CHAPTER FIVE
Against the Common Enemy

Tomorrow for the young the poets exploding like bombs,
The walks by the lake, the weeks of perfect communion;
  Tomorrow the bicycle races
Through the suburbs on summer evenings. But to-day the struggle . . .

– W.H. Auden, 'Spain', 1937

Dear Mum, Of all people I know you are the one that will feel it most, so my very last thoughts go to you. Don't blame anyone else for my death, because I myself chose my fate.

I don't know what to write to you, because, even though I have a clear head, I can't find the right words. I took my place in the Army of Liberation, and I die as the light of victory is already beginning to shine . . . I shall be shot very shortly with twenty three other comrades.

After the war you must claim your rights to a pension. They will let you have my things at the jail, only I am keeping Dad's undervest, because I don't want the cold to make me shiver . . .

Once again I say goodbye. Courage!

Your son.
Spartaco

– Spartaco Fontanot, metalworker, twenty-two years old, member of the French resistance group of Misak Manouchian, 1944 (Lettere, p. 306)

I

Public opinion research is the child of America in the 1930s, for the extension of the 'sample survey' of the market researchers into politics

essentially began with George Gallup in 1936. Among the early results of this new technique is one which would have amazed all US presidents before Franklin D. Roosevelt, and will amaze all readers who have grown up since the Second World War. When asked in January 1939 who Americans wanted to win, if a war broke out between the Soviet Union and Germany, 83 per cent favoured a Soviet victory against 17 per cent who were for Germany (Miller, 1989, pp. 283–84). In a century dominated by the confrontation between the anti-capitalist communism of the October revolution, represented by the USSR and anti-communist capitalism, of which the USA was the champion and chief exemplar, nothing looks more anomalous than this declaration of sympathy, or at least preference, for the home of world revolution over a strongly anti-communist country, whose economy was recognizably capitalist. All the more so as the Stalinist tyranny in the USSR was at that time, by general consent, at its worst.

The historic situation was certainly exceptional and comparatively short-lived. It lasted, at a maximum, from 1933 (when the USA recognized the USSR officially) until 1947 (when the two ideological camps confronted each other as enemies in the 'Cold War'), but more realistically, for the years from 1935 to 1945. In other words, it was determined by the rise and fall of Hitler Germany (1933–45) (see chapter 4), against which both the USA and the USSR made common cause, because they saw it as a greater danger than each of the two saw the other.

The reasons why they did so go beyond the range of conventional international relations or power politics, and this is what makes the anomalous alignment of states and movements which eventually fought and won the Second World War so significant. What eventually forged the union against Germany was the fact that it was not just any nation-state with reasons to feel discontented with its situation, but one whose policy and ambitions were determined by its ideology. In short, that it was a fascist power. So long as this was left aside or not appreciated, the ordinary calculations of *Realpolitik* held good. Germany could be opposed or conciliated, counter-balanced or, if need be, fought, depending on the interests of a country's state policy and the general situation. In fact, at one time or another between 1933 and 1941 all other major players in the international game treated Germany accordingly. London and Paris appeased Berlin (i.e. offered concessions at someone else's expense), Moscow exchanged a stance of opposition for one of helpful neutrality in return for territorial gains, and even Italy and Japan, whose interests aligned them with Germany, found that these interests also told them, in 1939, to stay out of the first stages of the Second World War. As it

happened, the logic of Hitler's war drew all of them as well as the USA into it eventually.

But as the 1930s advanced it became increasingly clear that more was at issue than the relative balance of power between the nation-states constituting the international (i.e. primarily the European) system. Indeed, the politics of the West – from the USSR through Europe to the Americas – can be best understood, not through the contest of states, but as an international ideological civil war. (As we shall see, this is not the best way to understand the politics of Afroasia and the Far East, which were dominated by the fact of colonialism (see chapter 7). And, as it turned out, the crucial lines in this civil war were not drawn between capitalism as such and communist social revolution, but between ideological families: on the one hand the descendants of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and the great revolutions including, obviously, the Russian revolution; on the other, its opponents. In short, the frontier ran not between capitalism and communism, but between what the nineteenth century would have called 'progress' and 'reaction' – only that these terms were no longer quite apposite.

It was an international war, because it raised essentially the same issues in most Western countries. It was a civil war, because the lines between the pro- and anti-fascist forces ran through each society. Never has there been a period when patriotism, in the sense of automatic loyalty to a citizen's national government, counted for less. When the Second World War ended, the governments of at least ten old European countries were headed by men who, at its beginning (or, in the case of Spain, at the start of the Civil War), had been rebels, political exiles or, at the very least, persons who had regarded their own government as immoral and illegitimate. Men and women, often from the heart of their countries' political classes, chose loyalty to communism (i.e. to the USSR) over that to their own state. The 'Cambridge spies' and, probably to greater practical effect, the Japanese members of the Sorge spy ring, were only two groups out of many.* On the other hand, the special term 'quisling' was invented – based on the name of a Norwegian Nazi – to describe the political forces within states attacked by Hitler who chose, out of conviction rather than expediency, to join their country's enemy.

* It has been argued that Sorge's information, based on the most reliable sources, that Japan did *not* intend to attack the USSR in late 1941, enabled Stalin to transfer vital reinforcements to the Western Front at a time when the Germans were on the outskirts of Moscow (Deakin and Storry, 1964, chapter 13; Andrew and Gordievsky, 1991, pp. 281–82).

This was true even of people moved by patriotism rather than global ideology. For even traditional patriotism was now divided. Strongly imperialist and anti-communist Conservatives like Winston Churchill, and men of reactionary Catholic background like de Gaulle, chose to fight Germany, not because of any special animus against fascism, but because of '*une certaine idée de la France*' or 'a certain idea of England'. Yet even for such as these, their commitment could be part of an international *civil* war, since their concept of patriotism was not necessarily their governments'. In going to London and declaring, on 18 June 1940, that under him 'Free France' would continue to fight Germany, Charles de Gaulle was committing an act of rebellion against the legitimate government of France, which had constitutionally decided to end the war, and was almost certainly supported in its decision by the great majority of Frenchmen at the time. No doubt Churchill, in such a situation, would have reacted in the same manner. Had Germany won the war, he would have been treated by his government as a traitor, as the Russians who fought with the Germans against the USSR were treated by their country after 1945. Just so Slovaks and Croats, whose countries acquired their first taste of (qualified) state independence as satellites of Hitler Germany regarded the leaders of their wartime states retrospectively as patriotic heroes or fascist collaborators on ideological grounds: members of each people fought on both sides.*

What bonded all these national civil divisions into a single global war, both international and civil, was the rise of Hitler Germany. Or, more precisely, between 1931 and 1941 the march to conquest and war of the combination of states – Germany, Italy and Japan, of which Hitler Germany became the central pillar. And Hitler Germany was both more ruthlessly and manifestly committed to the destruction of the values and institutions of the 'Western civilisation' of the Age of Revolution, and capable of carrying out its barbaric project. Step by step the potential victims of Japan, Germany and Italy watched the states of what came to be called 'the Axis' push their conquests forward, towards the war which, from 1931 on, seemed unavoidable. As the phrase went, 'fascism means war'. In 1931 Japan invaded Manchuria and set up a puppet state there. In 1932 Japan occupied China north of the Great Wall and landed in Shanghai. In 1933 Hitler came to power in Germany, with a programme which he made no attempt to conceal. In 1934 a brief civil war in Austria

* However, this should not be used to justify the atrocities committed by either side which, certainly in the case of the Croat state of 1942–45, probably in the case of the Slovak state, were greater than their opponents', and in any case indefensible.

eliminated democracy in Austria, and introduced a semi-fascist regime distinguished chiefly by resisting integration into Germany and (with Italian backing at the time) defeating a Nazi coup which murdered the Austrian premier. In 1935 Germany denounced the peace treaties and re-emerged as a major military and naval power, re-acquiring (by plebiscite) the Saar region on its western frontier and, contemptuously resigning from the League of Nations. In the same year Mussolini, with equal contempt for international opinion, invaded Ethiopia, which Italy proceeded to conquer and occupy as a colony in 1936–37, after which the state also tore up its membership of the League. In 1936, Germany recovered the Rhineland and, with open assistance and intervention from both Italy and Germany, a military coup in Spain initiated a major conflict, the Spanish Civil War, about which more will be said below. The two fascist powers entered a formal alignment, the Rome–Berlin Axis, while Germany and Japan concluded an 'Anti-Comintern Pact'. In 1937, not surprisingly, Japan invaded China and set out on a course of open warfare which did not cease until 1945. In 1938 Germany plainly also felt the time for conquest had come. Austria was invaded and annexed in March, without military resistance, and, after various threats, the Munich agreement of October broke up Czechoslovakia and transferred large parts of it to Hitler, again peacefully. The remainder was occupied in March 1939, encouraging Italy, which had not demonstrated imperial ambitions for a few months, to occupy Albania. Almost immediately a Polish crisis, which arose once again out of German territorial demands, paralysed Europe. Out of it came the European war of 1939–41, which grew into the Second World War.

However, another thing wove the threads of national politics into a single international web: the consistent and increasingly spectacular feebleness of liberal-democratic states (which happened also to be the victor states of the First World War); their inability or unwillingness to act, singly or in conjunction, to resist the advance of their enemies. As we have seen, it was this crisis of liberalism which strengthened both the arguments and the forces of fascism and authoritarian government (see chapter 4). The Munich agreement of 1938 perfectly demonstrated this combination of confident aggression on one side, fear and concession on the other, which is why for generations the very word 'Munich' became a synonym, in Western political discourse, for craven retreat. The shame of Munich, which was felt almost immediately, even by those who signed the agreement, lay not simply in handing Hitler a cheap triumph, but in the palpable fear of war that preceded it, and the even more palpable sense of relief that it had been avoided at any cost. '*Bande de cons*' the

French premier Daladier is said to have muttered contemptuously when, having signed away the life of an ally of France, he expected to be hissed on his return to Paris, but met nothing but delirious cheers. The popularity of the USSR, and the reluctance to criticise what was happening there, was chiefly due to its consistent opposition to Nazi Germany, so different from the hesitations of the West. The shock of the pact with Germany in August 1939 was all the greater.

II

The mobilization of the full potential of support against fascism, i.e. against the German camp, therefore, was a triple call for union of all political forces which had a common interest in resisting the Axis advance; for an actual policy of resistance, and for governments prepared to carry out such a policy. In fact, it took more than eight years to achieve this mobilization – ten, if we date the start of the race to world war in 1931. For the response to all three calls was, inevitably, hesitant, muffled or mixed.

The call for anti-fascist unity was, in some ways, likely to win the most immediate response, since fascism publicly treated liberals of various kinds, socialists and communists, any kind of democratic regimes and soviet regimes as enemies to be equally destroyed. In the old English phrase, they had all to hang together if they did not want to hang separately. The communists, who hitherto had been the most divisive force on the Enlightenment Left, concentrating their fire (as is, alas, characteristic of political radicals) not against the obvious enemy but against the nearest potential competitor, above all the Social Democrats (see chapter 2) changed course within eighteen months of Hitler's accession to power and turned themselves into the most systematic and, as usual, the most efficient, champions of anti-fascist unity. This removed the major obstacle to unity on the Left, though not deeply rooted mutual suspicions.

Essentially the strategy put forward (in conjunction with Stalin) by the Communist International (which had chosen as its new General Secretary George Dimitrov, a Bulgarian whose brave public defiance of the Nazi authorities in the Reichstag fire trial of 1933 had electrified anti-fascists everywhere)* was one of concentric circles. The united forces of labour

* Within a month of Hitler's accession to power, the German parliament building in Berlin was mysteriously burned down. The Nazi government immediately accused the Communist Party and used the occasion to suppress it. The communists accused

(the 'United Front') would form the foundation of a wider electoral and political alliance with democrats and liberals (the 'Popular Front'). Beyond this, as the advance of Germany continued, the communists envisaged an even wider extension into a 'National Front' of all who, irrespective of ideology and political beliefs, regarded fascism (or the Axis powers) as the primary danger. This extension of the anti-fascist alliance beyond the political Centre to the Right – the French communists' 'hand stretched out to the Catholics', or the British ones' readiness to embrace the notoriously red-baiting Winston Churchill – met with more resistance, on the traditional Left until the logic of war finally imposed it. However, the union of Centre and Left made political sense, and 'Popular Fronts' were established in France (which pioneered this device) and Spain, which pushed back local offensives of the Right, and won dramatic election victories in Spain (February 1936) and France (May 1936).

These victories dramatized the costs of past disunion, because the united electoral lists of Centre and Left won substantial parliamentary majorities – but though they showed a striking shift of opinion *within* the Left, notably in France, in favour of the Communist Party, they did not indicate any serious widening of political support for anti-fascism. In fact, the triumph of the French Popular Front, which produced the first French government ever headed by a Socialist, the intellectual Léon Blum (1872–1950), was achieved by an increase of barely one per cent of the united Radical-Socialist-Communist vote of 1932, and the electoral triumph of the Spanish Popular Front by a slightly larger shift, but one that still left the new government with almost half the voters against it (and a Right somewhat stronger than before). Still, these victories pumped hope, even euphoria, into the local labour and socialist movements; more than can be said for the British Labour Party, shattered by slump and political crisis in 1931 – it was reduced to a rump of fifty – but which, four years later, had not quite recovered its pre-slump vote, or much more than half of its 1929 seats. Between 1931 and 1935 the Conservative vote merely fell from c. 61 per cent to c. 54 per cent. The so-called 'National' government of Britain, headed from 1937 on by Neville

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the Nazis of having organized the fire for this purpose. An unbalanced Dutch loner of revolutionary sympathies, Van der Lubbe, as well as the leader of the communist parliamentary group and three Bulgarians working in Berlin for the Communist International, were arrested and tried. Van der Lubbe was certainly involved in the arson, the four arrested communists certainly not, nor obviously was the KPD. Current historical scholarship does not support the suggestion of a Nazi provocation.

Chamberlain, who became the synonym for the 'appeasement' of Hitler, rested on solid majority support. There is no reason to suppose that, had war not broken out in 1939 and had an election been held in 1940, as it would have had to have been, the Conservatives would not have won it again comfortably. Indeed, except for most of Scandinavia, where the Social Democrats gained ground strongly, there was no sign of any significant electoral shift to the Left in Western Europe in the 1930s, and some fairly massive shifts to the Right in those parts of eastern and south-eastern Europe in which elections were still held. There is a sharp contrast between the old and new worlds. Nothing like the dramatic shift from Republicans to Democrats in 1932 (their presidential vote rose from between fifteen and sixteen to almost twenty-eight millions in four years) occurred anywhere in Europe, but it must be said that, in electoral terms, Franklin D. Roosevelt reached his peak in 1932, even though (to everyone's surprise except the people's) he barely fell short of it in 1936.

Anti-fascism, therefore, organized the traditional adversaries of the Right, but did not swell their numbers; it mobilized minorities more easily than majorities. Among these minorities, intellectuals and those concerned with the arts were particularly open to its appeal (except for an international current of literature inspired by the nationalist and anti-democratic Right – see chapter 6), because the arrogant and aggressive hostility of National Socialism to the values of civilization as hitherto conceived was instantly obvious in the fields that concerned them. Nazi racism immediately led to the mass exodus of Jewish and Left-wing scholars who scattered across the remaining world of toleration. Nazi hostility to intellectual freedom almost immediately purged the German universities of perhaps one third of their teachers. The attacks on 'modernist' culture, the public burning of 'Jewish' and other undesirable books, began virtually as soon as Hitler entered government. However, while ordinary citizens might disapprove of the more brutal barbarities of the system – the concentration camps and the reduction of the German Jews (which included all those with at least one Jewish grandparent) to a segregated underclass without rights – a surprisingly large number saw them, at worst, as limited aberrations. After all, concentration camps were still primarily deterrents for potential communist opposition and jails for the cadres of subversion, an object with which many conventional conservatives had some sympathy, and when war broke out there were no more than about 8,000 persons in all of them. (Their expansion into an *univers concentrationnaire* of terror, torture and death for hundreds of thousands, even millions, happened during the war.) And, until the war, Nazi policy, however barbarous the treatment of the Jews, still appeared

to envisage the 'final solution' of the 'Jewish problem' as mass expulsion rather than mass extermination. Germany itself appeared to the non-political observer as a stable, indeed an economically flourishing country with a popular government, though with some unattractive characteristics. Those who read books, including the Führer's own *Mein Kampf*, were more likely to recognize, in the bloodthirsty rhetoric of racist agitators and the localized torture and murder of Dachau or Buchenwald, the threat of an entire world built on the deliberate reversal of civilization. Western intellectuals (though at this time only a fraction of students, then overwhelmingly a contigent of sons and future entrants of the 'respectable' middle classes) were therefore the first social stratum mobilised en masse against fascism in the 1930s. It was still a rather small stratum, though an unusually influential one, not least because it included the journalists who, in the non-fascist countries of the West, played a crucial role in alerting even more conservative readers and decision-makers to the nature of National Socialism.

The actual policy of resistance to the rise of the fascist camp was, once again, simple and logical on paper. It was to unite all countries against the aggressors (the League of Nations provided a potential framework for this), to make no concessions to them, and, by the threat and, if necessary, the reality of common action, to deter or defeat them. The USSR's foreign commissar Maxim Litvinov (1876–1952) made himself the spokesman of this 'Collective Security'. Easier said than done. The major obstacle was that, then as now, even states which shared the fear and suspicion of the aggressors had other interests which divided them or could be used to divide them.

How far the most obvious division counted, that between the Soviet Union committed in theory to the overthrow of bourgeois regimes and the end of their empires everywhere, and the other states, now saw the USSR as the inspirer and instigator of subversion, is not clear. While governments – all the main ones after 1933 recognized the USSR – were always prepared to come to terms with it when it suited their purposes, some of their members and agencies continued to regard Bolshevism, at home and abroad, as the essential enemy, in the spirit of the post-1945 cold wars. The British Intelligence services were admittedly exceptional in concentrating against the Red menace to such an extent that they did not abandon it as their main target until the middle 1930s (Andrew, 1985, p. 530). Nevertheless many a good conservative felt, especially in Britain, that the best of all solutions would be a German–Soviet war, weakening, perhaps destroying, both enemies, and a defeat of Bolshevism by a weakened Germany would be no bad thing. The sheer reluctance of

Western governments to enter into effective negotiations with the Red state, even in 1938–39 when the urgency of an anti-Hitler alliance was no longer denied by anyone, is only too patent. Indeed, it was the fear of being left to confront Hitler alone which eventually drove Stalin, since 1934 the unswerving champion of an alliance with the West against him, into the Stalin–Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939, by which he hoped to keep the USSR out of the war while Germany and the Western powers would weaken one another, to the benefit of his state which, by the secret clauses of the pact, acquired a large part of the western territories lost by Russia after the revolution. The calculation proved wrong, but, like the abortive attempts to create a common front against Hitler, they demonstrate the divisions between states which made possible the extraordinary and virtually unresisted rise of Nazi Germany between 1933 and 1939.

Moreover, geography, history and economics gave governments different perspectives on the world. The continent of Europe as such was of little or no interest to Japan and the USA, whose policies were Pacific and American, and to Britain, still committed to a worldwide empire and a global maritime strategy, though too weak to maintain either. The countries of Eastern Europe were squeezed between Germany and Russia and this obviously determined their policies, especially when (as it turned out) the Western powers were unable to protect them. Several had acquired formerly Russian territories after 1917, and, though hostile to Germany, therefore resisted any anti-German alliance which would bring Russian forces back on their lands. And yet, as the Second World War was to demonstrate, the only effective anti-fascist alliance was one which included the USSR. As for economics, countries like Britain which knew they had waged a First World War beyond their financial capacities, recoiled from the costs of rearmament. In short, there was a wide gap between recognizing the Axis powers as a major danger and doing something about it.

Liberal democracy (which by definition did not exist on the fascist or authoritarian side) widened this gap. It slowed down or prevented political decision, notably in the USA, and unquestionably made it difficult, and sometimes impossible, to pursue unpopular policies. No doubt some governments used this to justify their own torpor, but the example of the USA shows that even a strong and popular president like F.D. Roosevelt was unable to carry his anti-fascist foreign policy against the opinion of the electorate. But for Pearl Harbor, and Hitler's declaration of war, the USA would almost certainly have continued to stay out of the Second World War. It is not clear under what circumstances it could have come in.

Yet what weakened the resolution of the crucial European democracies, France and Great Britain, was not so much the political mechanisms of democracy, as the memory of the First World War. This was a wound whose pain was felt both by voters and governments, because the impact of that war had been both unprecedented and universal. For both France and Britain it was, in human (though not in material) terms, far greater than the impact of the Second World War proved to be (see chapter 1). Another such war had to be avoided at almost all costs. It was certainly the last of all resorts of politics.

A reluctance to go to war must not be confused with a refusal to fight, though the potential military morale of the French, who had suffered more than any other belligerent country, was certainly weakened by the trauma of 1914–18. Nobody went into the Second World War singing, not even the Germans. On the other hand unqualified (non-religious) pacifism, though quite popular in Britain in the 1930s, was never a mass movement and faded away in 1940. In spite of the extensive tolerance for 'conscientious objectors' in the Second World War, the numbers who claimed the right to refuse to fight were small (Calvocoressi, 1987, p. 63).

On the non-communist Left, even more emotionally committed to hatred of war and militarism after 1918 than it had been (in theory) before 1914, peace at any price remained a minority position, even in France where it was strongest. In Britain George Lansbury, a pacifist who, by the accident of an electoral holocaust, found himself at the head of the Labour Party after 1931, was efficiently and brutally removed from leadership in 1935. Unlike the French socialist-headed Popular Front government of 1936–38, British Labour could be criticized, not for lack of firmness towards the fascist aggressors, but for refusing to support the necessary military measures to make resistance effective, such as rearmament and conscription. So, for the same reasons, could the communists, who were never tempted by pacifism.

The Left was indeed in a quandary. On the one hand the strength of anti-fascism was that it mobilized those who feared war, both the last and the unknown horrors of the next. That fascism meant war was a convincing reason for fighting it. On the other hand, resistance to fascism which did not envisage the use of arms could not succeed. What is more, the hope of bringing about the collapse of Nazi Germany, or even Mussolini's Italy, by collective but peaceable firmness, rested on illusions about Hitler and about the supposed forces of opposition within Germany. In any case we who lived through those times *knew* that there would be a war, even as we sketched out unconvincing scenarios for avoiding it. We – the historian may also appeal to his memory – *expected* to fight in the

next war, and probably to die. And as anti-fascists we had no doubt that when it came to the point we had no choice but to fight.

Nevertheless, the political dilemma of the Left cannot be used to explain the failure of governments, if only because effective preparations for war did not depend on resolutions passed (or not passed) at party congresses; or even, for a period of several years, on the fear of elections. Yet governments, and in particular the French and the British, had also been indelibly scarred by the Great War. France had emerged from it bled white, and still potentially a smaller and a weaker power than a defeated Germany. France was nothing without allies against a revived Germany, and the only European countries which had an equal interest in allying with France, Poland and the Habsburg succession states, were plainly too weak for the purpose. The French put their money on a line of fortifications (the 'Maginot Line', named after a soon-forgotten minister) which, they hoped, would deter the attacking Germans by the prospect of losses like those of Verdun (see chapter 1). Beyond this they could only look to Britain and, after 1933, the USSR.

The British governments were equally conscious of fundamental weakness. Financially they could not afford another war. Strategically, they no longer had a navy capable of simultaneously operating in the three great oceans and in the Mediterranean. At the same time, the problem that really worried them was not what happened in Europe, but how to hold together, with patently insufficient forces, a global empire geographically larger than ever before, but also and visibly on the verge of decomposition.

Both states thus knew themselves to be too weak to defend a status quo largely established in 1919 to suit them. Both also knew that this status quo was unstable, and impossible to maintain. Neither had anything to gain from another war, and plenty to lose. The obvious and logical policy was to negotiate with a revived Germany in order to establish a more durable European pattern, and this, beyond any doubt, meant making concessions to Germany's growing power. Unfortunately the revived Germany was Adolf Hitler's.

The so-called policy of 'appeasement' has had such a bad press since 1939 that we must remember how sensible it seemed to so many Western politicians who were not viscerally anti-German or passionately anti-fascist on principle, and especially in Britain, where changes on the continental map, especially in 'far-off countries of which we know little' (Chamberlain on Czechoslovakia in 1938), did not raise the blood pressure. (The French were understandably far more nervous about *any* initiatives favouring Germany, which must sooner or later turn against

themselves, but France was weak.) A Second World War, it could safely be predicted, would ruin the British economy, and disband large parts of the British Empire. Indeed, this is what happened. Though it was a price socialists, communists, colonial liberation movements and President F.D. Roosevelt were only too ready to pay for the defeat of fascism, let us not forget that it was excessive from the point of view of rational British imperialists.

Yet compromise and negotiation with Hitler's Germany were impossible, because the policy objectives of National Socialism were irrational and unlimited. Expansion and aggression were built into the system and, short of accepting German domination in advance, i.e. choosing not to resist the Nazi advance, war was unavoidable, sooner rather than later. Hence the central role of ideology in the formation of policy in the 1930s: if it determined the aims of Nazi Germany, it excluded *realpolitik* for the other side. Those who recognized that there could be no compromise with Hitler, which was a realistic assessment of the situation, did so for entirely unpragmatic reasons. They regarded fascism as intolerable on principle and *a priori*, or (as in the case of Winston Churchill) they were driven by an equally *a priori* idea of what their country and empire 'stood for', and could not sacrifice. The paradox of Winston Churchill was that this great romantic, whose political judgment had been almost consistently wrong on every matter since 1914 – including the assessment of military strategy on which he prided himself – was realistic on the one question of Germany.

Conversely, the political realists of appeasement were entirely unrealistic in their assessment of the situation, even when the impossibility of a negotiated settlement with Hitler became obvious to any reasonable observer in 1938–39. This was the reason for the black tragicomedy of March–September 1939, which ended in a war nobody wanted at a time and in a place nobody wanted it (not even Germany), and which actually left Britain and France without any idea of what, as belligerents, they were supposed to do, until the *blitzkrieg* of 1940 swept them aside. In the face of the evidence they themselves accepted, the appeasers in Britain and France still could not bring themselves to negotiate seriously for an alliance with the USSR, without which war could neither be postponed nor won, and without which the guarantees against German attack suddenly and heedlessly scattered around Eastern Europe by Neville Chamberlain – without, incredible as it may seem, consulting or even adequately *informing* the USSR – were waste paper. London and Paris did not want to fight, but at most to deter by a show of strength. This did not look plausible for a moment to Hitler, or for that matter to Stalin,

whose negotiators asked vainly for proposals for joint strategic operations in the Baltic. Even as the German armies marched into Poland, Neville Chamberlain's government was still prepared to do a deal with Hitler, as Hitler had calculated he would (Watt, 1989, p. 215).

Hitler miscalculated, and the Western states declared war, not because their statesmen wanted it, but because Hitler's own policy after Munich cut the ground from under the appeasers' feet. It was he who mobilized the hitherto uncommitted masses against fascism. Essentially the German occupation of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 converted British public opinion to resistance, and in doing so forced the hand of a reluctant government; which in turn forced the hand of a French government that had no other option except to go along with its only effective ally. For the first time the fight against Hitler Germany united rather than divided the British, but – as yet – to no purpose. As the Germans quickly and ruthlessly destroyed Poland, and partitioned its remains with Stalin, who retreated into a doomed neutrality, a 'phony war' succeeded an implausible peace in the West.

No kind of *realpolitik* can explain the appeasers' policy after Munich. Once a war seemed sufficiently likely – and who in 1939 doubted this? – the only thing to do was to prepare for it as effectively as possible, and this was not done. For Britain, even Chamberlain's Britain, was certainly not prepared to accept a Hitler-dominated Europe before it happened, even if after the collapse of France there was some serious support for a negotiated peace – i.e. for accepting defeat. Even in France, where pessimism verging on defeatism was far more common among politicians and military men, the government did not intend to give up the ghost, or do so, until the army had collapsed in June 1940. Their policy was half-hearted, because they neither dared follow the logic of power-politics, nor the *a priori* convictions of resisters, to whom *nothing* could be more important than fighting fascism (as fascism or as Hitler Germany) or those of anti-communists, to whom 'Hitler's defeat would mean the collapse of the authoritarian systems which constitute the principle rampart against communist revolution' (Thierry Maulnier, 1938 in Ory, 1976, p. 24). It is not easy to say what determined these statesmen's actions, since they were moved not only by intellect, but by prejudices, preconceptions, hopes and fears which silently skewed their vision. There were the memories of the First World War and the self-doubt of politicians who saw their liberal democratic political systems and economies in what might well be final retreat; a state of mind more typical of the Continent than of Britain. There was the genuine uncertainty about whether, under such circumstances, the unpredictable results of a successful

policy of resistance could justify the prohibitive costs that it might entail. For, after all, for most British and French politicians the best that could be achieved was to preserve a not very satisfactory and probably unsustainable status quo. And behind all this there was the question whether, if the status quo was doomed anyway, fascism was not better than the alternative, social revolution and Bolshevism. If the only kind of fascism on offer had been the Italian kind, few conservative or moderate politicians would have hesitated. Even Winston Churchill was pro-Italian. The problem was, that they faced not Mussolini but Hitler. Still, it is not without significance that the main hope of so many governments and diplomats of the 1930s, was to stabilize Europe by coming to terms with Italy, or at least to detach Mussolini from the alliance with his disciple. It did not work, even though Mussolini himself was sufficiently realistic to keep some freedom of action until, in June 1940, he then concluded, mistakenly but not altogether unreasonably, that the Germans had won and declared war himself.

III

The issues of the 1930s, whether fought out within states or between them, were thus transnational. Nowhere was this more immediately evident than in the Spanish Civil War of 1936–39, which became the quintessential expression of this global confrontation.

In retrospect it may seem surprising that this conflict *instantly* mobilized the sympathies of both Left and Right in Europe and the Americas, and notably of the Western world's intellectuals. Spain was a peripheral part of Europe, and its history had been persistently out of phase with the rest of the continent from which it was divided by the wall of the Pyrenees. It had kept out of all European wars since Napoleon, and was to keep out of the Second World War. Since the early nineteenth century its affairs had been of no real concern to European governments, though the USA had provoked a brief war against it in 1898 in order to rob it of the last remaining parts of the old worldwide empire of the sixteenth century, Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines.* In fact, and contrary to the beliefs of this author's generation, the Spanish Civil War was not the first phase of the Second World War, and the victory of General Franco

* Spain retained a foothold in Morocco, disputed by the warlike local Berber tribesmen, who also provided the Spanish army with formidable fighting units, and some African territories further south, forgotten by everyone.

who, as we have seen, cannot even be described as a fascist, had no significant global consequences. It merely kept Spain (and Portugal) isolated from the rest of world history for another thirty years.

Yet it was no accident that the domestic politics of that notoriously anomalous and self-contained country became the symbol of a global struggle in the 1930s. They raised the fundamental political issues of the time: on the one side, democracy and social revolution, Spain being the only country in Europe where it was ready to erupt; on the other, a uniquely uncompromising camp of counter-revolution or reaction, inspired by a Catholic Church which rejected everything that had happened in the world since Martin Luther. Curiously enough, neither the parties of Muscovite communism nor those inspired by fascism were of serious significance there before the Civil War, for Spain went its own eccentric way both on the anarchist ultra-Left and on the Carlist ultra-Right.*

The well-meaning liberals, anti-clerical and masonic in the nineteenth-century manner of Latin countries, who took over from the Bourbons by a peaceful revolution in 1931, could neither contain the social ferment of the Spanish poor, in both cities and countryside, nor defuse it by effective social (i.e. primarily agrarian) reforms. In 1933 they were pushed aside by conservative governments whose policy of repressing agitations and local insurrections, such as the rising of the Asturian miners in 1934, simply helped to build up the potential revolutionary pressure. At this stage the Spanish Left discovered the Comintern's Popular Front, which was being urged on it from neighbouring France. The idea that all parties should form a single electoral front against the Right made sense to a Left that did not quite know what to do. Even the Anarchists, in this their last mass stronghold in the world, were inclined to ask their supporters to practise the bourgeois vice of voting in an election, which they had hitherto rejected as unworthy of the real revolutionary, though no anarchists actually sullied themselves by standing for election. In February 1936 the Popular Front won a small, but by no means sweeping majority of votes and, thanks to its coordination, a substantial majority of seats in the Spanish Parliament or *Cortes*. This victory produced not so much an effective government of the Left as a fissure through which the accumulated lava of social discontent could begin to spurt. This became increasingly evident in the next months.

At this stage, orthodox Right-wing politics having failed, Spain reverted

* Carlism was a fiercely monarchist and ultra-traditionalist movement with strong peasant support, mainly in Navarre. The Carlist fought civil wars in the 1830s and 1870s in support of one branch of the Spanish royal family.

to a form of politics it had pioneered, and which had become characteristic of the Iberian world: the *pronunciamento*, or military coup. But just as the Spanish Left found itself looking beyond national frontiers to Popular Frontism, so the Spanish Right was drawn to the fascist powers. This was not so much through the modest local fascist movement, the Falange, as through the Church and the monarchists, for whom there was little difference between the equally godless liberals and communists, and no possibility of compromise with either. Italy and Germany hoped to draw some moral and perhaps political benefit from a Right-wing victory. The Spanish generals who began seriously to plot a coup after the election needed financial support and practical help, which they negotiated with Italy.

However, moments of democratic victory and political mass mobilization are not ideal for military coups, which rely for success on the convention that civilians, not to mention uncommitted sections of the armed forces, accept the signals, just as military putschists whose signals are not accepted, quietly recognize their failure. The classic *pronunciamento* is a game best played at times when the masses are in recess or governments have lost legitimacy. These conditions were not present in Spain. The generals' coup of 17 July 1936 succeeded in some towns, and was met with passionate resistance from people and loyal forces in others. It failed to capture the two main cities of Spain, including the capital, Madrid. In parts of Spain it therefore precipitated the social revolution it had been intended to pre-empt. In all of Spain it became a long-drawn-out civil war between the legitimate and duly elected government of the Republic, now extended to include socialists, communists and even some anarchists, but uneasily cohabiting with the forces of mass rebellion which had defeated the coup, and the insurgent generals who presented themselves as nationalist crusaders against communism. The youngest, and most politically intelligent of the generals, Francisco Franco y Bahamonde (1892–1975) found himself the leader of a new regime, which in the course of the war became an authoritarian state, with a single party – a Right-wing conglomerate ranging from fascism to old monarchists and Carlist ultras, the absurdly named Spanish Traditionalist Falange. But both sides in the Civil War needed support. Both appealed to their potential backers.

The reaction of anti-fascist opinion to the rising of the generals was immediate and spontaneous, unlike the reaction of the non-fascist governments, which was distinctly more cautious, even when, like the USSR and the socialist-led Popular Front government that had just come to power in France, they were strongly for the Republic. (Italy and Germany

immediately sent arms and men to their side.) France was anxious to help, and gave some (officially 'deniable') assistance to the Republic until urged into an official policy of 'non-intervention' by internal divisions and the British government, deeply hostile to what they saw as the advance of social revolution and bolshevism in the Iberian Peninsula. Middle-class and conservative opinion in the West generally shared this attitude, though (except for the Catholic Church and the pro-fascists) it did not passionately identify with the generals. Russia, though firmly on the Republican side, also joined the British-sponsored Non-Intervention Agreement, whose object, to prevent German and Italian help to the generals, nobody expected, or wanted, to achieve and which consequently 'graduated from equivocation to hypocrisy' (Thomas, 1977, p. 395). From September 1936 on, Russia wholeheartedly, if not quite officially, sent men and materials to support the Republic. Non-intervention, which meant merely that Britain and France refused to do anything about the massive intervention of the Axis powers in Spain, and in doing so abandoned the Republic, confirmed both fascists and anti-fascists in their contempt for the non-interveners. It also enormously raised the prestige of the USSR, the only power that helped the legitimate government of Spain, and of the communists inside and outside that country, not only because they organized this help, internationally, but also because they soon established themselves as the backbone of the Republic's military effort.

Yet even before the Soviets mobilized their resources, all from the liberals to the outer reaches of the Left immediately recognized the Spanish struggle as their own. As the finest British poet of the decade, W.H. Auden, wrote

> On that arid square, that fragment nipped off from hot
> Africa, soldered so crudely to inventive Europe;
> On that table-land scored by rivers,
> Our thoughts have bodies; the menacing shapes of our fever
> Are precise and alive.

What is more: there, and only there, was the endless and demoralizing retreat of the Left being halted by men and women who fought the advance of the Right in arms. Even before the Communist International began to organize the International Brigades (whose first contingents arrived at their future base in mid-October), indeed before the first organized volunteer columns appeared at the front (those of the Italian

liberal-socialist movement *Giustizia e Libertá*), foreign volunteers already fought for the Republic in some quantities. Eventually over forty thousand young foreigners from over fifty nations* went to fight and many to die in a country about which most of them probably knew no more than what it looked like in a school atlas. It is significant that no more than a thousand foreign volunteers fought on the Franco side (Thomas, 1977, p. 980). For the benefit of readers who have grown up in the moral milieu of the late twentieth century, it must be added that these were neither mercenaries, nor, except in a very few cases, adventurers. They went to fight for a cause.

What Spain meant to liberals and those on the Left who lived through the 1930s, is now difficult to remember, though for many of us the survivors, now all past the Biblical life-span, it remains the only political cause which, even in retrospect, appears as pure and compelling as it did in 1936. It now seems to belong to a prehistoric past, even in Spain. Yet at the time it seemed to those who fought fascism to be the central front of their battle, because the only one in which action never ceased for over two-and-a-half years, the only one where they could participate as individuals, if not in uniform, then by collecting money, by helping refugees, and by the never-ending campaigns to put pressure on our own chicken-hearted governments. And the gradual, but apparently irreversible advance of the nationalist side, the foreseeable defeat and death of the Republic, merely made the need to forge a union against world fascism more desperately urgent.

For the Spanish Republic, in spite of all our sympathies and the (insufficient) help it received, fought a rearguard action against defeat from the start. In retrospect, it is clear that this was due to its own weaknesses. By the standards of the people's wars of the twentieth century, won or lost, the Republican war of 1936–39, with all its heroism, rates poorly; in part because it made no serious use of that powerful weapon against superior conventional forces, guerrilla warfare – a strange omission in the country which gave this form of irregular warfare its name. Unlike the Nationalists, who enjoyed a single military and political direction, the Republic remained politically divided, and – in spite of the communists' contribution – did not acquire a single military will and

* They included perhaps 10,000 French, 5,000 Germans and Austrians, 5,000 Poles and Ukrainians, 3,350 Italians, 2,800 from the USA, 2,000 British, 1,500 Yugoslavs, 1,500 Czechs, 1,000 Hungarians, 1,000 Scandinavians and a number of others. The 2–3,000 Russians can hardly be classed as volunteers. About 7,000 of these were said to be Jews (Thomas, 1977, p. 982–84; Paucker, 1991, p. 15).

strategic command, or not until it was too late. The best it could do was from time to time to throw back potentially fatal offensives by the other side, thus prolonging a war which might well have been effectively ended in November 1936 by the capture of Madrid.

At the time, the Spanish Civil War hardly looked like a good omen for the defeat of fascism. Internationally, it was a miniature version of a European war, fought between fascist and communist states, the latter notably more cautious and less determined than the former. The Western democracies remained sure about nothing except their non-involvement. Internally it was a war in which the mobilisation of the Right proved far more effective than that of the Left. It ended in total defeat, several hundred thousand dead, several hundreds of thousands of refugees in such countries as would receive them, including most of the surviving intellectual and artistic talents of Spain, which had, with the rarest exceptions, rallied to the Republic. The Communist International had mobilized all its formidable talents for the Spanish Republic. The future Marshal Tito, liberator and leader of Communist Yugoslavia, organized the flow of recruits to the International Brigades from Paris; Palmiro Togliatti, the Italian Communist leader, in effect ran the inexperienced Spanish Communist Party, and was among the last to escape from the country in 1939. It also failed, and knew it was failing, as did the USSR which detached some of its most impressive military minds for service in Spain (e.g. the future Marshals Konev, Malinovsky, Voronov and Rokossovsky and the future Commander of the Soviet navy, Admiral Kuznetsov).

IV

And yet, the Spanish Civil War anticipated and prepared the shape of the forces which were, within a few years of Franco's victory, to destroy fascism. It anticipated the politics of the Second World War, that unique alliance of national fronts ranging from patriotic conservatives to social revolutionaries, for the defeat of the national enemy, and simultaneously for social regeneration. For the Second World War was, for those on the winning side, not merely a struggle for military victory, but – even in Britain and the USA – for a better society. Nobody dreamed of a post-war return to 1939 – or even to 1928 or to 1918, as statesmen after the First World War had dreamed of a return to the world of 1913. A British government under Winston Churchill committed itself, in the midst of a desperate war, to a comprehensive welfare state and full employment. It

was no accident that the Beveridge Report, which recommended all these, came out in as black a year as any in Britain's desperate war: 1942. The post-war plans of the USA dealt only incidentally with the problem of how to make another Hitler impossible. The real intellectual efforts of the post-war planners were devoted to learning the lessons of the Great Slump and the 1930s, so that these could not recur. As for the resistance movements in the countries defeated and occupied by the Axis, the inseparability of liberation and social revolution or at least major transformation, went without saying. Moreover, throughout formerly occupied Europe, east and west, the same kinds of governments emerged from victory: administrations of national union based on all the forces that had opposed fascism, without ideological distinction. For the first, and only, time in history, communist ministers sat beside conservative, liberal or social-democratic ministers in most European states, admittedly a situation not destined to last long.

Even though a common threat drew them together, this astonishing unity of opposites, Roosevelt and Stalin, Churchill and the British socialists, de Gaulle and the French communists, would have been impossible without a certain slackening of hostilities and mutual suspicions between the champions and the adversaries of the October revolution. The Spanish Civil War made this a great deal easier. Even anti-revolutionary governments could not forget that the Spanish government, under a Liberal president and prime minister, had complete constitutional and moral legitimacy when it appealed for aid against its insurgent generals. Even those democratic statesmen who betrayed it, out of fear for their own skins, had a bad conscience. Both the Spanish government and, more to the point, the communists who were increasingly influential in its affairs, insisted that social revolution was not their object, and, indeed, visibly did what they could to control and reverse it, to the horror of revolutionary enthusiasts. Revolution, both insisted, was not the issue: the defence of democracy was.

The interesting point is that this was not mere opportunism or, as the purists on the ultra-Left thought, treason to the revolution. It reflected a deliberate shift from an insurrectionary to a gradualist, from a confrontational to a negotiating, even a parliamentary, way to power. In the light of the Spanish people's reaction to the coup, which was undoubtedly revolutionary,* communists could now see how an essentially defensive tactic, imposed by the desperate situation of their movement after Hitler's

* In the words of the Comintern, the Spanish revolution was 'an integral part of the anti-fascist struggle which rests on the widest social base. It is a popular revolution. It is a national revolution. It is an anti-fascist revolution.' (Ercoli, October 1936, cited in Hobsbawm, 1986, p. 175.)

accession to power, opened perspectives of advance, i.e. a 'democracy of a new type', arising out of the imperatives of both wartime politics and economics. Landlords and capitalists who supported the rebels would lose their property; not as landlords and capitalists but as traitors. The government would have to plan and take over the economy; not for reasons for ideology but by the logic of war-economies. Consequently, if victorious, 'such a democracy of a new type cannot but be the enemy of the conservative spirit . . . It provides a guarantee for the further economic and political conquests of the Spanish working people' (ibid., p. 176).

The Comintern pamphlet of October 1936 thus described with considerable accuracy the shape of politics in the anti-fascist war of 1939–45. This was to be a war waged in Europe by all-embracing 'people's' or 'national front' governments or resistance coalitions, which was waged by state-managed economies and ended, in the occupied territories, with massive advances in the public sector, due to the expropriation of capitalists, not as such but as Germans or collaborators with the Germans. In several countries of central and eastern Europe the road led directly from anti-fascism to a 'new democracy' dominated, and eventually swallowed by, the communists, but until the outbreak of the Cold War, the object of these post-war regimes was, quite specifically, *not* the immediate conversion to socialist systems or the abolition of political pluralism and private property.* In Western countries the net social and economic consequences of war and liberation were not very different, though the political conjuncture was. Social and economic reforms were introduced, not (as after the First World War) in response to mass pressure and the fear of revolution, but by governments committed to them on principle – governments, partly of the old reformist kind, like the Democrats in the USA, the Labour Party, now in government in Britain; partly by parties of reform and national revival directly emerging from the various anti-fascist resistance movements. In short, the logic of the anti-fascist war led towards the Left.

* As late as the foundation conference of the new cold war Communist Information Bureau (Cominform), the Bulgarian delegate, Vlko Tchervenkov, still described the perspectives of his country firmly in these terms. (Reale, 1954, pp. 66–67, 73–74).

V

In 1936 and even more in 1939 these implications of the Spanish war seemed remote, even unreal. After almost a decade of apparently total failure for the Comintern's line of anti-fascist unity, Stalin erased it from his agenda, at least for the time being, and not only came to terms with Hitler (though both sides knew that this could not last), but even instructed the international movement to abandon the anti-fascist strategy, a senseless decision perhaps best explained by his proverbial aversion to even the slightest risks.* Yet in 1941 the logic of the Comintern line came into its own. For as Germany invaded the USSR and brought the USA into the war – in short, as the struggle against fascism finally became a global war – the war became political as much as military. Internationally, it became an alliance between the capitalism of the USA and the communism of the Soviet Union. Within each country of Europe – but not, at the time, the world dependent on Western imperialism – it hoped to unite all who were ready to resist Germany or Italy, i.e. to form a Resistance coalition ranging across the political spectrum. Since all of belligerent Europe except Great Britain was occupied by the Axis powers, this war of the resisters was essentially one of civilians, or armed forces of former civilians, not recognized as such by the German and Italian armies: a savage struggle of partisans, which imposed political choices on all.

The history of European Resistance movements is largely mythological, since (except to some extent in Germany itself) the legitimacy of post-war regimes and governments essentially rested on their Resistance record. France is the extreme case, because there the governments after Liberation lacked all real continuity with the French government of 1940, which had made peace and cooperated with the Germans, and because organized, let alone armed, resistance had been rather weak, at any rate until 1944, and popular support for it had been patchy. Post-war France was rebuilt by General de Gaulle on the basis of the myth that, essentially, the eternal France had never accepted defeat. As he himself put it, 'Resistance was a bluff that came off' (Gillois, 1973, p. 164). It was an act of policy that the only fighters in the Second World War commemorated on French war memorials today are Resistance fighters, and those who joined de Gaulle's forces. However, France is by no means the only case of a state built on the Resistance mystique.

* Perhaps he was afraid that enthusiastic communist participation in a French or British anti-fascist war might be seen by Hitler as a sign of his secret bad faith, and thus an excuse to attack him.

Two things must be said about European Resistance movements. First, their military importance (with the possible exception of Russia) was negligible before Italy withdrew from the war in 1943, and not decisive anywhere except perhaps in parts of the Balkans. One must repeat that their major significance was political and moral. Thus Italian public life was transformed after over twenty years of fascism, which had enjoyed considerable support, even among intellectuals, by the unusually impressive and widespread mobilization of the Resistance in 1943–45, including an armed partisan movement in central and northern Italy of up to 100,000 combatants with forty-five thousand dead (Bocca, 1966, pp. 297–302, 385–89, 569–70; Pavone, 1991, p. 413). While Italians could thus put the memory of Mussolini's era behind them with a good conscience, Germans, who had remained solidly behind their government to the end, could not put a distance between themselves and the Nazi era of 1933–45. Their internal resisters, a minority of communist militants, Prussian military conservatives, with a scattering of religious and liberal dissenters, were dead or emerged from concentration camps. Conversely, of course, support for fascism or collaboration with the occupier virtually removed the people concerned from public life for a generation after 1945, though the Cold War against communism found plenty of employment for such persons in the underworld or half-world of Western military and intelligence operations.*

The second observation about the Resistance is that, for obvious reasons – though with one notable exception in Poland – its politics were skewed to the Left. In each country the fascist and radical Right and conservatives, the local rich and others whose main terror was social revolution, tended to sympathize, or at least not to oppose, the Germans; so did a number of regionalist or lesser nationalist movements; themselves traditionally on the ideological Right, some of which actually hoped to

* The secret anti-communist armed force known, after its existence was revealed by an Italian politician in 1990, as *Gladio* (the sword) was set up in 1949 to continue internal resistance in various European countries after a Soviet occupation, if such a situation arose. Its members were armed and paid by the USA, trained by the CIA and British secret and special forces, and its existence was concealed from the governments in whose territories they operated, apart from selected individuals. In Italy, and perhaps elsewhere, it originally consisted of last-ditch fascists who had been left behind as nuclei of resistance by the defeated Axis, who subsequently acquired a new value as fanatical anti-communists. In the 1970s, when invasion by the Red Army no longer seemed plausible even to American secret service operatives, the Gladiators found a new field of activity as Right-wing terrorists, sometimes masquerading as Left-wing terrorists.

benefit from their collaboration, notably Flemish, Slovak and Croat nationalism. So, it should not be forgotten, did the profoundly and intransigently anti-communist elements in the Catholic Church, and its armies of the conventionally pious, though Church politics were far too complex to be simply classified as 'collaborationist' anywhere. It follows that those from the political Right who chose resistance were inevitably uncharacteristic of their political constituency. Winston Churchill and General de Gaulle were not typical members of their ideological families, though it must be said that for more than one visceral Right-wing traditionalist of military instincts, a patriotism that did not defend the fatherland was unthinkable.

This explains, if any special explanation is needed, the extraordinary prominence of the communists in the resistance movements, and, consequently, their startling political advance during the war. The European communist movements reached the peak of their influence in 1945–47 for this reason, except in Germany, where they did not recover from the brutal decapitation of 1933, and the heroic but suicidal attempts at resistance in the next three years. Even in countries far from social revolution, like Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands, communist parties scored 10–12 per cent of the vote – a multiple of what they had ever scored before, forming the third- or fourth-largest blocs in their countries' parliaments. In France they emerged as the largest party of all in the 1945 elections, larger, for the first time, than their old rivals the socialists. In Italy their record was even more startling. A small, harried and notoriously unsuccessful band of illegal cadres before the war – they were actually threatened with dissolution by the Comintern in 1938 – they emerged from two years of resistance as a mass party of eight hundred thousand members, soon (1946) to reach almost two millions. As for the countries where the war against the Axis had been waged essentially by the armed internal resistance – Yugoslavia, Albania and Greece – the partisan forces had been dominated by the communists, so much so that the British government under Churchill, who lacked the slightest sympathy for communism, transferred its support and aid from the royalist Mihailović to the communist Tito, when it became clear that one was incomparably more dangerous to the Germans than the other.

The communists took to resistance, not only because Lenin's 'vanguard party' structure was designed to produce a force of disciplined and selfless cadres whose very purpose was efficient action, but because extreme situations, such as illegality, repression and war, were precisely what these bodies of 'professional revolutionaries' had been designed for. Indeed, they 'alone had foreseen the possibility of resistance war' (M.R.D. Foot, 1976, p. 84). In this they differed from the mass socialist parties, which found it almost impossible to operate in the absence of the legality – elections, public meetings and the rest – which defined and determined their activities. Faced with a fascist take-over or German occupation, social-democratic parties tended to go into hibernation, from which, in the best of cases they emerged, like the German and Austrian ones, at the end of the dark era, with most of their old support and ready to resume politics. While not absent from the resistance, they were, for structural reasons, under-represented. In the extreme case of Denmark a Social Democratic government was actually in office when Germany occupied the country *and remained in office* throughout the war, though presumably lacking in sympathy for the Nazis. (It took some years to recover from this episode.)

Two other characteristics helped the communists to prominence in the resistance: their internationalism and the passionate, quasi-millennial conviction with which they dedicated their lives to the cause (see chapter 2). The first allowed them to mobilize men and women more open to the anti-fascist appeal than to any patriotic call, e.g. in France the Spanish Civil War refugees who provided most of the armed partisan resistance in the south-west of that country – perhaps twelve thousand fighters before D-Day (Pons Prades, 1975, p. 66) – and the other refugees and working-class immigrants from seventeen nations who, under the acronym MOI (*Main d'Oeuvre Immigrée*), did some of the Party's most dangerous work, such as the Manouchian group (Armenians and Polish Jews) which attacked German officers in Paris.* The second generated that combination of bravery, self-sacrifice and ruthlessness which impressed even the adversaries, and which that work of marvellous honesty, the Yugoslav Milovan Djilas' *Wartime* (Djilas, 1977), brings out so vividly. The communists, in the opinion of a politically moderate historian, were 'among the bravest of the brave' (Foot, 1976, p. 86), and though their disciplined organization gave them the best survival chances in prisons and concentration camps, their losses were heavy. Suspicion of the French CP, whose leadership was disliked even among other communists, could not entirely deny its claim to be *le parti des fusillés*, which had at least fifteen thousand of its militants executed by the enemy (Jean Touchard, 1977, p. 258). Not surprisingly, they had a powerful appeal to

* One of the author's friends, who eventually became deputy commander of MOI under the Czech Artur London, was an Austrian Jew of Polish origin, whose resistance task was to organize anti-Nazi propaganda among the German troops in France.

brave men and women, especially the young, and perhaps especially in countries where mass support for the active resistance had been scarce, as in France or Czechoslovakia. They also appealed strongly to intellectuals, the group most readily mobilized under the banner of anti-fascism, and who formed the core of the non-party (but generically Left-wing) resistance organizations. The love affair of French intellectuals with Marxism, the domination of Italian culture by people associated with the Communist Party, both of which lasted for a generation, were products of the resistance. Whether the intellectuals themselves launched themselves into resistance, like the leading post-war publisher who notes with pride that *all* members of his firm took up arms as partisans, or became communist sympathisers because they or their families had *not* been actual resisters – they might even have been on the other side – they all felt the pull of the Party.

Except in their Balkan guerrilla strongholds, the communists made no attempt to establish revolutionary regimes. It is true that they were in no position to do so anywhere west of Trieste even had they wanted to make a bid for power, but also that the USSR, to which their parties were utterly loyal, strongly discouraged such unilateral bids for power. The communist revolutions actually made (Yugoslavia, Albania, later China) were made *against* Stalin's advice. The Soviet view was that, both internationally and within each country, post-war politics should continue within the framework of the all-embracing anti-fascist alliance, i.e. it looked forward to a long-term coexistence, or rather symbiosis, of capitalist and communist systems, and further social and political change, presumably occurring by shifts within the 'democracies of a new type' which would emerge out of the wartime coalitions. This optimistic scenario soon disappeared into the night of Cold War, so completely that few remember that Stalin urged the Yugoslav communists to keep the monarchy or that in 1945 British communists were opposed to the break-up of the Churchill wartime coalition, i.e. to the electoral campaign which was to bring the Labour government to power. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Stalin meant all this seriously, and tried to prove it by dissolving the Comintern in 1943, and the Communist Party of the USA in 1944.

Stalin's decision, expressed in the words of an American communist leader 'that we will not raise the issue of socialism in such a form and manner as to endanger or weaken ... unity' (Browder, 1944, in J. Starobin, 1972, p. 57) made his intentions clear. For practical purposes, as dissident revolutionaries recognized, it was a permanent goodbye to world revolution. Socialism would be confined to the USSR and the area

assigned by diplomatic negotiation as its zone of influence, i.e. basically that occupied by the Red Army at the end of the war. Even within that zone of influence it would remain an undefined prospect for the future rather than an immediate programme for the new 'people's democracies'. History, which takes little notice of policy intentions, went another way – except in one respect. The division of the globe, or a large part of it, into two zones of influence, negotiated in 1944–45, remained stable. Neither side overstepped the line dividing them more than momentarily for thirty years. Both withdrew from open confrontation, thus guaranteeing that cold world wars never became hot ones.

VI

Stalin's brief dream of post-war US–Soviet partnership did not actually strengthen the global alliance of liberal capitalism and communism against fascism. Rather it demonstrated its strength and width. It was, of course, an alliance against a military threat, and one which would never have come into existence but for the series of Nazi Germany's aggressions, culminating in the invasion of the USSR and the declaration of war against the US. Nevertheless, the very nature of war confirmed the 1936 insights into the implications of the Spanish Civil War: the unity of military and civilian mobilization and social change. On the allied side – more than on the fascist side – it was a war of reformers, partly because not even the most confident capitalist power could hope to win a long war without abandoning 'business as usual', partly because the very fact of the Second World War dramatized the failures of the inter-war years, of which the failure to unite against the aggressors was merely one minor symptom.

That victory and social hope went together is also clear from what we know of the development of public opinion in the belligerent or liberated countries in which there was freedom to express it except, curiously enough, in the USA, where the years since 1936 saw a marginal erosion of the Democratic presidential vote, but a marked revival of the Republicans: this was a country dominated by its domestic concerns and far more remote from the sacrifices of war than any other. Where there were genuine elections, they showed a sharp shift to the Left. The most dramatic case was the British, where the elections of 1945 defeated the universally loved and admired war-leader, Winston Churchill, and brought to power the Labour Party with a 50 per cent increase in its vote. In the next five years it presided over a period of unprecedented

social reforms. Both the major parties had been equally involved in the war effort. The electorate chose the one which promised both victory and social transformation. The phenomenon was general in warring Western Europe, though neither its scale nor its radicalism should be exaggerated, as its public image tended to be, by the temporary elimination of the former fascist or collaborationist Right.

The situation in the parts of Europe liberated by guerrilla revolution or the Red Army is more difficult to judge, if only because mass genocide, mass population displacement and mass expulsion or forced emigration make it impossible to compare the pre-war and post-war countries bearing their old names. Throughout this area the bulk of the inhabitants of the countries invaded by the Axis saw themselves as its victims, with the exception of the politically divided Slovaks and Croats, who acquired nominally independent states under German auspices; the majority peoples in Germany's allied states, Hungary and Rumania; and, of course, the large German diaspora. This did not mean that they sympathised with communist-inspired resistance movements – except perhaps for the Jews, persecuted by everyone else – still less (except for traditionally russophile Balkan slavs) with Russia. The Poles were overwhelmingly both anti-German and anti-Russian, not to mention anti-semitic. The small Baltic peoples, occupied by the USSR in 1940, were both anti-Russian, anti-semitic and pro-German, while they had the choice in 1941–45. Neither communists nor resistance were to be found in Romania, and little enough in Hungary. On the other hand, both communism and pro-Russian sentiment were strong in Bulgaria, though resistance had been patchy, and in Czechoslovakia the CP, always a mass party, emerged as the largest party by far in genuinely free elections. Soviet occupation soon made such political differences academic. Guerrilla victories are not plebiscites, but there is little doubt that most Yugoslavs welcomed the triumph of Tito's partisans, except the German minority, the supporters of the Croatian Ustashi regime, on whom the Serbs took savage revenge for earlier massacres, and a traditionalist core in Serbia, where Tito's movement, and consequently anti-German warfare, had never flourished.* Greece remained proverbially divided, in spite of the refusal of Stalin to assist the Greek communist and pro-red forces against the British who supported their opponents. Only experts in

* However, the Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia, as well as the Montenegrins (who provided 17 per cent of the officers for the Partisan army) were strongly for Tito, as were important sections of Croats – Tito's own people – and the Slovenes. Most of the fighting took place in Bosnia.

kinship studies would care to hazard a guess about the political sentiments of the Albanians after the communists triumphed. However, in all these countries an era of massive social transformation was about to begin.

Oddly enough, the USSR was (with the USA) the only belligerent country in which the war brought no significant social and institutional change. It began and ended the conflict under Joseph Stalin (see chapter 13). However, it is clear that the war imposed enormous strains on the stability of the system, especially in the harshly repressed countryside. But for the ingrained belief of National Socialism in the Slavs as a race of sub-human helots, the German invaders could have won lasting support among many Soviet peoples. Conversely, the real foundation of Soviet victory was the patriotism of the majority nationality of the USSR, the Great Russians, always the core of the Red Army, to which the Soviet regime appealed in its moment of crisis. Indeed, the Second World War became officially known in the USSR as 'the Great Patriotic War', and rightly so.

VII

At this point the historian must make a major leap to avoid falling into the pit of a purely occidental analysis. For very little of what has been written in this chapter so far applies to the greater part of the globe. It is not quite irrelevant to the conflict between Japan and continental East Asia, since Japan, dominated by the politics of the ultra-nationalist Right, was allied with Nazi Germany, and the main forces of resistance in China were the communists. It applies to some extent in Latin America, a great importer of fashionable European ideologies like fascism or communism, and especially to Mexico, reviving its great revolution in the 1930s under President Lázaro Cardenas (1934–40) and passionately taking sides for the Spanish Republic in the Civil War. In fact, after its defeat Mexico remained the only state which continued to recognize the Republic as the legitimate government of Spain. However, for most of Asia, Africa and the Islamic world, fascism, whether as an ideology or as the policy of an aggressor state, was not and never became the main, let alone the only enemy. This was 'imperialism' or 'colonialism', and the imperialist powers were, overwhelmingly, the liberal democracies: Britain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium and the USA. Moreover, all imperial powers, with the single exception of Japan, were white.

Logically the enemies of the imperial power were also potential allies in the fight for colonial liberation. Even Japan, which, as the Koreans,

Taiwanese, Chinese and others could tell, had its own ruthless brand of colonialism, could appeal to anti-colonial forces in South-east and South Asia as a champion of non-whites against whites. The anti-imperial struggle and the anti-fascist struggle, therefore, tended to pull in opposite directions. Thus Stalin's pact with the Germans in 1939, which disrupted the Western Left, allowed Indian or Vietnamese communists to concentrate happily on opposing the British and French; whereas the German invasion of the USSR in 1941 forced them, as good communists, to put the defeat of the Axis first, i.e. to put the liberation of their own countries much lower on the agenda. This was not merely unpopular, but strategically senseless at a time when the colonial empires of the West were at their most vulnerable, if not actually collapsing. And, indeed, local leftists who did not feel bound by the iron hoops of Comintern loyalty exploited the opportunity. The Indian National Congress launched the Quit India movement in 1942, while the Bengali radical Subhas Bose recruited an Indian Liberation Army for the Japanese from among the Indian army prisoners of war taken during the lightning initial advances. Anti-colonial militants in Burma and Indonesia saw matters the same way. The *reductio ad absurdum* of this anti-colonialist logic was the attempt by an extremist Jewish fringe group in Palestine to negotiate with the *Germans* (via Damascus, then under the Vichy French) for help in liberating Palestine from the British, which they regarded as the top priority for Zionism. (A militant of the group involved in this mission eventually became prime minister of Israel: Yitzhak Shamir.) Such approaches evidently did not imply any ideological sympathy for fascism, though Nazi anti-semitism might appeal to Palestinian Arabs at odds with Zionist settlers, and some groups in South Asia might recognize themselves in the superior Aryans of Nazi mythology. But these were special cases (see chapters 12 and 15).

What needs explaining is why, after all, anti-imperialism and the colonial liberation movements inclined overwhelmingly to the Left, and thus found themselves, at least at the end of the war, converging with the global anti-fascist mobilisation. The fundamental reason is that the Western Left was the nursery of anti-imperialist theory and policies, and that support for colonial liberation movements came overwhelmingly from the international Left, and especially (since the Bolsheviks' 1920 Congress of the Eastern Peoples in Baku) from the Comintern and the USSR. Moreover, the activists and future leaders of independence movements, who belonged chiefly to the Western-educated elites of their countries, found themselves more at ease in the non-racist and anti-colonial milieu of local liberals, democrats, socialists and communists

than in any other, when they came to their metropoles. They were in any case almost all modernizers, whom the nostalgic medievalist myths, Nazi ideology and the racist exclusiveness of their theories, reminded of just those 'communalist' and 'tribalist' tendencies which, in their opinion, were symptoms of their countries' backwardness which were exploited by imperialism.

In short, an alliance with the Axis, on the principle that 'my enemy's enemies are my friends', could only be tactical. Even in South-east Asia, where Japanese rule was less repressive than the old colonialists', and exercised by non-whites against whites, it could only have been short-lived, since Japan, quite apart from its pervasive racism, had no interest in liberating colonies as such. (In fact, it was short-lived, because Japan was soon defeated.) Fascism or the Axis nationalisms held no particular attraction. On the other hand a man like Jawaharlal Nehru who (unlike the communists) did not hesitate to launch himself into the Quit India rebellion in 1942, the crisis year of the British Empire, never ceased to believe that a free India would build a socialist society, and that the USSR would be an ally in this endeavour, perhaps even – with all qualifications – an example.

That the leaders and spokesmen for colonial liberation were, so often, minorities untypical of the population they set out to emancipate actually made convergence with anti-fascism easier, for the bulk of the colonial populations were moved, or at least mobilisable, by feelings and ideas to which (but for its commitment to racial superiority) fascism might have made some appeal: traditionalism; religious and ethnic exclusiveness; a suspicion of the modern world. In fact, these sentiments were not yet mobilized to any substantial extent or, if mobilized, they did not yet become politically dominant. Islamic mass mobilization did develop very strongly in the Moslem world between 1918 and 1945. Thus Hassan al-Banna's Muslim Brotherhood (1928), a fundamentalist movement strongly hostile to liberalism and communism, became the main standard-bearer of Egyptian mass grievances in the 1940s, and its potential affinities with the Axis ideologies were more than tactical, especially given its hostility to Zionism. Yet the movements and politicians which actually came to the top in Islamic countries, sometimes carried on the backs of the fundamentalist masses, were secular and modernizing. The Egyptian colonels who were to make the revolution of 1952, were emancipated intellectuals, who had been in contact with the small Egyptian communist groups, whose leadership, incidentally, was largely Jewish (Perrault, 1987). On the Indian subcontinent, Pakistan (a child of the 1930s and 1940s) has been correctly described as 'the program of secularized

elites who were forced by the [territorial] disunity of the Muslim population and by competition with the Hindu majorities to call their political society 'Islamic' rather than nationally separatist (Lapidus, 1988, p. 738). In Syria the running was made by the Ba'ath Party, founded in the 1940s by two Paris-educated schoolteachers who, with all their Arab mysticism, were ideologically anti-imperialist and socialist. The Syrian constitution contains no mention of Islam. Iraqi politics (until the Gulf War of 1991) was determined by various combinations of nationalist officers, communists and Ba'athists, all devoted to Arab unity and socialism (at least in theory), but distinctly not to the Law of the Koran. Both for local reasons and because the Algerian revolutionary movement had a wide mass base (not least among the large emigration of labourers to France) there was a strong Islamic element in the Algerian revolution. However, the revolutionaries specifically agreed (in 1956) that 'theirs was a struggle to destroy an anachronistic colonization but not a war of religion' (Lapidus, 1988, p. 693) and proposed to form a social and democratic republic, which became constitutionally a one-party socialist republic. Indeed, the period of anti-fascism is the only one in which actual communist parties acquired substantial support and influence within some parts of the Islamic world, notably in Syria, Iraq and Iran. It was only much later that the secular and modernizing voices of political leadership were drowned and silenced by the mass politics of fundamentalist revival (see chapters 12 and 15).

In spite of their conflicts of interest, which were to re-emerge after the war, the anti-fascism of the developed Westerm countries and the anti-imperialism of their colonies found themselves converging towards what both envisaged as a post-war future of social transformation. The USSR and local communism helped to bridge the gap, since they meant anti-imperialism to one world, total commitment to victory to the other. However, unlike the European theatres of war, the non-European ones did not bring the communists major political triumphs, except in the special cases where (as in Europe) anti-fascism and national/social liberation coincided: in China and Korea, where the colonialists were the Japanese, and in Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos), where the immediate enemy of freedom remained the French, whose local administration had subordinated itself to the Japanese, when these overran South-east Asia. These were the countries where communism was destined to triumph in the post-war era, under Mao, Kim Il Sung and Ho Chi Minh. Elsewhere the leaders of the states about to be decolonised came from movements, generally of the Left, but less hampered in 1941–45 by the need to give the defeat of the Axis priority over all else. Still,

even these could not but look at the world situation after the Axis defeat with some optimism. The two super-powers were no friends to the old colonialism, at least on paper. A known anti-colonialist party had come to power in the heart of the largest empire of all. The force and legitimacy of the old colonialism had been severely undermined. The chances for freedom seemed better than ever before. This proved to be the case, but not without some savage rearguard actions by the old empires.

VIII

So the defeat of the Axis – more precisely, of Germany and Japan – left little grief behind, except in Germany and Japan itself, whose people had fought, with stubborn loyalty and formidable efficiency, to the last day. In the end fascism had mobilized nothing outside its core countries except a scattering of ideological minorities of the radical right, most of whom would have remained on the political fringes in their own countries, a few nationalist groups who expected to achieve their objects by a German alliance, and a lot of the flotsam and jetsam of war and conquest, recruited into the savage auxiliary soldiery of the Nazi occupation. The Japanese mobilized nothing but, momentarily, a sympathy for yellow rather than white skins. The major appeal of European fascism, that it provided a safeguard against working-class movements, socialism, communism and the godless devil's headquarters in Moscow that inspired them all, had won it a good deal of support among the conservative rich, though big-business support was always pragmatic rather than principled. It was not an appeal that would outlive failure and defeat. In any case, the net effect of twelve years of National Socialism was that large parts of Europe now lay at the mercy of the Bolsheviks.

So fascism dissolved like a clump of earth thrown into a river, and virtually disappeared from the political scene for good except in Italy, where a modest neo-fascist movement (the *Movimento Sociale Italiano*) honouring Mussolini has a permanent presence in Italian politics. This was not due merely to the exclusion from politics of persons formerly prominent in fascist regimes, though by no means from the state services and from public life, and still less from economic life. It was not even due to the trauma of good Germans (and, in a different way, loyal Japanese) whose world collapsed in the physical and moral chaos of 1945, and for whom mere fidelity to their old beliefs was actually counterproductive. It stood in the way of adjusting themselves to a new, initially incomprehensible, life under the occupying powers who imposed their

institutions and ways on them: who laid the rails along which their trains would henceforth necessarily have to roll. National Socialism had nothing to offer to the post-1945 German except memories. It is typical that in a strongly National Socialist part of Hitler's Germany, namely in Austria (which, by a twist of international diplomacy found itself classified among the innocent rather than the guilty), post-war politics soon reverted to exactly what it had been before democracy was abolished in 1933, with the exception of a slight shift to the Left (see Flora, 1983, p. 99). Fascism disappeared with the world crisis that had allowed it to emerge. It had never been, even in theory, a universal programme or political project.

On the other hand anti-fascism, however heterogeneous and impermanent its mobilisation, succeeded in uniting an extraordinary range of forces. What is more, this unity was not negative but positive and, in certain respects, lasting. Ideologically, it was based on the shared values and aspirations of the Enlightenment and the Age of Revolution: progress by the application of reason and science; education and popular government; no inequalities based on birth or origin; societies looking to the future rather than the past. Some of these similarities existed purely on paper, though it is not entirely insignificant that political entities as remote from Western, or indeed any, democracy as Mengistu's Ethiopia, Somalia before the fall of Siad Barre, Kim Il Sung's North Korea, Algeria and communist East Germany chose to give themselves the official title of Democratic or People's (Popular) Democratic Republic. It is a label which inter-war fascist, authoritarian and even traditional conservative regimes between the wars would have rejected with contempt.

In other respects common aspirations were not so remote from common reality. Western constitutional capitalism, communist systems and the third world were equally committed to equal rights for all races and both sexes, i.e. they all fell short of the common target, but not in ways that systematically distinguished one lot from another.* They were all secular states. More to the point, after 1945 they were virtually all states which, deliberately and actively, rejected the supremacy of the market and believed in the active management and planning of the economy by the state. Difficult though it might be to recall in the age of neoliberal economic theology, between the early 1940s and the 1970s the most prestigious and formerly influential champions of complete market freedom, e.g. Friedrich von Hayek, saw themselves and their like as prophets

* Notably all forgot the major part played by women in war, resistance and liberation.

in the wilderness vainly warning a heedless Western capitalism that it was rushing along the 'Road to Serfdom' (Hayek, 1944). In fact, it was advancing into an era of economic miracles (see chapter 9). Capitalist governments were convinced that only economic interventionism could prevent a return to the economic catastrophes between the wars, and avoid the political dangers of people radicalized to the point of choosing communism, as they had once chosen Hitler. Third-world countries believed only public action could lift their economies out of backwardness and dependency. In the decolonised world, following the inspiration of the Soviet Union, they were to see the way forward as socialism. The Soviet Union and its newly extended family believed in nothing but central planning. And all three regions of the world advanced into the post-war world with the conviction that victory over the Axis, achieved by political mobilisation and revolutionary policies as well as by blood and iron, opened a new era of social transformation.

In a sense they were right. Never has the face of the globe and human life been so dramatically transformed as in the era which began under the mushroom clouds of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But as always history took only marginal notice of human intentions, even those of the national decision-makers. The real social transformation was neither intended nor planned. And in any case, the first contingency they had to face was the almost immediate breakdown of the great anti-fascist alliance. As soon as there was no longer a fascism to unite against, capitalism and communism once again got ready to face each other as one another's mortal enemies.