

New Societies, New Workers

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed the development of extraordinary social and cultural change in Western civilization. With the end of World War II, a new world came into being. A defining aspect of this new world was the emergence of women as a vital part of the social order.

Often through political organizations, women achieved new levels of accomplishment and acceptance during the final decades of the twentieth century. But these changes represent only a portion of the total picture of social change in the West.

Some of the changes witnessed in the West during this era were made possible by new technology. Computers, satellites, television, and cellular technology have made communication over long distances instantaneous. Such devices have facilitated the spread of new ideas and new ways of thinking.

The people of Europe experienced dramatic change after the end of World War II. The middle class expanded with the development of a new breed of professional—the managers, bureaucrats, and experts employed to operate the new technologies of the late twentieth century, as well as the larger government agencies which mushroomed following the mid-1900s. Such people boasted special skills, all needed to run computers, track satellites, and run the larger governments of the Western socialist and democratic nations.

With the development of a new generation of experts, technicians, and highly skilled, middle-class workers, a new emphasis on higher education developed. A college or university education was seen as the door which would open up the greatest opportunities for young people. Enrollments in higher education expanded greatly after World War II. In

Europe, the percentage of young people attending college tripled between 1940 and 1980.

Some cultural and social trends of the late twentieth century were merely continuations of developments which had begun during earlier decades, even centuries. One was a dramatic increase in urban populations. Following World War II, the number of farmers dramatically fell. Small family

farms were sold to large, corporate farming entities who changed the nature of production to agribusiness. Despite such changes in farm ownership, agricultural production rebounded from World War II declines. By the 1960s, most western European countries were experiencing between two and four percent growth in farm output annually.

European agriculture

also became more mechanized during these decades, and farms relied increasingly on chemical fertilizers to increase yields.

At the same time, the percentage of white-collar, service workers—salespersons, technicians, and distributors—expanded greatly in the decades following World War II. Businesses expanded into global corporations, increasing employment in the financial service sector. This trend caused an increase in the numbers of workers employed in banks, insurance companies, savings institutions, and lending businesses.

As the consumer economy grew, the service sector expanded. Jobs developed in the restaurant industry, personal grooming salons and styling parlors, and a host of other services from shoe repair to fitness training. By 1970, more employees in the West worked in the service sector than in the manufacturing plants of the industrialized nations.

