

denied government aid, the farmers, who backed the liberal Venstre Party, "used social policy tailored to their specifications to squeeze concessions from a state they did not yet control," writes Baldwin. A national old-age pension fund would reduce the burden of the countryside's increasingly costly local poor relief. Tax financing spread the costs to urban workers and manufacturers. Universal coverage allowed the farmers themselves, after retiring, to reap some of the benefits. In 1891, the conservatives gave in, agreeing to a social security scheme partly financed by a

new tax on workingmen's beer.

Sweden trod much the same path when it created its social security system in 1913, notes Baldwin. Only later would Scandinavia's socialists take credit for (and build upon) measures which many of them had in fact opposed.

Scandinavia's welfare states, says Baldwin, are not the product of "supposedly unique Scandinavian social virtues or . . . socialism's heroic march in these most quintessentially petty bourgeois of European nations. The origins of virtue turn out to be mundane"—even rustic.

The Middle East's Missing History

"The Map of the Middle East: A Guide for the Perplexed" by Bernard Lewis, in *The American Scholar* (Winter 1989), 1811 Q St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

The Middle East is one of the "cradles of civilization." Yet, today, it is a region without any fixed identity, comprised of "nations" which lack unity, tradition, or history. That, contends Lewis, a Princeton historian, partly explains the region's frightening instability.

Unlike the civilizations of China and India, which have been relatively unified by language and faith for millennia, "Middle Eastern civilization began in a number of different places and evolved along different lines," notes Lewis.

To make matters worse, most of the various cultures that did flourish in the Middle East were buried by a succession of cataclysms: Greek and Roman invasions; the coming of Christianity; and finally, during the seventh century, Islam. (Only Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia bear any significant geographic or ethnic resemblance to ancient empires.) By the late Middle Ages, most of the Middle East's "ancient languages were dead, its writings locked in scripts that no one could read. Its gods and their worship [were] known only to a small number of specialists and scholars." Islam provided the region's only unifying identity—a not altogether successful one at that, as the failure of pan-Islamic movements from the 19th century to Khomeini suggest.

Beginning during the early 19th century, European colonialists repeatedly redrew the map of the Middle East, utterly disregarding whatever pockets of local historical, ethnic, or linguistic unity remained. As a result, even many of the names of today's Middle Eastern countries are artificial "restorations and reconstructions" of ancient (and usually alien) names. In 1934, for example, the Italians combined two former Ottoman *sanjaks* and dubbed the new entity Libya, a name they plucked from ancient Greek atlases. The French named Syria in a similar way.

By the late 19th century, some Middle Eastern peoples, notably the Egyptians, began trying to "rediscover and repossess" an ancient identity. This search for a usable past has often been quixotic, Lewis remarks. Today, Saddam Hussein, the leader of ethnically divided Iraq (and arch-foe of Iranian leaders), evokes the memory of an ancient Iraqi nation that never existed and proudly cites Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar as a national hero who resolved "the Zionist problem" of his day.

Throughout the Middle East, Muslim fundamentalists are aggressively calling for a supra-national Islamic community. But Lewis believes that the borders drawn by Europeans will retain "their power to enclose and to divide" for years to come.