

# Revolts Against the Old Order: 1815-1850

## Early Nineteenth-Century Revolts

### *Italy and Spain*

Among the first revolts that the Concert of Europe faced erupted in Italy and Spain. The Concert sent Austrian troops to Italy to suppress a revolt in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies for a limited constitutional monarchy. In Spain, an attempt to force King Ferdinand VII to accept a limited constitutional monarchy was thwarted in 1823 by a Quadruple Alliance-backed French army sent into Spain.

### *Latin America*

Many successful nationalistic revolutions occurred in Latin America. With roots in Spanish and Portuguese mercantilism and slavery, these revolutions began when European control weakened during the Napoleonic Wars. Beginning in Argentina in 1810, the movement against Continental powers freed most South and Central American nations from European control. Having succeeded in Italy and Spain, the Concert was eager to reach across the Atlantic and help Spain and Portugal hold onto their colonies. But the British opposed the idea and, further, joined with the United States to protect the growing revolutionary movements and fledgling nations. These new nations provided Britain with both raw materials for its growing factory system and markets for the goods it was producing.

### *Greece*

The Greeks led one of the few successful European nationalistic revolts during the nineteenth century, in large measure because the great powers supported it. Ottoman Turks had controlled a large part of southeastern Europe, including Greece, for hundreds of years; the British, French, and Russians, eager to see the removal of the Muslim Turks, gave military and moral support to the Greeks. By 1832, the Greeks had their independence and a new Greek monarchy.

### *Russia*

After the death of Alexander I in 1825, a struggle ensued for his throne. Although Alexander had attempted to enact some Enlightenment reforms, he had become reactionary, wanting to move Russia back to stricter control. He

was succeeded by his conservative brother Nicholas. Many Russian liberals had assumed that Alexander's other brother, the more liberal Constantine, would become tsar. The Decembrist Revolt, their attempt to install a more liberal government, was squelched. It pushed Nicholas toward a more reactionary stance.

## Revolts in the 1830s

Revolts, led by both liberals and nationalists, continued in the 1830s, but the conservatives, opposed to change, began to lose their grip on Europe.

In 1824, upon the death of Louis XVIII, his brother Charles X, a conservative, ascended the French throne. Liberals disturbed by Charles's policies revolted in 1830. The July Revolution brought to the throne Louis Philippe, Charles's cousin, and a constitutional government. It also inspired three other revolutions.

The Congress of Vienna had united the Belgians and the Dutch after the fall of Napoleon. The Catholic Belgians, however, wanted to be independent of the Protestant Dutch, so they fought the Dutch, and in 1830, with the support of the major powers, gained independence under a constitutional monarch, Leopold of Saxe-Coburg.

Still, some revolts failed. Poland wanted to be free of Russian control, but a nationalist revolt was crushed by Russian troops in 1831. An attempt by three northern Italian states to overthrow Austrian control failed when Austria sent in troops. But the revolt saw the birth of the *risorgimento* (resurgence), a movement led by Giuseppe Mazzini that was a strong force in the eventual unification of Italy.

## The Revolutions of 1848

A major turning point came in 1848, when a revolution in France sparked revolts for liberalism and nationalism across much of Europe. Unable to deal with the rising liberal movement, and with his government mired in economic and political corruption, Louis Philippe abdicated the French throne in February 1848. A provisional government took over, and after a battle between moderates and radicals, a constitution was drawn up calling for an elected presidency. The French elected Louis Napoleon, a nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte.

Pressure for liberal reforms also ignited revolutions in the German states. As some of the reforms were enacted, a call was made for a new constitution, to be drawn up by the newly formed Frankfurt Assembly. It was immediately

problematic because it attempted to make government decisions for all of the German states. But its biggest problem was deciding what should make up the new German state – all German states (*Grossdeutsch* or Big German) or all except the province of Austria (*Kleindeutsch* or Little German). When the Austrians chose to stay out, the Prussian king, Frederick William IV, was offered the throne of a united Germany. However, he refused it; with no leader, the movement fell apart.

As nationalism swept across Europe, the Austrian Empire could no longer maintain control of the many nationalities it had long held together. The Hungarians, especially, wanted more recognition in the Austrian government. As revolts grew, Metternich, the architect of this period of reactionary politics, was dismissed and fled Austria. In settling the variety of disputes across the empire, Austria eventually allowed the Magyars in Hungary a measure of self-governance. Soon after, other nationalities, among them the Czechs and Croats, began to clamor for self-rule. The revolts in Austria itself were calls for liberal reforms, but neither the nationalists nor the liberals were successful. In Italy, the liberal movements that had developed in the 1830s gained strength. Across northern Italy, revolutionaries fought to remove Austrian control and set up constitutional governments. But only in Piedmont were they successful.

Both the successes and the failures of the revolutions of 1848 were significant. The successes – the removal of Metternich, the recognition of Hungarian authority in the Austrian Empire, and the creation of constitutional governments in France and Piedmont – provided foundations for the continued liberalization of European governments. The failures of 1848 were often the result of the lack of coordination among nationalities or various liberal groups. Achievement of their goals of independence and constitutionalism would be delayed until late in the nineteenth and early in the twentieth centuries.

**AP Tip**

For a solid understanding of the growth of liberalism and nationalism in response to Metternich's reactionary leadership, make a chart comparing the various nineteenth-century revolts. Include each revolt's year(s); whether it was for liberalism, nationalism, or both; the overall goals; and the outcome. A requirement of the newly redesigned AP exam is a more extensive knowledge of two or three revolts. Be able to compare and contrast some of the revolts, their causes, the details of what happened and how successful they were. The Greek War for Independence, the Decembrist Revolt, and the recurring Italian revolts would be good ones to know in more detail.