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Source: *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 71, No. 3 (Apr., 1966), pp. 826-845

Published by: American Historical Association

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1846024>

Accessed: 13/05/2010 13:01

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The Middle Class in Western Europe, 1815–1848

LENORE O'BOYLE*

ABOUT twenty years ago David Thomson wrote of the middle class as "this peculiarly self-raising class" and noted that "To explain broad historical development by the 'rise of the middle classes' has become an overworked device of historians."¹ Today there seems to be growing dissatisfaction with the abstraction "middle class," a feeling that the concept does not adequately express what historians know about events. Alfred Cobban has recently expressed this dissatisfaction in a learned and stimulating study, *The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution*.² David Pinkney is engaged in an interesting re-examination of the bourgeoisie in the French Revolution of 1830.³

Cobban argues that the theory of the Revolution as the overthrow of feudalism by the bourgeoisie is a historical myth. Merchants, financiers, and manufacturers did not lead the Revolution, and the Revolution did not result in the kind of legislation that would have best expressed business views and interests. The Revolution was prepared and led by the professional and official classes. Far from being a movement for capitalism, it was largely the means by which the peasant proprietors, lawyers, *rentiers*, and men of property in the towns successfully resisted the encroachments of early capitalism into French society. The result of the Revolution, Cobban concludes, was the consolidation of power in the hands of a new aristocracy of landowners.

Pinkney examines changes in the personnel of state in 1830 and finds that the *grande bourgeoisie* did not gain any significantly increased hold on public office. From this fact he argues that the Revolution did not represent, as is usually said, the accession of the *grande bourgeoisie* to power. A major

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¹ David Thomson, *Democracy in France: The Third and Fourth Republics* (2d ed., London, 1952), 53.

² Alfred Cobban, *The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Eng., 1964).

³ D. H. Pinkney, "The Myth of the French Revolution of 1830," in *A Festschrift for Frederick B. Artz*, ed. *id.* and Theodore Ropp (Durham, N.C., 1964), 52–71.

purge of government personnel did take place, but the effect of this was to give office to a different group of individuals, not to a new class. "After the Revolution the landed proprietors, the official class, and the professional men continued to predominate in the key offices of state as they had under the Empire and the Bourbon Restoration. Here the Revolution had introduced no new regime of the *grande bourgeoisie*."⁴

Cobban's study raises very complex problems. Here it can only be suggested that what seems to trouble him is a too close identification of bourgeoisie or middle class with the businessmen; it is as if every time middle-class victory were mentioned this had to be taken to mean a victory for the business interests, or capitalists. Yet does not the concept of the middle class just as often, and as properly, refer to the middling ranks of society, those intermediate between the laboring class and the aristocratic landowners? R. R. Palmer in *The Age of the Democratic Revolution* uses the term in that way and includes the businessmen as only one element in the middle class.⁵ Indeed without such a usage it is hard to see how historians could generalize about the period from 1750 to 1850. It appears undeniable that basic changes in European society did take place during that time and that these changes were bound up very closely with the growth in power and importance of those who were neither laborers nor members of the traditional privileged groups. To describe such long-term changes, as Palmer does, the term "middle class" can be justified as economical and accurate. The question probably reduces itself to a matter of time perspective. It is when shorter periods of time are involved that "middle class" becomes, not wrong, but simply unhelpful, because it obscures the complex relations among the various groups within the middle class. Cobban, for example, seems to have had the direction of his work largely determined by his initial realization of how large a part was played in the French Revolution by professional men and state officials. No one has drawn attention more effectively to the role of the lawyers in the Revolution,⁶ and in 1956 he wrote, "The class that is omitted in most interpretations of social history, the official class, may be one of the most important classes of all. . . ."⁷ His work is most valuable to the degree that he suggests, not that the term "middle class" is meaningless and should be abandoned, but that it needs

⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁵ R. R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800* (2 vols., Princeton, N.J., 1959, 1964).

⁶ Alfred Cobban, *The Myth of the French Revolution* (London, 1955).

⁷ *Id.*, "The Vocabulary of Social History," *Political Science Quarterly*, LXXI (Mar. 1956), 10.

fuller study in terms of its main components, the businessmen, the free professions, and the state officials.

One would expect historians to find this question of the interrelationship among the elements of the middle class an interesting one, but there has been surprisingly little attempt to think about the problem in any systematic way. There is a considerable amount of scattered observation about the behavior of professions and officials at particular times and places, and a certain amount of speculation, much of it desultory and offhand. The attempt to formulate generalizations about the way in which these three middle-class elements interacted, however, has seldom been made. Were the three elements of equal importance, or did one dominate? Through what means did one group succeed in determining the actions of the other two? What common aims held the three together? Conversely, how did their interests differ, how much, and with what results for themselves and the greater society? Was one of the elements more exposed than the other two to the pressure of the greater society? The following discussion represents an attempt to take some of the findings of contemporary scholarship that seem relevant and to see if they can be pieced together to yield some general framework in which the West European middle class in the period 1815-1848 can be explained.⁸

The initially striking fact about the businessmen is their apparent lack of interest in political power; their immediate aims were profit and status. It was the realization that to achieve these goals they needed a certain type of society that led the businessmen to consider the acquisition of political

⁸ Class is, of course, an economic category, and Karl Marx was correct, at least for the early nineteenth century, in seeing relationship to the means of production as decisive. What the members of the middle class had in common was capital, in the form of either money or skill. Marx was chiefly interested in money capital used in industry; it is probably from his emphasis that the tendency has come to identify the middle class with the businessmen and to neglect the intellectuals whose capital was their acquired specialized abilities. Max Weber's definition of class as a group who share a common chance in the market is perhaps more satisfactory. In the following discussion businessmen are defined as all those whose main occupation was manufacturing, commerce, or banking. The professions are likewise defined by enumeration; they were the lawyers, doctors, teachers, journalists, engineers, and so forth. It is usual to distinguish these as the "free professions," in contrast to the state officials. The category of state officials can be used in a broad sense to include all those whose chief occupation was the management of state affairs. It is common usage, however, to distinguish between elected officials—"politicians"—and career officials—"bureaucrats." The many minor state employees are not as a rule considered state officials, but rather professional men. Occupation is the decisive factor in classification. For example, a lawyer may be also a state official, or a state employee, or a politician; his chief occupation decides to which group he is assigned. Source of income is not considered crucial. A man whose chief occupation was the management of public affairs but who drew his income mainly from land would be considered a state official; a man whose career was teaching but who drew his income largely from business investments would be classified as a teacher. It will be immediately obvious that the landed interest is omitted as a chief component of the middle class. The omission will be discussed in the body of the article in relation to France.

power, but only so much as was necessary to achieve social equality and the right to the unrestrained search for profit. What evidence there is does not indicate that the ordinary man of business wanted to exercise political power directly and to form part of the political elite of paid officeholders and elected officials. Presumably the members of the business group had neither time nor aptitude to involve themselves in the full-time process of decision making. They did identify with the movement for representative government, but even this demand was to some extent forced upon them by the unwillingness of existing governments to provide institutions suitable for the new economy. Eighteenth-century French businessmen did not, after all, start from constitutional demands but from the desire for social and administrative reforms; it was the weakness of the monarchy and the pretensions of the nobility that pushed the reform movement in a political direction. In the same period English manufacturers and merchants showed little interest in agitation for parliamentary reform, and some apparently felt resentment at the attempt to involve them in politics. They acted promptly enough when they felt their interests threatened; William Pitt's initial condescension and lack of consideration toward the manufacturers changed in time to respect and cooperation.⁹

In the first half of the nineteenth century it was in England, if anywhere, that one would have expected the businessmen to claim predominant control in government. Instead there was a basic class harmony built largely on the businessmen's willingness to leave extensive political power in the hands of the landed interest.¹⁰ In France businessmen did not predominate even in the so-called bourgeois governments of Louis Philippe.¹¹ Certainly

⁹ Witt Bowden, *Industrial Society in England towards the End of the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1925), 162 ff.; Simon Maccoy, *English Radicalism 1762-1785: The Origins* (London, 1955), 441. Palmer, *Democratic Revolution*, II, 24-26, judges that throughout Europe in the years just before 1800 the businessmen seldom took any initiative in bringing on revolution, but once revolution was an accepted fact they very commonly supported it and benefited from it.

¹⁰ It was not until 1885 that commercial men and manufacturers outnumbered landowners in the House of Commons. (F. M. L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* [London, 1963], 276-79.) Some studies of the personnel of the House of Commons in the nineteenth century are J. A. Thomas, "The House of Commons," *Economica*, V (Mar. 1925), 49-61; S. F. Wooley, "The Personnel of the Parliament of 1833," *English Historical Review*, LIII (Apr. 1938), 240-62. W. O. Aydelotte's forthcoming study of Parliament in the 1840's should be of outstanding importance. Among his already published articles may be mentioned "The House of Commons in the 1840's," *History*, XXXIX (Oct. 1954), 249-62, "Voting Patterns in the British House of Commons in the 1840s," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, V (Jan. 1963), 134-63, "On the Business Interests of the Gentry in the Parliament of 1841-47," appendix in G. Kitson Clark, *The Making of Victorian England* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), 290-305.

¹¹ Ch.-H. Pouthas, "Les ministres de Louis-Philippe," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, I (Apr.-June 1954), 102-30. In regard to elected assemblies, one notes a franchise heavily weighted in favor of the landowners and the importance of the official element among the deputies. On the franchise, see Sherman Kent, *Electoral Procedure under Louis-Philippe*

they did not in the governments of the German states before 1848.¹² Even the political theory of Western liberal parties reflected this unwillingness to assume the sole burden of political decision. In France theorists like François Guizot and Pierre Royer-Collard, quintessentially bourgeois in mentality, expounded the doctrine of the sovereignty of reason and warned against locating sovereign power in any one group of men.¹³ Exponents of German liberalism assumed a division of sovereignty between a ruler and a representative assembly who were to cooperate in establishing the rule of law.¹⁴ This refusal to accept the responsibilities of power could even be used as a basis for moral censure of the nineteenth-century middle class, and was so used by Karl Marx.¹⁵

If business did not choose to rule directly, how then did it exert influence? That it did exert influence seems indisputable; there is no other explanation for the restructuring of Western European society in this period to suit the convenience of business interests. In the nature of the case, the indirect exertion of power is hard to see clearly. Here it is suggested that the problem can be approached in at least three different but complementary ways: first, study of the types and functioning of business organizations; second, investigation of the personnel of government; third, analysis of the interaction of society and culture.

As for business organizations, it is obvious enough that businessmen developed a variety of pressure groups, techniques of lobbying, and methods of influencing public opinion through the press. In representative systems they helped to organize and finance political parties. Beyond such general knowledge, however, comparatively little detailed work is known to me, and, without a basis of specialized studies, significant generalization about the functioning of business organizations as a common European phenomenon in this period cannot be expected.¹⁶

(New Haven, Conn., 1937); on the composition of the Chamber, see S. Charlety, "La Restauration (1815-1830)," in *Histoire de France contemporaine depuis la Révolution jusqu'à la paix de 1919*, ed. Ernst Lavisse (10 vols., Paris, 1920-22), IV, 91, 196, 331, and "La monarchie de Juillet (1830-1848)," *ibid.*, V, 161, 300, 347.

¹² Jacques Droz, *Les révolutions allemandes de 1848* (Paris, 1957), 33 ff.

¹³ Gabriel Rémond, *Royer-Collard: Son essai d'un système politique* (Paris, 1933); Douglas W. Johnson, *Guizot: Aspects of French History, 1787-1874* (London, 1963); Lothar Gall, *Benjamin Constant: Seine politische Ideenwelt und der deutsche Vormärz* (Wiesbaden, 1963).

¹⁴ E. R. Huber, *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte seit 1789* (2 vols., Stuttgart, 1957-60), II, 309-23, 371-90.

¹⁵ For an interesting contemporary restatement of Marx's indictment, see Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (2d ed., Cleveland, 1958), Pt. I.

¹⁶ Much more may have been done in this direction than I know. French historians in particular have recently shown great interest in special economic studies; one need only mention names such as Georges Duveau, Bertrand Gille, and Paul Leuilliot.

More can be said about the study of government personnel; here the crucial fact is certainly the predominance of professional men, lawyers above all. These were the men who accomplished business' purposes. Jean Lhomme, in his excellent study *La grande bourgeoisie au pouvoir (1830-1880)*, has developed the useful idea of clientage.

Sans qu'il soit nécessaire de remonter jusqu'aux clientèles romaines, on sait que des liens unissent très souvent telles personnes à telle autre, plus puissante, par exemple plus riche. Ce sont des liens *individuels*, créés par la dépendance. Ils sont réciproques, mais asymétriques, ce qui correspond bien à l'idée d'un pouvoir. Le supérieur exerce, par définition, son pouvoir sur l'inférieur; mais, en même temps, le supérieur n'est pas sans dépendre, d'une manière quelconque, de son inférieur.¹⁷

The value of this particular concept lies in its applicability to a wide range of relationships whose essential similarity is not immediately obvious. The businessman and the professional in our period could be linked in a variety of ways, more or less direct, more or less obvious. At one extreme would be the very marked dependence of the lawyer directly employed by a chamber of commerce or the journalist editing a newspaper owned by a banker. More complex and problematical would be the case of an elected representative in England or France. He might have gained his seat by direct purchase of votes, with the purchase money coming from a rich patron, in which case his debts would be clear. He might, however, have owed a variety of obligations to party backers, press owners, and accommodating bankers; his dependency, being thus diffuse, would be masked and might lack almost any element of personal subordination. Career officials in the bureaucracy would seem to have been comparatively removed from any dependent relationship, but even they could have been subjected to pressure through promises or threats regarding promotion, and by way of direct or indirect financial aid.¹⁸

¹⁷ Jean Lhomme, *La grande bourgeoisie au pouvoir (1830-1880): Essai sur l'histoire sociale de la France* (Paris, 1960), 254-55.

¹⁸ Lhomme's approach seems fully congruent with René Rémond's interesting analysis in *La droite en France de 1815 à nos jours* (Paris, 1954). Rémond views the July Monarchy as a government of elites, the notables of birth, fortune, and intelligence; he notes the high proportion of men who rose only through talent and intelligence. As for England, for an interesting picture of the symbiotic relationship between the landlord and his various retainers, see Thompson, *English Landed Society*, 95, 151. In England patronage and purchase were the chief methods of selecting public officials until 1870. Some prominent critics of the liberals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries showed a measure of condescension or contempt for the professional. Edmund Burke charged that the lawyers worked for revolution to further their private ends, seeking the "innumerable lucrative jobs which follow in the train of all great convulsions and revolutions in the state. . . ." He saw the worst elements in the nobility betraying their fellow nobles so that in the "spoil and humiliation of their own order these individuals would possess a sure fund for the pay of their new followers." (Edmund Burke, "Reflections on the Revolution in France," in *The Works of the Right Honorable Edmund*

Thirdly, understanding of the interaction of society and culture can clarify the ways in which business interests determined nineteenth-century society. In any society the importance of those who control the means of production is obvious. Direct pressure on government is hardly needed to ensure that every consideration be given to the economic elite. Such consideration, moreover, is in the main accepted as proper, not only by the wealthy but by all classes. The values of the economic elite become the common values. It is surely in this sense that Marx is to be understood when he speaks of a society's culture as the superstructure built on the material base, and the state as the executive committee of the ruling class. A bureaucracy is composed of men reared to accept the prevailing values of their society; their spontaneous tendency will be to preserve the existing society and its hierarchy. Revolutionaries do not become state officials, or, if they do, they soon cease to be revolutionaries or cease to be officials. In early nineteenth-century Europe the bureaucrat was himself in most cases a member of the middle or noble class and the product of a higher education built on dominant social attitudes and values. There was then really no paradox in the fact that governments whose personnel was never composed mainly or even largely of businessmen followed policies that were essentially more favorable to business than to other interests of society.¹⁹

Consideration of the professions may appropriately be introduced by Prince Metternich's well-known judgment, made in 1820: "In all four countries [France, Germany, Italy, Spain] the agitated classes are principally composed of wealthy men—real cosmopolitans, securing their personal ad-

Burke [12 vols., Boston, 1899], III, 287, 292.) Henri Saint-Simon denounced lawyers and metaphysicians as bastard classes who sold their services to the highest bidder. (F. E. Manuel, *The New World of Henri Saint-Simon* [Cambridge, Mass., 1956], 266-67.) Baron Heinrich vom Stein planned representative assemblies composed of nobles, landowners, and peasants, but wanted to exclude lawyers and the usual men of letters. (Fritz Valjavec, *Die Entstehung der politischen Strömungen in Deutschland, 1770-1815* [Munich, 1951], 387.) Marx and Engels wrote in general of the professionals as "the ideological representatives and spokesmen of the above classes [i.e., bourgeoisie and peasantry], their savants, lawyers, doctors, etc., in a word: their so-called *talents*." (Karl Marx, "The Class Struggles in France 1848-1850," in *Selected Works*, ed. V. V. Adoratsky and C. P. Dutt [2 vols., New York, 1933], II, 194.) Marx himself might, at least at one point, have been classified as one of "their . . . *talents*" since he served as editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, a paper founded in 1842 primarily to express the viewpoint of a group of leading business and professional men in Cologne. (Josef Hansen, *Gustav von Mevissen* [2 vols., Berlin, 1906], I, 245-62.) The theme of patronage appears frequently in nineteenth-century novels. It is prominent in all of Honoré de Balzac and Stendhal. In England one may note especially Maria Edgeworth's *Patronage* (1814), Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814), George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871-72), Anthony Trollope's *Phineas Finn* (1869). Interesting analyses of the dependent character of the professional men in the later nineteenth century in Russia and the United States are George Fischer, *Russian Liberalism: From Gentry to Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), and Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York, 1955), 135-55.

¹⁹ See notes 10, 11, 12, above. A work like Emmanuel Beau de Loménie, *Les responsabilités des dynasties bourgeoises* (2 vols., Paris, 1943-47), offers strong evidence in support of the argument that France from the time of the Revolution was in actuality governed by a number of great business families.

vantage at the expense of any order of things whatever—paid State officials, men of letters, lawyers, and the individuals charged with the public education.” As to the source of their agitation, “This evil may be described in one word: presumption. . . .”²⁰ Modern research supports this description. The professional men were of great numerical importance in the radical movements; their chief aim does seem to have been to better their position in society.

Here, as in the case of the businessmen, there is no evidence that the professional men started from the desire for political power. They apparently wanted profit and status, which in their case meant successful careers. As highly educated specialists they thought themselves deserving of social leadership and corresponding rewards; the example of France and the “career open to talent” could only strengthen their demands for recognition. The road to success lay through the sale of their talent. Here the political situation did become relevant, to the point where it would seem that the primary factor in determining the professionals’ political allegiance was the state of the market for their skills. The lawyers provide the best illustration. On the Continent, both in the French Revolution and in 1848, they formed a high proportion of the revolutionaries, yet in England and the United States they were consistent supporters of the existing order.²¹ Questions of the type of law practiced and the kind of legal education received may well have been involved,²² but the striking fact is that there existed in England and the United States, in contrast to the Continent, a large business class that needed and paid well for a wide range of legal services.

The professions suffered where a strong business group did not exist

²⁰ Prince Metternich, *Memoirs*, ed. Prince Richard Metternich (5 vols., New York, 1880–82), III, 467, 465.

²¹ Both Cobban and Palmer emphasize the revolutionary role of the lawyers on the Continent. (See note 18, above.) Nassau William Senior, *Journals kept in France and Italy from 1848 to 1852 with a Sketch of the Revolution of 1848*, ed. M. C. M. Simpson (2d ed., 2 vols., London, 1871), I, 313, II, 16–17, was struck by the low social position and limited prospect of advancement of lawyers in Piedmont and Naples. One must again call attention to Balzac for his extensive and varied treatment of the legal profession. For Germany, see Lenore O’Boyle, “The Democratic Left in Germany, 1848,” *Journal of Modern History*, XXXIII (Dec. 1961), 377–79. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Phillips Bradley (2 vols., New York, 1945), I, 283–90, contrasted the revolutionary character of French lawyers with the conservative character of English and American lawyers and explained the contrast by the different positions held by the legal profession in the three societies. Robert Robson, *The Attorney in Eighteenth Century England* (Cambridge, Eng., 1959), 153–54, deals with Halévy’s judgment that English attorneys, because of their low social standing, were a potentially revolutionary group. Walter Bagehot indicated that while in France it was the press that offered the best chance for dramatic upward mobility, in England it was the bar. (“Letters on the French Coup d’État of 1851,” in *The Works and Life of Walter Bagehot*, ed. Mrs. Russell Barrington [9 vols., London, 1915], I, 126.)

²² There are interesting suggestions in Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Bradley, I, 286–87, and Palmer, *Age of the Democratic Revolution*, II, 466–67.

because then they could serve only the aristocracy or the state. Noble societies, being agrarian, offered comparatively few outlets for the services of professionals.²³ The European nobility, moreover, was in general declining economically throughout the century, and there was apt to be a difficult period of transition before the loss to the national economy could be compensated by the growth of industry.

There remained only the state as a source of employment. Hence that enormous pressure for government office or state employment that impressed nineteenth-century observers arose. England was the single great exception.²⁴ The phenomenon was of course more marked as the observer moved east since it coincided with the delayed impact of the Industrial Revolution and the attendant lack of a business group with accessory professional jobs. It was also certainly connected with continental traditions of the absolute state built on the foundation of a great bureaucracy and the prestige associated with membership in such a bureaucracy. In Europe, moreover, the professions themselves were to some extent creations of the state, as in England and America they were creations of the middle class; in the absence of a strong middle class only the state had the resources to meet certain civil and military needs, and in the process it created a body of servants whose character was half bureaucratic, half professional.²⁵

In the long run this situation could not completely satisfy the professionals, if for no other reason than that there were narrower limits set to expansion of the state apparatus and the number of state employees than to business enterprise. Also, the nobility exploited its traditional superiority to monopolize public office as much as possible. It may very well be that one result was an overproduction of intellectuals in certain countries during this period; there is considerable evidence pointing in this direction for France and Germany.²⁶ Ambitious young men sought a higher education as the road to success in the free professions and the state, only to find that there

²³ In England an enterprising and rich landed nobility was closely linked to the growth of the professions. (See Robson, *Attorney in Eighteenth Century England*; David Spring, *The English Landed Estate in the Nineteenth Century: Its Administration* [Baltimore, 1963], 56-57, 60-61, 79, 96-97; Thompson, *English Landed Society*, 153-61.)

²⁴ This apparently ceased to be true later in the century. (Frank Musgrove, "Middle Class Education and Employment in the Nineteenth Century," *Economic History Review*, XII [Aug. 1959], 99-111.)

²⁵ Fischer develops this point in regard to Russia in *Russian Liberalism*. Prussia is a perfect example of what is meant—a country whose universities in this period were intended primarily for the training of officials, and whose bureaucracy was deeply and directly involved in economic development.

²⁶ This is a problem of great interest, but relevant evidence is hard to assemble and to assess. There is the impressive study of Henri Brunschwig, *La crise de l'état prussien à la fin du XVIII^e siècle et la genèse de la mentalité romantique* (Paris, 1947). I have tried in my previously cited article, "Democratic Left in Germany, 1848," to assemble some evidence on this question for the pre-1848 period in Germany. For France the subject is treated briefly by Guillaume de Bertier de Sauvigny, *La Restauration* (Paris, 1955), 319-23, and touched on by

were too few jobs to go around. If opportunities in business were also inadequate or were regarded as inferior in status, then the frustration of the intellectuals could become a revolutionary factor, and does seem to have become so in 1848.

In politics the professionals had obvious grounds for cooperation with both business and officials. All three groups were egalitarian in so far as that meant the career open to talent and an end to aristocratic privilege. They shared a bias in favor of policies determined by purely rational considerations rather than tradition. Each of the three stood to benefit from any growth in the size and complexity of society since such growth meant a corresponding increase in the demands for goods and professional services. These common values and aspirations made for a degree of unity in action among the three groups that justifies use of the term "middle class." The term should not, however, be used in such a way as to obscure the differences and tensions among businessmen, professionals, and officials. Professional men could not approve the putative materialism of businessmen and some of the social consequences of business activity. Tensions also arose from the disparity in economic rewards and social prestige enjoyed by businessmen and the professions. The most important differences, however, arose between business and professional men on the one hand and state officials on the other. Businessmen and the professionals distrusted the state, resented its direction of their activities, and increasingly demanded more personal and economic freedom; state officials quite naturally tended to enlarge the sphere of state action and to judge any opposition to themselves as a reflection of group self-interest.

The role of the state officials is probably the most difficult to analyze. They were professional men, inasmuch as they had special intellectual skills and lived by the sale of them. There was, however, an ambivalence toward the dominant economic groups built into their role. On the one hand the official's chief professional obligation was to preserve the stability and well-being of the state, and accordingly he had no choice but to pay attention to the economic elite on whose functioning so much of the country's strength depended. On the other hand, since the welfare of the total society is never perfectly coincident with the interests of any one group no matter how important economically, the state official in the exercise of his profession found himself forced to override any class interest that he judged inimical to the social welfare.

While the official necessarily had an ambivalent attitude toward the

dominant economic interests, he in turn was more or less distrusted and opposed by them. In representative systems this tension was even institutionalized in the relationship between career officials and elected representatives, the career official identifying with the state, the elected official identifying with a specific social group and as a rule expressing resentment and distrust of bureaucratic regulation.²⁷ In both representative and nonrepresentative systems, however, this clash between official and nonofficial was always mitigated by common class membership, for the state official was by background and education, or by choice, almost always a member of the upper class that disputed control of the state.

The discussion has, to this point, represented an attempt to generalize at a low level about the nature and behavior of elements in the early nineteenth-century middle class. If these generalizations have any validity, they should help in understanding concrete developments in the various countries, in each of which there was a somewhat different relationship among the same three elements.

In France the Restoration saw a conflict between nobility and bourgeoisie for control of the offices of state that culminated in 1830 with the victory of the middle class.²⁸ Itself bourgeois, the bureaucracy could be expected to serve the bourgeoisie rather than the aristocracy or the laboring class. The character of this French bourgeoisie has puzzled historians. The chief difficulties may perhaps be reduced to two: the weakness of French industry and the predominance of landowners in the population.²⁹

Compared to England, French industry was a minor element in the total economy and was unprogressive in method and spirit. This was to remain true until the time of Napoleon III. The financiers constituted the leading group in the business world, and even they were not notably venturesome. These truths can, however, be overemphasized. French industry grew steadily, if unspectacularly. It always contained a significant group successfully involved in innovation and expansion. Moreover, industry now operated in the different psychological climate and legal framework brought about by the Revolution. With proper reservations made as to any sweeping victory of "capitalism" over "feudalism," the fact remains that the Revolution did

²⁷ This point is developed by Thomson, *Democracy in France*, 58-64.

²⁸ Rémond, *Droite en France*, 55-57.

²⁹ For an excellent summary of economic development, see Guy de Palmade, *Capitalisme et capitalistes français au XIX^e siècle* (Paris, 1961); see also D. S. Landes, "French Entrepreneurship and Industrial Growth in the sixteenth Century," *Journal of Economic History*, IX (May 1949), 45-61. An acute analysis of Cobban's *Social Interpretation of the French Revolution* is made by Jeffry Kaplow in the *American Historical Review*, LXX (July 1965), 1094-96.

bring about a new conception of property that cleared the way for capitalistic practices. The picture of the French bourgeoisie is then of a small business group, a substantial contingent of professional men and state officials, and a large group of landowners. There is difficulty in treating this group as a middle class only if one insists on identifying middle class with businessmen.

The fact that France, even after the Revolution, remained predominantly a nation of landowners lies at the base of Cobban's contention that the Revolution merely substituted one landowning aristocracy for another. Yet the use of the word aristocracy is hard to accept. Cobban himself notes that the new holders of land were of a different class and type from the old. It is true that information about the transfer of land during the Revolution is inadequate, but surely it is impossible to deny that in the early nineteenth century much land was held by peasants who had benefited from legal changes that gave them outright ownership of land and by a *rentier* group who owned land but could scarcely have been classified as professional farmers.

The small and medium peasant proprietors whose occupation was farming and who held land in private ownership must surely be accounted middle class. The question is whether, particularly in view of their numbers, they should not be treated as a main component of the middle class along with business, the professions, and the officials. The decision not to treat them as such is based on the observation that the peasantry in France, as in other countries, was as a rule a passive rather than a dynamic factor, held back from effective action by lack of organization. "Their mode of production isolates them from one another," wrote Marx, "instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse. . . . the great mass of the French nation is formed by simple addition of homologous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sackful of potatoes."³⁰ The landowning peasantry seldom acted positively in its own right; it could more effectively prevent than initiate change.

The *rentier* group constitutes a genuine difficulty for analysis. There existed a category of persons who drew an income from land and who, even if as individuals they belonged to one of the three main occupational groups of the middle class, may well have had a kind of function and influence different from that of either business, the professions, or the officials. The existence of this group blurs the outline of a middle class neatly divided

³⁰ Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in *Selected Works*, ed. Adoratsky and Dutt, II, 414-15.

into three elements. It is clear, however, that this category of landowners was very closely bound up with the business, professional, and official groups. Many townspeople bought land because it was still regarded as the safest of investments, but continued to act as businessmen and to live in the towns. A number bought land as a symbol of status, but again this did not necessarily mean that they abandoned all connections with business. Many who did live on the land practiced concurrently as professional men or held official state positions. In view of these considerations it does not appear necessary to treat the *rentier* group as a fourth basic component of the middle class, at least not until further investigation demonstrates that the landowners did in fact have a psychology and interests differing significantly from those of business, the professions, and the officials. Provisionally it seems justifiable to retain the accepted picture of a bourgeoisie composed of bankers, officials, merchants, landowners, and professional men, held together by wealth and common values, and cut off equally from a laboring class to whose sufferings it was singularly oblivious and from the remnants of an aristocracy that no longer represented significant social power.³¹ The tone of the new age was brilliantly reflected in the descriptions of one of its great novelists, Balzac, and in the attacks of one of its great critics, Marx.

An examination of the way in which France was governed confirms the picture of bourgeois ascendancy. A legal framework recast by the Revolution favored the middle class at the expense of the rest of the people. French officialdom was homogeneous, a group confined within their class culture to such an extent that they seem to have lost the necessary sense of the good of the whole. Their failure to rule France responsibly pointed to the possibility that the victory of the middle class had been too complete a triumph. No organized and effective group remained outside of the bourgeoisie to put pressure on the bureaucracy. Political life was largely limited to conflict within the bourgeoisie, and the conflict centered less on matters of principle than on a fierce competition for the spoils of office.

This struggle for office that was such a marked feature of the period in France is explicable in terms of the conjunction, peculiar to France, of a comparatively undeveloped industry with a political system based on recognition of popular sovereignty. Ambitious young men without appreciable means found few openings in business. Study for the professions was expensive, and competition within them was very keen. The former sense of government as something apart from and even opposed to the people had

³¹ Nothing could better demonstrate the middle-class lack of sympathy and understanding for the workers than the comments of so liberal and astute an observer as Tocqueville on the Revolution of 1848. (Alexis de Tocqueville, *Recollections*, ed. J. P. Mayer [New York, 1949].)

been all but lost, while the career open to talent made possible a positive valuation and lively expectation of upward social mobility. Government office retained the prestige built up through centuries of absolutism and culminating in Napoleon. When it is remembered in addition that the French population was appreciably younger than it was to be later,³² and that in 1815 much of Napoleon's machinery of government had to be discarded as superfluous, then the extent and vigor of the demand for public office become understandable.³³ Influence was needed to get and retain office, a fact that worked against any strong sense of official independence. Personal ambition rather than principle tended to absorb men's energies.³⁴

The English prided themselves on having no important group of salaried officials and relied in both central and local government on the largely unpaid services of the aristocracy. Here, if anywhere, one might have expected to see class rule in unadulterated form. Such, however, was not the case.

Several factors acted to qualify the class character of English government. One was the tradition of state service that the English aristocracy shared with the Prussian. Another characteristic the English aristocracy shared with their Prussian counterpart was a limited readiness to admit successful commoners into their ranks, thus broadening aristocratic thinking and adding to aristocratic reserves of talent. Of crucial importance—and here again there is the parallel with Prussia—was the fact that certain elites emerged from the aristocracy to devote themselves almost completely to the management of public affairs. It is true that in England these elites were not organized into a bureaucracy as they were in Prussia, obviously an important difference. They had, however, the same basic commitment to government as an occupation, and they thus formed a group at least analogous to the state officials of Europe. It was because some of England's aristocracy developed a professional attitude toward government that the aristocracy as a whole displayed the capacity repeatedly to rise above narrow class interests.³⁵ If this is not understood, then English developments in this period

³² Bertier de Sauvigny, *Restauration*, 319. Relatively young men had been given administrative posts during the revolutionary and Napoleonic period and even under the Restoration; thus still younger men were blocked indefinitely from advancement.

³³ Contemporary witnesses to this competition for office were numerous. As revealing a statement as any is Tocqueville's frequently quoted remark: "The truth—the deplorable truth—is that a taste for holding office and a desire to live on the public money is not with us a disease restricted to either party, but the great, chronic ailment of the whole nation. . . ." (Tocqueville, *Recollections*, ed. Mayer, 31–32.)

³⁴ See note 11, above. Government majorities in the Chamber under the July Monarchy were notoriously dependent on the votes of the official deputies.

³⁵ There was a differentiation within the ruling class akin to that indicated by historians of England who use the terminology "aristocracy and gentry" and "court and country," though the expressions have also more extended and varied meanings.

would seem in the main paradoxical: Lord Liverpool advocating laissez faire; the Duke of Wellington forcing through Catholic emancipation; Lord Grey reforming the franchise to admit businessmen to a share in government; a Tory government (led by the son of a cotton manufacturer) carrying the repeal of the corn laws.³⁶

Later in the century England did develop a true bureaucracy. Professionalism in general had increased throughout the eighteenth century, as an aspect of society's growing complexity, and in the nineteenth century a salaried state bureaucracy was revealed as a necessity in an industrial society. To study this process is to see how a profession imposes certain ways of thinking on those who practice it. The men who entered the civil service had been educated in the school of laissez faire, in which individualism and self-help were axiomatic bases of policy. Exposed to the realities of English society, they gained a new understanding of how society determines the individual's fate and ended as exponents of state action to help the powerless.³⁷

One more feature of English society should be mentioned. Unlike France, England preserved a landed aristocracy that was cohesive and strong, and accordingly England never developed the overwhelmingly middle-class tone of French society.³⁸ Aristocracy and middle class shared the benefits of privilege, but they also checked each other. In practice this meant that the different groups within the ruling class were driven to bid for popular support against each other, and the lower classes often benefited from the competition.

Turning to Prussia one finds the same marked orientation of the nobility toward state service as in England, but social patterns were very different. The particular interest of the Prussian case lies in the shifting relationship between a very strong nobility on the one hand and a highly developed bureaucracy on the other.

³⁶ Thus arose Halévy's questions about the two-party system. George Kitson Clark, *Peel and the Conservative Party* (2d ed., Hamden, Conn., 1964), and Norman Gash, *Mr. Secretary Peel: The Life of Sir Robert Peel to 1830* (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), have both made the contrast between the man of party and the administrator central to their interpretation of Peel.

³⁷ David Roberts, *Victorian Origins of the British Welfare State* (New Haven, Conn., 1960), 152-85.

³⁸ On the ability of the English nobility to impose its values on the wealthy middle class, see Rupert Wilkinson, *Gentlemanly Power: British Leadership and the Public School System* (London, 1964). Matthew Arnold noted that students of the established professions in England attended the small number of great schools and universities, and so were attached to the aristocracy and cut off from the industrial middle class that received an inferior education. Arnold contrasted this with the situation on the Continent, where the upper and middle classes were brought up on the same plane. (Matthew Arnold, "Schools and Universities on the Continent," in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R. H. Super [5 vols. to date, Ann Arbor, Mich., 1960-], IV, 308-309.)

Prussian officials came from the nobility or middle class in proportions that varied under successive rulers.³⁹ The decisive factor, however, was not class origin. Officials from the middle class were so strongly attracted by the prospect of noble status that they desired nothing so much as assimilation into the nobility, and since the Prussian nobility was, like the English, a relatively open one, it absorbed the best talents of the middle class who made their way up in the bureaucratic hierarchy. In effect the Prussian nobility succeeded in capturing the bureaucracy. Accordingly the growth of bureaucracy did not lead to a loss of aristocratic privilege so much as to a growth of aristocratic power.⁴⁰

Still, a slight shift of focus raises a question. One can emphasize the feudalization of the bureaucracy, but could one not as easily argue that the nobility was bureaucratized? However close, the nobility's ethos of state service was not the same as the official's sense of professional responsibility for the state. A certain degree of role conflict for the noble-bureaucrat or bureaucrat-noble was unavoidable and can be traced throughout modern Prussian history. Was he primarily a noble or an official? If in the eighteenth century the officials identified with the nobles against the king on the issue of serf emancipation,⁴¹ nevertheless, in the period before 1806, many officials became increasingly aware of the need for reform and moved, if too hesitantly, in that direction.⁴² In the face of disaster in 1806 reformers and reform plans were there to be used, and it was the bureaucracy that rebuilt the state; no period better illustrates the coexistence within officialdom and nobility of considerations of self-interest and a disinterested concern for the good of the whole.⁴³ In the end the bureaucracy was forced to make substantial concessions to the nobility, and the *Junkers* preserved more of their privileges than was probably good for the state. Nonetheless the state was

³⁹ W. L. Dorn, "The Prussian Bureaucracy in the 18th Century," *Political Science Quarterly*, XLVI (Sept. 1931), 403-23, XLVII (Mar., June 1932), 75-94, 259-73; Hans Rosenberg, *Bureaucracy, Aristocracy and Autocracy: The Prussian Experience 1660-1815* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*; Nikolaus von Preradovich, *Die Führungsschichten in Österreich und Preussen (1804-1918) mit einem Ausblick bis zum Jahre 1945* (Wiesbaden, 1955).

⁴¹ They did not do so for purely selfish reasons, however; there were objective considerations relating to the effect of emancipation on tax collection and the labor supply that played a part in official thinking. (G. F. Knapp, *Die Bauernbefreiung und der Ursprung der Landarbeiter in den älteren Theilen Preussens* [2d ed., 2 vols., Munich, 1927], I, 81-117.)

⁴² Otto Hintze, "Preussische Reformbestrebungen vor 1806," *Historische Zeitschrift*, LXXVI (No. 3, 1896), 413-43.

⁴³ W. M. Simon, *The Failure of the Prussian Reform Movement, 1807-1819* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1955), 12-13, 233; Rudolf Stadelmann, *Scharnhorst. Schicksal und geistige Welt: Ein Fragment* (Wiesbaden, 1952), 60-65; Friedrich Meinecke, *Das Leben des Generalfeldmarschalls Hermann von Boyen* (2 vols., Stuttgart, 1896-99), I, 173-74, 195-96, 288, 290-92, 411. Meinecke concludes that the nobility as a whole could have moved decisively in the direction of either reform or reaction, depending on the attitude of the king. (*Ibid.*, II, 355.)

reformed. Prussia remained a great power, guided by a governing class composed of nobility and bureaucracy in partnership. The loser was the monarch; the officials won their long struggle to make his arbitrary intervention in affairs of state next to impossible.⁴⁴ The bureaucracy, now servants of the state rather than the king, ruled with notable efficiency, a regard for legality and established procedures, and a concern for the interests of both capital and labor. In time the Prussian bureaucracy lost its monopoly of power through its very success; 1848 showed that it had furthered social growth to the point where society felt strong enough to do without bureaucratic direction and demanded to rule itself.⁴⁵

An argument might even be made that the bureaucracy remained the core of the ruling class in Germany up to 1917. No genuine parliamentary government evolved, political parties increasingly assumed the character of interest groups, and the officials remained as the only group permanently concerned with the good of the state as a whole. It is true that Count Leo von Caprivi failed when he tried consciously to base his rule on the bureaucracy; his failure would seem to indicate that the bureaucracy did not represent independent power and could not for any length of time oppose powerful groups such as the *Junkers*.⁴⁶ Yet the study of German political life in the second half of the century also suggests that the state apparatus was at no time under the undisputed control of any one social group and that it always acted to some extent as an independent mediator among the interests. The *Junkers* enjoyed an unhealthy degree of influence within the bureaucracy, and this led to dangerous social strains, but it seems unwarranted to conclude that the nobility, as such, ruled Germany. In the last analysis, does not the evidence suggest that Germany was ruled by career officials who always thought and acted as professional civil servants at least as much as members of a social class?⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Rosenberg, *Bureaucracy*, 173 ff.; Huber, *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte*, II, 16–19.

⁴⁵ Reinhart Koselleck, "Staat und Gesellschaft in Preussen 1815–1848," in *Staat und Gesellschaft im deutschen Vormärz 1815–1848*, ed. Werner Conze (Stuttgart, 1962), 79–112; Jacques Droz, *Le libéralisme rhénan 1815–1848* (Paris, 1940).

⁴⁶ J. A. Nichols, *Germany after Bismarck: The Caprivi Era, 1890–1894* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958).

⁴⁷ Nineteenth-century Russia may be mentioned here as showing a variant of the type of service nobility. The Russian nobility had a strongly marked bureaucratic stamp from an early period, having been traditionally treated as paid servants of the state rather than as nobles enjoying independent power based on the control of land and local government. The service ethos, though, seems not to have gone very deep, no doubt because service had been too often extracted by coercion from above, and when they were permitted to do so in the eighteenth century, many nobles simply withdrew from state service and settled down to live on their estates. Important groups, however, retained the bureaucratic mentality, which led them to think of themselves primarily as career officials in the imperial service, relying on their landholding for revenue rather than power. While the majority of nobles in the nineteenth century showed little aptitude or will to preserve their economic and political power, the bureaucratic

The states of southern and western Germany in this period showed yet another balance of forces. There the aristocracy was not so strong as in Prussia and England, and the middle class not so developed as in France. The state officials came from both nobility and middle class. In the late eighteenth century the state officials more than the purely middle-class elements took the lead against the aristocracy, their aggressiveness reflecting both their commitment to Enlightenment ideas and their resentment against the aristocratic monopoly of high office. The officials had much their own way under the Confederation of the Rhine, when they enjoyed an opportunity to modernize their states by reconstructing them on the Napoleonic model. Bureaucrats and middle class in general cooperated because their interests coincided; significantly, the first suggestions for representative institutions came from officials who saw them as a means to limit noble power.⁴⁸

In the post-1815 period both elected assemblies and bureaucracies represented much the same social group, the patriciate of title and wealth, and they were interlocked through the large number of officials who sat as deputies in the assemblies. The importance of these bureaucratic deputies was enormous. For one thing they were the most esteemed and experienced element in a middle class made up largely of professors, lawyers, and journalists. Their aims as officials coincided, moreover, with the aims of the rest of the middle class; all wanted a modern, antifeudal state. Along with this often went, somewhat inconsistently, a common traditionalism in economic matters, a tendency to think in terms of small enterprise and to distrust and fear the rising plutocracy.⁴⁹

This identity of interests had its limits. Predictably, opposition crystallized around the officials' tendency to give primacy to the interest of the state, as they conceived it, over any class interest. The business and professional middle class grew increasingly resentful of bureaucratic restrictions and raised demands for greater economic and intellectual freedom. The conviction spread that the bureaucracies were not up to the economic demands of the time, while such things as government censorship began to seem intolerable.⁵⁰ Thus the middle-class official in southern Germany found him-

nobility identified with the state so closely that they sacrificed their own economic interests as serf owners in an attempt to check the state's decline. It was the bureaucratic nobility and the absolute monarch, rather than any strong middle class, that forced serf emancipation on the reluctant majority of the aristocracy. Here were an aristocratic officialdom limiting the powers of its own class, and an absolute state, in the interests of Russia's survival and growth, encouraging those middle-class elements that were sure to oppose absolutism.

⁴⁸ Valjavec, *Entstehung der politischen Strömungen*, 77-87.

⁴⁹ See note 12, above; see also Wolfram Fischer, "Staat und Gesellschaft Badens im Vormärz," in *Staat und Gesellschaft*, ed. Conze, 143-72.

⁵⁰ Wolfgang Hock, *Liberales Denken im Zeitalter der Paulskirche: Droysen und die Frankfurter Mitte* (Münster in Westfalen, 1957).

self involved in much the same kind of role conflict as his noble colleague in Prussia. The conflict was brought into the open by continuing controversy in all the German states regarding an official's right to take leave of absence from his regular duties to attend the *Landtag* as a deputy. Probably this ambivalence of role weakened the liberal movement, for it was difficult for a liberal deputy to oppose the same government he simultaneously served as an official. Also the prominence of the official element in the liberal movement may well have been connected with the strain of glorification of the state found in much German liberal thought.

In conclusion, it may be suggested that the above analysis has a bearing on problems of social stability and social change in this period.

Businessmen, professionals, and state officials helped to preserve a stable society because each group worked for the same ends and each profited from the success of the others. The businessmen used and rewarded the intellectuals to perform those functions for which business direction was unsuited. In return the intellectuals worked toward the creation of a type of society in which the economically dominant groups could function securely: the bureaucrat ran the political machinery; the teacher and journalist propagated appropriate values; the lawyer was the indispensable middleman between business and the state. The universities formed the bureaucrat; in turn the bureaucrat determined how the universities were to function. All in all, each relationship among the different middle-class groups confirmed adherence to a common set of values, strengthened the unity of the middle class, and made possible the emergence of middle-class, nineteenth-century society.

At the same time, the existence of a measure of independence in the functioning of the bureaucracy and the professions was apparent; it was in this way that necessary social change could be translated into political and moral terms. The crucial factor was the way in which professional interest cut across class affiliation. This is not to be explained in terms of the supposed disinterestedness of the professions as contrasted with the selfish search for profit on the part of businessmen or landowners.⁵¹ The professional man wanted success and economic rewards just as the businessman did. It was rather that the professional person worked against his own success if he neglected professional considerations, and thus he found himself at some points required to act in ways that might not directly satisfy the economically dominant groups. The bureaucrat provided the clearest example of this

⁵¹ See Talcott Parsons' now-classic essay, "The Professions and Social Structure," in *Essays in Sociological Theory Pure and Applied* (Glencoe, Ill., 1949), 185-200.

conflict; he could not be totally subservient to the ruling class without harming the state, which it was his professional obligation to safeguard. Similarly, the teacher's obligation was not only to indoctrinate students with prevailing values but also to help them to think objectively and critically, activity as apt to subvert as to consolidate. A successful journalist had to maintain some standards of objectivity. Even the lawyer, who was doubtless tied most closely to the economic elite, had to work within a framework of existing law that was not subject to endless manipulation in his client's interest.

Those who paid for the intellectuals' services may not always have been pleased with what the intellectuals did. Their acceptance of what was done must have involved a belief that it was necessary for the attainment of larger purposes; there was no getting around the fact that without social stability there would be neither private profit nor social status. Moreover, a profession by definition involves esoteric knowledge and special skills; thus outsiders are for the most part incapable of intelligent supervision. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries witnessed a great expansion of the professions, and a striking feature of this growth was the way in which the professions succeeded in becoming largely self-regulating. They developed a high degree of control over the admission of new members, the setting of standards of competence, and the definition of operating procedures. In the case of the state official the acquisition of tenure gave considerable security against interference from both politicians and the public. Clearly this marked an enormous advance in independence against even the most economically powerful.

The hypothesis may be considered that where this professionalism did not develop, government became dangerously identified with one social interest. Class considerations then outweighed the sense of professional responsibility. This seems to have been the case in France before 1848.