

Europe in Crisis (1815-1833): Repression, Reform, and Revolution

Revolutions II (1830-1833)

The conservative grip on Europe following the turbulent 1820s was loosened when revolution broke out in France in 1830. By then, forces of liberalism and nationalism had become so strong that they constituted threats to the security of many governments. In eastern Europe, nationalism was the greater danger, while in the West the demands of middle-class liberals for political reforms grew louder.

France: The July Revolution

The death of Louis XVIII in 1824 brought his brother, head of the ultra-royalists, to the throne as Charles X, and set up France for a new Old Regime – or else revolution.

Attempting to roll back revolutionary gains, Charles X alienated moderate forces on the right as well as the left. Continued violations of the Charter enabled French voters to register their displeasure in the elections of 1827 by giving the liberals a substantial gain in the Chamber of Deputies.

In 1829, when Charles X appointed a ministry led by the Prince de Polignac, the personification of Reaction in France, liberals considered this a dire insult. Elections in 1830 produced a stunning victory for them. Charles responded by issuing the Four Ordinances, which would have amounted to a royal *coup d'état* had the radicals of Paris, mostly workers and students raising barricades in the narrow streets, not revolted with the intention of establishing a republic. Charles abdicated and fled France.

The liberals in the Chamber of Deputies, under the leadership of Adolphe Thiers, preferred a constitutional cocktail – without Bourbon. With the leadership of Talleyrand and the Marquis de Lafayette, hero of the American revolution, they agreed on Louis-Philippe, head of the Orleans family and royal cousin to Charles X. Once again, Talleyrand had successfully betrayed a master.

Bourgeois (upper-middle-class) bankers and businessmen now controlled France. Louis-Philippe was “the bourgeois king” who would tilt government toward these interests. While the July monarchy of Louis Philippe was politically more liberal than the Restoration government, socially it proved to be quite conservative.

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The news of the successful July Revolution in France served as a spark (“When France sneezes, the rest of Europe catches cold”) igniting revolution throughout Europe.

Belgian Independence (1830-1831)

Since its merger with Holland in 1815, Belgium had never reconciled itself to rule by a country with a different language, religion, and economic life. Inspired by the news of the July Revolution in France, and an opera about a revolt in 1647 Naples, revolt against Dutch rule broke out in Brussels, led by students and workers. The Dutch army was defeated and forced to withdraw from Belgium by the threat of a Franco-British fleet. A national congress wrote a liberal constitution. In 1831, Leopold of Saxe-Coburg (reigned 1831-1865) became king of the Belgians. In 1839, the great powers declared the neutrality of Belgium, including the Scheldt River.

Poland (1830-1831)

The new tsar, Nicholas I (reigned 1825-1855), had a good opportunity to demonstrate his extreme conservatism in foreign policy when an insurrection broke out in 1830 in Warsaw. This nationalist uprising challenged the historic Russian domination of Poland. The Poles drove out the Russian garrison, and a revolutionary government deposed the tsar as king and proclaimed the independence of Poland.

Nicholas ordered the Russian army to invade; it ruthlessly crushed the nationalist rebellion. Poland became “a land of graves and crosses.” The Organic Statute of 1832 made Poland an integral part of the Russian Empire. The great composer Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849) happened to be out of the country when the revolt occurred. When it was crushed in 1831, he was in Stuttgart, Germany, and there he composed his great Revolutionary Etude to a homeland he would never see again.

Italy (1831-1832)

Outbreaks of discontent occurred in northern Italy, centering on Modena, Parma, and the Papal States. The inspiration for Italian nationalists to dream of unification came from (1) Giuseppe Mazzini and his secret revolutionary society called Young Italy; and (2) the *Carbonari*, the secret societies that advocated the use of force to achieve national unification. Too disorganized, Italian revolutionaries were easily crushed by Austrian troops acting on Metternich’s principle of international intervention. Still, the Italian *risorgimento* (resurgence of the Italian spirit) was well under way.

Germany (1830-1833)

The Carlsbad Decrees of 1819 effectively restricted freedom in the Germanies. Hearing of France's July Revolution, German students and professors led demonstrations that forced temporary grants of constitutions in several states. These expressions of liberal sentiment and nationalist desires for German unification were easily crushed by the German Confederation, as steered by Metternich with his influence over Prussia.

Great Britain: Reform Continues

The death of George IV and accession of William IV in 1830 resulted in a general parliamentary election in which the opposition political party, the Whigs, scored major gains with their platform calling for parliamentary reform. With the Tory party divided, the king asked the leader of the Whigs, Earl Grey (1764-1845), to form a government.

Immediately, the Whigs introduced a major reform bill designed to increase the number of voters by 50 percent and to eliminate underpopulated electoral districts ("rotten boroughs") and replace them with representatives for previously unrepresented manufacturing districts and cities, especially in the industrial Midlands.

After a national debate, new elections, and a threat from William IV to alter the composition of the House of Lords, Parliament enacted the Great Reform Bill of 1832. While the Reform Bill did not resolve all political inequities in British political life, it marked a beginning. Subsequent reforms would redraw the landscape of British society.

Evaluation

Neither the forces of revolution nor those of Reaction were able to maintain the upper hand between 1789 and 1848. Liberalism and nationalism, socialism and democracy, were on the march, but the forces of conservatism and reaction were still strong enough to contain them. The polarization of Europe was becoming clear: the liberal middle-class West, which advocated constitutionalism and industrial progress; and the authoritarian East, committed to preserving the status quo. The confrontation would continue until one or the other side would win out decisively.

The Revolutions of 1848

The year 1848 is considered the watershed of the nineteenth century. The revolutionary disturbances of the first half of the century reached a climax in a

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new wave of revolutions that extended from Scandinavia to southern Italy, from France to central Europe. Only England and Russia avoided violent upheaval.

The issues were substantially the same as in 1789. What was new in 1848 was that these demands were far more widespread and irrepensible than before. Whole classes and nations demanded to be fully included in society. The French Revolution of 1789 came at the end of a period (“*ancien regime*”), while the revolutions of 1848 signaled the beginning of a new age. Being aggravated by a rapid growth in population and the social disruption of industrialism and urbanization, a massive tide of discontent swept across the western world.

The 1848 upheavals shared the strong influences of romanticism, nationalism, and liberalism, as well as a new factor of economic dislocation and instability throughout most of Europe. Some authorities believe that it was the absence of liberty that was most responsible for the uprisings.

Several similar conditions existed in several countries:

1. Severe food shortages caused by poor harvests of grain and potatoes (for example, the Irish Potato Famine)
2. Financial crises caused by a downturn in commerce and industry
3. Business failures
4. Widespread unemployment
5. A sense of frustration and discontent among urban artisan and working classes as wages diminished
6. A system of poor relief that was overburdened
7. Living conditions that deteriorated in cities
8. The power of nationalism in the Germanies and Italies, as well as eastern Europe, to inspire the overthrow of existing governments

Middle-class predominance in the unregulated economy continued to drive liberals to push for more reform of government and for civil liberty. They pursued this by enlisting the help of the working classes in putting more pressure on the government to change. The marriage of liberals and workers would be short-lived.

Republicanism: Victory in France and Defeat in Italy

In France, working-class discontent and liberals’ unhappiness with the corrupt regime of Louis Philippe – especially his minister François Guizot –

erupted in street riots in Paris on February 22 and 23, 1848. With workers in control of Paris, Louis Philippe abdicated on February 24, and a provisional government proclaimed the Second French Republic.

Heading the provisional government was the liberal Alphonse Lamartine (1790-1869), a poet who favored a moderate republic and political democracy. Lamartine's bourgeois allies had little sympathy for the working poor and did not intend to pursue a social revolution.

Working-class groups were united by their leader Louis Blanc (1811-1882), a socialist who expected the provisional government to deal with the unemployed and anticipated the power of the state to improve life and the conditions of labor. Pressed by the demands of Blanc and his followers, the provisional government established national workshops (ateliers) to provide work and relief for thousands of unemployed workers.

An election in April resulted in a National Assembly dominated by moderate republicans and conservatives under Lamartine, who regarded socialist ideas as threats to private property. When Lamartine's government closed the national workshops, Parisian workers, feeling that their revolution had been nullified, took to the streets again.

Later called the "June Days," this new revolution (June 23-26, 1848) was unlike previous uprisings in France. It marked the inauguration of genuine class warfare; it was a revolt against poverty and a cry for the redistribution of property. It foreshadowed the great social revolutions of the twentieth century. The revolt was extinguished after General Cavaignac was given dictatorial powers by the government. The June Days confirmed the political predominance of conservative property holders, including well-off peasants, in French life.

The Constitution of the Second Republic provided for a unicameral legislature (manned by the current members of the National Assembly) and executive power vested in a popularly elected president. When the election returns were counted, the candidate of the government, General Cavaignac, was soundly defeated by a "dark horse," Prince Louis Napoleon Bonaparte (1808-1873), a nephew of the great emperor. On December 20, 1848, Louis Napoleon was installed as president of the Republic.

It was clear that voters turned to the name Bonaparte for stability and greatness. They expected him to prevent further working-class disorders. However, the election of Louis Napoleon doomed the Second Republic. He was a Bonaparte, dedicated to his own fame and vanity-not republican

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institutions. On December 2, 1851, Louis Napoleon staged a bloody *coup d'état* to kill the republic; a year later, in 1852, he became Emperor Napoleon III. France once again had, like a courtesan, flirted with republicanism only to drop it for a stronger, better-paying leader.

Italian nationalists and liberals wanted to end Austrian, Bourbon (Naples and Sicily), and papal domination, to unite these disparate areas in a unified liberal nation. A revolt by liberals in Sicily in January 1848 was followed by the granting of liberal constitutions in Naples, Tuscany, Piedmont, and the Papal States, Milan and Venice expelled their Austrian rulers. In March 1848, following the news of the revolution in Vienna, a fresh outburst of revolution against Austria occurred in Lombardy and Venetia, with Sardinia-Piedmont declaring war on Austria. Simultaneously, Italian patriots attacked the Papal States, forcing Pope Pius IX to flee to Naples for refuge.

The temporary nature of these successes was illustrated by the speed with which conservative forces regained control. In the North, Austrian Field Marshal Joseph von Radetzky swept aside opposition, regaining Lombardy and Venetia and crushing Sardinia-Piedmont. In the Papal States, the establishment of the Roman Republic (February 1849) under the leadership of Giuseppe Mazzini and the protection of Giuseppe Garibaldi failed when French troops took Rome in July 1849, after a heroic defense by Garibaldi. Pope Pius IX returned to Rome cured of his liberal leanings. In the South and in Sicily, the revolts were suppressed by the former rulers.

Within eighteen months, the revolutions of 1848 had failed throughout Italy. Among explanations for these failures were the failure of conservative, rural people to support the revolution: the divisions in aim and technique among the revolutionaries: the fear the radicals aroused among moderate groups of Italians, who would be needed to guarantee the success of any revolution: and the general lack of experience and administrative ability on the part of the revolutionists.

Nationalism Resisted in the Austrian Empire

The Austrian Empire was vulnerable to revolutionary challenge. Declared in 1804, as the Holy Roman Empire was dying (death: 1806), the new Austrian Empire was a collection of subject nationalities (more non-Germans than Germans) stirred by acute nationalism, its government was reactionary (liberal institutions were nonexistent), and its reliance on serfdom doomed the mass of people to misery. As soon as news of the February Days in France reached the borders of the empire, rebellions began. The long-suppressed

opponents of the government believed the time had come to introduce liberal institutions into the empire.

Vienna

In March 1848, Hungarian criticism of Habsburg rule was initiated by the Magyar nationalist Louis Kossuth (1802-1894), who demanded Hungarian independence. Students and workers in Vienna rushed to the streets to demonstrate on behalf of a more liberal government. The army failed to restore order, and Prince Metternich, symbol of reaction, resigned and fled the country. Emperor Ferdinand I (reigned 1835-1848) granted a moderately liberal constitution, but its shortcomings dissatisfied more radical elements, and continual disorder prompted the emperor to flee from Vienna to Innsbruck, where he relied on his army to restore order in the empire. Austrian imperial troops remained loyal to the Habsburgs. Prince Felix von Schwarzenberg, Chancellor of Austria, was put in charge of restoring control.

A people's committee ruled Vienna, where a liberal assembly gathered to write a constitution. In Hungary and Bohemia, revolutionary outbreaks were successful.

The inability of the revolutionary groups in Vienna to govern effectively made it easier for the Habsburgs to lay siege to Vienna in October 1848. The rebels surrendered, and Emperor Ferdinand abdicated in favor of his young nephew, Francis Joseph (reigned 1848-1916), who promptly restored royal absolutism.

The imperial government had been saved at Vienna through the loyalty of the army and the lack of ruling capacity on the part of the revolutionaries. The only thing the revolutionaries could agree on was their hatred of the Habsburg dynasty.

Bohemia

Nationalist feeling among Bohemians (Czechs) had been smoldering since the Hussite Wars. They demanded a constitution and autonomy within the Habsburg Empire.

A Pan-Slav Congress meeting in June 1848 attempted to unite all Slavic peoples, but accomplished little, because divisions were more decisive among them than was unified opposition to Habsburg control. During the congress's doomed but symbolically important tenure, Austrian military leader General-prince Alfred von Windischgritz bombed Prague into submission, accidentally killing his own wife in her palace. Prague submitted to military

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occupation, followed by a military dictatorship in July, after all revolutionary groups were crushed.

Hungary

The kingdom of Hungary was a state of about twelve million under Habsburg authority. Magyars or Hungarians, who represented about five million subjects of the emperor, enjoyed a privileged position in the empire. The remaining seven million Slavic, Jewish, Polish, Romanian, and other natives were powerless.

[In March 1848, Louis Kossuth took over direction of the movement and tamed a more radical rebellion. The nationalists declared autonomy in April, but failed to win popular support for the revolution, because of tyrannical treatment of Slavic minorities. Since the government in Vienna was distracted by revolutions everywhere in the empire in the summer and fall of 1848, Kossuth had time to organize an army to fight for Hungarian independence.

Austria declared war on Hungary on October 3, 1848, and Hungarian armies drove to within sight of Vienna. But desperate resistance from Slavic minorities forced the Hungarians to withdraw. Hungary was invaded by an Austrian army from the West, in June 1849, and a Russian army (Nicholas offered assistance to new emperor Francis Joseph) from the North. Along with Serbian resistance in the South and Romanian resistance in the East, the opposition proved too much for Kossuth's Hungarian Republic (proclaimed in April 1849), which was defeated. Kossuth fled into exile, while thirteen of his guards were executed. Not until Austria was defeated by Prussia, in 1866, would Hungary be in a position again to demand equality with Austria.

Italy

Charles Albert, king of Sardinia, having granted his people a constitution, and hoping to add the Habsburgs's Italian holdings to his kingdom, declared war on Austria. Unfortunately, the Sardinian army was twice defeated in battle (at Custoza and Novara) by Austrian General Radetzky.

King Charles Albert abdicated in favor of his son, Victor Emmanuel, who was destined to complete the unification of Italy (1859-1870).

The revolutions of 1848 failed in Austria for several reasons. The subject nationalities sometimes hated each other more than they despised Austria. Habsburgs used the divisions between the ethnic groups as an effective weapon against each. The imperial army had remained loyal to its aristocratic commanders, who favored absolutism. There were too few industrial workers and an equally small middle class. Workers could not exert political power,

and the middle class feared working-class radicalism and rallied to the government as defender of the status quo.

Liberalism Halted in the Germanies

The immediate effect of the 1848 revolution in France was a series of liberal and nationalistic demonstrations in the German states (March 1848), with rulers promising liberal concessions. The liberals' demand for constitutional government was coupled with another demand: a union or federation of the German states. While demonstrations by students, workers, and the middle class produced the promise of a liberal future, the permanent success or failure of these "promises" rested on Prussian reaction.

Prussia, the Frankfurt Parliament, and German Unification

Under Frederick William IV (reigned 1848-1861). Prussia moved from revolution to reaction. After agreeing to liberalize the Prussian government following street rioting in Berlin, the king rejected the constitution written by a special assembly. The liberal ministry resigned and was replaced by a conservative one. By fall, the king felt powerful enough to substitute his constitution, which guaranteed royal control of government, with a three-class system of indirect voting that excluded all but landlords and wealthy bourgeois from office. This system prevailed in Prussia until 1918. Finally, the government ministry was responsible to the king and the military services swore loyalty to the king alone.

Self-appointed liberal and nationalist leaders called for elections to a constituent assembly, from all states belonging to the Bund, for the purpose of unifying the German states. Meeting in May 1848, the Frankfurt parliament was dominated by intellectuals, professionals, lawyers, businessmen, and writers. After a year of deliberating the issues of (1) monarchy or republic, (2) federal union or centralized state, and (3) boundaries (that is, only German-populated or mixed nationalities), the assembly produced a constitution.

The principal problem facing the Frankfurt Assembly was to obtain Prussian support. The smaller German states generally favored the Frankfurt Constitution, as did liberals throughout the large-and middle-sized states. Austria made it clear that it was opposed to the work of the assembly and would remain in favor of the present system.

Assembly leaders made the decision to stake their demands for a united Germany on Frederick William IV of Prussia. They chose him as emperor in April 1849, only to have him reject the offer because he was a divine-right

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monarch, not subject to popularly elected assemblies. Without Prussia, the German states could not succeed, so the Frankfurt parliament dissolved without achieving much aside from the airing of liberal desires.

Frederick William IV had his own plans for uniting Germany. After refusing Frankfurt's offer, which he considered a "crown from the gutter," he offered his plan to German princes, wherein Prussia would play a prominent role, along with Austria. When Austria demanded allegiance to the Bund the Prussian king realized pushing his plan would involve him in a war with Austria and her allies (including Russia). In November 1850, Prussia agreed to forego the idea of uniting the German states at a meeting with Austria later called the "Humiliation of Olmutz." Austria had confirmed its domination of the German Bund.

Great Britain and the Victorian Compromise

The Victorian Age (1837-1901) is named for the long reign of Queen Victoria, who succeeded her uncle, William IV, at age eighteen and married her cousin, Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg und Gotha (the official name of the royal family until anti-German sentiment made them change it to Windsor in 1917). The early years of her reign coincided with continued liberal reform of the government accomplished through an arrangement known as the "Victorian Compromise." This was a political alliance of the middle class and aristocracy to exclude the working class from political power. The middle class gained control of the House of Commons, the aristocracy controlled the government, the House of Lords, the army, and the Church of England. The process of accommodation was working successfully.

Highlights of the Compromise Era

Parliamentary reforms continued after passage of the 1832 Reform Bill. Parliament enacted laws abolishing slavery throughout the empire (1833). The Factory Act (1831) forbade the employment of children under the age of nine. The New Poor Law (1834) required the needy who were able and unemployed to live in workhouses. The Municipal Reform Law (1835) gave control of the cities to the middle class. The last remnants of the mercantilist age fell with the repeal of the Corn Laws (1846) and repeal of the old Navigation Acts (1849).

Working-class protest arose in the wake of their belief that passage of the Great Reform Bill of 1832 would bring prosperity. When workers found themselves no better off, they turned to collective action. They linked the

solution of their economic plight to a program of political reform known as “chartism,” from the charter of six points that they petitioned Parliament to adopt: universal male suffrage, secret ballot, no property qualifications for members of Parliament, salaries for members of Parliament, annual elections for Parliament, and equal electoral districts.

During the age of Victorian Compromise, these ideas were considered dangerously radical. Both the middle class and aristocracy vigorously opposed the working class political agenda. Chartism as a national movement failed. Its ranks were split between those who favored violence and those who advocated peaceful tactics. The return of prosperity, with steady wages and lower food prices, robbed the movement of momentum. Yet the chartist movement came to constitute the first large-scale, working-class political movement that workers would eventually adopt if they were to improve their situation.

After 1846, the middle class dominated England: this was one of the factors that enabled England to escape the revolutions that shook Europe in 1848. The ability of the English to make meaningful industrial reforms gave the working class hope that its goals could be achieved without violent social upheaval.

Evaluation

The revolutions of 1848 began with much promise, but they all ended in defeat for a number of reasons. They were spontaneous movements that lost popular support as the people lost enthusiasm. Initial successes by the revolutionaries were due less to their strength than to the hesitancy of governments to use superior force. Once this hesitancy was overcome, the revolutions were smashed. They were essentially urban movements, so conservative landowners and peasants tended to nullify the spontaneous actions of the urban classes. The middle class, which led the revolutions, came to fear the radicalism of working-class allies. While in favor of political reform, the middle class drew the line at social engineering – to the dismay of the laboring poor. Divisions among national groups, and the willingness of one nationality to deny rights to others, helped destroy revolutionary movements across Europe. Because liberals and nationalists did not cooperate across borders, princes easily succeeded since, thanks to Prince Metternich, they were more than willing to cooperate across borders to maintain their powers and control.

However, the results of the conflicts of 1848-1849 were not entirely negative. Universal male suffrage was introduced in France; serfdom remained

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abolished in Austria and German states; parliaments were established in Prussia and other German states, though dominated to be sure, by princes and aristocrats: and Prussia and Sardinia-Piedmont emerged with new determination to succeed in their respective unification schemes.

The revolutions of 1848 to 1849 brought to a close the era of liberal revolutions that had begun in France in 1789. Reformers and reactionaries alike learned a lesson from the failures of 1848. They learned that planning and organization was necessary, that rational argument and revolution would not always assure success. With 1848, the Age of Revolution sputtered out. The Age of Romanticism was about to give way to an Age of Realism in which blood and iron would remake the world, not airy ideals.

Epilogue: The View from Mid-Nineteenth Century Europe

A new age was about to follow the revolutions of 1848-1849, as Otto von Bismarck, one of the dominant political figures of the nineteenth century, was quick to realize. If the mistake of these years was to believe that great decisions could be brought about by speeches and parliamentary majorities, the sequel would soon show that in an industrial era, new techniques involving ruthless force were all too readily available. The period of *realpolitik* – of realistic, iron-fisted politics and diplomacy – was about to happen.

By 1850, all humankind was positioned to become part of a single, worldwide, interacting whole. Given Europe's military technology and industrial productivity, no part of the world could prevent Europeans from imposing their will.

The half century after 1850 would witness the political consolidation and economic expansion that paved the way for the brief global domination of Europe. The conservative monarchies of Sardinia-Piedmont and Prussia united Italy and Germany by military force, and gave birth to new power relationships on the Continent. Externalizing their rivalries produced conflict overseas in a new age of imperialism, which saw Africa and Asia fall under the domination of the West.

Nationalism overtook liberalism as the dominant force in human affairs after 1850. Nationalists would be less romantic and more hardheaded. The good of the nation and not the individual became the new creed. The state would be deified.

After 1848-1849, the middle class ceased to be revolutionary. It became concerned with protecting its hard-earned political power and property rights against radical political and social movements. And the working classes also adopted new tactics and organizations. They turned to trade unions and political parties to achieve their political and social goals, or else to the violence, immediate and threatened, of anarchism and Marxist socialism.

A great era of human progress was about to begin – material, political, scientific, industrial, social, and cultural-shaping of the contours of the world.