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2. The Postwar Scene

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2. The Postwar Scene

Abstract

Turning now from the immediate diplomatic aftermath of World War I, let us examine some major features of Western Civilization during what has been called the long weekend, the two decades between that war and World War II (1919-1939). We will note first the way in which the West generated within itself economic stresses, local and general, which prevented it from realizing the tremendous potential created by continuing technological advances. Then we will note how these economic changes were paralleled by changes in social organization and attitudes. We will see these new attitudes in conflict with each other and with survivals from earlier ages. This will be illustrated in greater detail in three sections in which the democracies and their chief competitors are studied. All the above topics will deal with aspects of the civil wars — military and otherwise — which are one of the features of Western Civilization. This stands out sharply in the next section on the shifting balance of military power in the West and the road to World War II. At this point we will note the increasing impact of the non-Western world. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Contemporary Civilization, World War I, First World War, The Great War, International Crisis

Disciplines

European History | History | Military History | Political History | Social History | United States History

Comments

This is a part of [Section XVIII: The Western World in the Twentieth Century: The Historical Setting](#). The [Contemporary Civilization](#) page lists all additional sections of *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, as well as the [Table of Contents](#) for both volumes.

More About Contemporary Civilization:

From 1947 through 1969, all first-year Gettysburg College students took a two-semester course called Contemporary Civilization. The course was developed at President Henry W.A. Hanson's request with the goal of "introducing the student to the backgrounds of contemporary social problems through the major concepts, ideals, hopes and motivations of western culture since the Middle Ages."

Gettysburg College professors from the history, philosophy, and religion departments developed a textbook for the course. The first edition, published in 1955, was called *An Introduction to Contemporary Civilization and Its Problems*. A second edition, retitled *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, was published in 1958 and 1960. It is this second edition that we include here. The copy we digitized is from the Gary T. Hawbaker '66 Collection and the marginalia are his.

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The historically informed reader will observe in these topics few completely novel developments. Rather, trends in Western Civilization which had hitherto been submerged or of minor proportion suddenly assumed new prominence and often new forms. This occurred so quickly, so ubiquitously, and generally so unexpectedly that life could not be adjusted easily to it or thought comprehend it. Crisis became, not exceptional, but rather the order of the day.

Of this development World War I was itself at once part and cause. World War II and the subsequent Cold War occurred in a civilization somewhat inured to this crisis mentality. Consequently they seem to have had less emotional impact than their predecessor, whose occurrence, magnitude, and results were so unexpected as to appear to contradict common sense and invalidate a hundred years of history. In modern civilization, war itself is indeed revolution.