



THE WORLD IN 1900: THE NINETEENTH CENTURY LEGACY

When we learn about the past through books, films, television or the stories told by older people, we notice the differences and similarities between other times and our own. We are aware that certain material things and technologies that we use today either did not exist in 1900 or were used only by small numbers of people. Yet in terms of the organization of human life we have much in common with the people of the year 1900. This Unit will discuss how people in various parts of the world lived in 1900.



OBJECTIVES

After studying the lesson, you will be able to:

- visualize population patterns in different regions of the world in 1900;
- define capitalist industrialisation and understand its social consequences;
- explain relations of colonialism;
- visualize modern patterns of energy and resource use and
- analyse the emergence of modern political ideologies and mobilizations.

22.1 STRUCTURE OF WORLD POPULATION: 1900

The study of human populations—their rates of growth and shifting patterns of settlements—is called demography.

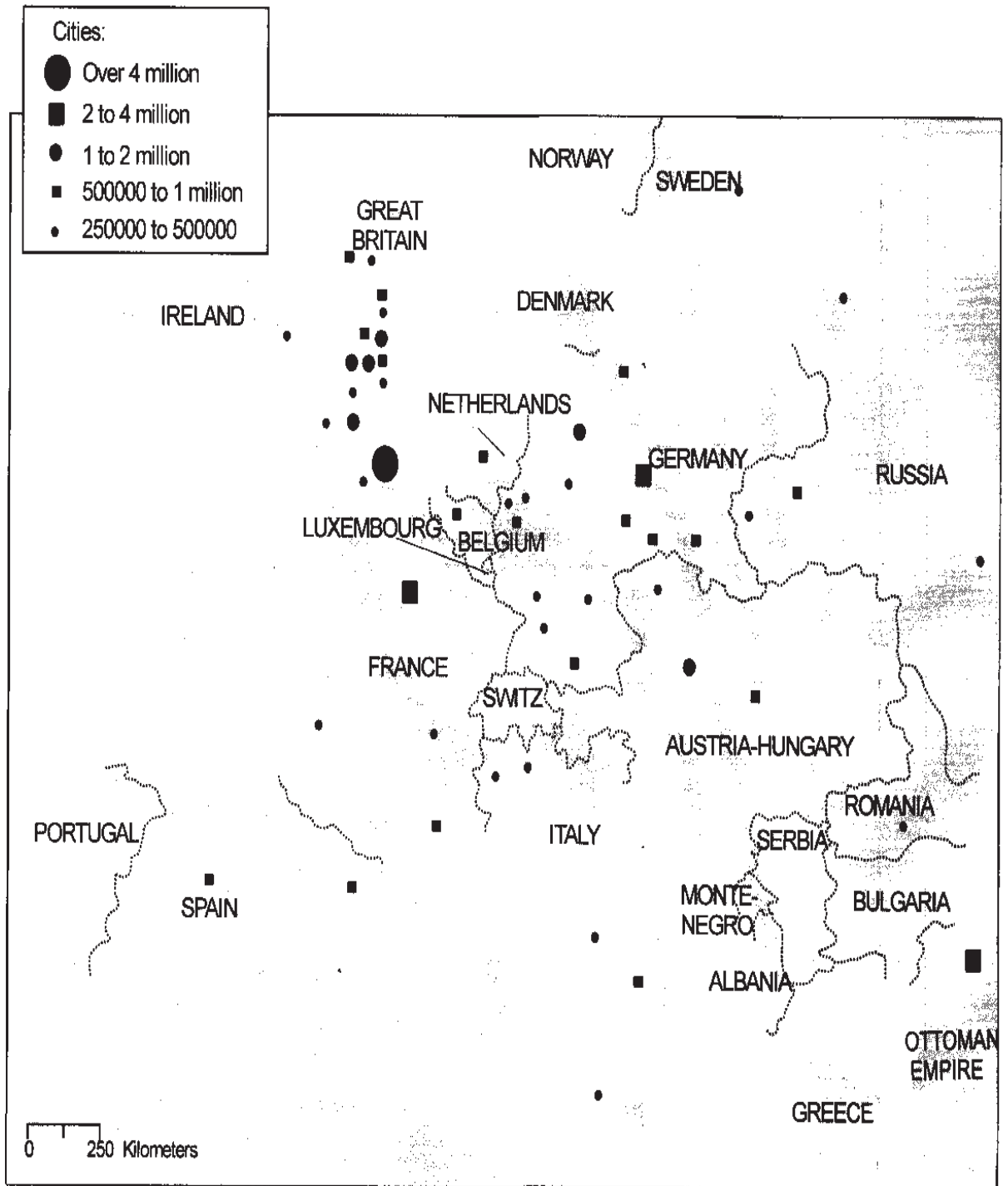
In 1900 the human population was about 1.5 billion (150crores). China and India were then, as today, the most populous countries. Yet in 1900 Asia contained a smaller *portion* of the world's population than it does today. Most of the people all over the world were settled agriculturalists in 1900, which cultivated crops and animals and lived in villages. In many parts of the world people existed as nomads, grazing herds of animals, and many were tribal hunter-gatherers, although they formed a smaller number in 1900 than a few hundred years earlier.

A steadily growing section of the world's population lived in cities. Cities had existed since ancient times in many parts of the world, but they were limited in size and population. However capitalist industrialization led to urbanization and faster growth of population in cities. By 1900 Europe has a larger concentration of cities than any



Notes

other region in the world: more than 100 cities had a population of at least 1, 00,000 people, and there were six European cities with about 10, 00,000 inhabitants. Europe and America had the largest cities, whereas in Asia and Africa large expanses of territory contained few cities and many stagnated and declined compared to hundreds of years earlier. Most of the large cities outside of Europe in 1900 were only 100 or 200 years old-like Sydney and Chicago-and were inhabited mostly by people of European origin. Some, like Calcutta in Bengal, grew under British rule.

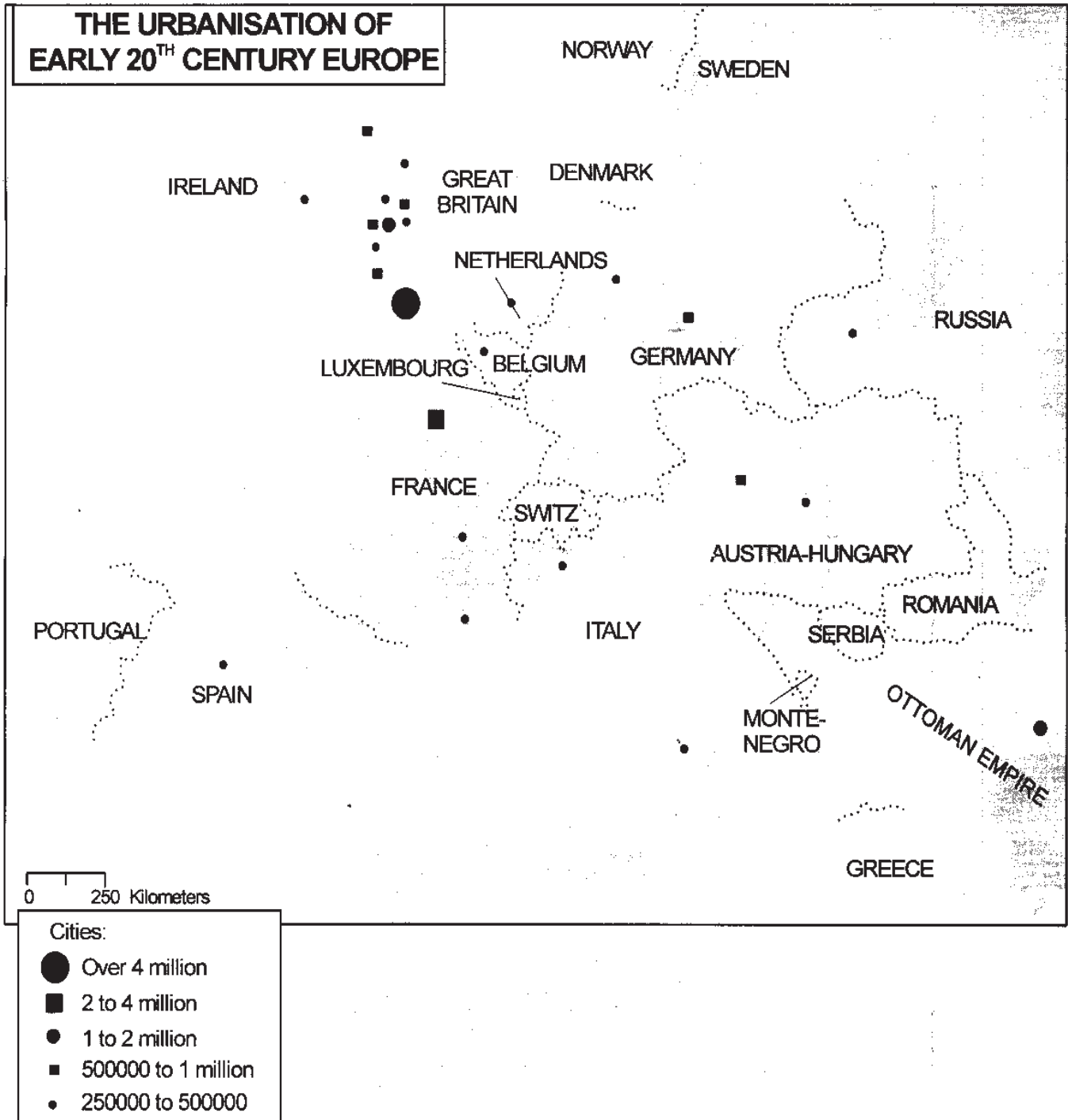


Map 22.1(a) Urbanisation of Early 20th Century Europe



Notes

In general human populations of Asia, Africa and South America in 1900 were 75–95% rural, or living in villages and dependent on agriculture. Industrializing Europe, or Americas and Australia where people of European origin had settled, either already had or were close to having 50% urban population, i.e., living in towns and cities.



Map 22.1(b) Urbanisation of Early 20th Century Europe



Notes

22.2 INDUSTRIALISATION AND SOCIAL CLASSES

The process of industrialization began in Western Europe after about 1700 with bringing together of large number of labourers near areas of energy and resources to produce metals, and to operate machines that turned out finished products at a fast pace. By 1900 when big amounts of money began to be required for industry to operate on a big scale, we see the growth of capitalist industrialization. Capitalism derives from the word capital, meaning accumulated wealth and property, and those people who have capital are called capitalists. Capitalists were directly engaged in industrial production, trading, administration and banking. By 1900 most of Europe, America and Australia had undergone capitalist industrialisation.

The wealth and property of capitalists came either from trade and commerce or from expropriating the property of small owners. On the other hand were people-men, women and children-who worked in factories and who did not have any property and were dependent for their livelihood on their labour for which they got wages. Between them was a large majority which even in 1900 was not property less wage earners, but which could not be called wealthy. Many were members of the salaried middle classes: teachers, doctors, engineers, clerks, and in other services.

Most people by then also believed that the existence of such classes is normal and would continue to remain so, and that the majority of people would accept these inequalities as their situation improved. They saw that the transfer of wealth from colonies would allow some benefits to go to the working people as well in the European countries. This did happen to some extent by 1900, and most people lived better than their grandparents had. But there were also difficult periods of unemployment.

By 1900 Asian and African cities like Bombay Shanghai and Dakar also contained large numbers of businessmen, shopkeepers and other sections of middle classes, as well as industrial wage labourers. But population here was greatly outnumbered by landlords, peasants and agricultural labourers in the surrounding villages.

It is important to keep in mind a few other facts about capitalist societies in 1900. Much of the raw materials and markets for European economies came from the colonies, and this relationship was also one of inequality: it was not an equal trading relationship. Within European societies landlords were no longer the dominant class.

22.3 URBANISM AND KNOWLEDGE

Another characteristic of industrialization was that production and sharing of knowledge in society became more closely connected than before with urban life. Cities and towns were not only concentrations of industrial wage labourers, they also had growing numbers of people engaged in jobs requiring education and literacy: clerks, managers, teachers, government officials etc. Soon it began to be recognized that even industrial workers with literacy and numeracy contributed to greater efficiency. Newspapers and magazines contributed to it. Daily production of newspapers in 1900 exceeded one million copies in cities like London, Paris, Berlin and New York.

By 1900 most industrial societies required that both boys and girls receive basic education, at least up to the age of thirteen or fourteen. School teaching became one of

**Notes**

the modern professions in which women participated in large numbers. There arose a knowledge and cultural gap between urban and rural people. As a whole, adult literacy in some western societies by 1900 was between 60% and 90%, while it was much less in non-western societies.

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 22.1**

1. What proportion of the human populations outside of Europe were rural in 1900?

2. Were most of the world's super-cities (> 10,00,000 people) in 1900 in Europe or outside of it?

3. Why was there a significant 'literacy-gap' between urban centers and rural areas by 1900?

4. What were indications of high literacy in the world of 1900?

22.4 ENERGY AND RESOURCE USE: INDUSTRIAL VERSUS NON INDUSTRIAL AREAS OF THE WORLD

In 1900 not only did people in the industrialised and non industrialised world produce different things, they developed very different patterns of energy use. Most production in the non-industrial world in 1900 was driven by human and animal power. Even on American farms plows and mechanical harvesters were drawn by horses, as were carts, carriages and buses in the towns.

Industrial societies required new energy sources to run their factories, light their homes and offices, and power modern means of transport such as railway engines and automobiles. Thus Britain, France and Germany in 1900 were largely coal powered societies, while Italy had begun to use hydro-electricity. US was relying increasingly on petroleum fuels. By 1915 it was clear that cars would replace horses in transportation.

These countries began to realize that their economic and political strength depended on sources of energy, and they began to exploit resources in their colonies. For example, the British were engaged in oil in Assam and Burma; the Dutch were doing the same in Sumatra and the Americans in Mexico. These factors determined their foreign policies.

22.5 COLONIALISM, ECONOMIC PATTERNS, AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Most industrialized nations of the western world in 1900 directly ruled, or controlled economically, territories far beyond their own boundaries. Britain ruled over most of



Notes

THE WORLD IN 1900: THE NINETEENTH CENTURY LEGACY

while Holland ruled over the entire area that is now Indonesia. France, Britain, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Belgium had colonies in Africa, Japan, China.

These colonial rulers tried to prevent Asians and Africans from acquiring advanced technologies, and carefully controlled railways and telegraph networks in their colonies. They also came down heavily on aspirations for freedom. They replaced the earlier languages of administration with their own. They also initiated some educational policies with the aim of assimilating some sections of colonial society with the foreign rule. They also prepared some sections of them for manning the colonial administration at lower levels. They practiced policies of divide and rule, restricted development of modern economic activity and used education for purpose of creating a social gulf between those educated in the colonial languages and those in the local languages.

The impact of colonialism and capitalist penetration altered social relations in the colonies. They altered the pattern of agriculture to shift its priorities towards the cash crops they might trade in. This pattern of production for export was greatly expanded during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For example, Indian peasants produced opium that British entrepreneurs exported to China. Indian merchants too had a hand in this. In other words both production and trade were geared to the interests of the ruling power. As a result larger number of people around the world came to produce things that they did not themselves consume, while they consumed things produced elsewhere by others.

Such commercial patterns created interdependence but also dependancies because of the hold of the ruling powers. Peasants in many areas lost food sufficiency, with the result that although the total world production of food was higher than ever before in history, the late nineteenth century famines killed millions of people.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 22.2

1. Which countries in 1900 were shifting towards use of fossil fuels?

2. Where were such fuel supplies located in 1900?

3. Did international trade benefit the colonies of the great powers in 1900?

4. While the total supply of food in the world grew rapidly during the last part of the nineteenth century, many people lost food security. Why?

5. How was language use and access to education related to colonial rule?

22.6 IDEOLOGIES AND POLITICAL MOBILIZATION IN THE DEVELOPED AND UNDEVELOPED WORLDS

The world of 1900 saw a tremendous growth of ideas and competing ideologies or various sets of political ideas about life and organization of societies. This was to a

**Notes**

large extent the result of economic and social transformations connected with industrialization. The debates became widespread and different ideologies began to have mass following and organizations due to the rise of print culture and other means of communication. By 1900 print media in western countries and in many colonies as well were providing information (and advertising products and services) to large numbers of people, but also shaping their political views.

Liberalism

Liberalism as a set of ideas began to emerge more than three hundred years ago when nobles and people of substantial property (sometimes joined by poorer people) struggled to regulate or limit the powers of the rulers. Liberals believed that individuals have some 'natural rights' including the right to resist oppression, accumulate property, freedom of religion, right to express their opinions freely and so on. They believed that governments and rulers must be made to respect these rights. They thought formulation of public laws and constitutions were the best method of creating and enforcing these rights. These laws and constitutions were the best safeguard against arbitrary exercise of power by rulers and government machinery. They also objected to state authorities dictating the religious beliefs of their people through national churches, as religion was a private matter. With growth of popular movements liberalism was forced to acknowledge the extension of political and citizenship rights to all members of society and not just the propertied classes. These included rights to form organizations and participate in elections.

Liberalism is also connected with certain economic ideas. Liberals saw people as economic agents, as producers and consumers of goods and services. They saw these as important aspects of their personalities and self expression of individuals. But to them it was not the labourer but the profit seeking merchants, shopkeepers and manufacturers who were the heroes. Adam Smith, one of the major spokespersons of economic liberalism, argued that such people, if allowed to pursue their own self interest would contribute to common good. Economic activity if left to its own creates its own set of supply and demand and this leads to fairness in society. They argued for free trade. So for economy the best government is that which governs least and leaves everything to the market operations.

By 1900 many liberals began to think that governments should intervene in a minimal fashion by introducing some welfare measures for the poorer sections of society—like education and health. But their basic ideas remain till today. They represented mainly the interests of propertied people. Liberals drew their main support from professional and educated people who were dissatisfied with traditional and arbitrary arrangements which ensured privileges on basis of birth (i. e., noble lineage), and of the business and industrial capitalists. They also won support of many working people who liked their arguments about constitutions and individual rights, but did not understand that they were not at all keen on economic equality or economic rights of the working people.

Conservatism

Conservatives came mainly from land owning and other sections of society who did not like the abolition of privileges and restrictions which benefited them. They were from land-owning classes, or merchants and traders who enjoyed state protection and monopolies which were lost due to free trade policies. For them the whole idea of natural rights was disruptive because it destroyed the old traditional order in society, in which each section of society already had its place. To them social order and stability were more important than equality. They felt that while all may be equal before God, it was not



Notes

desirable that it should be so in the real world as well. They saw the old social order as the best defense against the chaos of the modern world which was causing upheavals and conflicts in society. All the western states had strong conservative political groups who participated in elections, and had influence in the administrative machinery.

Socialism

Socialists also criticized the liberals, but for things very different from the conservatives. The socialists represented the interests of the working people, and argued that in industrialist capitalist societies the old tyranny of the monarchy and the aristocracy had been replaced by that of the propertied capitalist bourgeoisie. Some earlier socialists, such as Louis Blanc and Robert Owen believed that co-operatives of producers would lead to more equal sharing of profits.

Others, like Karl Marx, thought that workers would never be fairly rewarded under the capitalist system. This would happen only if all enterprises were commonly owned i. e., if the state owned them for the equal benefit of all. Marx said that in a communist society when all means of production were held in common and were not private property, each person will contribute according to his/her capacity and receive according to his/her needs. Social justice therefore required abolition of private property. Classes would also cease to exist in a society which was equal. According to him the ultimate goal of the socialist movements was the establishment of such a society. Marx also said that since the ruling classes would not co-operate in this, a revolution was necessary. There should be communist parties and strong and committed working class movements.

Thus, the Social Democratic (Marxist) Party in 1900 organised millions of workers into labour unions, clubs and associations, participated in elections, and held a huge block of seats in the Reichstag (German parliament). They were able to get passed legislation to improve the lives of the workers. Marxist, socialist and labour parties existed in many parts of the world by 1900, though they were under tremendous surveillance by the governments and police of their countries who wanted to prevent revolutions at all costs. In countries like Russia the socialist organizations were banned and known socialists were imprisoned or exiled (as happened to V.I Lenin, a leader of the Russian revolutionary movement).



INTEXT QUESTIONS 22.3

1. What were the 'natural rights' recognized by liberals?

2. Why were liberals in principle opposed to govt. regulation of economic activity?

3. Describe the shifting class argument of the later 19th century with regard to liberalism & conservatism.

**Notes**

4. Explain the Marxist conception of equality and Marxists' understanding of basis of inequality.

5. Give one example of a country in 1900 where Marxists were very successful in mobilizing working class people.

6. Socialists (Marxists) are the most consistent opponents of imperialism. Why?

Imperialism

The world of 1900 was one in which the more industrialized states had power over the people and resources of the unindustrialized world. Many inhabitants of the industrialized countries believed that colonialism was beneficial for the countries that were being ruled and that the inhabitants of the 'backward' countries were being 'civilised' by foreign rule. Liberals in the ruling countries were divided over how the dominance of their countries over the colonies should be maintained. Not everyone thought that direct political rule was necessary: but none were willing to let go of the benefits of colonialism and the control over resources in the colonies. In Germany the liberals argued that their country's industrial power depended on taking more colonies. In the US many liberals said that their country had no moral right to rule over Cubans and Filipinos, but hardly any US citizens criticized their government's interventions in Latin America. British, French, German, Belgian and American capitalists invested heavily in economic activities both within and outside the formal empires. They therefore supported as well as influenced the foreign policies of their respective countries and pushed for colonial domination of the rest of the world—countries comprising Africa, Latin America and Asia.

The political groups in 1900 that had the most consistent anti-imperialist views were the socialists, who believed that colonialism benefited only the ruling classes everywhere and was not in the interest of the working people anywhere. Therefore the working classes of all the countries needed to unite to overthrow this imperialist domination by a few countries.

Nationalism

Nationalism and national liberation ideology was an explosive force in the world of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In all parts of the world in 1900 competing nationalisms flourished and became important forms of mobilization of people. Broader notions of civilisational identity competed with nationalism in winning support of the people. Both were important in Asia and Africa. Pan ('All')-Africanism and Pan-Islamism fueled freedom struggles in the colonies. The Chinese and Indians emphasized their cultural independence as well as opposition to colonial policies in their struggle for freedom. Popular participation in government was also an important aspect of national movements. Protest against colonial policies of the imperialist countries—economic exploitation and denial of self governance—formed the basis for national liberation movements all over the world. Most national freedom struggles of the twentieth century thus engaged with ideas about democracy and also with ideas of how national wealth should be produced and shared.

**Notes****THE WORLD IN 1900: THE NINETEENTH CENTURY LEGACY**

In contrast, within the industrialized, imperialist countries, nationalism became aggressive and tied with support to colonial policies and domination of other countries, which, as you will see in your study of the following Units, led to intense competition among those countries and eventually to World War I.

**WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT**

The century before 1900 was a period of rapid population growth, with the most striking growth occurring in Europe and North America. Population growth in these places occurred in tandem with industrialization. The emergence of industrial society led to the formation and solidification of ideologies – sets of ideas and principles about achievement of the desired social order. By 1900, ideologies were beginning to shape the struggles of people in non-industrial societies for liberation from empires. In particular, nationalism and socialism were to have an explosive impact within ‘developed’ Europe as well as in the ‘undeveloped’ colonial world.

**TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

1. In what ways did industrialization alter ancient patterns of human existence?
2. How did industrialization change patterns of global production and trade?
3. How were liberalism and socialism opposed to one another, even though both sought to achieve human liberation?

**ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTION****22.1**

1. 75-95%.
2. Inside of Europe.
3. Urban areas were sites of industrial production and commercial distribution. Literacy was most useful or relevant in such areas and less useful in rural areas.
4. High levels of primary school attendance and large circulation of newspapers.

22.2

1. Britain, France, Germany, U.S. were some of the fossil fuel dependent countries of 1900.
2. Many rich supplies of fossil fuel were located outside of Europe and the U.S. in 1900.
3. Colonies suffered from unequal trade. They produced mainly low-cost food and raw materials for the industrializing countries.



Notes

4. Large number of people produced food for others distant from them and consumed larger quantities of goods produced by others.
5. Colonial rulers used language and education to create new social differences and retard growth of national consciousness.

22.3

1. Resistance to oppression, private property, choice of religion, freedom of speech and expression, participation in government.
2. Liberals believed that individuals pursuing self-interest in economic activity would serve the good of all better than a powerful regulating authority ('government').
3. Early in the 1800s conservatives were mostly members of the land –owning classes or their dependents while liberals were often active in manufacturing and commerce. By 1900, members of the traditional land-owning class had combined with business people to support liberalism. Meanwhile, some traditional 'liberals' came to support conservatism.
4. Marxists believed human inequality was due to access or lack of access to the means of production. By eliminating private property and putting resources under (national) state control, people would become really equal.
5. Germany, where the Social Democratic Workers' Party won most votes from the working classes.
6. Socialists believed that the division of society between capitalists and proletarians was occurring on a global scale. Therefore, proletarians of all countries/colonies should be interested in struggles against oppressive capitalists everywhere.

HINTS FOR TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. See para 22.1 -22.4.
2. See para 22.5.
3. See para 22.6.2 & 22.6.4

GLOSSARY

1. **Bourgeoisie** – The social class including people with substantial property in the form of houses, factories, or bank accounts—'capitalists'.
2. **C.E.** – Common Era. The historical epoch dated according to Christian calendars, with Year One being the year following the birth of Jesus Christ. Civilizations and states centered on other religious traditions (e.g., Judaism, Hinduism, Islam) follow different calendars, but the 'Christian' calendar is the one most widely used around the world today. 'Twentieth century' means the century of the 1900s.



Notes

- 3. **Ideology** – A set of principles or ideas, or a ‘worldview’ that endorses a particular plan for the development of a society; a social philosophy.
- 4. **Imperialism** – (1) The process of acquiring or maintaining colonies, territories dependent on the ‘parent’ country. (2) The ideology of acquiring empire.
- 5. **Laborism/laborist** – Referring to political or economic organizations of workers. Laborism defends the ‘rights of labor’ against employers or the state. Some laborists are Marxists.
- 6. **Print culture** – Means the pattern of communication and knowledge based on printed texts, such as books and newspapers, that can be replicated quickly through mechanical means (instead of people copying out texts ‘by hand’). Print culture depends on literacy and cheapness of technology of printing. Europe, Japan and Korea all had print cultures c. 1500 C.E. involving small numbers of readers in each of those places. By 1850 print culture involved tens of millions of people around the world, most of them in towns and cities. Reading a newspaper to learn prices of stocks and reading a novel are both practices of print culture.