

# The Advance of Democracy in Great Britain, France, and Italy

## TIME LINE

- 1851 Louis Napoleon Bonaparte becomes French president for life
- 1852 Louis Napoleon Bonaparte establishes the Second Empire
- 1867 The British Parliament passes the Reform Bill of 1867
- 1868-1874 British Prime Minister William E. Gladstone heads his “Great Ministry”
- 1870 The French Third Republic is established
- 1871 The Paris Commune is suppressed
- 1874-1880 Benjamin Disraeli serves as British prime minister
- 1875 The French adopt constitutional laws for the Third Republic
- 1884 British farm workers win the right to vote
- 1886 The British Parliament rejects Irish home rule
- 1889 General Georges Boulanger challenges the French Third Republic
- 1894 A French army court-martial convicts Captain Alfred Dreyfus of treason
- 1900 The British Labor party is established
- 1903-1914 Giovanni Giolitti dominates Italian politics
- 1905 A Liberal government takes office in Great Britain
- 1911 The British Parliament Act of 1911 is adopted
- 1912 Italy adopts universal manhood suffrage

*In the late nineteenth century, the cause of democracy advanced in Great Britain, France, and Italy.*

*In France, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte subverted the Second Republic and created the Second Empire. Following the overthrow of Napoleon III in 1870, the French established the democratic Third*

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*Republic. France remained a deeply divided nation, however, and the leaders of the Third Republic did relatively little to promote economic and social reform.*

### France

#### Louis Napoleon Bonaparte and the Second Republic

After winning the presidency of the Second Republic in December 1848, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte (1808-1873) set out to consolidate his support among the army, the middle class, the peasantry, and the Roman Catholic Church. In 1849, he sent French troops to Rome to help restore the authority of Pope Pius IX (r. 1846-1878) in the wake of the Italian revolutions of 1848. He also increased the influence of the Catholic Church in French education.

In December 1851, Louis Napoleon proclaimed himself president for life, and France's new constitution gave him ultimate authority. As head of the armed forces, he had the power to declare war and make peace. He also dominated the legislative process. The Council of State, whose members he appointed, drafted legislation, while the Senate, which he also appointed, could reject laws it judged unconstitutional. The Legislative Body, elected by universal manhood suffrage, could accept or reject legislation submitted to it but could neither initiate nor amend legislation. The government influenced elections for the Legislative Body by providing financial support to pro-government candidates and by using local officials to count the ballots.

#### Napoleon III (r. 1852-1870)

In late 1852, a plebiscite endorsed the reestablishment of the Bonapartist empire, and on December 2, 1852, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte became Napoleon III. (The Bonapartists regarded Napoleon I's young son, who had died in 1832, as Napoleon II, although he had never reigned.) In 1853, the emperor married Eugénie de Montijo (1826-1920), a Spanish countess.

#### The Authoritarian Empire

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From 1852 to 1860, Napoleon III was at the height of his power. The government maintained strict censorship of the press and prohibited the establishment of political associations.

### ***Economic Programs***

The emperor promoted economic expansion, and the prosperity of these years helped keep popular discontent at a minimum. The government established two investment banks, the *Crédit Mobilier* and the *Crédit Foncier*, to assist the development of railroads, public utilities, industry, and agriculture.

### ***Aid to Workers and Peasants***

The government also enacted measures to benefit the workers, including programs to improve housing and to construct hospitals and homes for the elderly. Private systems of social insurance for workers were encouraged, and labor unions received limited legal recognition.

Peasants were helped by the building and improvement of roads and canals, the draining of swamps, and the promotion of scientific agriculture and animal husbandry.

### ***Public Works***

Napoleon III initiated extensive programs of public works, which provided employment. The most famous of these projects involved the rebuilding of much of Paris under the direction of Baron Georges Haussmann (1809-1891).

## **The Liberal Empire**

After 1860, several factors combined to cause Napoleon III to lose both popularity and his ability to control the government.

### ***Domestic and Foreign Problems***

In the economic sphere, the emperor's free-trade policy began to have a negative effect. In particular, the Cobden Treaty of 1860, which he negotiated with Great Britain, lowered French tariffs on imports of British manufactured goods, which now flooded the country to the detriment of French industry.

Napoleon III also suffered from the results of his inept intervention in Italy in 1859 (see Chapter 23).

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The emperor sought to strengthen his position by making concessions. In 1860, he authorized both the Senate and the Legislative Body to discuss the speech from the throne and respond to it, and in the following year, the budgetary powers of the Legislative Body were increased.

### ***Intervention in Mexico***

In 1863, Napoleon III began his ill-fated intervention in Mexico, attempting to install the Austrian Archduke Maximilian (1832-1867), the brother of Emperor Francis Joseph, as the French puppet emperor. The United States protested but was unable to take effective action before the Civil War ended in 1865. In 1866, Napoleon III abandoned his efforts to create a French domain in Mexico. Mexican revolutionaries executed Maximilian the following year.

### ***Political Concessions***

Both the Maximilian affair and the Prussian defeat of Austria in 1866 further weakened Napoleon III. In 1867, he expanded the role of the Senate in the legislative process, and he agreed in 1868 to end press censorship and to permit political meetings to be held under government supervision.

Opposition to Napoleon III continued to mount, and in July 1869, he once again expanded the powers of the Legislative Body, granting it the authority to initiate legislation, and in December, he appointed a cabinet that represented a majority in the Legislative Body. In April 1870, the Senate became a true upper house, with the power to pass on legislation.

### ***End of the Second Empire***

The final crisis for the Second Empire came in the Franco-German War of 1870. At Sedan on September 2, the Germans captured Napoleon III. In Paris, radicals proclaimed the creation of the Third Republic.

## **The Paris Commune**

While radicals dominated Paris and other major cities, the provinces were more conservative. In February 1871, monarchist

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candidates won a majority of seats in the new National Assembly.

The Third Republic also confronted a threat from radicals in Paris. On March 17, 1871, Adolphe Thiers (1797-1877), who headed the government, ordered the dissolution of the Paris National Guard. The radicals responded by electing a new city government, the Paris Commune.

Thiers decided to crush the Paris Commune. On May 8, the army began a bombardment of Paris, and on May 21, troops entered the city. During the following week, the army reestablished the government's control over the capital, taking about 20,000 lives in the process.

## **The Constitutional Laws**

An attempt to restore the monarchy failed as a result of the rivalry between the Bourbon and Orleanist claimants to the throne, and in 1875 the constitutional laws for the Third Republic were adopted. These laws established a weak government, with authority centered in parliament. The parliament consisted of two houses, the Chamber of Deputies, elected by universal manhood suffrage, and the indirectly elected Senate. The executive functions of government were exercised by the cabinet, headed by a premier and responsible to the parliament. The president of the republic, elected by both houses of parliament for a term of seven years, had relatively little power. Their history since 1789 had taught the French that a strong executive was likely to seek to establish his arbitrary authority.

The government's effectiveness was further weakened by the multiparty system. Since no one party could command a majority in parliament, coalition cabinets were necessary. These coalitions often proved fragile as a result of disagreements among the parties and their leaders.

## **Anticlericalism**

The Roman Catholic Church had generally supported the monarchist cause, and during the 1880s, the republican leaders promoted an anticlerical campaign, designed to reduce the church's

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influence in national life. The government established a system of free secular elementary schools to compete with schools controlled by the church. The Jesuit Order was expelled from France, and the name of God was removed from oaths.

### **The Boulanger Affair**

In the late 1880s, the republic's survival was threatened by the emergence of General Georges Boulanger (1837-1891). A popular minister of war, Boulanger benefited from revelations of financial scandals involving a number of prominent republican politicians. In 1889, it appeared that Boulanger might attempt to carry out a coup d'état with monarchist and clerical support. He failed to do so, however, and instead fled the country. The Boulanger Affair discredited the monarchists and thus served to strengthen the republic.

### **The Dreyfus Affair**

For several years around the turn of the century, France was torn apart by the Dreyfus Affair.

In December 1894, an army court-martial convicted Captain Alfred Dreyfus (1859-1939), a Jewish officer, of conveying secret information to the Germans, and he was sentenced to imprisonment in the penal colony of Devil's Island in French Guiana.

Some doubts remained about Dreyfus's guilt, however. In early 1896, Colonel Georges Picquart (1854-1914), the new head of the French intelligence service, developed evidence indicating that Major Ferdinand Esterhazy (1847-1923) was the guilty party, although he was promptly acquitted by a court-martial. It was also revealed that certain key documents used by the prosecution against Dreyfus had been forged.

A bitter conflict developed. On one level, the issue involved the question of Dreyfus's guilt or innocence. On another level, it was a conflict between the Dreyfusards, who supported both Dreyfus's innocence and the cause of the republic and anticlericalism, and the anti-Dreyfusards, who insisted on Dreyfus's guilt and supported

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the cause of the monarchists, the army, and the church. The anti-Dreyfusards were often openly anti-Semitic.

### **Zola's "J'Accuse"**

In 1898, the novelist Emile Zola (1840-1902), a Dreyfusard, published a newspaper article entitled "*J'Accuse*" ("I Accuse"). Zola charged the army with forging the evidence that convicted Dreyfus and with deliberately suppressing evidence that would vindicate him. A new court-martial found Dreyfus guilty once again, although this time with "extenuating circumstances." The French president pardoned Dreyfus, and in 1906, the French supreme court invalidated the convictions handed down by the two courts-martial.

### **Renewed Anticlericalism**

The victory of the Dreyfusards was a decisive defeat for the ultraconservative officers who dominated the French army and for the monarchists and the church, as well. The government now renewed its anticlerical campaign, adopting laws to exclude members of Catholic religious orders from teaching. In 1905, the government abrogated Napoleon's Concordat of 1801. Church and state were now separated.

### **French Socialism**

Focusing their attention on the struggle against the monarchists and on the anticlerical campaign, the French republicans showed relatively little interest in the problems of the country's workers. In 1905, several socialist groups joined under the leadership of Jean Jaures (1859-1914) and Jules Guesde (1845-1922) to form the United Socialist Party, which sought to represent the interests of the workers.

*In France, the democratic Third Republic replaced the Second Empire. France remained a deeply divided country, however. Monarchists and clericals rejected the republic, and France's political leaders were slow to enact economic and social reforms to meet the needs of the working masses.*