Preface to the First Edition

Two world wars in one generation, separated by an uninterrupted chain of local wars and revolutions, followed by no peace treaty for the vanquished and no respite for the victor, have ended in the anticipation of a third World War between the two remaining world powers. This moment of anticipation is like the calm that settles after all hopes have died. We no longer hope for an eventual restoration of the old world order with all its traditions, or for the reintegration of the masses of five continents who have been thrown into a chaos produced by the violence of wars and revolutions and the growing decay of all that has still been spared. Under the most diverse conditions and disparate circumstances, we watch the development of the same phenomena—homelessness on an unprecedented scale, rootlessness to an unprecedented depth.

Never has our future been more unpredictable, never have we depended so much on political forces that cannot be trusted to follow the rules of common sense and self-interest—forces that look like sheer insanity, if judged by the standards of other centuries. It is as though mankind had divided itself between those who believe in human omnipotence (who think that everything is possible if one knows how to organize masses for it) and those for whom powerlessness has become the major experience of their lives.

On the level of historical insight and political thought there prevails an ill-defined, general agreement that the essential structure of all civilizations is at the breaking point. Although it may seem better preserved in some parts of the world than in others, it can nowhere provide the guidance to the possibilities of the century, or an adequate response to its horrors. Desperate hope and desperate fear often seem closer to the center of such events than balanced judgment and measured insight. The central events of our time are not less effectively forgotten by those committed to a belief in an unavoidable doom, than by those who have given themselves up to reckless optimism.

This book has been written against a background of both reckless optimism and reckless despair. It holds that Progress and Doom are two sides of the same medal; that both are articles of superstition, not of faith. It was
written out of the conviction that it should be possible to discover the
hidden mechanics by which all traditional elements of our political and
spiritual world were dissolved into a conglomeration where everything
seems to have lost specific value, and has become unrecognizable for human
comprehension, unusable for human purpose. To yield to the mere process
of disintegration has become an irresistible temptation, not only because
it has assumed the spurious grandeur of "historical necessity," but also
because everything outside it has begun to appear lifeless, bloodless, mean-
ingless, and unreal.

The conviction that everything that happens on earth must be compe-
hensible to man can lead to interpreting history by commonplaces. Compre-
hension does not mean denying the outrageous, deducing the unprecedented
from precedents, or explaining phenomena by such analogies and generali-
ties that the impact of reality and the shock of experience are no longer
felt. It means, rather, examining and bearing consciously the burden which
our century has placed on us—neither denying its existence nor submitting
meekly to its weight. Comprehension, in short, means the unpremeditated,
attentive facing up to, and resisting of, reality—whatever it may be.

In this sense, it must be possible to face and understand the outrageous
fact that so small (and, in world politics, so unimportant) a phenomenon as
the Jewish question and antisemitism could become the catalytic agent for
first, the Nazi movement, then a world war, and finally the establishment
of death factories. Or, the grotesque disparity between cause and effect
which introduced the era of imperialism, when economic difficulties led, in
a few decades, to a profound transformation of political conditions all over
the world. Or, the curious contradiction between the totalitarian movements' avowed cynical "realism" and their conspicuous disdain of the whole texture
of reality. Or, the irritating incompatibility between the actual power-of
modern man (greater than ever before, great to the point where he might
challenge the very existence of his own universe) and the impotence of
modern men to live in, and understand the sense of, a world which their
own strength has established.

The totalitarian attempt at global conquest and total domination has
been the destructive way out of all impasses. Its victory may coincide
with the destruction of humanity; wherever it has ruled, it has begun to
destroy the essence of man. Yet to turn our backs on the destructive forces
of the century is of little avail.

The trouble is that our period has so strangely intertwined the good with
the bad that without the imperialists' "expansion for expansion's sake," the
world might never have become one; without the bourgeoisie's political
device of "power for power's sake," the extent of human strength might
never have been discovered; without the fictitious world of totalitarian move-
ments, in which with unparalleled clarity the essential uncertainties of our
time have been spelled out, we might have been driven to our doom with-
out ever becoming aware of what has been happening.

And if it is true that in the final stages of totalitarianism an absolute evil
appears (absolute because it can no longer be deduced from humanly comprehensible motives), it is also true that without it we might never have known the truly radical nature of Evil.

Antisemitism (not merely the hatred of Jews), imperialism (not merely conquest), totalitarianism (not merely dictatorship)—one after the other, one more brutally than the other, have demonstrated that human dignity needs a new guarantee which can be found only in a new political principle, in a new law on earth, whose validity this time must comprehend the whole of humanity while its power must remain strictly limited, rooted in and controlled by newly defined territorial entities.

We can no longer afford to take that which was good in the past and simply call it our heritage, to discard the bad and simply think of it as a dead load which by itself time will bury in oblivion. The subterranean stream of Western history has finally come to the surface and usurped the dignity of our tradition. This is the reality in which we live. And this is why all efforts to escape from the grimness of the present into nostalgia for a still intact past, or into the anticipated oblivion of a better future, are vain.

Hannah Arendt

Summer 1950
PART TWO

Imperialism

I would annex the planets if I could.

CECIL RHODES
II: Power and the Bourgeoisie

WHAT IMPERIALISTS actually wanted was expansion of political power without the foundation of a body politic. Imperialist expansion had been touched off by a curious kind of economic crisis, the overproduction of capital and the emergence of "superfluous" money, the result of oversaving, which could no longer find productive investment within the national borders. For the first time, investment of power did not pave the way for investment of money, but export of power followed meekly in the train of exported money, since uncontrollable investments in distant countries threatened to transform large strata of society into gamblers, to change the whole capitalist economy from a system of production into a system of financial speculation, and to replace the profits of production with profits in commissions. The decade immediately before the imperialist era, the seventies of the last century, witnessed an unparalleled increase in swindles, financial scandals, and gambling in the stock market.

The pioneers in this pre-imperialist development were those Jewish financiers who had earned their wealth outside the capitalist system and had been needed by the growing nation-states for internationally guaranteed loans. With the firm establishment of the tax system that provided for sounder government finances, this group had every reason to fear complete extinction. Having earned their money for centuries through commissions, they were naturally the first to be tempted and invited to serve in the placement of capital which could no longer be invested profitably in the domestic market. The Jewish international financiers seemed indeed especially suited for such essentially international business operations. What is more, the governments themselves, whose assistance in some form was needed for investments in faraway countries, tended in the beginning to prefer the well-known

33 For this and the following compare chapter ii.
34 It is interesting that all early observers of imperialist developments stress this Jewish element very strongly while it hardly plays any role in more recent literature. Especially noteworthy, because very reliable in observation and very honest in analysis, is J. A. Hobson's development in this respect. In the first essay which he wrote on the subject, "Capitalism and Imperialism in South Africa" (in Contemporary Review, 1900), he said: "Most of (the financiers) were Jews, for the Jews are par excellence the international financiers, and, though English-speaking, most of them are of continental origin. . . . They went there (Transvaal) for money, and those who came early and made most have commonly withdrawn their persons, leaving their economic fangs in the carcass of their prey. They fastened on the Rand . . . as they are prepared to fasten upon any other spot upon the globe. . . . Primarily, they are financial speculators taking their gains not out of the genuine fruits of industry, even the industry of others, but out of construction, promotion and financial manipulation of companies." In Hobson's later study Imperialism, however, the Jews are not even mentioned; it had become obvious in the meantime that their influence and role had been temporary and somewhat superficial.

For the role of Jewish financiers in South Africa, see chapter vii.
Jewish financiers to newcomers in international finance, many of whom were adventurers.

After the financiers had opened the channels of capital export to the superfluous wealth, which had been condemned to idleness within the narrow framework of national production, it quickly became apparent that the absentee shareholders did not care to take the tremendous risks which corresponded to their tremendously enlarged profits. Against these risks, the commission-earning financiers, even with the benevolent assistance of the state, did not have enough power to insure them: only the material power of a state could do that.

As soon as it became clear that export of money would have to be followed by export of government power, the position of financiers in general, and Jewish financiers in particular, was considerably weakened, and the leadership of imperialist business transactions and enterprise was gradually taken over by members of the native bourgeoisie. Very instructive in this respect is the career of Cecil Rhodes in South Africa, who, an absolute newcomer, in a few years could supplant the all-powerful Jewish financiers in first place. In Germany, Bleichroeder, who in 1885 had still been a co-partner in the founding of the Ostafrikanische Gesellschaft, was superseded along with Baron Hirsch when Germany began the construction of the Bagdad railroad, fourteen years later, by the coming giants of imperialist enterprise, Siemens and the Deutsche Bank. Somehow the government's reluctance to yield real power to Jews and the Jews' reluctance to engage in business with political implication coincided so well that, despite the great wealth of the Jewish group, no actual struggle for power ever developed after the initial stage of gambling and commission-earning had come to an end.

The various national governments looked with misgiving upon the growing tendency to transform business into a political issue and to identify the economic interests of a relatively small group with national interests as such. But it seemed that the only alternative to export of power was the deliberate sacrifice of a great part of the national wealth. Only through the expansion of the national instruments of violence could the foreign-investment movement be rationalized, and the wild speculations with superfluous capital, which had provoked gambling of all savings, be reintegrated into the economic system of the nation. The state expanded its power because, given the choice between greater losses than the economic body of any country could sustain and greater gains than any people left to its own devices would have dreamed of, it could only choose the latter.

The first consequence of power export was that the state's instruments of violence, the police and the army, which in the framework of the nation existed beside, and were controlled by, other national institutions, were separated from this body and promoted to the position of national representatives in uncivilized or weak countries. Here, in backward regions without industries and political organization, where violence was given more latitude than in any Western country, the so-called laws of capitalism were
actually allowed to create realities. The bourgeoisie's empty desire to have money beget money as men beget men had remained an ugly dream so long as money had to go the long way of investment in production; not money had begotten money, but men had made things and money. The secret of the new happy fulfillment was precisely that economic laws no longer stood in the way of the greed of the owning classes. Money could finally beget money because power, with complete disregard for all laws—economic as well as ethical—could appropriate wealth. Only when exported money succeeded in stimulating the export of power could it accomplish its owners' designs. Only the unlimited accumulation of power could bring about the unlimited accumulation of capital.

Foreign investments, capital export which had started as an emergency measure, became a permanent feature of all economic systems as soon as it was protected by export of power. The imperialist concept of expansion, according to which expansion is an end in itself and not a temporary means, made its appearance in political thought when it had become obvious that one of the most important permanent functions of the nation-state would be expansion of power. The state-employed administrators of violence soon formed a new class within the nations and, although their field of activity was far away from the mother country, wielded an important influence on the body politic at home. Since they were actually nothing but functionaries of violence they could only think in terms of power politics. They were the first who, as a class and supported by their everyday experience, would claim that power is the essence of every political structure.

The new feature of this imperialist political philosophy is not the predominant place it gave violence, nor the discovery that power is one of the basic political realities. Violence has always been the ultima ratio in political action and power has always been the visible expression of rule and government. But neither had ever before been the conscious aim of the body politic or the ultimate goal of any definite policy. For power left to itself can achieve nothing but more power, and violence administered for power's (and not for law's) sake turns into a destructive principle that will not stop until there is nothing left to violate.

This contradiction, inherent in all ensuing power politics, however, takes on an appearance of sense if one understands it in the context of a supposedly permanent process which has no end or aim but itself. Then the test of achievement can indeed become meaningless and power can be thought of as the never-ending, self-feeding motor of all political action that corresponds to the legendary unending accumulation of money that begets money. The concept of unlimited expansion that alone can fulfill the hope for unlimited accumulation of capital, and brings about the aimless accumulation of power, makes the foundation of new political bodies—which up to the era of imperialism always had been the upshot of conquest—well-nigh impossible. In fact, its logical consequence is the destruction of all living communities, those of the conquered peoples as well as of the people at home. For every political structure, new or old, left to itself develops
stabilizing forces which stand in the way of constant transformation and expansion. Therefore all political bodies appear to be temporary obstacles when they are seen as part of an eternal stream of growing power.

While the administrators of permanently increasing power in the past era of moderate imperialism did not even try to incorporate conquered territories, and preserved existing backward political communities like empty ruins of bygone life, their totalitarian successors dissolved and destroyed all politically stabilized structures, their own as well as those of other peoples. The mere export of violence made the servants into masters without giving them the master's prerogative: the possible creation of something new. Monopolistic concentration and tremendous accumulation of violence at home made the servants active agents in the destruction, until finally totalitarian expansion became a nation- and a people-destroying force.

Power became the essence of political action and the center of political thought when it was separated from the political community which it should serve. This, it is true, was brought about by an economic factor. But the resulting introduction of power as the only content of politics, and of expansion as its only aim, would hardly have met with such universal applause, nor would the resulting dissolution of the nation's body politic have met with so little opposition, had it not so perfectly answered the hidden desires and secret convictions of the economically and socially dominant classes. The bourgeoisie, so long excluded from government by the nation-state and by their own lack of interest in public affairs, was politically emancipated by imperialism.

Imperialism must be considered the first stage in political rule of the bourgeoisie rather than the last stage of capitalism. It is well known how little the owning classes had aspired to government, how well contented they had been with every type of state that could be trusted with protection of property rights. For them, indeed, the state had always been only a well-organized police force. This false modesty, however, had the curious consequence of keeping the whole bourgeois class out of the body politic; before they were subjects in a monarchy or citizens in a republic, they were essentially private persons. This privateness and primary concern with money-making had developed a set of behavior patterns which are expressed in all those proverbs—“nothing succeeds like success,” “might is right,” “right is expediency,” etc.—that necessarily spring from the experience of a society of competitors.

When, in the era of imperialism, businessmen became politicians and were acclaimed as statesmen, while statesmen were taken seriously only if they talked the language of successful businessmen and “thought in continents,” these private practices and devices were gradually transformed into rules and principles for the conduct of public affairs. The significant fact about this process of revaluation, which began at the end of the last century and is still in effect, is that it began with the application of bourgeois convictions to foreign affairs and only slowly was extended to domestic politics. Therefore, the nations concerned were hardly aware that the recklessness that had
prevailed in private life, and against which the public body always had to
defend itself and its individual citizens, was about to be elevated to the one
publicly honored political principle.

It is significant that modern believers in power are in complete accord
with the philosophy of the only great thinker who ever attempted to derive
public good from private interest and who, for the sake of private good,
conceived and outlined a Commonwealth whose basis and ultimate end is
accumulation of power. Hobbes, indeed, is the only great philosopher to
whom the bourgeoisie can rightly and exclusively lay claim, even if his prin-
ciples were not recognized by the bourgeois class for a long time. Hobbes's
Leviathan 35 exposed the only political theory according to which the state
is based not on some kind of constituting law—whether divine law, the law
of nature, or the law of social contract—which determines the rights and
wrongs of the individual's interest with respect to public affairs, but on the
individual interests themselves, so that "the private interest is the same with
the publique." 36

There is hardly a single bourgeois moral standard which has not been an-
ticipated by the unequaled magnificence of Hobbes's logic. He gives an
almost complete picture, not of Man but of the bourgeois man, an analysis
which in three hundred years has neither been outdated nor excelled. "Rea-
son . . . is nothing but Reckoning"; "a free Subject, a free Will . . .
[are] words . . . without meaning; that is to say, Absurd." A being with-
out reason, without the capacity for truth, and without free will—that is,
without the capacity for responsibility—man is essentially a function of
society and judged therefore according to his "value or worth . . . his
price; that is to say so much as would be given for the use of his power."
This price is constantly evaluated and re-evaluated by society, the "esteem of
others," depending upon the law of supply and demand.

Power, according to Hobbes, is the accumulated control that permits the
individual to fix prices and regulate supply and demand in such a way that
they contribute to his own advantage. The individual will consider his ad-
vantage in complete isolation, from the point of view of an absolute mi-
nority, so to speak; he will then realize that he can pursue and achieve his
interest only with the help of some kind of majority. Therefore, if man is
actually driven by nothing but his individual interests, desire for power must
be the fundamental passion of man. It regulates the relations between indi-
vidual and society, and all other ambitions as well, for riches, knowledge,
and honor follow from it.

35 All quotes in the following if not annotated are from the Leviathan.
36 The coincidence of this identification with the totalitarian pretense of having
abolished the contradictions between individual and public interests is significant
enough (see chapter xii). However, one should not overlook the fact that Hobbes
wanted most of all to protect private interests by pretending that, rightly understood,
they were the interests of the body politic as well, while on the contrary totalitarian
regimes proclaim the nonexistence of privacy.
Hobbes points out that in the struggle for power, as in their native capacities for power, all men are equal; for the equality of men is based on the fact that each has by nature enough power to kill another. Weakness can be compensated for by guile. Their equality as potential murderers places all men in the same insecurity, from which arises the need for a state. The raison d'être of the state is the need for some security of the individual, who feels himself menaced by all his fellow-men.

The crucial feature in Hobbes's picture of man is not at all the realistic pessimism for which it has been praised in recent times. For if it were true that man is a being such as Hobbes would have him, he would be unable to found any body politic at all. Hobbes, indeed, does not succeed, and does not even want to succeed, in incorporating this being definitely into a political community. Hobbes's Man owes no loyalty to his country if it has been defeated and he is excused for every treachery if he happens to be taken prisoner. Those who live outside the Commonwealth (for instance, slaves) have no further obligation toward their fellow-men but are permitted to kill as many as they can; while, on the contrary, "to resist the Sword of the Commonwealth in defence of another man, guilty or innocent, no man hath Liberty," which means that there is neither fellowship nor responsibility between man and man. What holds them together is a common interest which may be "some Capitall crime, for which every one of them expecteth death"; in this case they have the right to "resist the Sword of the Commonwealth," to "joyn together, and assist, and defend one another. . . . For they but defend their lives."

Thus membership in any form of community is for Hobbes a temporary and limited affair which essentially does not change the solitary and private character of the individual (who has "no pleasure, but on the contrary a great deale of griefe in keeping company, where there is no power to overawe them all") or create permanent bonds between him and his fellow-men. It seems as though Hobbes's picture of man defeats his purpose of providing the basis for a Commonwealth and gives instead a consistent pattern of attitudes through which every genuine community can easily be destroyed. This results in the inherent and admitted instability of Hobbes's Commonwealth, whose very conception includes its own dissolution—"when in a warre (forraign, or intestine,) the enemies get a final Victory . . . then is the Commonwealth dissolved, and every man at liberty to protect himselfe"—an instability that is all the more striking as Hobbes's primary and frequently repeated aim was to secure a maximum of safety and stability.

It would be a grave injustice to Hobbes and his dignity as a philosopher to consider this picture of man an attempt at psychological realism or philosophical truth. The fact is that Hobbes is interested in neither, but concerned exclusively with the political structure itself, and he depicts the features of man according to the needs of the Leviathan. For argument's and conviction's sake, he presents his political outline as though he started from a realistic insight into man, a being that "desires power after power," and as though he proceeded from this insight to a plan for a body politic best
fitted for this power-thirsty animal. The actual process, *i.e.*, the only process in which his concept of man makes sense and goes beyond the obvious banality of an assumed human wickedness, is precisely the opposite.

This new body politic was conceived for the benefit of the new bourgeois society as it emerged in the seventeenth century and this picture of man is a sketch for the new type of Man who would fit into it. The Commonwealth is based on the delegation of power, and not of rights. It acquires a monopoly on killing and provides in exchange a conditional guarantee against being killed. Security is provided by the law, which is a direct emanation from the power monopoly of the state (and is not established by man according to human standards of right and wrong). And as this law flows directly from absolute power, it represents absolute necessity in the eyes of the individual who lives under it. In regard to the law of the state—that is, the accumulated power of society as monopolized by the state—there is no question of right or wrong, but only absolute obedience, the blind conformism of bourgeois society.

Deprived of political rights, the individual, to whom public and official life manifests itself in the guise of necessity, acquires a new and increased interest in his private life and his personal fate. Excluded from participation in the management of public affairs that involve all citizens, the individual loses his rightful place in society and his natural connection with his fellow-men. He can now judge his individual private life only by comparing it with that of others, and his relations with his fellow-men inside society take the form of competition. Once public affairs are regulated by the state under the guise of necessity, the social or public careers of the competitors come under the sway of chance. In a society of individuals, all equipped by nature with equal capacity for power and equally protected from one another by the state, only chance can decide who will succeed.\(^{37}\)

According to bourgeois standards, those who are completely unlucky and unsuccessful are automatically barred from competition, which is the life of society. Good fortune is identified with honor, and bad luck with shame. By assigning his political rights to the state the individual also delegates his social responsibilities to it: he asks the state to relieve him of the burden of

\(^{37}\) The elevation of chance to the position of final arbiter over the whole of life was to reach its full development in the nineteenth century. With it came a new genre of literature, the novel, and the decline of the drama. For the drama became meaningless in a world without action, while the novel could deal adequately with the destinies of human beings who were either the victims of necessity or the favorites of luck. Balzac showed the full range of the new genre and even presented human passions as man's fate, containing neither virtue nor vice, neither reason nor free will. Only the novel in its full maturity, having interpreted and re-interpreted the entire scale of human matters, could preach the new gospel of infatuation with one's own fate that has played such a great role among nineteenth-century intellectuals. By means of such infatuation the artist and intellectual tried to draw a line between themselves and the philistines, to protect themselves against the inhumanity of good or bad luck, and they developed all the gifts of modern sensitivity—for suffering, for understanding, for playing a prescribed role—which are so desperately needed by human dignity, which demands of a man that he at least be a willing victim if nothing else.
caring for the poor precisely as he asks for protection against criminals. The
difference between pauper and criminal disappears—both stand outside
society. The unsuccessful are robbed of the virtue that classical civilization
left them; the unfortunate can no longer appeal to Christian charity.

Hobbes liberates those who are excluded from society—the unsuccessful,
the unfortunate, the criminal—from every obligation toward society and state
if the state does not take care of them. They may give free rein to their de-
sire for power and are told to take advantage of their elemental ability to
kill, thus restoring that natural equality which society conceals only for the
sake of expediency. Hobbes foresees and justifies the social outcasts' organi-
zation into a gang of murderers as a logical outcome of the bourgeoisie's
moral philosophy.

Since power is essentially only a means to an end a community based
solely on power must decay in the calm of order and stability; its complete
security reveals that it is built on sand. Only by acquiring more power can it
guarantee the status quo; only by constantly extending its authority and only
through the process of power accumulation can it remain stable. Hobbes's
Commonwealth is a vacillating structure and must always provide itself with
new props from the outside; otherwise it would collapse overnight into the
aimless, senseless chaos of the private interests from which it sprang. Hobbes
embodies the necessity of power accumulation in the theory of the state of
nature, the "condition of perpetual war" of all against all, in which the
various single states still remain vis-à-vis each other like their individual
subjects before they submitted to the authority of a Commonwealth. This
ever-present possibility of war guarantees the Commonwealth a prospect of
permanence because it makes it possible for the state to increase its power
at the expense of other states.

It would be erroneous to take at its face value the obvious inconsistency
between Hobbes's plea for security of the individual and the inherent in-
stability of his Commonwealth. Here again he tries to persuade, to appeal
to certain basic instincts for security which he knew well enough could sur-
vive in the subjects of the Leviathan only in the form of absolute submission
to the power which "over-awes them all," that is, in an all-pervading, over-
whelming fear—not exactly the basic sentiment of a safe man. What Hobbes
actually starts from is an unmatched insight into the political needs of the
new social body of the rising bourgeoisie, whose fundamental belief in an
unending process of property accumulation was about to eliminate all indi-
vidual safety. Hobbes drew the necessary conclusions from social and eco-
nomic behavior patterns when he proposed his revolutionary changes in
political constitution. He outlined the only new body politic which could

The presently popular liberal notion of a World Government is based, like all
liberal notions of political power, on the same concept of individuals submitting to
a central authority which "overawes them all," except that nations are now taking the
place of individuals. The World Government is to overcome and eliminate authentic
politics, that is, different peoples getting along with each other in the full force of
their power.
correspond to the new needs and interests of a new class. What he actually achieved was a picture of man as he ought to become and ought to behave if he wanted to fit into the coming bourgeois society.

Hobbes's insistence on power as the motor of all things human and divine (even God's reign over men is "derived not from Creating them . . . but from the Irresistible Power") sprang from the theoretically indisputable proposition that a never-ending accumulation of property must be based on a never-ending accumulation of power. The philosophical correlative of the inherent instability of a community founded on power is the image of an endless process of history which, in order to be consistent with the constant growth of power, inexorably catches up with individuals, peoples, and finally all mankind. The limitless process of capital accumulation needs the political structure of so "unlimited a Power" that it can protect growing property by constantly growing more powerful. Granted the fundamental dynamism of the new social class, it is perfectly true that "he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath at present, without the acquisition of more." The consistency of this conclusion is in no way altered by the remarkable fact that for some three hundred years there was neither a sovereign who would "convert this Truth of Speculation into the Utility of Practice," nor a bourgeoisie politically conscious and economically mature enough openly to adopt Hobbes's philosophy of power.

This process of never-ending accumulation of power necessary for the protection of a never-ending accumulation of capital determined the "progressive" ideology of the late nineteenth century and foreshadowed the rise of imperialism. Not the naive delusion of a limitless growth of property, but the realization that power accumulation was the only guarantee for the stability of so-called economic laws, made progress irresistible. The eighteenth-century notion of progress, as conceived in pre-revolutionary France, intended criticism of the past to be a means of mastering the present and controlling the future; progress culminated in the emancipation of man. But this notion had little to do with the endless progress of bourgeois society, which not only did not want the liberty and autonomy of man, but was ready to sacrifice everything and everybody to supposedly superhuman laws of history. "What we call progress is [the] wind . . . [that] drives [the angel of history] irresistibly into the future to which he turns his back while the pile of ruins before him towers to the skies." Only in Marx's dream of a classless society which, in Joyce's words, was to awaken mankind from the nightmare of history, does a last, though utopian, trace of the eighteenth-century concept appear.

89 Walter Benjamin, "Über den Begriff der Geschichte," Institut für Sozialforschung, New York, 1942, mimeographed.—The imperialists themselves were quite aware of the implications of their concept of progress. Said the very representative author from the Civil Services in India who wrote under the pseudonym A. Cartbill: "One must always feel sorry for those persons who are crushed by the triumphal car of progress" (op. cit., p. 209).
The imperialist-minded businessman, whom the stars annoyed because he could not annex them, realized that power organized for its own sake would beget more power. When the accumulation of capital had reached its natural, national limits, the bourgeoisie understood that only with an “expansion is everything” ideology, and only with a corresponding power-accumulating process, would it be possible to set the old motor into motion again. At the same moment, however, when it seemed as though the true principle of perpetual motion had been discovered, the specifically optimistic mood of the progress ideology was shaken. Not that anybody began to doubt the irresistibility of the process itself, but many people began to see what had frightened Cecil Rhodes: that the human condition and the limitations of the globe were a serious obstacle to a process that was unable to stop and to stabilize, and could therefore only begin a series of destructive catastrophes once it had reached these limits.

In the imperialist epoch a philosophy of power became the philosophy of the elite, who quickly discovered and were quite ready to admit that the thirst for power could be quenched only through destruction. This was the essential cause of their nihilism (especially conspicuous in France at the turn, and in Germany in the twenties, of this century) which replaced the superstition of progress with the equally vulgar superstition of doom, and preached automatic annihilation with the same enthusiasm that the fanatics of automatic progress had preached the irresistibility of economic laws. It had taken Hobbes, the great idolator of Success, three centuries to succeed. This was partly because the French Revolution, with its conception of man as lawmaker and citoyen, had almost succeeded in preventing the bourgeoisie from fully developing its notion of history as a necessary process. But it was also partly because of the revolutionary implications of the Commonwealth, its fearless breach with Western tradition, which Hobbes did not fail to point out.

Every man and every thought which does not serve and does not conform to the ultimate purpose of a machine whose only purpose is the generation and accumulation of power is a dangerous nuisance. Hobbes judged that the books of the “ancient Greeks and Romans” were as “prejudicial” as the teaching of a Christian “Summum bonum . . . as [it] is spoken of in the Books of the old Morall Philosophers” or the doctrine that “whatsoever a man does against his Conscience, is Sinne” and that “Lawes are the Rules of Just and Unjust.” Hobbes’s deep distrust of the whole Western tradition of political thought will not surprise us if we remember that he wanted nothing more nor less than the justification of Tyranny which, though it has occurred many times in Western history, has never been honored with a philosophical foundation. That the Leviathan actually amounts to a permanent government of tyranny, Hobbes is proud to admit: “the name of Tyranny signifies nothing more nor lesse than the name of Soveraignt . . . ; I think the toleration of a professed hatred of Tyranny, is a Toleration of hatred to Commonwealth in generall. . . .”

Since Hobbes was a philosopher, he could already detect in the rise of the
bourgeoisie all those antitraditionalist qualities of the new class which would take more than three hundred years to develop fully. His *Leviathan* was not concerned with idle speculation about new political principles or the old search for reason as it governs the community of men; it was strictly a "reckoning of the consequences" that follow from the rise of a new class in society whose existence is essentially tied up with property as a dynamic, new property-producing device. The so-called accumulation of capital which gave birth to the bourgeoisie changed the very conception of property and wealth: they were no longer considered to be the results of accumulation and acquisition but their beginnings; wealth became a never-ending process of getting wealthier. The classification of the bourgeoisie as an owning class is only superficially correct, for a characteristic of this class has been that everybody could belong to it who conceived of life as a process of perpetually becoming wealthier, and considered money as something sacrosanct which under no circumstances should be a mere commodity for consumption.

Property by itself, however, is subject to use and consumption and therefore diminishes constantly. The most radical and the only secure form of possession is destruction, for only what we have destroyed is safely and forever ours. Property owners who do not consume but strive to enlarge their holdings continually find one very inconvenient limitation, the unfortunate fact that men must die. Death is the real reason why property and acquisition can never become a true political principle. A social system based essentially on property cannot possibly proceed toward anything but the final destruction of all property. The finiteness of personal life is as serious a challenge to property as the foundation of society, as the limits of the globe are a challenge to expansion as the foundation of the body politic. By transcending the limits of human life in planning for an automatic continuous growth of wealth beyond all personal needs and possibilities of consumption, individual property is made a public affair and taken out of the sphere of mere private life. Private interests which by their very nature are temporary, limited by man's natural span of life, can now escape into the sphere of public affairs and borrow from them that infinite length of time which is needed for continuous accumulation. This seems to create a society very similar to that of the ants and bees where "the Common good differeth not from the Private; and being by nature inclined to their private, they procure thereby the common benefit."

Since, however, men are neither ants nor bees, the whole thing is a delusion. Public life takes on the deceptive aspect of a total of private interests as though these interests could create a new quality through sheer addition. All the so-called liberal concepts of politics (that is, all the pre-imperialist political notions of the bourgeoisie)—such as unlimited competition regulated by a secret balance which comes mysteriously from the sum total of competing activities, the pursuit of "enlightened self-interest" as an adequate political virtue, unlimited progress inherent in the mere succession of events—have this in common: they simply add up private lives and personal be-
Behavior patterns and present the sum as laws of history, or economics, or politics. Liberal concepts, however, while they express the bourgeoisie's instinctive distrust of and its innate hostility to public affairs, are only a temporary compromise between the old standards of Western culture and the new class's faith in property as a dynamic, self-moving principle. The old standards give way to the extent that automatically growing wealth actually replaces political action.

Hobbes was the true, though never fully recognized, philosopher of the bourgeoisie because he realized that acquisition of wealth conceived as a never-ending process can be guaranteed only by the seizure of political power, for the accumulating process must sooner or later force open all existing territorial limits. He foresaw that a society which had entered the path of never-ending acquisition had to engineer a dynamic political organization capable of a corresponding never-ending process of power generation. He even, through sheer force of imagination, was able to outline the main psychological traits of the new type of man who would fit into such a society and its tyrannical body politic. He foresaw the necessary idolatry of power itself by this new human type, that he would be flattered at being called a power-thirsty animal, although actually society would force him to surrender all his natural forces, his virtues and his vices, and would make him the poor meek little fellow who has not even the right to rise against tyranny, and who, far from striving for power, submits to any existing government and does not stir even when his best friend falls an innocent victim to an incomprehensible raison d'état.

For a Commonwealth based on the accumulated and monopolized power of all its individual members necessarily leaves each person powerless, deprived of his natural and human capacities. It leaves him degraded into a cog in the power-accumulating machine, free to console himself with sublime thoughts about the ultimate destiny of this machine, which itself is constructed in such a way that it can devour the globe simply by following its own inherent law.

The ultimate destructive purpose of this Commonwealth is at least indicated in the philosophical interpretation of human equality as an “equality of ability” to kill. Living with all other nations “in the condition of a perpetual war, and upon the confines of battle, with their frontiers armed, and canons planted against their neighbours round about,” it has no other law of conduct but the “most conducing to [its] benefit” and will gradually devour weaker structures until it comes to a last war “which provideth for every man, by Victory, or Death.”

By “Victory or Death,” the Leviathan can indeed overcome all political limitations that go with the existence of other peoples and can envelop the whole earth in its tyranny. But when the last war has come and every man has been provided for, no ultimate peace is established on earth: the power-accumulating machine, without which continual expansion would not have been achieved, needs more material to devour in its never-ending process. If the last victorious Commonwealth cannot proceed to “annex the
planets,” it can only proceed to destroy itself in order to begin anew the never-ending process of power generation.

III: The Alliance Between Mob and Capital

WHEN IMPERIALISM entered the scene of politics with the scramble for Africa in the eighties, it was promoted by businessmen, opposed fiercely by the governments in power, and welcomed by a surprisingly large section of the educated classes. To the last it seemed to be God-sent, a cure for all evils, an easy panacea for all conflicts. And it is true that imperialism in a sense did not disappoint these hopes. It gave a new lease on life to political and social structures which were quite obviously threatened by new social and political forces and which, under other circumstances, without the interference of imperialist developments, would hardly have needed two world wars to disappear.

As matters stood, imperialism spirited away all troubles and produced that deceptive feeling of security, so universal in pre-war Europe, which deceived all but the most sensitive minds. Péguy in France and Chesterton in England knew instinctively that they lived in a world of hollow pretense and that its stability was the greatest pretense of all. Until everything began to crumble, the stability of obviously outdated political structures was a fact, and their stubborn unconcerned longevity seemed to give the lie to those who felt the ground tremble under their feet. The solution of the riddle was imperialism. The answer to the fateful question: why did the European comity of nations allow this evil to spread until everything was destroyed, the good as well as the bad, is that all governments knew very well that their countries were secretly disintegrating, that the body politic was being destroyed from within, and that they lived on borrowed time.

Innocently enough, expansion appeared first as the outlet for excess capital production and offered a remedy, capital export. The tremendously increased wealth produced by capitalist production under a social system based on maldistribution had resulted in “oversaving”—that is, the accu-

40 “The Services offer the cleanest and most natural support to an aggressive foreign policy; expansion of the empire appeals powerfully to the aristocracy and the professional classes by offering new and ever-growing fields for the honorable and profitable employment of their sons” (J. A. Hobson, “Capitalism and Imperialism in South Africa,” op. cit.). It was “above all ... patriotic professors and publicists regardless of political affiliation and unmindful of personal economic interest” who sponsored “the outward imperialistic thrusts of the '70ies and early '80ies” (Hayes, op. cit., p. 220).

41 For this and the following see J. A. Hobson, Imperialism, who as early as 1905 gave a masterly analysis of the driving economic forces and motives as well as of some of its political implications. When, in 1938, his early study was republished, Hobson could rightly state in his introduction to an unchanged text that his book was real proof “that the chief perils and disturbances . . . of today . . . were all latent and discernible in the world of a generation ago. . . .”