

# Must History Stay Nationalist?

## *The Prison of Closed Intellectual Frontiers*

BENEDETTO CROCE remarked some forty years ago that all history is contemporary history. It would be truer to say now that all history is nationalist history, and especially that all contemporary history is nationalist history. This runs so contrary to what many people seem to believe that evidence for it must be presented. It comes from three different sources: from surveys of the general sweep of historical writing since 1945; from an exploration of the research into contemporary history undertaken in different countries; and from several experiments in studying and writing history on a non-nationalist basis. Nationalist—even nationalistic—historiography is a highly significant feature of our culture in the 1960s. It is ubiquitous if not quite universal, and it shows no sign of receding. The accumulative force of the evidence for such generalisations compels a further question: can historical study, at least in our modern society, have much educational or intellectual value unless it is based on a continuous community consciousness as well-defined and as positive as that of a modern nation?

Several major countries produce bibliographies of historical works published in the years since 1945, comparable with the Historical Association's *Annual Bulletin of Historical Literature* which has been appearing since 1911. They list works about the main countries in several different languages. But the French, guided by

their *Comité français des sciences scientifiques*, have tackled the job most systematically.<sup>1</sup> Even so, the compiler of the admirable bibliography which forms the second volume of *Ving-cinq ans de recherche historique en France* felt obliged to apologise lest he had inadvertently let in works—written in French—by Belgian, Swiss, or Canadian historians. Of the 6,460 titles there listed, all but some 3,000 are on modern history, the great majority being about aspects of French history. When broader themes—the general history of Europe, or cultural aspects, or overseas history—are handled there is a strong tendency to approach them from a particularly French slant.

Would a similar compilation of the output of historians in other countries during the last twenty years reveal similar trends? For modern history, even for medieval or ancient history, it probably would. South Africa is, significantly, an extreme case where obsessive nationalism keeps the eyes of research-workers fixed on such well-worn themes as the Great Trek or the Boer War, and within the confines of a brief span of time. Certainly American and British historiography does not lack a comparable bias toward homeland history, a certain priority for national themes and an underlying faith that history, like charity, should begin at home. There are notable exceptions in both countries. Eminent American historians have made original contributions to the study of France (Robert Palmer, Gordon Wright, Henry Ehrmann) or of Germany (Gordon Craig, Hajo Holborn). In post-war Britain John Elliott at Cambridge, Raymond Carr at Oxford, have produced masterly studies of Spanish history; E. H. Carr is still writing his massive *History of Soviet Russia*; Denis Brogan, Richard Cobb,

<sup>1</sup> *Vingt-cinq ans de recherche historique en France, 1940-1965* (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 2 vols. 1965), Vol. II, *Bibliographie*. Comparable bibliographies from other countries are mentioned in *Problèmes de la recherche en histoire contemporaine* (Strasbourg, 1966).

and Alfred Cobban have made valuable contributions to the study of France, even to that proud preserve of the French, their own *Révolution*. It may be true that there is no Leopold von Ranke in Germany to be magisterial about 17th-century England, no Élie Halévy in modern France to encompass so wide a sweep of 19th-century Britain. But such phenomena were never common, and there are few these days who write on this scale about even their own countries.

THERE ARE OBVIOUS ENOUGH reasons for some concentration on one's own national history. The sources are most readily to hand, in languages one is most likely to know and in accessible archives. Academic training in research, especially when it accompanies part-time employment, tends to be strongest on home materials. The beginner feels at home—and having begun may never find the time or opportunity to shift his focus abroad. All these circumstances favour a choice of national themes, quite apart from any nationalistic urge to explore deeper the origins and development of the society to which the historian inevitably belongs. Deterrents to mastering the history of another nation may be financial, or linguistic, or a dozen other things apart from temperamental aversion. They are real and operative, nonetheless, and need strong inducements to offset them. Whereas most universities offer positive incentives to study the language or literature of other countries, few offer more than facilities—if that—to undertake serious research into the history of other people.

THE CURRENT FASHION in historical studies in most Western countries is to widen their scope and diversify their interests: so that emphasis is placed much less predominantly on political, constitutional or military history (with a presumed propensity to cast it in a firm nationalistic mould), and much more on economic, intellectual and scientific history (which of necessity transcends national frontiers). It might be expected that one consequence of this new focus would be to loosen the grip of nationalism on historiography. This expectation has not yet been fulfilled. The investigation of economic changes, or of intellectual and scientific developments, has often been attuned to more traditional concentration upon national history.

Nor is this surprising. New fields of historical enquiry, demanding fresh techniques and use of less familiar materials, are again most readily pursued in native archives and on home ground. There are plenty of new questions of interest and importance to be answered there—how economic changes interact with political or social changes, what impact new ideas or new scientific developments have had on national life, how external relations of the state have been affected by growth of a world economy or by the endowments of modern technology. Traditional features of national history, instead of seeming out-of-date or threadbare, acquire fresh interest and vitality.

For these reasons and others, the basic subject of study has usually remained the national community, in its more varied internal developments and in its changing external relations. The most striking exceptions are a few regional studies, such as Fernand Braudel's famous *Le Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (Paris, 1949), or histories of the large international movements or organisations, ranging from Sir Steven Runciman's *History of the Crusades* (3 vols.) to F. P. Walters' *History of the League of Nations* (2 vols., 1952). Diplomatic history, the study of international relations, and much that is written about international organisation, peacemaking or warmaking, are inevitably national in basis even when multi-national in scope: and works on these themes have abounded.

IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN expected, too, that the increasing attention given by serious scholars to "contemporary" or 20th-century history would have further encouraged a choice of themes other than national, and treatment other than nationalistic. Never before have events anywhere so quickly had effects on events everywhere. Human fortunes in one area of the world are intimately linked with those in other areas, when the twin threats of world starvation and of nuclear war hang over mankind. Contemporary history must, in a special sense be world history. It must be studied and written in a global context before it can be fully intelligible. The pivots of contemporary history are those of world history—such moments as 1917 or 1929 or 1941 when great displacements of world power take place and history flows into new channels. All this being so, concern with the study of contemporary history, more than of

any earlier period, might have been expected to bring an escape from the essentially nationalist basis of most historiography. But again the expectation has not been fulfilled.

*The Journal of Contemporary History* recently devoted a whole issue (January, 1967) to exploring trends in the writing of contemporary history in the United States, France, Italy, Germany, Holland, Sweden, Spain, Poland, Czechoslovakia and India. The most recurrent single refrain was that writers of contemporary history seldom undertake serious study of countries other than their own. "French historians in general take little interest in other countries," laments M. René Rémond. Italian historiography, notes Professor Claudio Pavone, gives "scanty attention to the world beyond Italy," adding that "the only comprehensive history of united Italy to have appeared since the war is the work of an Englishman" (Mr. Dennis Mack Smith). Professor Hans Herzfeld records that

the great debate over the "wrong turnings" taken by German historians has for the last decade restricted all work almost exclusively to problems of German history, and to the revision of the German concept of history.

Dr. Krister Wahlbäck states bluntly that "one conspicuous feature of Swedish research in contemporary history is its parochialism"; while from beyond the iron curtain Dr. Frantisek Ryszka adds, "one can rightly criticise the Poles for their half-hearted interest in questions which do not directly concern Poland," and Karel Bartosek emphasizes the danger in Czechoslovakia of "a national, provincial, limited outlook" with the consequent "inability to make a genuine comparison, an uncritical and subservient adulation of the national entity."

Recalling the experience common to so many European nations this century, the experience of war, economic slump, invasion, occupation, resistance, liberation, rehabilitation, this chorus of assent from professional historians themselves that even among students of this century's history "all history is nationalist history" is both surprising and disturbing. Despite the cold war, despite the movements towards federalism, integration and wider horizons,

European culture in this important respect remains rooted in national identity. And if the old nations of Europe perpetuate such separatism, it is hardly surprising that the new nationalities of Africa or Asia search fervently for distinctive nationalist roots, recalling the notion of Fontenelle that history is only "a fable that men have agreed upon."

**B**EFORE these tendencies, however, are lamented too loudly or condemned as mere regression, it may be asked whether more prolonged and profound research into national sources, using modern approaches and techniques, may not yield rich benefits, intellectually and culturally. Reinvigorated by new methods and ideas, historical studies are enriching human knowledge in many fields; and nothing is lost by deeper understanding of our national communities. National society investigated, and its history written, with a nationalistic bias may be as blameworthy as neglect by historians of non-nationalist themes: but firmer understanding of national history enhanced by more versatile researches is entirely gain.<sup>3</sup> What we need is not less national history but more trans-national historiography: more studies of national history by historians who "belong" to other nations; more pursuit of themes common to several nations or to a whole region, such as Robert Palmer's controversial *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800* (2 vols. Princeton, 1959-64); assessments of scientific and technological changes more distinctively historical than any hitherto accomplished. But of grandiose collective or "collaborationist" undertakings in these fields, let us be unceasingly wary.

THREE SUCH have been attempted since 1945, each seeking by means of multi-national authorship to overcome both the hurdle of specialisation and the bane of nationalism. The Cambridge University Press is nearing completion of its 12-volume *New Cambridge Modern History*, with its focus on European civilisation since 1493. The Italian firm of Marzorati presents a 6-volume history of Europe since 1815 (*L'Europe du XIXe et du XXe siècle*) inspired in large measure by "the European idea." The International Commission of UNESCO for a "History of the Scientific and Cultural Development of Mankind" has produced three of its six

<sup>3</sup> For exemplification of these trends see the three issues of the *Times Literary Supplement* devoted to "New Ways in History" (7 April, 28 July, and 8 September 1966). The trends were described in an editorial as "the general explosion of the subject over the past decade."

volumes (some of the "volumes" running to two or three separately-bound and very substantial books), including a final volume (in two parts) on *The Twentieth Century*. Comparison of the approaches, methods and achievements of these three experiments in composite and multi-national writing of history, especially of recent history, throws further light on the incorrigible nationalism of historiography in our times.

Sir George Clark, general editor of the *New Cambridge Modern History*, defined its theme as

that "civilisation" which, from the fifteenth century, spread from its original European homes, assimilating extraneous elements as it expanded, until it was more or less firmly planted in all parts of the world.

As regards method, he laid down that

when there is a common process affecting a number of states or nations, this will provide the theme; but where necessary there will be separate chapters or sections for the affairs of nations or groups of nations which diverge too markedly to be treated along with others.

He added that "the History will not give separate continuous accounts of all the separate states; it will neither be nor include a collection of separate national histories bound together in the same covers." The contributors have been drawn almost entirely from the Western world, especially from Britain and the United States. Although the cries of outrage which have

greeted most volumes have been much exaggerated, few would regard the experiment as a whole as outstandingly successful in the aim of presenting what Sir George Clark called "an articulated history."<sup>3</sup>

The aim of the Marzorati volumes is more didactic, just as the scope of the work, both in period and in geographical area, is narrower. The work starts from the assumption: *la nationalité en Europe est un fait acquis, un point de départ et non plus un point d'arrivée*. Its aim is to enlist wide international collaboration in an effort to extract from recent historiography in each country an agreed level of historical interpretation of the development of European civilisation. The distinguished contributors from many European countries—nearly a hundred in all—failed to include communist historians, so the editors had to fall back on Western historians to write about Russian history. Although contributors agreed to present their allotted themes on a common pattern, they evidently differed greatly in how they interpreted this pattern: and some ignored it completely. The result is no less patchy than the Cambridge History.<sup>4</sup>

The UNESCO enterprise is by far the most ambitious and comprehensive of the three. It is presented by the Director-General as belonging to "that noble line of great syntheses which seek to present to man the sum total of his memories as a coherent whole." One purpose is to demonstrate the "intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind" mentioned in the Preamble to UNESCO's Constitution. The demonstration is expected to follow from the "two-fold ambition, to embrace the past in its entirety and to sum up all that we know about the past": a remarkable ambition, perpetuating a 19th-century positivist conception of history which few modern historians would care to endorse.<sup>5</sup> Each volume is equipped with its own little team of "author-editors," whose task it has been to produce "a joint, not a composite, piece of work." Chapters and sections, drafted by them or by specific collaborators, have been worked over jointly and represent "combined thought and judgment." Thus the volume on the 20th century had as author-editors an American, a Dutchman and an Indian (though the two latter unfortunately died during the completion of the work); half a dozen other people, mostly scientists rather than historians and all of them English-speaking, drafted particular chapters; and two consultants (an Ameri-

<sup>3</sup> *The New Cambridge Modern History*, vol. I (1957), pp. xxxv–xxxvi. By May 1968, nine out of the twelve volumes had appeared: they varied greatly in quality, both from volume to volume, and from chapter to chapter within each volume. Many contributors evidently experienced some agony of mind in trying to be multi-national, while others scarcely tried to be. With this approach may be contrasted that of Mr. J. E. Morpurgo as Editor of *The Pelican History of the World*. He defends the plan of separate national histories on the grounds that "the old and familiar emphasis upon national history has meant sufficient to justify its continuance in this series," which he hopes, nevertheless, will be "in the true sense, a history of the modern world." Surrenders to nationalism can take various forms.

<sup>4</sup> *L'Europe du XIXe et du XXe siècle* (6 vols., Milan, 1959–). Heavy emphasis on debates among historians introduces a strange atmosphere of unreality, as if the untidiness of history were being deplored because this makes historiography more difficult. History—even national history—does not happen for the sake of historians—even nationalists.

<sup>5</sup> *History of Mankind: Cultural and Scientific Development* (6 vols., Allen & Unwin, London).



can and a Russian) were appointed to add notes to the text already revised in the light of comments collected from the National and the International Commissions. It is these notes, especially, which "reflect many of the divergencies that characterise historical scholarship with respect to fundamental issues in the 20th century."

TAKEN TOGETHER WITH the comparable notes in earlier volumes, they reveal at least three different levels of dissent, all of them rooted in important differences of national culture.

There is the normal scholarly dispute between historians who take differing views of how events should be interpreted, usually involving technical and erudite arguments. This form of dissent is the least objectionable and the least aligned to distinctions of nationality: an example being the "Note on the Origins of the Etruscans" contributed by Mr. W. M. Fredrikson to Professor Luigi Pareti's chapter on "The Ancient World." There is, secondly, the protest based on downright patriotic considerations, and examples are quite numerous.

László Mátrai, Corresponding Member, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, writes that it is incorrect to say the non-Euclidean spaces were first studied by followers of Corrado Segre, whose work was based on that of Hermann Grassman. It is generally acknowledged that the first in the field were Bolyai and Lobachevsky. (Vol. VI, Part I, p. 162.)

There is, thirdly, and most plentifully of all, the dissent based on a fundamentally different ideological approach: and this makes the notes following many chapters some of the most fascinating reading of all. For while the Chinese were totally excluded from the UNESCO undertaking, the Soviet Union participated only after the basic plans had been agreed. Even in the chapters on food and agriculture, desperately little is said about China; and on such delicate matters as Lysenko and Stalin mention is discreet to the point of being meaningless. As latecomers, the Soviet historians and scientists were given especially loose rein in the notes, and they made full use of it. The notes range from full-scale *exposés* of the materialist dialectic and the Marxist-Leninist doctrines about history, to the detailed application of such theories to religion, science, demography, and the arts, as well as to economics and politics. The differences emerge as no mere diversities of emphasis or selection, but basic conflicts of understanding.

Candidate of Biological Sciences L. Ya. Blyakher expresses astonishment and concern that the authors should apparently be inclined to question whether all biological phenomena are at all times susceptible to a materialist explanation.

Such a clash arises about the concepts of nationalism itself:

Candidate of Philosophical Sciences E. D. Modrzhinskaya cannot agree with the way in which the authors treat the concepts of "nation" and "nationalism."... Historical materialism teaches that the nation is an historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.... Soviet scholars take the view that nationalism is the expression of the policy of the bourgeoisie in the form of ideas and concepts, and that it reflects the attitude of the bourgeoisie to its own nation and to other nations; in other words, nationalism is a constituent element of bourgeois ideology. (Vol. VI, Part I, p. 54.)

The most interesting characteristic of the Soviet notes is the merger they reveal of Marxist ideology with national pride: a feature casting solemn doubt on the official Soviet description of nationalism just quoted. The Soviet commentators are touchy and edgy to a remarkable degree: which may explain, on one hand, the total omission of any clear statement that the Nazi-Soviet Pact led to the partition of Poland, and on the other to the effrontery with which the Soviet-Polish Pact of December 1941 is actually quoted as evidence that

the first of the Powers belonging to the anti-Hitler coalition to declare officially that it was necessary to set up a new international organisation was the Soviet Union" (Vol. VI, Part I, p. 55).

IN THE REALM OF SCIENCE it was, doubtless, of high educational value for both Western and Communist writers to discover, from the dialogue between text and notes, how divergent their national cultures had become. The Soviet commentators repeatedly attack Freud and the "semi-scientific concept of the unconscious" and labour under the impression that "Freudianism is only popular in the U.S.A." Even in physics and mathematics, there appear divergent arguments, mingled with the complaint that "no information is given about the achievements of Soviet physics." It is evident that Western science and Soviet science are not identical. And on such dominant 20th-century issues as popu-

lation the Western authors are attacked on two fronts, by the Italian Roman Catholics for assuming that control of births is the main solution, and by the Russian Communists for writing "based on neo-Malthusian theories."

Professor Vittorio Marcozzi finds the Author-Editors lacking in this chapter [the biological sciences] in consideration for the importance of Divine plans and Divine intervention, of the distinction between man and the rest of nature, or of what he calls the "philosophical aspect."

Indeed, only on such matters as the growth of transport and communications is there an absence of fundamental disagreement.

To the inherent difficulties of intellectual comprehension, with such contrasting basic assumptions in mind, are added more superficial impediments, such as sheer linguistics. Time and again the author-editors have to point out that the writers of comments attribute to the text statements or ideas which are not there. One would have thought that within the massive resources of UNESCO such misunderstanding might have been successfully ironed out without surviving into the thousands of pages of these volumes. And if not there—what hope is there for less ambitious writers of history?<sup>6</sup>

IN ALL THESE RESPECTS, the major experiments in writing collaborationist histories can scarcely be said to have overcome the bane of nationalism. They have done a service by bringing the realities to the surface and by showing their far-reaching power. They have exposed unsuspected depths of disagreement, which cannot be resolved by anodyne phrases or formulae. The unhappy author-editors have performed prodigies of synthesis and tactful exercises in comprehension, though the full inclusion of China would certainly have disrupted still more of these. But in the end what is significant, and of the liveliest interest, is not the measure of agreement so much as the residual areas of dispute. Does this ungrateful conclusion

imply that the very attempt to attain a master-synthesis—the expectation that any rounded interpretation of the whole of history, or even of 20th-century history alone, might be universally accepted—was mistaken?

The hackneyed controversy which raged at the beginning of this century, whether historiography was a Science or an Art, is widely taken to be dead, at least in England. These attempts at universal history prove that it is not, though it has assumed a rather more intelligent form. They presuppose, the UNESCO project more explicitly than the others, that there is an objective truth about the past to be discovered, and that once such truth is defined in precise terms all reasonable men will acknowledge it and un-animously accept it. This positivist view of historiography is opposed—perhaps it will always and irreconcilably be opposed—by the view that historical study, and the writing and reading of history, are an integral part of a community's culture: and that just as nobody laments if a nation's painting or music or literature is distinctively different from those of every other nation, so nobody should be surprised or find it other than delightful that one nation's historiography differs from another's.

The methods, concepts, and styles of exploring and explaining the past are necessarily rooted in the whole pattern of a community's culture. So far as national community is the most intense and self-conscious in the modern world, on both sides of the European division, history must indeed "stay nationalist." So far as wider communities are also real—in the sense that there is a level of culture common to the English-speaking world, or the "Latin nations" of whom President de Gaulle likes to speak, or to "Western civilisation" as a whole when compared with Indian or Chinese cultures—then historiography, too, can become rooted in these wider cultural patterns, and so can expect to reach some consensus of opinion about the past. But try to press synthesis beyond this level, and in the manner of 18th-century rationalism or 19th-century positivism attempt a universal synthesis, comprising European and Asiatic, liberal and communist, Christian and Islamic, understanding of the past, and it soon becomes apparent that the Muse of History has out-reached her grasp. Clio can reach only the fruit of the tree of knowledge, not the golden apples of the Hesperides, still less the world's apples of discord.

<sup>6</sup> There is a further strange surrender to the impediments of language. The bibliography is limited, almost entirely, to books written or translated in English; and "the French edition will have a principally French bibliography." Given the famous propensity of French scholars to ignore books written on their subject in English, this decision seems regrettable.

THIS CONCLUSION is, of course, no argument at all against efforts to eliminate, from the teaching of history in schools and universities, the distorting and ludicrous versions of history exposed in such a work as Ray Allen Billington's delicious examination of *The Historian's Contribution to Anglo-American Misunderstanding* (London, 1966). Every country still suffers from the persistence of chauvinistic mythology in its text-books. Still less is it an argument against systematic teaching in schools of "World history," as discussed intelligently in the recent booklet *Towards World History*.<sup>7</sup> The conclusion there reached is that instead of either sticking on additional courses to those already provided in British history, or replacing these by new courses focused *only* on world history, "what is suggested is a new relationship between British history and that of the world as a whole." The problem remains to *define* this new relationship.

Nor is it an argument against scholarly attempts to transcend nationalistic separatism by systematic research into the archives of a nation other than the historian's own: though then he would be wise to be yet more humble, and suggest neglected approaches to the truth or fresh aspects of it, rather than imply that he may know better than scholars who are themselves rooted in its whole cultural heritage.

The writers who have run beyond these limits, who offer sweeps of universal history and new interpretations of it, have not, as a

rule, been notably humble men: Bishop Bossuet, H. G. Wells, Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee or the pundits of UNESCO. For this reason, however vast their erudition or ingenious their minds, they have invariably produced the very opposite of what they set out to do. Instead of some absolute truth at the bottom of the well, they have found at best a few aspects of the vastly complex reality of man's past experience. They have written fiction or poetry or prophecy. They have not written history. The historian today who would venture beyond the firm basis of national culture to attempt a larger synthesis of the collective experiences of the peoples of Europe, or the Atlantic basin, or even the great globe itself, must first dress in sackcloth and ashes. He must stand ready to be refuted and condemned by his peers in other lands, and eager to confess not merely to vast ignorance (for all historians must confess to that), but also to lapses of historical imagination and scholarly insight which would hardly have afflicted him on his "home ground." The natural coherence which would have come to his aid within a national culture now proves a hindrance, and it cannot be replaced by any *a priori* pattern or mechanical rhythm such as those invoked by Spengler and Toynbee.

This is not to say that non-nationalist history is impossible, or that it should not be attempted. It is only a warning, based on all the evidence so far in hand, that it is the most exacting and discouraging task that any historian can undertake. Perhaps, once its extreme hazards and difficulties are more widely appreciated along with its inherent limitations, it will be done better.

<sup>7</sup> Issued by Britain's Department of Education and Science (H.M.S.O., 1967).



## Column

"THE mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come into conflict with the existing relations of production, or—what is but a legal expression of the same thing—with the property relations within which they had been at work. From forms of development of the forces of production, these relations turn into their fetters. Then comes the period of social revolution..." (*The Communist Manifesto*).

In human history, or rather pre-history, for men had not yet become fully-developed human beings, Marx thought there had been four stages in the development of society; the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal, and the bourgeois, each enduring for centuries, and each culminating in a relatively short period of revolution. The reason why revolutionary periods were comparatively rare (only four in human history, and the next would be the last!) was that changes in the material forces of production took place very slowly, and men's consciousness changed in the same slow rhythm. Only when the effects of such changes had fully worked themselves out did revolution become inevitable. Except at such moments, society lived in a precarious yet enduring balance between the old and the new, which continually shifted in favour of the new, yet never so fast that a man in his lifetime could expect to die in a fundamentally different world from the one in which he was born. For most men, the slow rotation of the seasons was of greater importance than any changes brought about by human agency and they could confidently expect to live as their parents had lived

before them and their children would continue to live after them.

But what happens, on this view of history, if as a result of rapid and continuous advances in scientific knowledge, the material forces of production are themselves in process of incessant and continually increasing change, which can be measured in terms not of millennia or centuries, but of decades or even less? Do men's consciousness and the institutions in which it is embodied, church and state, the universities, the legal system, change with equally bewildering rapidity? Quite evidently they do not. But in that case will there not be a continuous series of such conflicts as Marx envisaged and the world enter on a phase of permanent revolution, in which no point of equilibrium is ever reached, even for the shortest period? Is this not in fact what is happening today?

It is worth while asking such questions because they may help us to understand why today even the most stable and firmly established institutions are suddenly presented with situations which seem to show that they are built upon sand. In particular they may help us to understand how the world presents itself to the young, who have never known a society in which everything was not provisional and who take it for granted that continuous change is of the very essence of their lives.

The phenomenon of youthful revolt, and in particular of student revolt, has by now become one of the most characteristic features of the Western world (and even of some parts of the Communist), and has begun to assume new forms which established authority tends to find more and more intractable.<sup>1</sup> Their common quality is a hostility amounting to contempt for the existing institutions of society, and in particular for that institution with which so many of them are brought into close contact today, the university.

THE MOST SPECTACULAR recent manifestations of this attitude have occurred in Western Germany, and particularly in Berlin, following the attempted assassination of the radical student leader, Rudi Dutschke. But the student demonstrations which have taken place in Germany are only an extreme case of similar demonstrations which have taken place in almost every other Western country, particularly the United States; so much so indeed, that it has led some people to believe that behind them all there must lie a common inspiration or a common organisation.

In fact, this would not appear to be the case. The followers of Rudi Dutschke, for example, or of the other radical German student leaders, are not communists, and indeed one of their

<sup>1</sup> In her recent Pelican study *Risinghill: Death of a Comprehensive School*, Mrs. Leila Berg records the following about the attitude of the London school inspectorate: "One, who maintained that six of the best would cure anything, seeing a nuclear disarmament symbol chalked on a playground wall, was heard to exclaim furiously, 'I'd sooner see four-letter words than that!...'"