Struggles

The nineteenth century was marked by vigorous growth but also by strong socio-economic inequalities. The social question was very much on the agenda in the European countries that had been won over by industrialisation, now concerned with improving the living, health, and working conditions of the increasingly numerous working class.

The first social surveys date back to the first third of the nineteenth century and highlight the difficult conditions of housing, food, hygiene, and working environments created by emergent industrialisation. Surveys were carried out by hygienists such as Dr James Phillips Kay in Great Britain or Dr Villermé in France, or by other reformers throughout Europe. These observers measured poverty across the continent, with terrible findings—particularly accentuated by epidemics, such as cholera, which swept through Europe in the early 1830s. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the life expectancy of a worker did not exceed twenty-five years from Manchester to Rouen.

Paternalism was one response to the social question, formulated by the large industrial families: they would provide housing, guarantee security of work, and access to care—including maternity care, as for example with the Schneider family in Le Creusot or the Krupp family in Essen.

Responses to the deterioration in workers' conditions of employment are numerous and do not all follow the same path. From the beginning of the century, philanthropists—who were sometimes industrialists themselves,

like Owen in Britain—denounced the misdeeds of capitalism and unbridled industrialisation. Saint-Simon in France joined in this criticism, putting forward the idea of an ideal society in which the happiness of humanity would be based on the progress of industry and science. Other Utopian socialists also emerged in France and Germany during the turmoil of the 1830s and sometimes gave birth to ideal communities such as the Familistère de Guise, built from 1858 onwards, inspired by the ideas of Fourier and his phalanstery, a place for community life made up of dwellings organised around a central courtyard such as the Guise Familistery in France.

For their part, Engels and Marx criticised these socialists. They considered capitalist society to be defined by class struggle between the holders of capital (the bourgeois), and those who have only their labour power (the proletarians). In their perspective, the perspective of historical materialism, this must lead inevitably to revolution.

The 1860s and 1870s saw the spread of workshop regulation, laying down detailed prohibitions and penalties and leading to the factory space becoming a place of further alienation and self-dispossession for workers. There were, however, many ways of getting around these restrictions: absenteeism and the resulting high turnover was the cause of significant difficulties for heavy industries at the end of the century. Despite a relatively active paternalism, the Krupp factories had an annual labour turnover rate of thirty-six percent. This mobility is a known strategy used by workers to maximise their earnings and reduce disciplinary pressure.

From the 1880s onwards, reformist movements emerged in several liberal democracies. These movements were generally in favour, if not of state intervention, then at least of collective action on behalf of the working classes. In Great Britain, reformist institutions such as the National Committee for the Organisation of a Retreat, supported by the Congress of Trade Unions, made themselves heard by royal commissions. In France, reformers were more numerous in the Republican Party, which has been dominated until that point by liberal ideas. Among the radicals, the *solidarisme* of Léon Bourgeois manifested another form of reformism, in opposition to Social Darwinism. Despite the Law on Workplace Accidents (1898) in France, the most important social legislation was passed after 1900 in both France and Great Britain.

Family and Reproduction

Against this backdrop of vast urban change and anxieties about social protections for workers, the family, on the surface, seemed a locus of comfort and stability in the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, it too was coloured by concerns about social change. Scholars like the French sociologist Ferdinand LePlay and British lawyer Henry Maine theorised about modernisation and

the declining impact of kinship networks. Industrialisation and urbanisation across much of Europe during the long nineteenth century meant a shift towards wage earners and male family breadwinners. As a result, individual, nuclear families would need to fend more for themselves, and sometimes turn to charity or the state, for example, through poor laws or the new field of social work, to seek help. Assistance for the poor was itself experiencing vast transformation during this period—for example, in the reinvention of the English Poor Law in 1834 to be a more restrictive system. Other examples of these transformations in assistance for the poor included the creation of social insurance systems linked to paid employment. Such systems favoured the model of the breadwinner family by rewarding wage earners (and, by extension, their families) with protections in case they were injured at work, came into ill health, or retired.

Meanwhile, feminist groups like the German League for the Protection of Mothers (1904) sought to break down old patriarchal systems that gave husbands and fathers ultimate authority in the household. They aimed instead to augment women's rights as mothers and wives. Concerns about the protection of women as mothers led to innovative new policies on maternity leave, including—for example—the Swiss Factory Act of 1877, and additional legislation in Germany in 1878 and 1883, and France in 1909. The movement to protect women, wives, and mothers often intersected, both in terms of its arguments and in terms of its members, with campaigns to protect children. A number of countries across Europe introduced new legislation in the middle of the nineteenth century to reduce labour hours and increase schooling for children, or to ban them outright from employment in certain industries.

Policies on the protection of children and infants connected in the latter part of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century with anxieties about declining birth rates as well as high infant mortality rates. For example, during the 1840s in France, England, and Sweden, nearly 150 out of every 1,000 babies died in their first year of life. Poor sanitary conditions in urban areas contributed to this problem, as did illness and poor nutrition. As a consequence, a number of innovative municipalities around the continent developed milk dispensary schemes and education in breastfeeding in order to help provide sanitary milk to babies.

Moreover, across many European countries, birth rates were also slowing. This seemed a particularly pressing problem both in light of worryingly high infant mortality rates and in the wake of war, which led to fears that families were failing to produce enough children to provide for future armies that could defend their homelands. For example, the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871 sparked a pronatalist movement in France that sought to increase the country's diminishing birth rate. These fears resonated elsewhere as well,

and were amplified during and after the First World War, which was marked by what contemporaries saw as a 'lost generation' of young men.

Anxieties about the birth rate intersected with a broader movement that was gaining traction in social policy circles during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: eugenics. Following the publication of Charles Darwin's 1871 *The Descent of Man* and other works, a number of scholars began considering whether specific traits could be inherited. Driven by this thinking, some posited that certain individuals should be encouraged to reproduce (through, for example, the incentive of family allowances) while others should be discouraged from reproducing (by means of other disincentives, such as marriage bans on the disabled or on those with sexually transmitted diseases like syphilis). These concerns stretched across Europe, from Britain—where Darwin's cousin Francis Galton helped spearhead the Eugenics Society in 1907—to Russia, and could be found across the political spectrum.

Social Policies

The social question became particularly urgent and politically meaningful in the course of the nineteenth century. The erosion of traditional ties, industrialisation, rapid urbanisation, and both old and new forms of social and economic inequality pushed the question of how to prevent (or channel) social unrest to the fore. The various social groups in Europe responded quite differently to this challenge: while workers often opted to unionise or organise social solidarity within political parties, charities and/or families or extended households, self-employed people and members of the bourgeoisie mostly relied on savings or basic insurance schemes provided by professional associations (such as guilds or other work-related fraternities) or commercial life insurance companies. These latter options were, however, only available to the better-off parts of the population in Europe, whereas workers and their families mostly continued to live under precarious conditions. By mid-century most 'collective risks', such as invalidity, sickness, old-age, widowhood or joblessness were still not covered by any central welfare institutions. Existing institutions were mostly local and failed to insure members that were moving away from their home region. Given the rising mobility of the industrial labour force, more encompassing and overarching solutions needed to be found.

The nineteenth century was, by and large, the century of the nation-state, in which the ideas and concepts that had framed its 'invention' since the seventeenth century resulted in the foundation of dozens of new nation-states in Europe. These states did not only assume responsibility as military, political, or economic agents; they also aimed at widening their outreach in social affairs. Dreading social unrest and looking for ways to bind their citizens

to the national state, governments discussed ways to enhance the state's impact on citizens' health and hygiene as well as social affairs in and around the workplace, most prominently in and around the factories. Apart from creating and widening extensive hygiene regimes—by investing in sanitation infrastructure and (often socially discriminatory) hygiene education—most European governments also passed legislation regulating compensation for accidents in the workplace. Social policies aiming at the protection of (nursing) mothers and children were introduced across Europe throughout the nineteenth century. In addition, invalidity, unemployment and old age were discursively defined as looming social problems for which solutions had to be found.

These debates were pushed forward by different players and on different levels. The labour movement, while closely embedded locally (often running its own welfare organisations), was also transnational in nature. Its leaders, such as Louis Blanc (1811–1882) or Ferdinand Lassalle (1825–1864), fought for the improvement of social conditions, while pointing out that inequality and misery of the working classes were mostly the effect of the capitalist order—which ultimately needed to be overcome. On the other side there were various so-called social reformers, often high-ranking civil servants, men and women of the bourgeoisie (including some factory owners), as well as scientists and intellectuals, who drew attention to the 'social question' and its potentially detrimental implications for the stability of the rising European nation-states. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, reformist European and even transatlantic debate, as well as pressure from organised workers, led to the establishment of large, government-run welfare programs in many European countries.

In Germany, for instance, the first state-run social insurance schemes were invented in the 1880s. Health insurance (1883) and especially old-age or invalidity insurance (1889) were established as central programmes granting limited sick leave (e.g. after accidents at work) and (rather minimal) funds to invalids and the elderly (older than 70). The introduction of these 'Bismarckian' insurance schemes, named after the German Chancellor Bismarck (see Figure 2, which depicts German welfare programmes as branches of a German oak tree), were closely monitored by international reformers and government experts and adapted to local conditions in many European states afterwards. Subsequently, government-run insurance models (to which employers and workers contributed) as well as tax-based welfare programmes—often means-tested and only accessible after close scrutiny of whether applicants were 'officially' needy—emerged in many European countries. While the programmes differed between nations, most European governments were keen to define a new role for the state in social affairs. Slowly but surely, the idea that welfare and social prevention were a collective challenge—a challenge

that could best be met by central, state-run welfare programmes—was gaining ground.

Fig: 2. "Diagram of Workers' Insurance" (1909/1914), Public Domain, Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bundesarchiv_Bild_146-1980-091-21,_Schaubild_der_Arbeiterversicherung.jpg

Conclusion

In many regards, the long nineteenth century was a period of accelerated change and unprecedented dynamism. Traditional social ties eroded quickly as industrialisation, urbanisation, mass migration and open class struggle became the new normal. Social conflict, but also utopian thinking and new intellectual concepts framing transnational debate about modernity and the future of humankind in the industrialising world, impacted all societies on the European continent and beyond.

The 'social question' was not only a theoretical or intellectual endeavour: it also impacted and motivated political players all over Europe. The labour movement, social reformers and intellectuals, as well as government experts and political leaders, promoted diverse solutions—intellectual and institutional—hoping to foster stability, order and (new or proven) political models for the European societies in the making. Dealing with change

and trying to build better futures was what united the various—and often divergent—approaches discussed in this chapter. In addition, the national state emerged as a central player, not only widening its administration and bureaucracy but also assuming new responsibilities in the fields of social planning, welfare and social policies—a development that would continue far into the twentieth century.

Discussion questions

1. 1. What was the 'social question' and why was it so important in nineteenth-century Europe?
2. 2. Which roles did cities play in the development of welfare in modern Europe?
3. 3. In which ways was welfare a political issue in nineteenth-century Europe?

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