

CHAPTER 7

The Consumer-Citizen

How Europeans Traded Rights for Goods

In Alsace in 1945, a German spy disguised as a GI blew his cover when he picked up an old cigarette butt. Everybody knows that the Americans don't pick up old cigarette butts.

ROBERT GUÉRIN,
French wit, 1955

Consumer sovereignty and the liberal system . . . stand or fall together.

GEORGE H. HILDEBRAND,
American economist, 1951

SPAIN WAS THE ONLY COUNTRY in all Europe excluded from the Marshall Plan. Until Stalin turned down the offer of aid, even the Soviet Union was eligible for the grants, credits, and supplies that the U.S. government started sending abroad in June 1948 under the terms of the European Recovery Program. Spain was barred because Francisco Franco's dictatorship, now firmly ensconced, continued to be regarded as a "squalid offshoot of Nazism."¹ To include this pariah among nations along with the fifteen other countries finally declared eligible, President Harry S. Truman determined, was "not only a bad credit risk" but "a moral risk" as well.²

In Spain's exclusion lies the plot of a whole movie, titled with self-evident irony *¡Bienvenido Mister Marshall!* Made in 1952 by the gifted young director Luis García Berlanga, the film was loosely based on an actual event. This was the mission of U.S. Army Major General James W. Spry, conducted from August to November 1951 at the head of a survey

team of ninety, to reconnoiter the country for Cold War military bases. Mixing the fond populism of contemporary Italian neorealism with the Spanish taste for grotesque caricature, Berlanga satirized official Spain's subservient quest for handouts. Belatedly, under the terms of the Mutual Security Act of 1951 in recognition of Spain's newfound usefulness as an ally, the dictatorship began to collect the aid it had been begging for since 1949.

Welcome Mr. Marshall! slyly succeeds, where written records fail, in telling of a Europe coming face to face with this behemoth of well-being: of the fanciful expectations the Marshall Plan aroused that Europeans would soon enjoy American standards of living; of new alliances formed in the name of the consumer, dynamized by Cold War politics and smoothed by U.S. economic and cultural capital; but also of the travailed journey most people took over the next two decades from the ruins of the bourgeois regime of consumption to the jerry-built foundations of what in Europe too by 1960 was known as "the mass consumer society."

Berlanga's film opens as a rundown Castilian village rouses itself from its secular slumber at the early-morning news that the Americans are due to visit. The mayor prepares to welcome this "Mr. Marshall" in the time-honored fashion with toasts of lemonade and sangria, only to be persuaded by a passing entertainment agent that Villar del Rio as it really is—with its dried-up fountain, broken-down town clock, scrawny animals, black-shrouded women, and listless men "sitting around the central square dreaming about harvests they'd never planted"—will never attract the Americans' benefaction. The whole world knows, Manolo the flashy impresario argues, that people need to package themselves properly to become the objects of America's generosity.³ With an alacrity that confounds the deadbeat local elite, the townspeople transform their desiccated flat land into an enticing Andalusian stage set, of the kind familiar to aficionados of *Carmen* and to American tourists with a picture-postcard image of Spain. As the full-dress rehearsal of their new identity reaches its climax, the sun-bleached cow patch now a sun-drenched Potemkin Village of chorale-singing school children, Flamenco-dancing women, and bull-fighting men, the Yankee cavalcade whizzes through. It doesn't even slow down enough to register the town's existence, much less respond to its ingratiating display of creativity.

Hollywood condemned the film as anti-American when it was shown at the Cannes Festival in 1953 (where it was acclaimed for its humor).⁴ The industry's dour emissary, Edward G. Robinson, missed its point—

which was not at all to castigate U.S. indifference, but to chide public illusions about quick fixes. The film showed the people who had formerly stood in the shadows of back-street doorways stepping into the foreground, raggedly lining up in the central square to voice their hodgepodge of wants. It showed the town intellectual petitioning for a telescope to enable him to see further; an old peasant lady, prodded to make her choice, screeching out "chocolate," the ancient craving of the poor; and two working women squabbling over whether both can list a mass-produced good, the sewing machine. The peasant Juan's longing for a tractor is shown consummated in a dream sequence that has the machine delivered from an airplane, its bearers, the Three Magi, bearded like Santa Claus and mustached like Stalin, parachuting it to earth, where Juan, smiling seraphically like a Five-Year Plan hero, throws it into gear and speeds off to plow his hardscrabble lands.

All fantasies to naught: The final scene shows the chastened villagers straggling into the central square to pay for their frilly costumes, paper garlands, potted plants, and other props—not with money, for they have none, but with trussed-up chickens, candlesticks, mirrors, copper water jugs, and the other bric-a-brac of humble lives. The last to arrive, the stiff-legged old Hidalgo, obliges by donating his rusted sword, emblem of his own onetime grip over Villar del Río and his conquistador ancestors' long-lost hegemony over the American "cannibals." Silly deluded ones, the omniscient narrator gently chides them: change, when it comes, will occur at your own tempo, through your own resources, and be in your own image.

How much and what should the people of Europe be getting in the wake of World War II? Any study of the challenge of American consumer culture to European commercial civilization has to consider the Marshall Plan, as it really was, as central to the answer. Not as enlightened benefaction, but as bearer of new ways of thinking about producing affluence. Not as a gift propagated with glossy images of giant dockside forklifts in Southampton, Rotterdam, and Antwerp unloading countless tons of cotton, grain, coal, and corn to feed people, provide animal fodder, and supply voracious industries, mammoth turbines destined to generate hydroelectric power, or immense steel presses to stamp out automobile parts, but the staging ground for a more austere scenario. This promised all the abundance that a revved-up capitalist war economy could deliver. But its price was to suppress the cornucopias of populist tradition, cut back on necessities, and inculcate the discipline to satisfy wants in an orderly sequence.

The fact is that the Marshall Plan was neither the first nor the only response to defining the standard of living appropriate for postwar Europeans. There were new alternatives; for the vexed problem began to be revived in terms now utterly altered with respect to the past as reformist coalitions took shape across Europe to proclaim the right to a decent standard of living.

At its publication in December 1942, the Beveridge Report was the earliest indicator of this profound change in expectations. Drawn up at the behest of Winston Churchill's wartime cabinet to rally public support as German planes bombed British cities, it launched the first comprehensive scheme for what contemporaries eloquently spoke of as the *welfare* as opposed to the *warfare* state. Authored by Sir William Beveridge, the liberal reformer, the report detailed the five giant "social evils"—illness, ignorance, disease, squalor, and want—that beset the British people. In extraordinary amplitude, it also set forth the remedies: nothing less than national health care for all, then full employment, universal secondary education, subsidized housing, and state insurance against sickness, unemployment, and old age. The 300 pages of bureaucratic prose presented such a powerful statement of the well-being that the Allied victory would bring to Europe that Nazi propagandists mobilized to vilify it as "humbug," nothing of which would remain once the war was over except government sops for "veterinary aid to cats and dogs." As it turned out, the Beveridge Report inspired the governing ethos of both Labourites and Conservatives for the next three decades. If "the name of a man" did not become the "the name of a way of life, not only for Britain, but for the whole civilized world," as Sir William immodestly hoped, it was only because the United States pressed forward a more persuasive alternative in its prescriptions for the "American way of life."⁵

Positions in sympathy with the Beveridge Report, if less comprehensively acted on, could be found across the political spectrum. The new Italian constitution put into effect on January 1, 1948, asserted in its article 2 that "it is the duty of the Republic to remove all economic and social obstacles that, by limiting the freedom and equality of citizens, prevent the full development of the individual and the participation of all workers in the political, economic, and social organization of the country." As he made his farewell speech before the French parliament on November 21, 1947, Léon Blum finally saw the wide support to "improve the working-class condition and accordingly the real purchasing power of income and salaries up to the very limits of the current possibilities of the French economy."⁶ The "modern day economy" would be "neither a

free-market system of liberalized buccaneering” nor the “free interplay of forces,” the Christian Democrat Ludwig Erhard reasoned in 1948 on the way to becoming the German Federal Republic’s first minister of economic affairs; it would be “a socially committed market economy conferring the deserved rewards on achievement.”⁷

In the United States, too, raising the standard of living had become the official watchword for postwar global reconstruction. “Freedom from want” numbered first among the “Four Freedoms”—followed by freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and freedom from fear—that President Roosevelt set out on January 6, 1941, to press Congress to send Lend-Lease aid to the alliance of nations already at war against the Axis. Following Roosevelt’s death, as the New Deal gave way to the Fair Deal, Truman made the “standard of living” a central motif of successive State of the Union speeches. Under American influence, the signatories of the United Nations Charter of 1945 subscribed to article 55 affirming the global objective “to promote higher standards of living.” And article 25 of the UN’s 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights specified in perhaps greater detail than Washington would have liked that “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age, or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.”⁸ In the Point Four program presented to Congress on June 24, 1949, Truman expanded the United States’ goal “to assist the people of economically underdeveloped areas to raise their standard of living.”⁹

As the issue of “raising the living standard” turned up on one political agenda after another, it stirred up a wasps nest of contention over who should be getting what, where, why, and when. Beware those “careless habits” of mind that confuse the current “planes of living” with new “standards of consumption,” castigated Joseph Davis, the newly elected president of the powerful American Economic Association in February 1945. Years of depression and war had shown that the “marked disparity . . . between what [people] had and what they urgently wanted and felt they had reason to expect” yielded “bitter frustration” and could provoke “social disaster.” Yes, it was positive news that “we are now in the throes of change in the standards of living of the community of nations . . . Our own national interests are deeply involved in translating this possibility into actual fact.” But to introduce “external standards” would

“only court disillusionment and frustration” given that “nothing like the full potentialities can be realized within calculable time.”¹⁰

Professor Davis’s considerations, advanced when the war in Europe was not yet over, reflected liberal common sense. Their premise was simple: as war ruins were repaired, markets opened up, government regulations were lifted, industrial output rose, and wages increased, the average European’s standard of living would slowly rise to the same norm as the average American’s. Meanwhile the cart of expectations couldn’t go before the horse of productivity. Yet conventional liberalism had never had a good grip on the obstacles to changing the European standard of living. And it had not yet imagined the political leverage that the Market Empire could bring to bear to eliminate them—once its “national interests” showed that this was necessary.

Having seen how recalcitrant ways of life are to change, it should be no surprise that the Allied victory notwithstanding, levels of living were still stratified by social inequality, encoded in radically divided political outlooks about the meaning of the good life, and subject to all nature of government and private checks and controls. True, people everywhere chafed at impositions from wartime, especially the rationing of food, clothes, and fuel, which in many places lasted as late as 1951. In England sweets were rationed until 1953. However, nowhere was it automatic that the multitude of people, if faced with the choice between minimal guarantees of social security and new streams of consumer goods, would automatically select the latter. And nowhere could it be taken for granted that governments, if faced with the alternative between providing social guarantees at the cost of slower economic growth and deregulating markets and structural reforms at the risk of public protest would choose the latter. In sum, the war had dislodged the old regime of consumption. But it had not at all cleared the way for a civilization of creature comforts on the American model, with its overweening confidence in technology, raucous commercialism, and tolerance for social wreckage as the price paid for progress.

Indeed, social reformism, which had now triumphed in western Europe with the defeat of the reactionary right and narrow-minded liberalism, continued to work from a different legacy from the American. The solidaristic impulse, from having shown its most reactionary profile under the Nazi New Order, now revealed its largely progressive face. The issue of the breadth and depth of the market was still there. And since no single country nor Europe as a whole yielded a domestic market on the

scale of the American, most government leaders resolved to address it as Keynes had advised, using the national state to promote economic recovery with full employment by priming demand within protected markets. The problem of dreadful inequality still existed. Now they intended to address it by embracing the new social orthodoxy, namely that the market could not be trusted to be egalitarian and that government had to intervene to equalize their citizens' purchasing power. Thereby European societies had come around to embracing the right to "social citizenship," in the absence of which the majority of their people had been kept from exercising the political rights and opportunities for personal development promised by liberal rule.¹¹

To acknowledge that a "minimum existence" was a right, hence no longer the subject of "doctrinal disputes," marked a big step forward. If nothing else, it opened the way for a new consensus, namely that everybody could agree to disagree about the specific sets of goods and services that added up to an adequate "minimum."¹² In negotiations for new labor contracts, for example, having to include the cost of shelter, what calculations should be made about the size, not to mention the quality, of housing? In mid-May 1950, when hard-nosed delegates of the French industrial employers sat down with their equally tough-minded trade union counterparts to negotiate the details of France's new "minimum vital," rent, they agreed, was a necessary item. But employers wouldn't concede that the two rooms plus a kitchen that were right for a worker with a family were also right for one who was single. One room would do. To that, the exasperated General Confederation of Labor delegates responded: Fine, if it is one room only, make it the kitchen!¹³ Not yet imagining how fast minimums could change, nobody at the time foresaw that hardly a decade later the standard of shelter for workers would include not just newly built low-rent housing, but a kitchen with running water and a battery of shiny new appliances, an indoor toilet, a common living area, and a bedroom, or even two or three if the household included several children.

Driving the stunningly rapid change in consumption standards that Europeans would experience starting in the early 1950s was the conflict between the European vision of the social citizen and the American notion of the sovereign consumer. Each of these models rested on very different justifications for pressing for a higher standard of living, defining the bundle of goods and services that could satisfy it, and determining the means by which these would be attained. The former claimed higher standards as a social right, looked to the state to reduce inequalities

among consumers, and was strongly influenced by the shared values of still intact political, religious, and community subcultures. The latter rode on the economic boom of the “miracle years” of the 1950s and 1960s, confided in the market to deliver goods, and embraced the profusion of new identities associated with U.S. consumer cultural goods and practices. The European *citizen-consumers* who evolved from this conflict were hybrids. “The children of Marx and Coca-Cola,” as Jean-Luc Godard famously described them, the first huge cohort of them, born in the decade after the war, came of age in the 1960s.¹⁴ At once discomfited and indulged by the explosion of consumer gratifications, they were torn between social struggles for higher wages and more public goods and individual striving after private satisfactions. Contended for by left and right, they turned uneasily between state and market, and between the security promised by the European welfare state and the freedoms promised by American consumer culture.

This contentious development makes better sense if it is set within the framework of the renewed confrontation between American consumer culture and European market civilization, though now on a very different plane and with new frontiers. On the one hand, the post-World War II American model, more self-confident, clear-cut, and aggressive than ever before, advanced with more direction on the part of policymakers in Washington, D.C., and with better synchronization between the national government, international corporations, and foreign policy aims. It held that the consumer was sovereign and the people, like the economy generally, prospered from the free play of market forces, rising output, and growing demand. If markets functioned as they should, people should be able to satisfy their “legitimate aspirations” for physical comfort and personal self-fulfillment. Hence there was no innate need for the state to step in to provide goods or step up its delivery of services. In the best of possible worlds, consumer freedom was the most basic of all freedoms. The skills, habits of mind, and desires exercised by consumers in their daily transactions sharpened their capacity as citizens to influence the political system by calculating and weighing their choices in the voting booth. In the struggle with totalitarianism, liberal political theory anguished over the capacity of individuals to make free choices. In consumer freedoms it saw the potential for society to develop people who were not only economically wise but also politically rational and ethically good. In sum, “consumer sovereignty and the liberal system . . . stand or fall together.”¹⁵

By contrast, European principles of social citizenship conceived of peo-

ple as requiring a certain minimum to belong to society. This was a "right" as opposed to a "legitimate aspiration" or "claim." If this standard was wanting, collective services, also called social consumption, had to be introduced. Not the market, then, but the political process shaped by ideals of equality and justice and culminating in the vote determined what these would be. In turn the state was duty-bound to intervene should market forces, in the course of generating new habits of consumption, also create new inequalities among citizens. In principle, more and more egalitarian consumer habits would be accompanied by more widespread political democracy, social justice, the satisfaction of basic needs for decencies, and the wider dissemination of European traditions of high culture to strengthen national identity. All in all, getting consumer goods was an important means of achieving the good society. But never could it be the end-all.

That this latter position arose out of collective ideas of community needs, now largely identified with reformist socialism, Marxist ideology, and Soviet-type planning, transformed the differences on either side of the Atlantic from a tug-of-war over policies into a major front of the conflict between the superpowers. In the first half of the century, the struggle between the ascendant U.S. market culture and the declining European bourgeois commercial civilization mostly treated the Soviet experiment as irrelevant, except for two key moments: in 1918–1921, when the Soviet revolution threatened to spill over into western Europe, and during the 1930s, when the mighty Five-Year Plans of Stalin's dictatorship presented themselves as an alternative to the sick-unto-death Western capitalism of the Great Depression. Now the line traced by the "Iron Curtain" from "Stettin on the Baltic to Trieste on the Adriatic" became a long front of struggle over which system more effectively satisfied standards for the good life, with each spelling out, in opposition to the other, a definition of mass consumption suited to its resources and legacy of development. On material cultural grounds, the two worlds were as distant as Duluth was from Dresden at the outset of the century.

Yet Joseph Stalin too had spoken about the "standard of living" when, in his first major speech to the Soviet electors on February 9, 1946, he reviewed the successes of the war against fascism. Wanting to downplay the "enormous achievements" of the Red Army, whose leadership appeared dangerously competitive with his own, he underscored that "above all, it was our Soviet social system that triumphed. The war showed that our Soviet social system is a truly popular system." As for the future: "We

will pay particular attention to increasing production of consumer goods, to raising the standard of living of workers, by progressively reducing the cost of goods and by creating all sorts of scientific research institutes."¹⁶

Observers, not only on the left, took very seriously the Soviet system's capacity to accomplish this. Given the high growth rates reported for the Five-Year Plans of the 1930s and the Soviet Army's remarkable mobilization of the country's resources to defeat the Nazis, it was generally expected that centrally planned economies would rebuild quickly and that investment in producer industries would rapidly give way to turning out the basic consumer goods that European workers generally lacked, meaning adequate food, proper clothing, decent shelter, and collective services such as education, health care, and leisuretime pursuits. This illusion persisted well into the mid-1970s: until China's feats of the 1990s, no country delivered more refrigerators, television sets, or washing machines per capita in a ten-year period than the USSR in the decade from 1970 to 1980.¹⁷ And even later the Soviet bloc still presented itself—and was regarded by a substantial chunk of the western European left—as the only viable model for the impoverished postcolonial world. What's more, many European intellectuals continued to admire socialist Europe's high standards of cultural consumption, contrasting its patronage of the arts, egalitarian education systems, and heavily subsidized books, records, and theater tickets to the squalid pulp culture alleged to be propagated by America's invasive imperialism. True, the main terrain of armed conflict between the United States and the USSR took place outside Europe. But the main theater of the battle over living standards was western Europe.

Welcome Mr. Marshall!

Seen as a keystone of Europe's travailed development as a consumer society, the Marshall Plan acquires new meaning, for its imprint lies not so much in its financial contribution to European reconstruction as in the conditions that were demanded to disburse the aid. All told, the actual sums expended in Europe in the form of credits, grants, and supplies are now regarded as small with respect to indigenous investment, representing perhaps 5 percent of the total capital formation during the years of recovery down to 1950. Working in close collaboration with like-minded western Europeans, U.S. planners, aid officials, and business leaders aimed to prevent political leaders, with the memory of the great depression and wartime economic administration still fresh in their

minds, from being tempted to fall back on state intervention, centralized planning, and closed economies. Accordingly, the goal of the European Cooperation Agency (ECA) set up to administer the European Recovery Program was to coordinate cross-European arrangements. Operating out of headquarters in Paris under the direction of Paul G. Hoffman, the former president of the Studebaker Company, it worked through local country missions to establish the aid guidelines. These aimed at building a self-sustaining industrialized Europe, one that thrived by intra-regional trade yet was firmly inserted into the American-dominated world economy.¹⁸

Though often regarded as the starting point for western Europe's post-war boom, the Marshall Plan was not at all conceived to create a consumers' Europe. Its first consideration was to address the dollar shortage that prevented European suppliers from purchasing U.S. goods and risked bringing recovery to a standstill. This shortfall was blamed on the trade gap between the two areas, which in turn was blamed on Europe's perennially flagging economic output. Consequently the first priority of aid was to boost productivity by investing in industrial retooling and infrastructure such as power stations, electric grids, port facilities, and railroad bridges. For the time being, national levels of consumption were not to exceed the prewar benchmark of 1938. Accordingly no aid was to be released to refurbish ragged wardrobes, replenish war-ravaged homes with household crockery and furnishings, pay for pensions, much less raise wages. Even food assistance was doled out parsimoniously—only in cases where it was absolutely necessary politically—as in western Germany in 1948, to relieve malnutrition, offset the worst shortages, and enable governments to push ahead with recovery without stirring up furious protests from people who were famished. Given these aims, the Beveridge Plan was the Marshall Plan's *bête noir*: ECA officials were furious that Britain's Labour government took American aid only to pour it down the bottomless pit of welfare state spending.¹⁹

More fundamentally, western Europeans had to be persuaded to accept what Charles S. Maier has concisely called the "politics of productivity."²⁰ For this to happen, business had to let go of its Malthusian belief that all-out production, based on introducing Fordist principles and the latest American technology and machinery, would bring about oversupply and depression. The more difficult proposition was to persuade labor to relinquish its resistance, for revamping production systems called for layoffs as well as intensifying the vexatious time-and-motion stud-

ies, clocking, speedups, and piecework systems that workers loathed. In the past labor had rarely benefited from increasing output, and nothing new was in store in the late 1940s. The pressure was on to revive exports—which was indispensable if European manufacturing was to re-enter global trade circuits more and more dominated by U.S. international corporations. All signs pointed to exploiting Europe's cheap labor force, if possible even to cut wages, though the prices of food, clothing, and housing, swelled by shortages and inflation, showed no signs of dropping.

True, the "high standard of living" of "Joe Smith, America's average worker"—with his sturdy build, tidy home, clean blue-jean overalls, shiny tools, and car—was the showpiece of campaigns to persuade European wage earners to work harder, accept unemployment, and defer consumption for the sake of investment. But the unspoken price was curbing autonomous trade union power and restoring managerial hierarchies. As a condition for obtaining aid, American officials not only pressed for the more or less legal ouster of the left from governing coalitions, but with help from missions of U.S. labor union officials to Europe, it sought to repress labor radicalism by splitting the trade union movements and turning a blind eye to firing militant workers and Communist union delegates.²¹

For a mass market to be established as the basis for intra-European co-operation, which, as propaganda insisted, would in turn promote peace and a higher standard of living, huge power was applied and consumer expectations of higher standards not only postponed, but emphatically lowered. Hence the "striking contrast" between U.S. and western European levels of consumption around 1950: whereas western Europeans were consuming only 3 percent more than in 1938, even though industrial output was up fully 50 percent, American consumption levels had risen 70 percent. Moreover, pricing practices remained "monstrous," notably in France, the fault of the "megalomania" of producers, the inefficiencies of distributors, and the disorientation of consumers in the face of inflation and shortages. Duly considering the different legacies of distribution of wealth, the terrible war damage inflicted on eastern Europe, and the very unequal sets of resources available to each to rebuild, the investment priorities set for the Atlantic Community by the Marshall Plan turned out to be as harsh on lower-class consumers as those imposed within the Soviet bloc by the various Five-Year Plans.²²

Yet there was a world of difference. For the ultimate intention was

to promote a cross-Atlantic, western European-wide alliance to grow consumption rather than to revive the anticonsumption coalitions of the prewar era. Hostility to higher norms of consumption was intended to be temporary. And so it happened that around 1951, as inflation was reduced, basic industries took off, trade recovered, and labor protests began to burst out across western Europe, American ECA officials reminded their allies that the Marshall Plan had originally been conceived to fight Communists, hence the funds now needed to be disbursed more generously for housing, hospitals, schools, tourist facilities, and the like. Employers too, if they were not to appear like the politically reactionary, economically retrograde bourgeois industrialists of the continent's unhappy past, should share their profits from productivity gains with the "little people of Europe."²³

Meanwhile, to convince western European publics that the long-term benefits of this new market culture offset the short-term costs, the ECA engaged in mass marketing. As a onetime company executive, Paul Hoffman regarded it as self-evident that for the local missions to function without a "strong information arm" would be "as futile as trying to conduct a major business without sales, advertising, and customer relations."²⁴ A half-century's practice at selling products and public policy had taught that information imparted in nonideological language offered the most effective means of convincing people to trust new social calculations. Hence the Marshall Plan should emphasize best practice, not politics, the "American assembly line," not "the communist party line," the "full dinner pail," not the "free lunch."²⁵ Any well-managed U.S. corporation at the time spent 5 percent of the costs of a new product launch on marketing; that was the exact percentage Hoffman ordered the local missions to spend on education and information.

A generous part of the monies went to the ECA's Film Unit, which in the hands of talented teams of European filmmakers produced about 200 documentary-style movies from 1949 to 1953. Sober realism was their leitmotif rather than populist reveries. The scripts called for trusting in slow progress rather than expecting instant gratification, focusing on concrete needs rather than embracing utopian schemes, and confiding in European traditions rather than imitating social makeovers of foreign provenance.²⁶

That was the carefully calibrated message of *The Story of Koula*, one of a handful of films dedicated to the reconstruction of Greece, where the

United States was involved in an arduous, eventually successful operation to restore the conservative monarchy in the face of Communist-led republican insurgents. Filmed in 1951 (the same year Berlanga conceived his feature), Charles (aka Vittorio) Gallo's pseudodocumentary was similarly focused on the fate of a rural backwater.²⁷ As the camera moves amid the stone hovels, olive trees, and dry-as-dust fields of Filavia, a mountain village of Xanthi in northern Thrace, to show the futile labors of the old men, boys, and women in the absence of adult males (victims, it is implied, of the Communist-fomented civil war), the narrator speaks in stentorian tones of the people's inveterate struggle for subsistence. Their biggest need, as he diagnoses it, is powerful draft animals to furrow the rebarbatively rocky soil.

The story of Filavia's redemption then unfolds. Fatalistic and diffident, the old people ignore the official notice to register to be eligible for aid. Were it not for the enterprising spirit of a single lad, nobody would have applied. When the date of consignment comes due, with his old Papu in tow, Kyriakos hitches up the oxcart for the two-day trip down to the port of Kavala. Normally aid was stamped "For European Recovery—Supplied by the United States of America." But for live Missouri mules, that label was inappropriate: not that the rodeo atmosphere at the dockside or the Roman-lettered "Texas" branded on the animals' glossy haunches left any doubt about their provenance. As the older men futilely try to domesticate the braying animals with kicks and slaps, Kyriakos shows that persuasion works better than force: animals, like humans, work more efficiently if treated as individuals, called by name, and cajoled into new routines, rather than like anonymous beasts of burden, cursed, beaten, and starved into submission. Even so, democratic manners won't tolerate the high-spirited Koula's insubordinate bucking when he is finally harnessed to work. There is no place at Filavia for an unproductive animal, especially not one with his scale of appetite. Now Old World common sense comes into play. Kyriakos hitches the massive mule to his spindly female donkey, and the main message comes through: individuals resolved to choose a better future, combining new machinery with age-old practice and prowess with patience, "work together for a little more productivity, a little bit more well-being." So the villagers of Filavia get the message right. The Marshall Plan is intended to produce not the high standard of living in itself, but rather the technologies, procedures, and information about how to achieve "a little bit more well-being." Expec-

tations for the future draw on sound traditions, and none should be so grandiose as to confound the current planes of living with the “external standards” that the United States’ own example threatened to introduce.

Fighting the Nylon Wars

The great predicament facing the Market Empire as its great former enemy, European merchant civilization, capitulated, and as it geared up militarily and ideologically to fight the Cold War against its new enemy, Soviet collectivism, was whether a mighty power could be sustained on the basis of the humdrum principles of material betterment. No matter how much faith the Americans reposed in the belief that their standard of living was superior, and that the alternatives to freedom of choice, the high standard of living, and democracy were coercion, deprivation, and dictatorship, there was something problematic, even contradictory, about resting such huge power on such a labile basis as the satisfaction derived from mass consumer goods. Historically, the capacity to make war had been associated with the aptitude for sacrifice. Yet from the turn of the 1950s, the U.S. corporate elite promised a “people’s capitalism,” a system that could mount a full-fledged war effort even while guaranteeing higher and higher levels of consumption. Unlike old Europe, the United States had the industrial capabilities to deliver both guns and butter.

Still, discomfiting questions abounded. Was Western civilization (as the North Atlantic area was now regularly described), based on the dulling comforts of mass consumption, also a society worth fighting for in terms of values? How could it be shown that Soviet claims to be catching up by means that guaranteed both equality and well-being were meaningless when large parts of Europe, as well as the globe, were not just not catching up with standards of living proposed by the West but were being left further and further behind? How could it be demonstrated that the so-called sovereign consumer was truly sovereign, and that mass-consumption society was not paralyzing to the political skills and critical capacities of its citizenry? “Between nations, a certain equality of condition . . . is necessary for understanding and frankness.” Writing about Europeans’ growing estrangement from the United States in the early 1950s, the philosopher Hannah Arendt’s point about the misrecognition begotten by extreme disparities of living conditions could have been taken straight from Woodrow Wilson.²⁸

In “The Nylon Wars” (1951) the sociologist David Riesman captured

the dilemma of a nation whose hegemony rested on the plumped-up cushion of material affluence. At first reading, his short satirical essay sounds like a paean to peaceable conflict resolution. The U.S. military is commended for the “inspired” decision to bombard the Soviet Union with consumer goods in the belief that “if allowed to sample the riches of America, the Russian people would not long tolerate masters who gave them tanks and spies instead of vacuum cleaners and beauty parlors.”²⁹ Under the code name Operation Abundance, the first raids pound the Soviet people with 200,000 pairs of nylon hose, 4 million packs of cigarettes, 35,000 Toni permanent-wave kits, 20,000 yo-yos, 10,000 wristwatches, and a barrage of odds and ends from Army PX overstock. The Soviets retaliate with their own “aggressive generosity”: tins of caviar, ill-fitting fur coats, and copies of Stalin’s speeches on the minorities question. Saturation bombing culminates when American forces make a massive drop of two-way radios. Armed with these gadgets, private Soviet citizens are in turn able to command drops of goods as if they were ordering from a Sears Roebuck catalogue. Succumbing to American strategic cunning, the Soviets ingloriously scramble around gathering up capitalist junk, the electrical supply collapses under overloaded circuits, and, the American victory proclaimed, totalitarian government turns from producing guns to turning out butter.

The goods-poor USSR was an easy butt of ridicule, and Hollywood films and newspaper columnists often indulged in an attitude that Riesman himself later disavowed as encouraging “a way of life racism.”³⁰ In fact his satire cut two ways. Though Riesman was unimpeachably anti-Soviet, he worried that Americans’ obsession with war materiel was the other face of their growing fixation on consumer material. By treating bombardments with commodities as real combat, he expanded on an idea first set out in his famous book, *The Lonely Crowd*, namely that the American middle classes, who had once been a wholesome “inner-directed” people guided by an internal moral gyroscope, under the corrupting influence of mass consumption had degenerated into an “other-directed” people guided by the external radar of conformist impulses. This pliability left them susceptible to the militaristic posturing incited by the mass media. Peer pressure had turned them into Cold War fanatics. If war it be, better then that it be acted out through the play of Operation Abundance than by dallying on the brink of nuclear holocaust.³¹ Accordingly, “The Nylon Wars” closes with a double victory: as the Soviet dictatorship turns its resources from armaments to the accouterments of mass

consumption, the American people abandon their nuclear saber-rattling for a more innocuous war-games fantasy.

More concretely, official America rose to the challenge of resting mighty power on the bases of consumer democracy by developing a number of strategies, none altogether new with respect to the past, but all far better coordinated. The most fundamental move was to contrast the consumer freedoms and affluence of the Atlantic Community with the closed economies and low standards of living of collectivist societies. Fusing the right to a higher standard of living with the two other fundamental values of the anticommunist crusade, democracy and freedom, propaganda declared that the Soviet Union was the archenemy not only because it was totalitarian and anticapitalist, but also because the lack of consumer choice was the purest evidence of the absence of freedom. If there was no consumer choice, there could be no human development, however big the leaps in gross national product.

Even so, the USSR's sheer economic capacity drew begrudging admiration, and American officials closely followed every move the Soviets embarked upon after Stalin's death to compete around the standard of living. One result was totally to reverse the official attitude toward trade fairs, for the planned economy's strong suit was the collective display of its productive might and confidence in the future. Indeed, it so happened that as Leipzig had fallen into the Soviet Zone in the last days of the war, when the Great Fair reopened in May 1946, the first "Freedom Fair" became a showcase of economic planning: first for the rapidly reviving industries of Saxony and Thuringia, then for the output of the Five-Year Plans of the Soviet bloc. Under the management of the German People's Republic, more and more energy went into the Machine Fair, its displays of dynamos, tractors, and hydraulic equipment, dominated by giant statues of Stalin and Mao Tse-tung, greatly eclipsing in size and visibility the venerable Sample Fair with its characteristic displays of porcelain dolls, photographic equipment, office machinery, and fountain pens. Moreover, western European buyers had not lost the habit of going to Saxony for machine goods, as well as for fine finished products—Leica cameras, musical instruments, and toys. At the Fall 1954 fair they mingled with 670,000 visitors.³² This was a worrisome development. For one thing, the buyers brought back glowing news of the achievements of socialist reconstruction. Worse, the contacts created opportunities for trafficking in Western technological secrets, which was illegal according to National Security Council Order 68 of April 14, 1950, which barred

American allies from trade in strategic materials with Communist-bloc countries.

Political concerns as much as trade interests thus strengthened the Eisenhower administration's determination to build an alternative fair system. In August 1954, with monies drawn from the presidential emergency fund earmarked for cultural programs, it launched "immediate and vigorous action to demonstrate the superiority of the products and cultural values of our system of free enterprise." Drawing on "a national network of volunteers dedicated to the twin principles of decentralization and voluntarism," government departments collaborated with national business associations like the Advertising Council to solicit donations of manpower, equipment, and money. Whereas the Soviet fairs showcased the power of planning, focusing on monster machinery, technological advances, and scientific discoveries as stepping-stones to universal progress, the American fairs showcased the eclectic material democracy of the here and now: at one time or another, the exposition grounds mounted with Buckminster Fuller's geodesic domes and other modernist follies hosted full-replica self-service stores and ranch homes, exhibitions of abstract art, jazz concerts, Cinerama spectacles showing snippets from everyday life, and fashion runways. In 1960, six years into the program, the Commerce Department's recently established Office of International Trade Fairs ran ninety-seven official exhibits in twenty-nine countries, exposing more than 60 million people to the way of life of a nation in which government seemed practically nonexistent and liberty was shown not as some abstract right but as exposure to the concrete freedom of making choices by selecting among a myriad of spectacles and artifacts.³³

The U.S. government also took in hand the elaboration of statistics to demonstrate the superiority of the American Standard of Living. Responding to "insistent public demand for comparative wage and price data," the Bureau of Labor Statistics, guided by the economist Irving Kravitz, constructed new indices to calculate the purchasing power of hourly earnings.³⁴ By cutting through the muddle of estimates about local costs, currency, and wage differentials that had plagued the ILO-Ford Inquiry and caused the breakdown of crossnational comparisons in the 1930s, they facilitated the comparison of standards from country to country. Practically any medium could cite these figures, and any consumer could grasp the sense. When it was learned that, on average, American workers had to labor for 6 minutes to buy a pound of bread, 27 minutes for a dozen eggs, and 32 minutes for a pound of butter,

whereas their Soviet counterparts had to work respectively 25, 158, and 542 minutes for the same items, the case for which system was superior seemed open and shut.

In reality these indices suffered from many of the same drawbacks as the Ford-ILO inquiry, insofar as they assumed that the standard of living was based on individual income and the price consumers paid for single items. They indulged the habit of ignoring the contribution to individual welfare of government services (like tax discounts on mortgages) or price supports (such as big highways and cheap fuel). And they made no determination about what goods people really wanted. Nor did they offer any way of measuring the value of goods acquired through informal exchanges or gray markets—which in centrally planned economies went along with the terrain. Nor did they reflect the human and other costs of the high productivity that resulted in higher income, as well as lower prices, but also more intense and longer work time. Though these indices could have been applied to practically any reality, which was their virtue, they were almost invariably used to contrast the hardest to compare, namely market-driven and planned economies with their wholly different systems of pricing and supply. Rarely were the figures used to make historical comparisons, as between the postwar era and prewar times. Nor, more instructively, were they used to compare the ever more prosperous core areas of western Europe and the emerging Third World countries or its own ever more marginal periphery, notably Spain, Portugal, southern Italy, and Greece; nor did they compare the tenor of life in the latter countries with the rising standards in fast-industrializing Poland, Yugoslavia, and Hungary.

As such comparisons became the norm, workers too were solicited to voice their opinions about relative standards of living. And as this happened, they too learned to explain their opinions on material grounds rather than according to ideological beliefs. So in 1955, when 1,000-plus French workers were asked to rank countries according to where they thought workers lived the best, the majority ranked their homeland France the highest, the United States second, and neighboring Italy last. They were completely split about the Soviet Union, with a quarter marking it the best place and a slightly larger group the worst. Left-wing union members were similarly split. Half thought that American workers lived best, on the basis of what they heard about American workers' owning cars, televisions, refrigerators, and washing machines, dressing well, and having more amusements and fun. Half said that Soviet workers lived

best, on the basis of their belief that Soviet society was more egalitarian and workers were engaged in the pursuit of social justice, labored for the collectivity rather than for the bosses, and got more respect.³⁵ As polling became more professionalized, questions about best and worst would be reframed as questions about the quality of life as determined by goods and services. It was implicit that the answers should be based on individual satisfactions framed in terms of the choices being offered, and not on collective beliefs about the relative merits of alternative political systems.

Above all, American policy pressed for the areas the U.S. armies had occupied after the war, Japan, but especially Germany, to become showcases of consumer democracy. That was a more problematic strategy with respect to Japan: that everything about living conditions, from the tiny scale of shelter to the semiotics of diet, was so distant from the Western consumer experience made it hard to agree on benchmarks for consumer progress. Anyway, in the larger scheme of geoeconomics, it was more important for Japan to be turned to producing consumer goods than to consuming them.³⁶ In western Europe, by contrast, the impatience for Europe to lift its standards was great, especially as the argument that low standards of living had caused fascism was adapted to explain the popularity of Communism. Turning Europe into an area of high consumption also made more and more sense from the point of view of rationalizing the division of labor within the Atlantic Alliance. Because of its "inability to resist militarily," western Europe "has to compensate economically." To do this, the region had to keep pace with Soviet rates of growth. Thereby it could "weaken if not destroy the appeal of communism to its workers and intellectuals." In turn, "its rising standard of living would give the lie to communist propaganda about the decadence of the West" and have "a magnetic effect on the satellite peoples."³⁷ It was an unspoken aim that as European elites accepted this new division of labor, they would surrender the galling snobbery that Europe stood for true culture whereas the United States stood for crass civilization.³⁸

For western Europe to become the showcase for consumer democracy three conditions had to be fulfilled. The first was that it renounce irrevocably the region's mercantilist traditions, opening up its markets. This was indeed occurring under American pressure and with the core western European states' own steps toward establishing the Common Market beginning in the early 1950s. The second condition was for the imperial powers—France, Great Britain, Belgium, Holland, and Portugal—to distance themselves from, if not renounce, their colonies. This meant re-

nouncing the special economic ties that were under pressure anyway in the face of anticolonial movements and changing terms of trade that favored the United States. It also meant renouncing a major pillar of the old regime of consumption, namely the colonial way of life, which had justified to colonialists the rightness of their civilizing mission, differentiated the peoples of each empire from one another, and reinforced their ties to the hierarchies of distinction of the metropolis. Tying their standards to American society, some western Europeans expressed regret at the distance that this would create with respect to their former colonies. The leaders of the nonaligned world, meeting in Bandung, Indonesia, in April 1955, recognized as much. As a "Third World" in the making, they took stock both of their outcast status under the old bourgeois regime of consumption and of the unattainable heights of the new American standards, seeking in Soviet-type strategies of collective provisioning some new alternative. Thereby western European states were more firmly joined to the White Atlantic, and more inclined to the appropriate vocation of a second-order power, namely to guarantee the material improvement of their own citizens. Henceforth competition among them was no longer measured in terms of the power of arms, size of colonial territories, or wealth of empire, but within the framework of comparative data on gross national product, inflation rates, index figures for expenditure on health and leisure, and diffusion curves for indoor plumbing, automobiles, washing machines, and television sets.

On the other hand, Europeans too had widely come around to accepting that Europe's perennial state of war in the twentieth century had been the major obstacle to raising living standards, hence that enduring peace alone could guarantee that prosperity would persist, and even grow. This turnabout in thinking made the possibility of armed conflict between superpowers on European soil, with the threat of nuclear annihilation, all the more terrifying. Consequently, America's western allies had little trouble finding majorities convinced that economic security could not be achieved without military security, and that this could best be achieved under the American nuclear umbrella. This was all the more true as it became evident that such a commitment not only did not interfere with, but in fact greatly enhanced, the share of the national product available for consumer goods and services.

Without the "birth of the mass market," however, these conditions would have been harder, if not impossible, to secure. This auspicious event took place in 1953, as Howard Whidden, foreign editor of *Business*

Week, expertly wrote, when “a sudden spurt in personal consumption” made it appear that “the long-neglected consumer will play an increasingly important role in the European economy.” Sharply rising demand had the effect of reorienting the distribution system to the “one-class market” that had enabled American manufacturers to commit to mass-production systems in the early twentieth century. By so doing, it broke the monopoly of “manufacturers who in their domestic sales were too exclusively concerned with service to a limited, almost custom-tailored, high quality market.” By the end of the decade, Whidden predicted, “an American style consumer market will be quite fully developed in Britain and some other continental countries, while in the rest of Western Europe it will be well on the way.”³⁹ This optimism was borne out as early as 1954, when the recession that hit the United States with the end of the Korean War left the European economies pretty much unscathed.

This “one-class market,” which many had yearned for but nobody expected to appear so suddenly, came from four sources. The first was fuller employment. The second was an upward nudge in real wages for workers, which resulted from higher output. The third was the decline of income differentials between the wealthiest and the lower income groups as a result of war losses, inflation, and the introduction of income taxes. The fourth was the rise in social benefits associated with welfare statism, including rent control, housing subsidies, pensions, and family allowances. Government programs imparted a sense of security as well as giving heft to purchasing power for household goods when wages were still very low. By setting priorities with an eye to the succession of developments in American society, government also fostered a sense of the sets of goods people could expect to obtain in the near future.

The one factor missing from this account was war, namely the Korean War, which unlike the two earlier global wars fought in the twentieth century was blessedly distant from European territory. Lasting from June 1950 to July 1953, the conflict had many of the same profitable effects for European manufacturers and consumers that European wars had had for the Americans earlier in the century. The demand for armaments exceeded the capacity of the main belligerent, the United States, and the urgency of satisfying this need, as well as the demands for consumer goods in countries not engaged on the war fronts, generated higher employment. In turn, higher employment generated greater purchasing power. Meanwhile, in the belief that Korea was a diversion and that the main attack from the USSR would still come from the east, the United States

poured millions of dollars more into Europe, mainly in the form of army procurement. As the number of well-cared-for U.S. divisions deployed by NATO rose from one to six, and the troop levels from 81,000 to 260,800, compared with the 238,600 Americans stationed in Korea, their host regions boomed.⁴⁰

Moreover, by pressing its European allies to contribute materiel to the war effort, the United States gave a nice stimulus to the European economy. The Allies' old enemy, Germany, was the biggest beneficiary. Whereas other western European states threw resources into military production at the expense of the civilian sector, the German Federal Republic had been banned from producing for military purposes. Consequently, West German enterprises were left to concentrate on capital and consumer goods. Initially these goods were destined for export. But as business picked up and employment and wages rose, leftover capacity began to be used to manufacture for home consumption as well. For the first time, not just the trade unions but also government and business conceived of the nation as having markets that were deep at home as well as expansive abroad. With full employment and rising wages, West German industrial workers began to be treated as full-fledged consumers.

During the Korean War, West Germany was more firmly drawn into the western European trading area, bringing the region one step closer to having the breadth of market indispensable to the economies of scale and scope of American-style mass production. If left to their own devices, German enterprises would have sought this breadth of market outside its borders to the east, as it had in the past, returning to its old markets in central Europe. But American strategic interests barred this tendency. Forced by Cold War politics into the more competitive environment of Atlantic Europe, West German enterprises came under more and more pressure to curb their cartels, introduce American techniques of mass production, and be more receptive to the mass-marketing methods indispensable to establishing themselves in new sales territories.⁴¹

Thus the rump state of the great German Empire, the sole power that in the first decades of the century had been capable of anchoring a European-based, continentwide market at the same time as generating a notion of market culture that presented itself as an alternative to the American, was integrated into the western area, to become the powerhouse of the crossnational export trade indispensable to the development of a regional mass market. Its cultural pretensions reduced, the chastened western area of the German nation embraced the basics of consumer well-

being with remarkable equanimity. Ludwig Erhard, economics minister under Konrad Adenauer from 1949 to 1963 and chancellor in his own right for the three years following, was especially eloquent in endorsing the “basic democratic right of consumer freedom,” which he defined as “first and foremost the freedom of all citizens to shape their lives in a form adequate to the personal wishes and conceptions of the individual, within the framework of the financial means at their disposal.” However, for Erhard—as a Catholic, a onetime member of the circle around Wilhelm Vershofen’s Society for Consumer Research at Nuremberg, and a firm, if subdued, critic of the Nazi command economy before the Anglo-American forces appointed him economic adviser for their occupation zone—consumer well-being was never an absolute good, as current American ideology held. Consumers acted in their own and society’s best interest when they were properly guided by carefully negotiated national labor contracts, a tight money supply, and conservative good taste.⁴²

Practically speaking, by the turn of the 1960s West Germans were no longer either heroes or hagglers; they were becoming known as affluent Europeans with high rates of expenditure on kitchens, automobiles, and holidays. So the west of the nation, once the least hospitable to the idea of consumer sovereignty, had now become the most open, albeit within the constraints of stolid middle-class virtue and the protections advised by the social market economy. It was in 1959 that for the first time a German spoke of “our consumer society.”⁴³ The proclamation wasn’t without ambiguity. It expressed the immense self-satisfaction at the progress made since 1945, when Germans were scrounging cigarette butts from American GIs, as well as pride at being the showcase of the Western way of life against the collectivist vision being showcased on the other side of the Brandenburg Gate. But this new self-definition was also mixed with the anxiety to assert that “our consumer society” was not exactly identical with the American version, castigated for its excess of materialism and degenerate youth culture, and to paper over a well-known secret, that many older people remembered the last good times as the peaceful late 1930s before Germany had been led into war.

Breaking through Barriers, Leveling Differences

What did the advance of the mass consumer society mean in view of European society’s history of contentious politics? Had affluence begun to make the publics of Germany, France, or Italy into a “people of plenty,”

as David Potter characterized contemporary Americans?⁴⁴ In the early 1960s the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu was among the first to pose the question: What impact did consumption have on class? And in the next decade his main research would be dedicated to mapping the new social “distinctions” generated by the redistribution of “cultural capital” as consumers made choices among an ever more abundant and disparate array of goods and services.⁴⁵ Clearly, there were no easy answers. A quarter of a century later, a Bourdieu protégé dedicated to answering the same query would respond: “the figure of the consumer has to be conceived in relation to an ensemble of changes that are not purely of an economic order, even if, indisputably, its development is coterminous with the growth in quantity and diversity of consumer goods as well as access by new social groups to goods and services hitherto reserved to a narrower section of the public.”⁴⁶

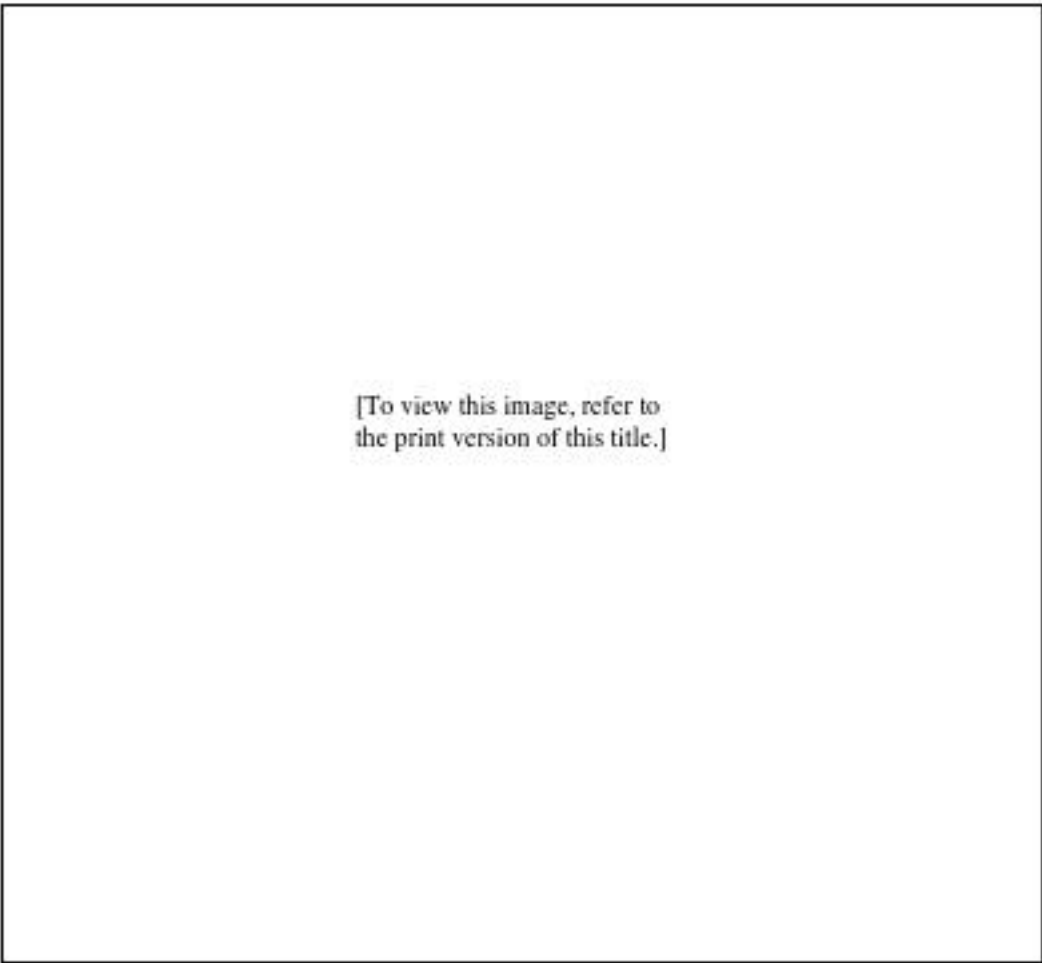
By the mid-1960s western Europe’s occupational profile was acquiring some traits common to the United States as, everywhere if very unevenly, peasants became scarcer, the number of capitalists and independent professionals declined, and the proportion of salaried executives, white-collar employees, and factory workers rose. Still, to speak of the growth of “middle classes,” as if to imply that social inequality had declined or political power was effectively democratized, was open to challenge by any number of studies that showed the persistence of “inequality of access to nearly all of the rewards of the socio-economic system.”⁴⁷ For good reason, most Europeans continued to emphasize the glass half empty, rather than the glass half full.

Nonetheless, western Europe had begun to move away from the caste-like hierarchies of the pre-World War II era as the sheer increase in the proportion of salaried people in the total population made it possible for more and more of them to make new choices about using their income.

The choices becoming available to people from increased income as early as the first half of the 1950s were the focus of the first consumer survey ever in France, and the first to be undertaken by any government in Europe. This was conducted in 1954 under the auspices of the General Commissariat of Planning as the government prepared to launch France’s second Four-Year Plan. Shifting investment priorities from capital goods to consumer equipment, the plan calculated that family income would increase at an annual average of 4–5 percent. This was a spectacular sum compared with the 3 percent increase for the entire period 1938–1950, not to mention the paltry 5.5 percent overall gain by western Europeans for the period 1913–1929.

"You earn 20 percent more; what are you going to do with it?" That was the shockingly direct question that the commissariat hired the Institut Français d'Opinion Publique, or IFOP, to ask. It was the first time that French citizens—or any European people—were asked what they would do if they had more income. Moreover, the pollster, Jean Stoetzel, a longtime collaborator of George Gallup, built his sample of "urban salaried people" to include not only skilled wage earners, unskilled laborers, and pensioners, but also managers. In the past they would have been regarded as too diverse in their "aspirations and desires" to be comparable. Now, however, the supposition was that there was no intrinsic difference. To account for differences in their wants, the statisticians studied variables such as family size, place of residence, and disposable income instead of assuming different needs for different classes.⁴⁸

A preliminary look at the responses shows how remarkably inegalitarian and uncomfortable a place urban France still was in terms of basic necessities: 76 percent of all households had no running hot water, 90 percent no washing machine, and 91 percent no refrigerator. Only 5 percent of the men who worked went by automobile, compared with the 85 percent who used public transportation, rode bicycles, or went on foot. French salaried people, no matter how large their income, were still parsimonious: 57 percent had never used credit. Most were familiar with the new commodities they could purchase with more income and looked forward to the time they might take a vacation, buy kitchen appliances, or purchase an automobile. But large numbers of manual workers and pensioners intended to spend any additional income on food, especially meat and vegetables. And when managers and office heads spoke of making "important purchases," they were referring to what we would regard as basics, such as clothing, home improvements, and household equipment. If mass-consumption society was being "born," it was an excruciating slow labor: two-thirds of the cadres said their standard of living had improved since 1950, but only one-third of the office employees and skilled workers, and less than a sixth of the unskilled. That the old regime of consumption still cast a long shadow over social relations is underscored by the quaint class stereotypes that the IFOP's bright young statisticians used to illustrate their findings. Social standing may have begun to be regarded as mattering less when it came to spending income. Nonetheless the little diagrams still emphasized social distinctions based on education, dress, work tools, and body language: the office manager was shown suited seated at his desk, the supervisor flourishing his telephone to bark out commands, the clerk clutching his dossier of papers, the



[To view this image, refer to the print version of this title.]

“What would you do with 20% more income?” Occupational stereotypes are still being used to characterize consumer wants, 1955. Courtesy of the Bibliothèque de Sciences Po.

skilled worker brandishing his toolbox, and the unskilled laborer bent over his wheelbarrow.

At least another decade passed before these differences were eclipsed by a new world of reference outside the traditional status hierarchies of class, work, and education. As nonworking time increased, income rose, and exposure to the mass media became more and more intense, especially as a result of the jump in television ownership, the commercial-cultural sphere that we saw pressing into the political sphere even under authoritarian regimes established itself as an unrelenting font of new cultural models for millions of urbanized peasants, emigrant laborers, and women entering the labor force, not to mention the young. It was a signally important font for new elites of managers and executives, who, in the values of efficiency, relaxation, and democratic manners or the habit

of the “week-end,” the “barbecue,” or Saturday supermarket shopping, established their social visibility and legitimacy with respect to traditional bourgeois conventions of distinction. It was no less important for young people who, in their quest to establish their identity as a “generation,” drew on the music, dress, and other paraphernalia of cross-Atlantic youth culture. Now fully transatlantic in scope, the commercial-cultural sphere offered an endlessly rich repertoire of commodities and customs, from rock and roll and blue jeans to dating and the pill; it made for the biggest break between one age cohort and another experienced in the twentieth or any other century.⁴⁹

Unlike the traditional political-economic or cultural leadership, the new elite of celebrity fashioned by mass consumption and spectatorship lacked decisionmaking power, yet were “objects of discussion, interest, admiration, imitation, and collective affection.” As “celebrities,” Franco Alberoni, the Italian sociologist, presciently observed in the early 1960s, they did not stand at the apex of society in any conventional sense. Thus they could engage attention without provoking the class envy, resentment, or hierarchical patterns of emulation typically stimulated by the old elites. In sum, they were a resource like other commodities, offering new models of social belonging.⁵⁰ What is more, their origin could be just as easily international as national. The celebrity could be European—the Italian pop singer Mina, the French crooners Jonny Halliday and Sylvie Vartain, or the Beatles—or from the United States like Bill Haley, Elvis Presley, James Dean, Natalie Wood, or any number of other Hollywood stars. By the 1950s the distinction between the autochthonous and the alien was becoming ever harder to draw; the commercial-cultural sphere already existed wide and deep in the United States, and for decades it had been intermixing with that which existed in European societies. Only now the connections were more intense and politicized, and the points of contact between the two sides of the Atlantic more numerous, clearly drawn, and pervasive.

As had occurred in the United States far earlier, the consumer market began to yield a brand-new social scientific visualization of consumers, assisted by American marketing and polling agencies, with George Gallup and the Nielsen Company in the lead.⁵¹ The images it produced in turn blurred, then eventually obliterated the figures that were emblematic of the old categories of social stratification—the parsimonious worker, the self-sacrificing housewife, the disoriented, fascist-leaning salaried man, the conservative *bürgerlich* man of culture—to make way

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Changing stereotypes, 1961: yesterday's gluttonous, sedentary worker becomes tomorrow's sleek, comfort-minded consumer.
Entreprise, February 1961. Courtesy of the Thomas J. Watson Business
and Economics Library, Columbia University.

for new figures—the middle-of-the-road managerial cadre, the discerning Mrs. Consumer, the blue-jeaned, “ye-ye” teenager, the “affluent worker”—followed, in the 1970s and 1980s, by the proliferation of so-called lifestyle identities like the Huppé, the French equivalent of the Yuppie, the working wife, the Gay, or the *paninaro* who hung out in the fast-food shops of Rome and Milan.

As in the United States earlier in the century, marketing spoke as if the mass market existed. True, the structure of demand was changing. Beginning in the 1960s, statistics picked up on a phenomenon that American consumer markets had experienced as early as the 1920s. People with higher incomes were the first to purchase new goods like automobiles or refrigerators when they came on the market. But those with lower incomes caught up on novelties more and more quickly. In 1954, when color television came on the market in France, 5,000 units were sold; in 1965, 4.2 million. The well-off bourgeois family may have been the first to experiment with new goods around 1960, but around 1970 it was the middle-level manager's household or even the decently paid young working-class family tuned into advertising and willing to buy on credit.⁵² Class distinctions were known to be sturdy, and real social power remained vested in old elites. Even so, business found that for purposes of marketing, it worked to divide all of western European society into four categories of revenue from A to D, and to plot marketing strategies accordingly. It was especially exciting for them to observe the emergence of

a new mass-middle, in the big movement of lowest-level D earners to the striving middling C.⁵³

For mass consumption to become the material basis of a “new civilization,” to recall Simon Patten’s phrase, people of different backgrounds had to recognize each other with respect to shared norms of living, even if they accepted that not all citizens, sometimes even hardly any of them, could attain the most prestigious items. With remarkable rapidity as western Europe passed from an “era of scarcity” to an “era of abundance,” ideologues of European consumer society began to speak of the new “civilization” of consumption without the dread of out-of-control desires that the prospect of mass consumption had sparked among the bourgeoisie in the first half of the century. The French sociologist Jean Fourastié, the Candide of the *trente glorieuses*, or the Thirty Glory Years, 1945 to 1975, was particularly eloquent on the subject. Like Patten, he envisaged consumption as having civilizing effects: “a new genre of life should normally create a new civilization,” he hazarded as early as 1947.⁵⁴ When Fourastié returned to the subject of the “civilization of consumers” two decades later, far from fearing that modern consumption standards would destroy the old way of life, he welcomed that spending less on food and drink and more on leisure, health, and education would prolong as well as improve life—for everybody.⁵⁵ Accordingly, primitive consumption would give way to civilizing consumption. Henceforth the physically unhealthy and socially immobile proletariat that conservatives often reproved for spending wage increases on food was treated as capable of becoming upwardly mobile. So the obtuse, obese worker fixed to the table, gobbling down platefuls of food would be transmogrified into a sleek, quick-witted sportsman slaloming down the ski slopes. Even so, the image that was given to illustrate this radical change in the 1961 issue of *Entreprise*, the bimonthly of French managerial elites, is so ambiguous that it is hard to tell whether it was intended as parody about personal self-transformation, a prescription for upward mobility, or an ugly stereotyping of the worker, a still physically repugnant social antagonist.

Building a European Community around Consumption

The figure of the consumer-citizen took a further step away from the past with the establishment of the Common Market in 1957. Article 2 of the Treaty of Rome affirmed that the European Economic Community’s

main social objective was “to promote to the highest degree the satisfaction of needs of the Europeans.” In reality, only one article, number 39, actually used the term “consumer,” in referring to agricultural policy as a means to “secure reasonable prices for delivery to consumers.” Nevertheless, the whole framework was inspired by the neoliberal faith that the enlarged market area would improve the international division of labor, relieve the obstructions to the passage of goods, and lend itself to economies of scale and scope, such that consumers would benefit from increased productivity, higher incomes, new variety, and lower prices. In the euphoria that accompanied the first steps to implement the treaty, Jean Monnet predicted flatly that Europeans would achieve “the standard of American living within fifteen years.”⁵⁶

Europe’s “founding father” wasn’t so far off the mark if we consider the advances made down to 1973–74. Each year the gross national product of France, Germany, Italy, and the Benelux countries grew on average 3.5 percent a year compared with 2.1 percent in the United States, and per capita consumption grew 4.6 percent, compared with the latter’s 2.9 percent. More important, disposable income practically doubled for wage and salary earners, and the volume of trade within the area tripled, quadrupling for automobiles, with visible results on purchasing habits.⁵⁷ As tariffs dropped, the Dutch, inhabitants of a pancake-flat country with no significant auto manufacture, discarded their bicycles to move around by car. Belgian families, who had been cut off from household amenities by high tariffs and inefficient distribution, were suddenly exposed to Italian refrigerators, German washing machines, and German, Dutch, and Japanese radios. Even West Germany, though the largest exporter of household appliances, was also an importer of lower-range refrigerators, washing machines, and radios, as well as the shoes, underwear, and food products that we would expect from sharing markets with its partners, France and Italy.⁵⁸

The excited perception that European markets were becoming homogenized to the benefit of the consumer contained a large measure of wishful thinking, which was greatly reinforced by the first marketing surveys. The very first was conducted in 1963 under the auspices of the *Reader’s Digest*, the United States’ premier advertising medium, which, after installing its headquarters at Paris in 1945, had immediately become a European fixture, translating its pabulum, liberally interspersed with advertisements, in all of Europe’s leading language areas. Interpreting the gloriously illustrated graphs and charts, which were based on interviews

conducted by six independent consumer research companies of a sample of 12,500 people, the economist U. W. Kitzinger concluded: "the countries of Western Europe, Britain and the Six (if we except Central and South Italy) now really look substantially alike. The homes of the Dutch have much of the same durable goods as the homes of the North West Italians, the homes of the Germans have much the same amenities as those of the Dutch."⁵⁹ This finding did not preclude myriad tiny differences, especially in eating habits, that plugs and outlets were rarely compatible from country to country, that pharmaceuticals like birth control pills that were licensed in one place were banned in another. Nor did it preclude huge price differentials for the same or similar goods, which common value-added taxes sought to diminish starting in the early 1970s, only to be thwarted by leaps and dives in currency rates from one country to another. But then the notion of a European consumer, like the American consumer or, for that matter, the French, German, or Italian one, was in large measure a marketers' fiction in the face of the cleavages of class, locality, and ethnic background internal to every nation, as well as leaving out half of Europe. It was a convenient fiction, nonetheless, for investors, marketers, and public officials. The discovery of common consumer habits—which consumers themselves would still have been hard pressed to recognize—redounded politically to the success of the emerging European Community, taking into account that its first aim was to motivate investment and thereby secure greater economic integration.

Official Europe had envisaged that the Common Market would reinforce ties with the United States, just as official America envisaged that it would reinforce U.S. ties to Europe.⁶⁰ But nobody anticipated the degree to which fast-footed American corporations moved in, or the degree to which they were capable, far more than before the war, of leaving their mark on entire sectors of economic activity, including those that had once seemed especially resistant to American corporate inroads, like food and retailing. Down until 1958–59, unless they already had substantial experience in the region, like Kodak, Coca-Cola, or the big automakers, most companies stayed clear of continental Europe, scared off by the regulations, fearful of labor unrest, and dismayed by anti-American animosity. For high returns from direct investment abroad, they preferred Latin America or their special favorite, Anglophone Canada, where by 1960 U.S. companies owned 43 percent of the capital invested in manufacturing.⁶¹ However, as regulations began to be lifted, and as profits on standardized goods sagged in the United States, while consumer spending in

Europe promised to continue to rise, U.S. enterprises became excitedly bullish about investing in the Common Market, especially since they were advantaged by the overvalued dollar. Accordingly the old firms redoubled their efforts, and new companies rushed in. Whereas American capital contributed perhaps 2 percent to fixed capital formation in 1950, it amounted to 5.2 percent in 1965.⁶² Moreover, the effects far exceeded the overall volume of investment, for it was directed toward highly visible industries, notably food, cosmetics, and household appliances, all of which were characterized by rapid growth, high profits, and heavy marketing. Capitalizing on a scale of operations that was used to continent-size markets, European-wide distribution networks, and well-oiled marketing departments, American companies were well positioned to be the first to offer novelties or low-cost models. Such was well known to be the case of the Ford Taunus, which, as it set about "its conquest of Europe," forced European car manufacturers, the French in particular, to bring down the price of their low-cylinder models. In view of the aim of the Common Market to offer consumers more choices and lower prices, American corporations proved "more European than the Europeans."⁶³

It was practically impossible to escape the new logic of competition established by American multinational capitalism. Charles de Gaulle, the austere president of the Fifth Republic, regarded U.S. multinationals as the long arm of American imperialism, and like the millions of other readers of Jean-Jacques Servan-Schrieber's celebrated book *The American Challenge* (1967), he was scandalized to discover that the biggest single economy in the new Europe was not any European nation, but the total output of American corporations operating within the Common Market. It was Servan-Schrieber's prescient recommendation that European companies organize across national lines in the image of their U.S. counterparts. Their capacity to mobilize capital and knowledge was especially important in the arena of telecommunications and information, to compete with American firms in the onrushing next phase of investment and innovation.⁶⁴

Not being able to eliminate U.S. manufacturing, de Gaulle's government tried to bend it to the advantage of the French economy. This was the thinking behind the Gaullist revolution in the perfume industry. As standards of hygiene changed and income rose, a huge export market was opening up for the scents created by the centuries-old industry centered at Grasse, a lovely medieval hilltop town of Provence surrounded by fields of tuberose, lavender, roses, and jasmine. However, like many

other craft-based consumer industries, it was not inclined to budge from old routines: perfume oil was obtained by *enfleurage*, which involved collecting and steaming blossoms and roots in huge copper vats with chemical solvents, then tamping their extracts with tallow. Slow and costly, the process was also limited by shortages of raw materials. And it produced an unstable product with an unpredictable shelf life, which put a crimp on adopting novel marketing strategies. In the 1950s, though Grasse's perfume industry still controlled 95 percent of the West's trade in natural raw aromatic materials, it had little chance to compete abroad, much less to satisfy growing demand on home markets. Increasingly, it had to face the challenge of expensively marketed American synthetic scents imported by Estée Lauder, Revlon, Elizabeth Arden, and Harriet Hubbard Ayer, which in turn had built not just on marketing skills but on the fact that the United States had come out of the war with a cutting-edge chemical industry, thanks in part to the presence of foreign chemists, notably Germans and Jews. Consequently, when the U.S. firm Universal Oil Products, which had developed synthetic scents by tapping into the concentrated know-how generated around the petro-chemical works of northern New Jersey's marshlands, presented itself on the scene, the French state welcomed it. In 1966 it licensed the company to purchase a majority share in Chiris, the biggest French producer. In return the French industry obtained access to U.S. patents and international markets—including the largest and hardest to enter, the American. By 1970 American firms had taken over eleven of France's fifteen leading perfume companies, and the whole sector had been revamped. Parisian connoisseurs may have noted the difference, but not perhaps wealthy Park Avenue matrons, much less new masses of fragrantly scented consumers. In the next years, Grasse would diversify, becoming as well known for its production of food-flavoring additives and other synthetic odors as for its perfume fragrances.⁶⁵

As the Common Market transformed local, delimited, and familiar groups of clients into transnational, unlimited, and unknown masses of consumers, the moment was ripe for American marketing to reappear on the scene.⁶⁶ Like U.S. corporations generally, advertising agencies had reduced their European investments to a trickle after the war in anticipation of more secure times. J. Walter Thompson was typical in this respect, cautiously reopening its Paris office at the turn of the 1950s and setting up a one-room, two-man office in Frankfurt in 1952. As the Treaty of Rome was concluded, the New York office put its European agents on

notice to "keep ahead of developments in the Common Market and be flexible enough to take advantage of every opportunity."⁶⁷ So they would.

The completely rebuilt sky-scrapered city of Frankfurt, not London or Paris, was the center of JWT's new continental realm. Under the direction of the Silesian-born Peter Gilgow, who, in the void left by the war and the Allied occupation, was largely American trained, the company flourished. By 1964 JWT's staff of 470 filled a five-story mansion alongside the consular buildings on Bockenheimer Landstrasse and was handling accounts for 117 products and services, including the German-made Ford Taunus, Kraft, Pepsi-Cola, Triumph women's undergarments, Unilever soaps and detergents, Maggi bouillon cubes, Findus frozen foods, De Beers diamonds, Jacobs (Germany's largest coffee manufacturer), and the Deutsche Bank. As in the 1920s, its equipment set the new standard for full-service agencies. In addition to having its own photographic film editing with Moviola, sound-recording studios, a projection theater with closed-circuit television, and a research library with current magazines and newspapers from all over the world, it installed its own gleaming industrial kitchen to test products and packaging.⁶⁸

As earlier, JWT thrived on the extracurricular interests that it regarded as indispensable to marketing in a service-oriented society. Cross-European markets were indeed more homogeneous. But as the U.S. experience taught that large-scale marketing campaigns called for "a high degree of flexibility based on local knowledge," JWT backed the foundation of ESOMAR, the European Society for Marketing and Opinion Research.⁶⁹ The company also played a central role in establishing the new German Association of Full-Service Advertising Agencies (*Gesellschaft Werbeagenturen*, or GW), which, like the "Four A's," or American Association of Advertising Agencies, was to improve and promote the profession. One of its first initiatives was to lobby to roll back the competition-inhibiting legislation that the Nazis had passed to moralize the advertising industry. JWT was also the foremost local advocate of the "social advertising" advocated at home by the Advertising Council to deflect the public criticism of the industry incited by the crusading writing of Vance Packard and Ralph Nader. Working under the auspices of the GW, it campaigned for Community Spirit in Action (*Aktion Gemeinsinn*), a volunteer corps whose honorary president was Wilhelmine Lübke, the wife of the Federal Republic's president. Its four-year goal was "to educate the West German to a democratic way of life by influencing him to become active in public affairs." JWT was responsible for the slo-

gan "The government cannot do everything, it should not do everything—the citizen must play his part in public affairs," as well as for its bugaboo: Herr Ohnemichel (Mr. Indifference).⁷⁰

By joining American sociability with European social solidarity in the name of an emerging service-oriented society free from state interference, JWT was on the same wavelength as West Germany's nascent Rotary clubs. By the end of the 1960s the Federal Republic of Germany offered the ideal economic, political, and cultural humus for a fresh bloom of clubs. A quiet few recalled the clubs' tormented effort to conform to the Nazi regime. But the prevalent belief was that the prewar circles were cradles of liberalism, which, after they were forced to dissolve by the dictatorship, hung on as "Clubs of Friends" harassed by the Gestapo. That they survived was the result of bonds of friendship and heroic acts of subterfuge by means of which they preserved the club regalia in the face of Nazi terror. As the American forces occupied Germany, the surviving circles sought to regroup. When twenty-seven-year-old Captain Don Sheldon, a Rotarian from Prescott, Arizona, occupied Munich in the name of the Fifth Army on April 30, 1945, he developed an immediate affinity with Karl Scharnagl, a bread manufacturer, former mayor, and onetime dining companion of Thomas Mann at the Monday Rotary gatherings. Right after the troops' arrival, old Scharnagl had gone around to city hall to introduce himself as a Rotarian—the proof his blue-gold enamel lapel pin nestled in its little box, which he had kept hidden away in his vest pocket all the time he was imprisoned at Dachau. (An unlikely story, sniffed Rotary International's Swiss liaison, when he heard it. If he had really had it with him and he really had been at Dachau he would have been dead. But that was easy enough to say for somebody who had sat tight as a tick in Zurich throughout the war.) Anyway Preston treated the pin as Rotarians intended: as a badge of rectitude and mutual recognition. AMGOT, the American occupation forces, needed a new lord mayor for Munich, and although the officer in command of reeducation programs (a Rotarian from Tuscaloosa, Alabama) would later judge Scharnagl "not so hot as an Oberbürgermeister in this day and age," he was duly sworn in, his enamel Rotary lapel pin the only decoration adorning his lank, threadbare dress suit. The times, if not a new spirit of service, had him out with the people in the next terrible months, a gaunt-checked, snaggle-toothed old gentleman, taking his turn at the shovel to dig out the rubble left by seventy Allied bombing runs.⁷¹

Rotary International had wanted to hold off reorganizing the German

clubs for at least five years—until Germany had its own government, local applicants, like everybody else, could pass through denazification procedures, and the Belgians, and other peoples who had suffered under the Nazi occupation, were pacified. However, the Americans saw the clubs as contributing to defending the West against Soviet aggression. So Rotary was back in Germany by 1949, earlier than anybody expected, except onetime German Rotarians. With the aristocratic members fled or dead, the Jewish bourgeoisie extinguished, and the professionals and business elites scrabbling to deal with the material cares of everyday life having little time for cultural self-contemplation, the German club members promised to be model international citizens. Assiduous about measuring itself against international norms—for strict attendance, recruiting younger members, increasing contacts with foreigners, and sponsoring community service programs—the movement spread rapidly during the 1960s, especially in the prospering industrial and commercial centers of the Rhine and Ruhr. In Cologne, where Max Adenauer, the founding father and Konrad's son, was the president in 1969–70, fully three Rotary clubs had been established to meet the needs of the growing middle classes of the sprawling city; that year 320 were active in the German Federal Republic, organized in seven districts with 11,500 members. Service, translated simply as *Dienst* or *Dienstleistung*, had become a familiar concept, and the club was regarded as a model of both social and international service. Adenauer was reportedly very busy as town supervisor, yet he personally oversaw the club activities. Over the previous two years he had spearheaded the efforts to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the club's foundation by raising monies to purchase a Volkswagen van for a school for mentally and physically handicapped students. In addition to funding fellowships for university students and sending emergency relief abroad in cases of natural disasters, Cologne's Rotary clubs often joined forces with the Lions Club and other volunteer associations. In Frankfurt Peter Gilow, head of JWT, though not a member himself, frequently attended the weekly Rotary luncheons.⁷²

What did this changed sensibility toward serving citizens as consumers mean for consumer rights? At the outset, the European Community lacked any concept of the representation of consumers. Article 193 of the 1957 Treaty of Rome called for an "Economic and Social Committee," one of whose functions was to "represent the different categories of economic and social life," specifically named as "producers, agriculturalists, distributors, workers, retailers, artisans, the liberal professions, and the general interest."⁷³ "Consumers" weren't mentioned. There were high

hopes nonetheless, as a spokeswoman for France's Women's Civic and Social Union recalled: "The European housewife will gain from having the whole of Europe for household furnishings! Television will erase what remains of commercial frontiers." Though consumers did indeed experience greater choice, prices were rarely lower, except in the fiercely competitive automobile and refrigerator markets. What the Women's Union wanted from consumer-citizenship was active representation, that consumers be protagonists rather than passive subjects whose desires were left to the interpretive whims of private enterprise. Many had experienced disorientation, if not damage, from rapidly changing material habits. Marketers had stepped in where public planners feared to tread. "All affirmations to the contrary, the wish seems to be to turn us into the typical consumer of the consumer society, whose model is exactly present-day American society."⁷⁴

"The affluent society banks the fires of indignation," Raymond Aron famously observed in 1957.⁷⁵ The governing consensus was that, as in the United States, left "religions" would die off with the consolidation of the consumer society, following to their graves the reactionary Catholic and nationalistic ideologies of the 1930s. It was popular to misquote Werner Sombart to the effect that in America "socialism broke apart on shoals of roast beef and apple." Thereafter European political systems would steer a decidedly centrist course, more and more resembling America's "non-ideological" alternation of political parties. That Americanization would result in the suppression of left-wing politics was a consoling prospect for conservative elites. That European cultural values might suffer, if not be extinguished in the process, understandably caused some anguish. Pierre Massé, the grand old man of French planning, spoke to this predicament just after the French parliament passed the Fourth Plan in February 1962 with practically no debate. He recognized this event as a real turning point, for the goal of planning was no longer measures on behalf of the economic modernization and minimum well-being regarded as indispensable to the salvation of the French nation; it was higher and higher levels of individual consumption pure and simple. Far be it from him to "reproach the consumer" or philosophize about the "fluid frontier between need and desire." Yet "the consumer society" had to take responsibility for "collective goods" against the "perverse effects" of the "cult of growth rates" that resulted in "a less limited idea of mankind." And consumers had the duty to enlighten themselves to their true needs and to exercise their power to curb the excesses perpetrated in their name.⁷⁶

The fact that conservative and center-right political coalitions had been

the main beneficiaries of relative well-being had originally only reinforced the left's view that mass consumption was politically numbing. However, in recognition that consumer goods were still very unevenly distributed and that their constituents wanted higher standards of living, the social democratic and Communist left pressed for higher pay packets, accepting the tradeoff, namely speedups, physical exhaustion, even the loss of political voice. To reinforce social solidarity, they also pressed for more social infrastructure, public transport, and collective programs for leisure, endeavors that more often than not were frustrated or waylaid. The first heyday of individualist mass consumption—the 1960s—was also the high point of modest national and municipal Communist and social Catholic forms of collective social and cultural undertakings—outing clubs, local governmental vacations for children and pensioners, public theater, alternative movie circuits, and so on. Wondering about the political effects of these projects, critics within the left asked whether the “collectivization of consumption” was really “synonymous with democratization.” The answer, “nothing enables us to say so,” garnered a wide consensus. To increase “the quantity and quality of consumer goods and services” only yielded the “appearance” of democracy, so long as the “users” possessed significantly different “aptitudes to use them.”⁷⁷

These issues came to a head in the vast protest movement of students and workers in 1968–69, now generally seen as a double movement. One was identified with young workers especially, expressing outrage at inequality of access to mass consumer society. The other identified with students expressing outrage at the accumulation of problems that mass-consumer society not only had not solved, but in effect had exacerbated—the loss of a sense of the authenticity of material life associated with old kinds of labor, craft, and neighborhoods and the closing off of a sense of future in the substitution of grand projects of social redemption by the humdrum of small increments of material change.⁷⁸

One outcome was that official Europe began to recognize the consumer as an organized interest. After rejecting the need for a specific consumer policy in 1967, in 1975 the European Economic Community launched its own “consumer protection and information policy.”⁷⁹ This recognized five rights: to the protection of health and safety, to the safeguarding of economic interests, to redress, to advice and guidance, and to representation. In May of the next year the EEC carried out its first *Study of European Consumers: Their Interests, Aspirations and Knowledge of Consumer Affairs*. This showed that lots of people had indeed come to

identify themselves as consumers, but not first and foremost. Party loyalty still mattered. But many of those interviewed felt that the political parties in general did not concern themselves at all effectively with their problems as consumers.⁸⁰ Given that the consumer interest was likely to become increasingly better articulated, this finding did not bode well for the solidity of party allegiances.

The very ambiguity of this metamorphosis spoke to the openness of possibilities, but also to the confusion and conflict of interests competing in the so-called new Europe of the 1960s: a "Europe of 221,750,000 consumers."⁸¹ Whereas "oxcart Europe," to recall François Delaisi's expression, had mostly fallen under the Soviet sphere of influence, "horsepower Europe" was ever more visibly spanned by the long hand of American corporate enterprises and by the neocalvinist ethic of service capitalism of a reborn, rapidly spreading Rotary club movement, the revamping of mass distribution systems, the proliferation of full-service advertising, marketing, and polling agencies, the renewed triumph of Hollywood films, and the circulation of yet more new social inventions—the self-service supermarket, the all-equipped consumer household, and the endlessly proliferating lifestyles shaped by fast-changing consumer industries of the last quarter of the twentieth century.