CHAPTER 22 - ECONOMIC ADVANCE AND SOCIAL UNREST (1830-1850)

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter treats the growth of industrial society, the intellectual responses to that society and the unsuccessful revolutions in France, Austria, Italy and Germany. The industrial revolution began in eighteenth century Britain, and in 1850 England remained a generation ahead of its future continental competitors. Material progress was being made, accompanied by continued population growth and considerable migration from the countryside to the cities. This movement was aided by railroads; the 1830s and 1840s were the great age of railroad building. Art & the West discusses J. M. W. Turner's painting entitled, “Steam and Speed—The Great Western Railway.” It was the age which prized talent and efficiency. The middle classes tended to measure success in monetary terms and were increasingly dissatisfied with their lack of political influence. With some exceptions, they were unsympathetic to the plight of the poor. The labor force was varied, but the two broad categories were factory workers and urban artisans. By the late 1830s, the British working classes turned to direct political activity and pushed a reform program known as Chartism. As a national movement Chartism failed, but it set an example for workers on the continent.

The chapter then focuses on societal developments which resulted from industrialism. In particular there were changes in family structure because economic life and home life were no longer the same and the family ceased to be a close unit of production and consumption. Women received lower wages and the employment of children in the factories became a major concern. The English Factory Act of 1833 limited a child's work day to eight hours and imposed a mandatory responsibility on the factory owner for the education of employed children. The rise in urban population also was a rise in the crime rate which resulted in the development of professional law enforcement officers. Prison reform was another issue which received attention. New prisons were developed from models in the United States which sought rehabilitation as a result of incarceration. In France, however, imprisonment became more repressive as the century passed and transportation to infamous penal colonies (Devil's Island) were designed to rid the country of its worst elements.

Classical economists such as Malthus and Ricardo dominated policy discussions. They believed generally in laissez-faire and were pessimistic about the working class. Closely related to the classical economists were the British utilitarians, led by John Stuart Mill. They believed that the principle of utility (the greatest good for the greatest number) should constitute the guiding principle of public policy. They were the actual authors of much reform legislation.

This period also saw the beginning of the socialist movement. Early socialist doctrines were blurred and the early spokesmen lacked any meaningful political following. The early socialists generally applauded the new productive capacity of industrialism but decried industrial mismanagement and thought that human society should be organized as a community rather than merely as a conglomerate of atomistic, selfish individuals.

Other writers, known as anarchists, rejected both industry and the dominance of government. Some, like Blanqui, were violent; others, like Proudhon, were peaceful. Many conservative Europeans also hated the view of society set out by the classical economists. In general, the writers who upheld this position were less brilliant than the liberals and the socialists, but they did achieve some reforms by posing as protectors of the poor. The price of such protection was non-participation in politics by the working class.

At mid-century, the ideas of Karl Marx were only one more contribution to the criticism of emerging industrial society. Marxism differed from its competitors in the brilliance of its author, its claim to scientific accuracy, and its message of the inevitable collapse of the capitalist order. Marx believed that class conflict in the nineteenth century had become simplified into a struggle between the bourgeoisie (middle class) and the proletariat (workers), a struggle which the proletariat would eventually win and which would result in a propertyless and classless society.

In 1848, a series of liberal and national revolutions spread across the continent. The text then details the causes and courses of the revolutions in Austria-Hungary, France, Italy, Prussia and the German states. A convenient chronology of the revolutions is presented within the text for clarity.

KEY POINTS AND VITAL CONCEPTS

1. The Socialist Movement: Among the first writers to define the social question were the utopian socialists, notably Saint-Simon, Owen and Fourier. Their ideas were often visionary and idealistic, but they expected some existing government to carry them out. Saint-Simon believed that modern society required rational management and hoped for a government consisting of a large board of expert directors organizing and coordinating individual activity. Owen's version of socialism was little more than old-fashioned paternalism transported to the industrial setting, but he did show that industrial production and humane working conditions were compatible. Fourier emphasized the problem of tedium and urged liberated living in communities called phalanxes. It should be stressed that early socialist spokesmen lacked any meaningful political following.
2. **Marxism**: The ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels expounded in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) have become some of the most politically influential in modern European history. The major ideas of the *Manifesto* were derived from German Hegelianism, French socialism and British classical economics. The *Manifesto* contended that human history must be understood rationally and as a whole. It is the record of humankind's coming to grips with physical nature to produce the goods necessary for human survival. Historically, the organization of the means of production has always involved conflict between the classes who owned and controlled the means of production and those classes who worked for them. Only radical social transformation can eliminate the social and economic evils that are inherent in the very structure of production. The proletarian revolution is inevitable and will lead to a society without class conflict—the culmination of human history.

3. **The Revolutions of 1848**: The causes of the series of widespread revolutions were similar: food shortages and unemployment; a new willingness of political liberals to ally with the working classes in order to put increased pressure on the government, even though the new allies had different aims; and finally, (outside France) a movement to create national states that would reorganize or replace existing political entities. The immediate results of the 1848 revolutions were stunning: the French monarchy fell and many others were badly shaken. But not one revolution established a new liberal or national state. The political initiative passed from the liberal to the conservative political groups. Most importantly, after 1848, the European middle class ceased to be revolutionary; it became increasingly concerned about the protection of its property against radical political and social movements.

**SUGGESTED FILMS**

*Civilization XIII: Heroic Materialism*. Time-Life. 52 min.

*Balzac*. Radim Films. 23 min.

*English Literature: Romantic Period*. Coronet. 14 min.

*Early Victorian England and Charles Dickens*. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 30 min.

*The Industrial Revolution in England*. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 26 min.


*Revolts and Reforms in Europe (1815-1848)*. Coronet. 16 min.

*Revolutions of 1848*. Radim Films Inc. 22 min.