

On Globalisation and Twentieth-Century History: Some Inquiries About a Comparative Approach*

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I

Understanding globalisation appears to be the main motive for studying twentieth-century international history today. Though, there is no shared opinion among scholars until now about how any facts we know may fit such a viewpoint. And that requires some theoretical work in the first place.

Of course, the current meaning of globalization is not very far from everyday life: it might sound rather trivial, as well. But that is no reason to create any unnecessary sophistications while stating it. To most people, globalisation simply means that governments throughout the world either do not want or simply cannot effectively tell private business people what to do and what not to do about their money – as far as any of the latter do control any money in abundance. And that is right. Moreover, governments in a globalised world either do not want or simply cannot effectively tell that even to people from abroad who come to make business in their country. In a globalised world, governments are no players in the game about who gets how many life chances and who loses how many – or stays with how few. Neither taxes nor government spending or currency control are meant to influence results in that field.

On these assumptions, one might ask whether enlarged electoral franchise and free ballot would ever be easily matched with such behaviours on the part of governments. Indeed, that sounds like a crucial question – especially to historians. We shall get busy about it.

Before we do, let us mention some further sides of that “core meaning” of globalisation. True, no government in a globalised world would totally abstain from raising taxes – at least, no such case may actually be observed until now. And no government seems to have promoted any legislation openly permitting rich people – for instance – to hire gunmen, to buy slaves, or to bribe courts in order to influence their verdicts. No such thing is openly allowed through law – or through

the absence of laws. But that is not all. In a globalised world, the golden rule is that taxes are something bad that should be kept as low as possible; while – on the other side – the effectiveness of legislation forbidding the deeds I have just mentioned has been significantly weakened in a number of cases.

Both former aspects of that popular meaning of globalisation are usually described in terms of “less government”; and, on turn, that means that governments in a globalised world are expected to behave less assertively both inside their own country and towards the governments and the people of other countries. Is that true? That is: does “globalisation” *always* mean the same as “interdependence”? And, secondly, is “globalisation” *always* opposed to nationalism, to power politics, and to wars?

To historians, answering those questions requires that a more fundamental one be preliminarily raised: is present-time “globalisation” any quite novel matter? Was there no period in world history that may show us at least some significant similarities? Actually, a significant amount of literature has grown about a vision which depicts most of the twentieth century as something between two globalisations. That is, a First Globalisation has been recognised as a feature of world history during the two decades or so which went on before the big catastrophe of 1914.¹

Of course, giving the name of a “first” globalisation to the eve of the First World War – or, rather, to the eve of a Thirty-Years’ World War – may sound as rather ominous. Indeed, most authors and writers who recently suggested it *do* mean it to be ominous; they *do* mean to warn everybody. In a word, this kind of comparative approach is as far as can be from whatever kind of idle talk.

While assuming that some kind of globalisation had something to do with the outbreak of a Thirty-Years’ World War at the beginning of the twentieth century, we immediately come to be faced with an old dilemma. That is: which was the role of economic factors in the outbreak of the First World War? Was pre-1914 world economy a source of international conflict, or was it a factor of international integration or cooperation? Was any attitude and motive which promoted civic progress at least in Europe before 1914 helplessly crushed through the blind and mighty drive of economic constraints? Or – instead – were the peaceful

blessings of economic progress barbarously destroyed through a climax of ideological prejudices and political immaturity?

Of course, the former interpretation generally happens to be associated with Lenin's theory of imperialism, whereas the latter appears to be associated with some kind of more optimistic evaluation of the virtues of capitalism. Though, we should escape any simplistic vision about that.

Sure, both ways of thinking have actually been followed in the shape of some simplistic versions – as well by historians as by political theorists and political actors. However simplistic forms of Leninism may be recalled, though, Lenin himself was following no one-sided intellectual path while he was developing his theory – no more than he ever did in his life. Lenin was very familiar with contradictions – both as challenges to scientific and philosophical understanding and as an actual feature of his own personality and deeds.² Although he saw “imperialism” as a development of capitalism, he never saw that as really too obvious. He rather talked about such matters as “imperialist *contradictions*” than merely about “imperialism”. Namely, he did so in his effort to explain the protracted and massive destruction of life chances (and of lives) on a worldwide scale which was still going on before his eyes since two years as he finished his book on “imperialism”. Now, the novelty of that catastrophe was by no means any milder shock to Lenin's mind than to such other cosmopolitan intellectuals as Siegmund Freud, for instance. The difference between Lenin's approach and the attitudes of any more optimistic observers of market world economy was rather the size of the “contradiction” – that is, the degree of its acuteness – than the contradiction itself.

To understand that, we should first recall that Lenin's book on *Imperialism, the extreme phase of capitalism*, on which he stated his theory in 1916, was largely written as a favourable discussion of a previous book by the English economist and social scientist John A. Hobson. Now, Hobson's sharp rejection of imperialism was not meant to recommend the overthrow of capitalism as the alleged source of the former. Rather, Hobson's purpose was little less than rescuing capitalist liberalism from the costly and disrupting machinations of a minority of narrow-minded profiteers.³

Hobson's views may also be seen as a late episode of militancy within the ranks of English reform liberalism, whose main intellectual and political leader – during most of the 1840s and 1850s – was Richard Cobden. Incidentally, we may find that Cobden's name is quoted as some kind of virtuous example to middle-class democratic leaders as we read Karl Marx' historical, journalistic and political writings of that period.

An important feature of that kind of reform liberalism is the assumption that state power should better refrain not only from imposing duties or prohibitions on the honest work of people inside borders, but also – and, perhaps, most significantly – from exerting military pressure outside. Wars are seen as the manifestation of some outdated forms of organisation of society, which would have nothing to do with modern market economy or with the kind of social and cultural advancement that reform liberalism holds to be promised through its development.

I have just noticed that Marx' appreciation of Cobden was a rather sympathetic one. Just like Lenin after him, though, Marx was acquainted with contradictions, both as an aspect of theoretical work and as a matter of his own personality and life. And neither he (or Lenin) ever saw any problem there. Indeed, in Marx' (as in Lenin's) view, facts *are* contradictory – and, perhaps, everyone might be directly acquainted with some reason to suppose he may be right.

In other words, Marx believed *both* that violence and war were no specific substance of modern progress *and* that modern progress was understandably moving on *through violence as well* – including not only revolution, but even war. Of course, as he was thinking so, he never was any kind of enthusiast that would indulge to any easy warlike rhetoric. It is true that he did take side during the wars of his time, as a militant intellectual and a journalist. Namely, he saw the wars which were favouring the emergence of a large “German” state as tantamount to steps along the path of human progress – and, besides, he never forgot either to be a German himself or that national groupings are basic aspects of the complex network of relationships that constitute the actual situation of every human existence. He did so, however, out of some rather cool considerations. To him, “national” struggle was no less an “objective” feature of reality than *class* struggle – that is, nothing that should or might be either approved or disapproved of. As a result, while promoting the case of revolution amidst the events of his time, Marx actually added many a nuance to one of the most famous assertions of his own and Engels' *Manifesto* of 1847 – which sounded, of course, “proletarians have no fatherland”.

Some interpreters would even go so far as to allegedly unveil Marx as a hidden albeit “enlightened” nationalist: that is, as the promoter of national developments that would both ensure the blooming of national languages, national varieties, and national cultures, and that developing cultures – on their turn – might produce universally shared allegiance to some broader international community.⁴ Before them, socialist political leaders had been

giving some less subtle interpretations of this, as they fostered policies that gave state power a far more significant role in enhancing the sake of social progress than Marx ever admitted. The German social thinker and revolutionary leader Ferdinand Lassalle was an early case in point – which turned him from a favourite disciple into a target of bitter hostility on the part of Marx. When some followers of the exiled Marx met together with some followers of the newly reconciled *Reichstreuer* (“loyal to the Empire”) Lassalle in 1875, to establish the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), that development gave Marx the opportunity to write one of his most concise and most significant texts, that is the *Kritik des Gothaer Programms*, or “The Gotha Program Criticised”. As relates to our concern, the most important passage in that text is Marx’ well-determined reaffirmation of the “alienating” (i. e. not properly human) nature of *whatever* submission to state power – however useful any such submission may be later recognised as a major step along the path of human progress. That might never be changed, in Marx’ view, either through the establishing of some kind of “free state” (*Freies Staat*) whose very nature would be allegedly modified through the practice of universal franchise – as it was envisaged through the Gotha program. Striving to change the nature of the state into some kind of “free state”, Marx argued, was not only pointless but directly opposed to solving the real issue: that is, “restricting the freedom of the state”, i. e. the burden of *ancient régime* meanings and implications of the very concept of “sovereign” power.

Before we go further through the development of socialist ideas and policies during the latest phase of the “long” nineteenth century – that his, shortly before 1914 – we should now look better at what is meant by those intellectual traditions which assume that market economy as such was innocent for the tragedies of 1914 (and after), and that every blame should fall on some wrong ideologies, some wrong policies, or the like, which brought the promises of a globalised market economy to be ineffective. Here, too, we are not faced with anything too simple – were we, there would be no point in going through that.

Few serious historians, few social scientists, and – namely – few economists, would tell us that economic developments might ever be described as being totally independent from facts relating to state power, or from how it is exerted. Consequently, most thinkers who share some more optimistic views of capitalism than Marx’ are no less ready than Marxists to reach conclusions that spell final blame on *actual* or “really-existing” capitalism before 1914 – whatever may be said of the *concepts* of

market economy and market society as such. On those grounds, most developments within the advanced nations, which weakened the factors of international cooperation, and rather encouraged or even promoted conflict, may be reconsidered under a light that enables us to understand them better, however we are subsequently going to assess them.

As we try to recall the literature we should first come to be confronted with in order to check the former assumptions, one may be induced to match such an almost classical book as Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* (1944) with some pages by the outstanding economic historian Barry Eichengreen. The former was written *before* whatever thought about a second globalisation might be nourished, whereas the latter was written just while the world was witnessing the early rise of it.⁵

While considering the latest years of what he names "the hundred years' peace" that made the pattern of the developed international system between 1815 and 1914, Polanyi openly declares his debt to Herbert Feis' *Europe, the World's Banker* (1930) where the tangled web of the almost two-sided relationship between *haute finance* and sovereign powers before 1914 is shown through such deep-sighted skill and such rich information as have scarcely been equalled afterwards. Feis observes – basing himself on a great deal of evidence he accurately scrutinises – that "the hopes that were nourished by millions of small *rentiers* were increasingly depending on the keeping of peace throughout the continent [of Europe]", although no government ever abstained from influencing private lending and borrowing abroad in order to increase each 'nation's' influence and power in the so-called world 'arena'. On his turn, Polanyi suggests that, sure, bankers and finance people were also behind the low-intensity wars of the nineteenth century – as we may name most European wars of that period with respect to most following major wars. That is, bankers and finance people were behind such wars – Polanyi seems to allude – just as they would ever be behind whatever kind of convenient business; though, they "organised peace" as well. Moreover, in Polanyi's view, the task of organising peace throughout the nineteenth century was being fulfilled much better and much more effectively through the web of international market economy than through any shared view among diplomats about the point of preserving the world balance of power – even though the latter was exerting a marked influence on the foreign policies of all big powers during most of that same century.

The reason for that, Polanyi explains, was that trade was now depending on a world monetary system (i. e., the Gold Standard) which

could not function during a general war, while it rather asked for peace. And, indeed, the great powers were busy to keep peace. Polanyi stresses that the economic drive to wars is an essential feature of traditional or less developed societies, *not* of modern capitalism – at least if we look through a long-term and wide-range anthropological and sociological perspective. Modern capitalism, Polanyi argues, had significantly loosened the millennial tangle through which international trade had been always strictly linked to such activities as ravage and plunder.

As a sociologist, who looks for large-scale trends, Polanyi willingly understates that some big waves of worldwide bloody plunders across the oceans were prerequisites for Europe's capitalist development, and that something not too far from that was still significantly marking the relations between "white" and "non-white" groups of mankind, even at the peak of the "hundred years' peace". Perhaps, he oversees that as something too obvious to himself and his readers.

Anyway, as far as the concept of the nineteenth-century "international system" is limitedly defined as constituted by the signatory powers of the Vienna Final Act of 1815, by such successor states of theirs like Italy and the German Empire, and by such newcomers like Japan and the United States, all Polanyi wants to do is showing that an effective interest to peaceful international relations came to be relatively stronger than any interest to armed international conflict during most of the nineteenth century inside that system – although some opposite interests were also at work and might occasionally either dictate or encourage warlike behaviours on the part of some great powers.

Polanyi leaves us with some appetite for explanations about why all that simply ceased to be true at the beginning of the twentieth century. Perhaps some keys might be found in a very dense although significantly understated warning on his part about the volatile and somewhat hazardous nature of the general balance that had assured the "hundred years' peace". As he reminds us, factors leading to a severe unbalance may originate from "countless reasons", which affect real lives of real people: "just even the increase of a population or of their wealth, or their decrease, will start some political drives, and the external balance will invariably reflect the internal one". With an eye to the Vienna system and its shakings between 1848 and 1870, Polanyi argues that any peaceful international system which is based upon the balance of power can only be effective if it can prevent whatever "internal" source of unbalance. Indeed, Prince von Metternich appears to have known that very well.

Polanyi understates the consequences of that assumption, as applied to explaining the crisis of the international system which broke out into the thirty-years' world war of 1914-1945. He simply writes that, as one sees that neither the network of *haute finance* nor the Gold Standard could prevent the world from falling prey to havoc, "the true nature of the extremely artificial economic organization where peace rested upon acquires an utmost importance to the historian". As the rest of his book is committed to show how mere market society is both artificial and unbalanced, and how some more developed forms of social balance and social welfare were bound to rise as soon as the havoc would be over – which might be expected to be very likely to happen in 1944, and would actually happen to a significant extent during the following three decades – there is little to be found there in order to single out the actual factors of "internal" unbalance that may account for the catastrophe of 1914.

Here Eichengreen's book, which was written fifty years later, may come to rescue. His appreciation is concise – but not properly understated. Eichengreen provides us with a direct answer for the question we have raised above about how and whether the rise of mass politics and of labour unionism might be reconciled with a set of economic priorities that encouraged international cooperation before 1914 – such as the stability of currencies according to the rules of the Gold Standard, and the high priority which all governments used to give to the expectations of capital-owners.

Eichengreen suggests that there might be no room enough for both. "The extension of the franchise and the emergence of political parties representing the working classes", he namely writes, "raised the possibility of challenges to the single-minded priority the monetary authorities attached to convertibility". And, one might add, they raised the possibility that governments would consider doubts about the point of risking unpopularity and internal political defeat for the sake of international cooperation – that is, for the sake of the kind of international cooperation which then happened to be supplied through general compliance to a set of specific rules about international finance and trade. The factors to which Eichengreen ascribes what he names a politicisation of monetary policy were "rising consciousness of unemployment and of trade-offs between internal and external balance" – that is, just between the terms of Polanyi's picture of modern international crises.

That does not necessarily involve any all-out determinist interpretation of nationalism. Of course, nationalism was a significant opponent of the

globalising processes that affected world capitalism in the late nineteenth century, but that does not mean that it reflected any merely economic drive. Plainly speaking, as governments were increasingly faced with difficult choices between internal and external balance, they found fewer reasons to resist nationalism, or even not to go nationalist themselves. And that may be taken as symbol of a more general drive to reaffirm the ultimate submission of people's ownerships to sovereign state power; that is to say, the ultimate submission of people's ownerships *and lives* to the modern pattern of sovereign state power – i. e. the nation-state.

All what precedes may provide some motives to make some further attempts to see through two rather familiar questions. A first one is why did tens of millions young people rather willingly slaughter each other in an organised horror machine for four years – with either few or easily controlled rebellions, and except the big and fatefully dubious exception of Russia.⁶ A further and thereto related one is why peace was given so few effective advocates even among ordinary people – including organised labour – either while the storm was roaring up or when attempts were being made to stop the bloodshed. Apart from Russia, governments and ruling classes – or at least a significant part of the latter – proved to be successful in persuading people that the slaughter was worth while being undergone – and imposed.

At least two major sets of issues seem now to be worth being recalled as related to those questions. We should always go on considering the trends in mass politics which may explain the low rate of popularity of any “really-existing” international cooperation in the main European countries, as *really* nothing too obvious – especially if we notice that mass politics was itself a novel trend at that time. And it may be worth while observing again how governments were able to exploit the former factor, and preserve its effectiveness in face of such challenges as rising demands for a compromise peace on the one hand, and a successful revolution affecting a great warring power on the other, during such a turning year as 1917.

This kind of question-raising is not yet very spread in history-teaching. That is why students participating to an advanced seminar in this Faculty were invited to submit papers relating to the latter issues, by exploiting some published sources. Those papers can be found on appendix to this article, together with some short remarks they have suggested during the panels.

II

On a whole, pacifist and internationalist ideologies proved to have no impact on mass behaviours in any warring nation either at the eve of World War I or during most part of it. We now know that episodes of fraternisation between troops deployed within opposite trenches – most often during Christmas or Easter – were more frequent than admitted through any official information, and there is evidence of some concern about it at the top of each country's war machine. Though, for however spread such attitudes may prove to have been behind any official efforts to conceal and repress them, it may never be demonstrated that they were anything but exception.

Mass ideas and mass expectations at the peak of the second industrial revolution – and of its impact on mass behaviour and life in the countryside as well – might explain something. Studies about the language and the everyday behaviours of the German Social Democracy before 1914 show us that internationalist slogans were less influent on mass psychology than one might suppose; and that also meant that the leaders who launched such slogans were far less convinced of their truth – or far more inclined to put conditions about it – than one might suppose.

That seems to be no exception. The French Socialist leader Jean Jaurès always showed to be very attentive to preserve his image as both of a proletarian internationalist *and* of a French patriot throughout his career as an opponent of those French politicians – like Delcassé and Poincaré – who fostered militarism at home and unilateralist assertiveness about foreign issues. As a conclusion, Poincaré's approach was thoroughly successful in August 1914, while Jaurès was finally shot dead in the street, and nobody moved on to protest rather than reaching railway stations were shouts of "À Berlin!" were being exchanged between leaving soldiers and greeting crowds.

As a general rule, one might observe that opposing militarism and unilateralist foreign policies was far easier to socialist leaders than actively encouraging internationalist and cooperative foreign policies which might be pursued by any "capitalist" statesmen. While feverish accusations of "ministerialism" inside the ranks of French socialism were threatening the position of the advocates of "republican" unity after the *affaire Dreyfus* – including Jaurès – French socialist leaders were warned from making any moves which might be interpreted as compromise toward *both* the domestic ruling bourgeoisie *and* toward the foreign – namely, German – one. That is

why Jaurès never might overtly say that Pierre-Joseph Caillaux was simply right as he suggested that working with the industrious Germans would ultimately help French well-being much more than threatening war in order to keep them out of French business across the world.

The Italian socialist leader Filippo Turati was faced with a similar problem. He should rather carefully try to conceal than ever overtly declare that he shared the purpose to keep Italy out of the war with a man like Giolitti, who was still widely held to represent “the establishment” - although this assumption was proving increasingly inaccurate. Italian political confrontations between 1911 and 1914 would clearly show that left-wing political movements were finding it easier - and worthier - to oppose Giolitti as a war leader than ever to support him as a peace advocate. As soon as the socialist left-wing leader Benito Mussolini decided to capitalise that in order to start paving his own way to power through the increasing chances of mass politics - and hence launched a popular campaign for Italian entry into the European war - he was given credit by a number of young revolutionary intellectuals at first, including some unsuspectable ones.

As we come back to France, we may see how some substance of Mussolini's *voûte-face* had been anticipated through the action of an outstanding opponent of Jaurès' inside the ranks of French socialism, that was, the once rabidly anti-militarist (ant anti-*blocquard* or *antiministérialiste*) Gustave Hervé. It was Hervé that stirred up a wave of excitement against “Prussian” militarism and alleged will of domination during the fateful summer of 1914.

Let us now turn again to look for an explanation for this lack of mass affection to whatever “really-existing” internationalism - that is, to whatever kind of understanding might be pursued and reached among leading European statesmen and officials in order to preserve the advantages of economic cooperation. To that purpose, we may put attention on some keen observations that had been written in 1907 by the very young and clever Austrian Socialist leader Otto Bauer (then at 25).

“Petty-bourgeois people, peasants, workers”, Bauer argued in an essay about the socialist approach to the question of nationalities, “do stand under a foreign rule in whatever state - that is, even in a national state. That is, they are exploited and oppressed by landlords, by capitalists, and by bureaucrats. Though, such a foreign rule usually conceals itself; you cannot see it at eyes' glance, but you must seize it intellectually. Instead, the rule of a foreign nation is visible to the eyes: you can observe it immediately. As a

worker enters a public board, or as he comes before a court, he does not believe that a foreign nation is ruling him through the official or the judge he sees: indeed, both appear to belong to his nation as well. But, if the official or the judge are speaking a foreign language, then the submission of popular masses to a foreign power is openly visible – thence, it is unbearable [...] Here is why foreign rule [we might also read here: “foreign influence of whatever kind”] is so much significant: it makes visible, and thence unbearable, whatever kind of exploitation and oppression – which would otherwise require some intellectual understanding”).⁷

To put it differently, whatever “really-existing” internationalism at the beginning of the twentieth century was deeply marked as something which was bound to be only shared within some relatively small elites. If we are to use Polanyi’s terms, *haute finance* as the organiser of peace was being felt no less alien or oppressive than the cosmopolitan elite which can be best depicted through the image of the French-speaking and German-born Austrian Chancellor Clement von Metternich. If any kind of common sake of mankind was ever to be given any chance to work as a motive for popular behaviour and feelings, some new kind of internationalism ought to be proposed.

And some was. For, indeed, both Wilsonianism and Leninism *might* play the role of some kind of popular internationalism – not too less strong than the kind of popular nationalism that had so largely influenced mass behaviours until before. Both were appropriate means to counteract the popular appeal of the national loyalties which had grown to encompass the horizon of mass expectations, and had ultimately come to undermine the stability of whatever kind of world order.

Now, if one looks for some reason why both Wilsonianism and Leninism might be effective at the level of mass public opinion and of mass feelings, one may find something that spelled at least some of their future shortcomings as well. That is, neither Wilsonian internationalism nor Leninist internationalism were mere intellectual concepts. Both were represented through the images – however inaccurate – of some definite country, and through some definite flag. And, perhaps, the former observation may also help explaining the incoming split of mass loyalties on a world scale during the second half of the twentieth century.

Before we come to deal with that subject, though, we should raise the question of how both Wilsonian and Leninist kinds of internationalism were originally responding to the set of challenges that we are considering

here as affecting world history in the era of globalisation. And, to that purpose, we should go back to a more precise question about globalisation itself.

At the start of our inquiry, we also asked ourselves whether “globalisation” and “interdependence” should be taken as synonyms. Sure, that might be perceived as a matter of mere wording. Well, now, every word has also a history of its own – and, hence, a substance of its own as well.

The term “globalisation” was made popular in the early 1990s by people who had been warmly and actively endorsing the very facts that were then coming to influence the game about the distribution of assets affecting world economic and political power – and were now largely taking profit from that. Ideologically speaking, of course, some may also have used the term “globalisation” just in order to mean a world that is less divided through nation-state borders than before, whatever actual social processes may ever go on within such a framework. More often than not, such actual processes were rather understated than criticised through the proposition of such a “neutral” meaning of globalisation.

Besides, anyway, neutral concepts are no historical concepts. Historical concepts should tell us what actually happens to people. So you cannot call globalisation both public neutrality about unemployment or mass starving and public concern about such challenges. In order to mean the latter alternative, a better choice is using the term “interdependence”.

Of course, the latter has a history of its own as well. It gained some fortune during Gorbachev’s years, and is presently promoted – among others – through some American intellectual circles that sharply criticise the policies and the inspiring values of the Bush administration.

As we revert to the aftermath of World War I at the light of these concepts, we should be bent to look for some breakthrough toward some measure of interdependence, which might restore the possibility of people living together in the complex world that had been shaped through the progress of knowledge and of technology. To that purpose, both Leninism and Wilsonianism lacked something.

Wilsonianism represented no intellectual step forward with respect to the ideology of the first globalisation. Of course, Wilson’s economic ideas are far more implicit than plainly stated. As we try to sum up his main statements about world economy, we can find little more than the assumption that the main job had been already done through the defeat of such disturbing factors as “Prussian” militarism and “Prussian” attempts to undermine the freedom of world seas and world trade. That is,

Wilsonianism lagged far behind Hobson's awareness of how really-existing capitalism was producing imperialist drives – no matter how accurately he might have actually come to explain why. It might be added that Wilson's policy even lagged behind Theodore Roosevelt's "open door" criticism of European (and Japanese) behaviours about the partition of world markets – as Wilson carefully moulded any reference to that issue while he was dealing with the Entente Powers in his quality as leader of the main "Associate Power".

One should read again Keynes' merciless picture of Wilson's behavior during the Paris peace conference. As we follow it, we should come to conclude that the victorious American President was combining the worst of both worlds. That is, he was adding the harm of some poorly defined novelties in world politics to the harm of some outdated concepts in world economics – or, rather, of little or no care to the economic side of world problems.

As we come to consider the performance of Leninism as a response to the sudden absence of whatever kind of economic world order, one should first notice that Lenin's contribution was more effective on assessing what ought to be rejected – like "imperialist" war, "chauvinistic" nationalism, and second-rank dependant imitations of any existing pattern of capitalist development – than on suggesting what ought to be actively done in order to organise the world. The actual contents of the world revolution he was promoting – which was expected to really start as soon as the proletariat of the Western "developed" countries would come to help the poorly endowed Russian one – were not much more defined than they had been through the elaborations of the Second International before the Great War.

Sure, though, between 1917 and 1919 – with a peak after November 1917 – Wilsonianism and Leninism were given many a chance to help each other. Had they seized any of them, perhaps they would have started some processes that would produce some significant developments beyond their own limitations. Though, both missed those opportunities.

But some of their followers were later given one more chance. Unfortunately, the occasion for it was a further world war. A relatively good news, though, is that they did not *totally* miss the chance this time.

III

To understand that, our effort should now be oriented to investigate the meaning of the Grand Alliance that was formed in 1941 between such a peculiar kind of Wilsonian as Franklin D. Roosevelt and such a peculiar kind of Leninist as Joseph Stalin. To many observers, including ourselves, such a task may well appear as tantamount to explaining why an enlightened humanitarian reformer ought to court a bloody tyrant in order to save the world from falling into a frightening realm of slavery. Now, was Stalin no more than a bloody tyrant? And was Roosevelt no more than an enlightened humanitarian reformer?

Investigating Stalinism is not of our concern here. We shall limit ourselves to make some short remarks that appear to be left after considering the extreme experiences that were made by the Russian people during the 1930s. That is, Stalin the bloody tyrant and Stalin the champion of peace and righteousness were widely felt to be the same person among several millions people. Furthermore, whatever may be unveiled about Stalin's own dark mind, the foundations of his power lay precisely on those feelings – and, most ostensibly, he did know that. We are not concerned here with the possibility of moral evil and personal guilt. We are concerned with how human ideas, human interests, and human wills, may or may not concur into shaping the range of people's choices – that is, what one might name “the range of people's life chances”, or what many social theorists would name “structures”.

As we have defined our viewpoint, we may now revert to the parallel developments of Wilsonian and Leninist internationalist approaches after the early failure of both by the early 1920s. That is, we may now revert to a parallel history of American and Soviet isolationisms during the twenty-years' truce in the thirty-years' world war of the twentieth century.

American Wilsonians did not dare to overtly challenge the isolationist mood of the American public as they faced the actual results of American participation in the First World War. It may be stated that the whole American nation – not just conservative America – went isolationist after 1920.

It took a little more time until a Soviet isolationist choice became explicit. As late as April 1922, Soviet participation in the Genoa economic world conference was another important side of the internal relaxation of Leninist revolutionary power which is known as the NEP or “New economic policy”.⁸ That move was related to efforts by some far-sighted

Western European statesmen such as Walther Rathenau, and by some former academic counsellors of the British government such as J. M. Keynes, to foster the planning of European economic reconstruction on a somewhat broader basis than the immediate demands of financial circles inside the victor European powers. As these efforts were fatally torpedoed through the French stubborn stance on German reparations – and, more generally, out of lack of courage in the field of monetary and financial reform – the Soviet leaders increasingly oriented themselves toward a way to social and economic development which would ultimately appear very similar not only to economic isolationism, but to economic nationalism as well.

Steps toward *political* and ideological nationalism, though, were less determined on the part of the Soviet regime. True, Soviet foreign policy during most of the 1920s and the early 1930s was angrily opposed to the Western European victor powers. It even went so far as to cultivate some “revisionist” territorial claims – namely, against Rumania. And the Soviet Union was leader in the field of military expenditure by the end of the 1920s. But the Soviet Union also willingly endorsed the Conference on Disarmament which was convened by the League of Nations in 1927, although she did not yet modify her negative stance toward the League as such, nor did she still make any step to enter it. Moreover, she joined the Briand-Kellogg Pact on collective security in 1930 – significantly enough, after some dwindling which reflected some degree of incertitude at the top.

American post-Wilsonian foreign policy shows some similar features. Even before the Democrats would win the White House again in 1932, the “America first” ideology – i. e. the banner of American political nationalism – never really came to inspire American foreign policy.

One rather trivial reason for it is that Wall Street could see no point in favouring any developments of that kind. American bankers sustained very actively through their loans such things as the restoration of Germany's currency and of Germany's supposed ability to pay reparations. Moreover, the wide ranks of American middle-class subscribers of foreign bonds were sensitive to some sort of international cooperation. Though, neither would admit that the U.S. government would commit them to whatever form of international agreement that would modify the expectations where their calculations were based upon. These were still related to pre-war Gold Standard usual practices – including the use of the London financial market as the main facility for big international capital flows, and the prevailing use of sterling as the sign of the latter. On turn, that would involve that most of

the political burden of issuing the main international currency was yet expected to rest on British shoulders, and that it should be American policy not to discuss too deeply whatever measure the British government would take in order to ground the international role of sterling on a convenient basis of British world power.

As a general thing, after the first globalisation – or Gold Standard – had went into pieces in 1914, putting them together again was everything most leaders of the western powers were able to think about what should be done to repair the damage. That pattern lay behind such developments as the Dawes Plan, the following German monetary reform, the restoration of the pre-war gold and dollar value of sterling and of its convertibility, the chain of deflationist and authoritarian processes which affected a number of European countries in order to follow suit, and, finally, an interest-rate policy of the U. S. Federal Reserve that appeased European central bankers, the City of London – and American stock-market speculation.⁹ As it went out, this chain was a climax that blew up in Wall Street on October 16th, 1929 – to spread mass unemployment and starvation throughout the world.

IV

Franklin D. Roosevelt's inauguration speech on March 4th 1933 represented an overt break between U.S. policy and the U.S. and international financial establishment. As he loudly blamed before Congress the "money-lenders" who had "failed out of cowardice and ineptitude" and "flown", he was certainly offering many a further motive to all those who were spreading his popular picture as a "demagogue". Besides, he does not seem to have ever feared such an accusation – as persuading people was something he simply loved to do. Anyway, he knew pretty well what he was meaning.

As the former Wilsonian vice-presidential candidate of 1920 was elected as president in 1932, and took office in 1933, the earliest consequences of that were perceived rather as some steps back toward isolationism than as any further or faster steps toward international cooperation. As a matter of fact, some significant U.S. foreign policy moves might have been credited with the latter meaning while progressive Republicans had been successfully striving to take the lead on foreign affairs under the previous Harding and Hoover administrations. Thus, FDR's "bombshell message" to the London

international economic conference of June 1933 was a sudden shock to whoever believed that there is a time for demagoguery and a time for following the advices of some experienced people who know what business is. And, though, Roosevelt did nothing less than proclaim “the New Deal in one country” until a world New Deal might see the light, and a new internationalism be practiced.

Soon after 1933, such a peculiar kind of New Deal isolationism was used as a device in order to reject any British-led or British-inspired effort to produce the kind of world political landscape where any restoration of globalisation might rest upon. Of course, Britain had definitively fled from the Gold Standard since 1931 – just like the U.S. would do again exactly 40 years after – and British conservative leaders and officials were considering some new means in order to ensure the role of sterling as the main international currency – just as American conservative leaders and counsellors would do again after 1971.

To British conservative leaders and officials, that meant using the tools of diplomacy and of world power politics in the first place. As any American collaboration was missing, a significant degree of British-German cooperation in Europe – and of British-Japanese cooperation in the Far East – was chosen as a convenient background. After all, it was Germany's rise as a European power after 1870 that had occasionally paved the way to the establishment of the Gold Standard and of the globalised economic world system which was related to it. True, the German Nazi regime might now be regarded as a very dubious means in order to restore the stable and well-ordered kind of Germany which was envisaged. Should one take seriously the ideological zeal that the Nazi leaders were raising in popular rallies against “Jewish” gold fetters and the interest-rate constraints which were allegedly attempting to enslave the German people, one would rather have to worry. But there were also some motives to believe that those words were nothing but window-dressing to appease angry middle- and lower-class resentful people – whose mock subjugation of capitalism might be easily accepted as a rather low price for a much more effective warrant that Germany would never run any communist or communist-friendly course.

British appeasement policy toward Germany in the 1930s is one of the most popular commonplaces about twentieth-century history. Though, the alternatives that may be considered as meaningful counterfactual history are somewhat less clearly defined. After the doctrine of pre-emptive war was launched by the Bush administration in 2002, some writers have suggested

just that option as the right thing to be done before Nazi Germany might strike first – as she actually did.

Before discussing that issue, one should first notice that some sort of British endorsement had been a master card to Hitler's final game for access to power. He had won that card through committing himself to an internal crisis management policy that would involve neither inflation nor devaluation – and, of course, German understandable popular horror of both had also helped him against some last-minute competitors to the role of emergency leader. As it is known, some clever experts were going to help him to run a kind of full-employment policy which might fit such self-imposed constraints as the stability of the official exchange rate of the Reichsmark and its theoretical gold peg.¹⁰

That means, some alternative international monetary framework, and some related alternative policies on the part of key foreign countries, *might* have permitted to appease some alternative – that is, other than Nazi – German leadership. Of course, one should ideally replace too many surrounding factors in order to build any credible counterfactual development. And, however, that consideration might shed some light on the motives behind Roosevelt's perception, as early as June 1933, that the whole game ought to be changed.

As a matter of fact, it took just a few years until it became apparent that playing the Nazi card was going to backfire British efforts. The economic appeasement of Nazi Germany was ultimately proving too demanding to British and international financial interests – and, inversely, acquiescing to British and international financial interests was proving too demanding to Nazi concerns about the stability of their own regime. As matters had went so far, there seemingly was no manoeuvring room in order to shift from that kind of appeasement policy to some sort of containment policy – that is, in order to temptatively check Nazi Germany's expansionist drive through any means short of all-out war. Ultimately, it was only Nazi Germany that had the power of choosing peace. And the Nazi leaders might see no interest in that choice.

And they seem to have been not totally wrong. Their totalitarian leaders might hope to win wars; but they knew that peace – at least, peace with equals – would vanquish them out.

Yet, while observing Europe's new rush into havoc, Roosevelt seems to have tested some elements of an alternative way of driving and even appeasing totalitarian regimes into peace. It would be difficult to demonstrate that he ever cultivated any hope that these would work with

respect to Nazi Germany – although he still coupled a plea for general disarmament with a rather cool stance on the Sudetes crisis of 1938.

It was only after some years, while a ravaging world war was still burning, that he might lay the foundations of a world system that would induce another mighty totalitarian regime to accept the risk of peace. Yet, it should be repeated that Roosevelt's temptative appeasement of the Soviet Union at Yalta was far from resembling whatever might be done to appease Nazi Germany because *facts* were quite different.

Should one imagine that the Soviet leaders were really conceiving of any possibility of dictating their conditions and imposing their way of life on the rest of the world – which seems to be dubious – they simply lacked whatever means of pursuing that in 1945, and there were reasons to suppose that they were going to lack them for a long while. That opened a unique opportunity to couple a peaceful coexistence with Soviet totalitarianism with some kind of peaceful exhaustion of its living breath. And Roosevelt did know that.

History gave him reason in a broad sense – indeed, too broad. A somewhat peaceful overcoming of Soviet totalitarianism has actually occurred by the end of the twentieth century – and the very foundations which made it possible were precisely those that Roosevelt's work had laid down. Yet, the actual processes which brought to that end were rather merely “short of war” – at least, short of U.S.-Soviet direct confrontation – than properly peaceful. And that is also why the exhaustion of the Soviet system has occurred within a vacuum, which was ready to be filled with unexpected – but not unforeseeable – dire challenges.

Was there really no other way? Was the unfamiliar attitude of Soviet totalitarianism to international war fully exploited in order to induce it to peaceful changes? Were any such peaceful changes actually sought on the Western side, when, and by whom? Had that anything to do with what most Western leaders did see as the actual stakes of the Cold War? Or *what* was the Cold War *really* about? And, anyway, what was it perceived to be about on the Soviet side – both basically, and at different stages?

A further set of questions may be developed out of the former ones, as one raises them at the light of the problems of the present world – that is, at the light of the problems of the post-Cold War world. And that finally brings us back to present-day globalisation.

So, first, is present-day globalisation just what “the West” was striving to reach as the Cold War was engaged? And, anyway, what did “the West” mean – or, more clearly, *who* were “the West” – as the Cold War was started

– and at each single stage of it? Do “the West” and globalisation mean the same? Do “the West” and democracy mean the same? And what kind of relation is there between democracy and globalisation?

But, finally, there is a war on. So, what is the place of warfare in the post-Cold War world? More precisely: what is the place of warfare within the framework of globalisation? Is there anything *outside* the world of globalised markets that is challenging it? Or are we faced – one more time – with the inner *contradictions* of globalisation – just as before 1914?

Comparing trends inside the cycles of global market civilization¹¹ might suggest that whatever answer to the latter question should be somewhat more complex. The second globalisation of our time might prove more short-breathed, and less balanced, than the first one. Today’s chronic U.S. budget and balance-of-payments problems might induce to find that its current position is more comparable with that of Britain in the 1930s than with that of late-Victorian and even Edwardian Britain. On the political side, the current role of the United States might turn out to have something to share with the pattern of the British puzzling job of facing the Nazi cat – which had been formerly supposed to catch mice lest they ate financial harvests – after realizing to have fed it into a tiger.

That is, perhaps one should only substitute the dollar for sterling inside the latter pattern – as well as islamist regimes and movements for Nazi ideology – in order to reach a deeper sight on a main feature of current history: that is, on the bloody clash between the United States and some former partners of its within the framework of some grand strategy about money and power.

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- * This article is largely based on lectures given during the Seminar of Contemporary History for Master Degree in Languages for International Communication, University of Sassari. It is followed by some students' working papers with excerpts from panel discussions about them.
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- ⁴ See for instance Solomon F. Blum, 1941, *The World of Nations. A Study on the National Implications in the World of Karl Marx*, Columbia University Press, New York.
- ⁵ Barry Eichengreen, 1996, *Globalizing Capital. A History of the International Monetary System*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- ⁶ Attempts have recently been made to write a history of feelings that may account for that, which simply reveal how slaughtering may have been perceived as some kind of "gratification" as well: see for instance Joanna Bourke, 1999, *Intimate History of Killing. Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare*, Basic Books, New York. Though, while Bouke's work may convince us that much more people than supposed did find it exciting to kill people during World War I, it gives no element to conclude that they were either a majority or that the horrifying experience of trenches would not have aroused mutiny anyway (as it did in Russia) whenever the whole set of motives for mass behaviour would be modified.
- ⁷ See Otto Bauer, 1907, *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie. Sonderaufgabe aus dem II. Band der „Marx-Studien“*. Wien.; now reproduced in Otto Bauer, 1976, *Werkausgabe*, Vol. 1. Wien.
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- ¹¹ On that subject, see mainly Giovanni Arrighi, 1994, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Time*, Verso, London; Christopher Chase-Dunn, Thomas D. Hall, 1997, *Rise and Demise: Comparing World Systems*, Boulder, Co.: Westview; Christopher Chase-Dunn, 1999, "Globalisation: a World-System Perspective", *Journal of World-System Research*, 5 (2), (<http://jwsr.ucr.edu/archive/vol.5/number2/html/chase-dunn/index.shtml>)