

---

# Introduction

---

---

---

DICK GEAR Y

From its inception the Editorial Board of *Contemporary European History* has met annually to discuss matters of journal business and policy. Members have travelled from the United States and Australia, as well as several European countries, to be present at these meetings and have never just made up a list of distinguished but inactive names. At the annual meeting of 1997 it was suggested that, for a change, we should use the opportunity of the 1999 meeting to allow board members to reflect on their own fields of historical research at the turn of the century. As a result the April 1999 board meeting, which took place in New York thanks to the good offices of the Remarque Institute of New York University and its Director, Professor Tony Judt, transformed itself into a small conference, 'Reflections on the Twentieth Century'. It is some of the (revised) 'think-pieces' of that conference that form this issue of the journal. Not all papers given at the conference appear here. Those that do have been seen by external referees.

The papers presented here make no claim to be comprehensive but aim to stimulate reflection on some important historical processes/issues at the turn of the twentieth/twenty-first centuries. Those by Georges-Henri Soutou and Gustav Schmidt deal with international relations and the role of the European state system therein. Both, interestingly, see that system as resting on a set of values that might fundamentally be described as liberal, although had we had contributions on colonialism, a different face of Europe might have been uppermost. Both György Péteri and Carole Fink sanguinely see membership of the European Union as a possible salvation from ethnic conflict in eastern Europe. Here again the liberal values of the west European states, at least, are to the fore. Had we had lengthy contributions on the fascist and communist state experiences in both war and peace, as well as on an arguably more traditional authoritarianism in Iberia (lasting to the 1970s!) or eastern Europe between the wars, things might have appeared differently. We do not have a contribution on the European states of Scandinavia or Iberia. Big business in Europe, in its national similarities and differences, is explored by Youssef Cassis; but we lack a contribution on small business. Given that Cassis demonstrates the relatively weak link between overall economic performance and big business, this is a pity. Paul Ginsborg ranges widely in examining state policies towards the family in different countries at different times, but his paper remains largely a study

of policy rather than a social or economic history of the twentieth-century European family itself, despite some fascinating insights. My own essay is more about the writing of labour history than labour itself. In short our coverage is partial and personal. Issues of modernisation, of class structure and of cultural and gender history are largely absent. And the United States, the prime mover of 'globalisation' and in many ways the determiner of Europe's fate in the twentieth century, is largely absent. What follows, however, does provide plenty of food for thought.