

## THE AGE OF REALISM: 1850-1871

The failure of the popular revolts of 1848 prompted authoritarian governments across Europe to engage in a pragmatic form of decision making called *Realpolitik*. Between 1850 and 1871, new leaders used a realistic approach to nation building, which included the acceptance of differing degrees of liberal reform. Realism was also evident in the world of science as scientific knowledge was used to solve social problems. The fields of art and literature were also influenced by Realism; in their works, painters and novelists examined the everyday life of ordinary people.

### KEY TERMS

*Ausgleich*

Austro-Prussian War

Austro-Sardinian War

*bourgeoisie*

*The Communist Manifesto*

Crimean War

dual monarchy

Franco-Prussian War

joint-stock investment bank

materialism

*mir*

natural selection

organic evolution

pasteurization

populism

*proletariat*

Realism

*Realpolitik*

Red Shirts

Reform Act of 1867

Second Empire

Victorian Age

*zemstvos*

*Zollverein*

### KEY CONCEPTS

- After putting down the revolutions of 1848, authoritarian forces reasserted themselves across Europe, engaging in nation building and liberal reform on their own terms.
- The industrial innovations first introduced in Britain in the early nineteenth century now spread across the Continent, increasing industrial output and economic prosperity.
- In response to the long hours and poor working conditions that emerged as a result of industrialization, workers organized. Significant change did not occur, however, until socialist parties and socialist trade unions, based upon the ideas of Karl Marx, appeared after 1870.
- Realism dominated the worlds of art and literature as proponents rejected Romanticism in favor of depictions of everyday life and ordinary people.

For a full discussion of this period, see *Western Civilization*, 8th and 9th editions, Chapter 22.

### NATION BUILDING AND REFORM

New conservative leaders including Otto von Bismarck and Count Camillo di Cavour came to power after 1850, marking the beginning of a period of authoritarian rule. Yet many of these leaders used liberalism to secure power. In addition, the balance of power across Europe was dramatically transformed as new nations emerged during the second half of the nineteenth century.

### FRANCE AND THE SECOND EMPIRE

The events of 1848 led to the election of Louis Napoleon as president of the Second French Republic. Louis Napoleon wanted to dominate the French government, so in 1851 he seized control of the National Assembly, and then asked the French people to allow him to serve in office for a ten-year term. His overwhelming victory in 1851 influenced his decision to create a new French empire. Again the French people approved, and in 1852 Louis Napoleon became Napoleon III. The Second Empire was born.

As emperor of France, Napoleon III served as a model for other authoritarian rulers at that time. Although he maintained control over the vital functions of the government, the French people acceded to that, because he also introduced

many domestic policies that were beneficial to the economic and social welfare of the nation. During the early part of his rule, he helped industrialize France, bringing great prosperity to the nation. One of his major achievements was the redesign of Paris, and with the guidance of Baron Haussmann, he oversaw the creation of a modern infrastructure that advanced public health, thwarted insurrections, and improved aesthetics.

### THE END OF THE CONCERT OF EUROPE

Napoleon III was eager to reestablish France as the dominant force in Europe. By mid-century it had become apparent that the Ottoman Empire was disintegrating. The question then became which European nation would benefit the most from the decline of the Ottomans. All of the European powers—but especially Russia and Austria—had interests in the territories. France and Britain were afraid of Russian advances in southeastern Europe, so they supported the Ottoman Empire after it declared war on Russia in 1853.

The ensuing Crimean War was a military disaster, with substantial losses for all sides. More than 250,000 soldiers died, with over 60 percent of the soldiers succumbing to disease; the only positive outcome of the conflict was the

recognition of professional nurses under the leadership of Florence Nightingale. Combined French and British forces laid siege to the Russian fortress at Sevastopol, which fell in 1855. The Treaty of Paris, signed in 1856, served to bring an end to the Concert of Europe as Austria and Russia, former allies, now became enemies. Russia's defeat led to its retreat from European affairs and altered the balance of power.

## ITALIAN UNIFICATION

Attempts at revolution had been made in the Italian states since the 1830s; all met with defeat. Italian nationalists under the leadership of Mazzini and his *risorgimento* had gained support but failed to overthrow the influence of Austria and France. The tide began to change with the appointment of Count Cavour as prime minister of Piedmont. Cavour was a wealthy nobleman who advocated a constitutional government. In 1859, he struck a deal with Napoleon III, gaining French military support in order to drive the Austrians out of Italy, in return for granting the French Nice and Savoy. The French fought two battles with the Austrians, then bowed out of the war. Although Cavour did not gain all the territory he sought, the fighting gave rise to nationalist movements throughout northern Italy. These eventually came together under the leadership of Piedmont and Count Cavour.

In southern Italy, Giuseppe Garibaldi led his Red Shirts against the Bourbon king of the Two Sicilies. Fighting against great odds, Garibaldi's bold leadership proved victorious. As the Red Shirts prepared to march up the Italian peninsula, Count Cavour intervened so as to prevent war with France, which had been protecting Rome since the failed revolution of 1848. The Piedmontese army invaded the Papal States and Naples, prompting a confrontation with Garibaldi and his Red Shirts. Garibaldi accepted the rule of the Piedmontese under the leadership of King Victor Emmanuel II, and the kingdom of Italy was declared in 1861. With help from Prussia, Italy was able to finalize its territorial conquest by gaining Venetia from Austria and Rome from France. Thus, in 1870, a new united Italian state was complete.

## GERMAN UNIFICATION

After the failure of the Frankfort Assembly in 1848, Prussia used economic tactics to help establish German unity. By 1853, all of the German states other than Austria had joined a customs union called the Zollverein. Economic progress was achieved by eliminating tolls on trade routes between member states. A growing middle class was given more voice in the Prussian constitution, yet power remained firmly in the hands of the king. When middle-class liberals challenged the growing influence of the Prussian military, King William I appointed Otto von Bismarck chancellor in hopes of containing liberal dissent.

Bismarck's reign as chancellor proved vitally important to the fate of not only Germany but Europe as well. A dominating force, Bismarck practiced *Realpolitik*, in which political decisions are based on everyday realities—such as the

growing political power of the labor movement—rather than ethics or morality. In practice, this meant allowing his enemies certain victories as long as the overall political advantage remained on the side of Prussia. Bismarck chose to launch an aggressive foreign policy as a way to distract liberals upset with the military's involvement in domestic affairs.

Under Bismarck's leadership, Prussia was involved in three wars that eventually led to a unified Germany. Prussia's victory over Denmark (1864) served as a precursor to the Austro-Prussian War (1866). Prussian military superiority brought victory to Bismarck, allowing him to negotiate Prussian dominance over German affairs. Bismarck's military victories gained him liberal support and created a sense of nationalism that furthered his plans for a new German government controlled by Prussia.

## THE FRANCO-PRUSSIAN WAR

The growth of Prussia as a European power inevitably led to conflict with France. Napoleon III grew wary of Prussian maneuvering in Germany and saw a confrontation as a way to bolster his sagging popularity at home. Meanwhile, Bismarck cleverly edited a diplomatic telegram, the "Ems Dispatch," to make it especially insulting to the French, thus goading Napoleon III into declaring war against Prussia in July 1870.

The French army proved no match for the very well trained Prussian armies. The French army, including Napoleon III, was captured at the Battle of Sedan. The Second French Empire subsequently fell, while the Prussian army laid siege to Paris. After four months, Paris surrendered, and a peace treaty was signed. France was forced to pay an indemnity and relinquish Alsace and Lorraine to the new German state.

By the end of the war, the southern German states agreed to join the North German Confederation. This was confirmed by the proclamation of William I as emperor of the Second German Empire. Military victory brought German unification under Prussian leaders, who espoused militarism alongside authoritarian rule. Nationalism had won out over liberalism.

### AP Tip

The Franco-Prussian War had long-term implications for Europe. Not only did the war give rise to a new German state, but France's humiliation would prove a potent reason for the French people's dislike of Germany and contribute to France's overwhelming need for revenge. Also remember that the French removal of its troops from Rome during this war was the final step in Italian unification, making Rome the Italian capital.

## THE AUSTRIAN EMPIRE

As was true elsewhere in Europe, industrialization brought not only economic change, but social change as well. In Austria, the rise of an urban proletariat served to challenge the autocratic rule of the Habsburgs. Military defeat in Italy and, later, Prussia forced great changes on the Austrian empire. The Compromise of 1867 created the Dual

Monarchy of Austria-Hungary, with each part of the empire receiving its own constitutional government under a single monarch, Francis Joseph. The compromise did very little to satisfy the desires of the ethnic nationalities whose members remained under the power of the ethnic Germans and Magyars.

## **IMPERIAL RUSSIA**

Russia's defeat in the Crimean War highlighted the need for greater reform—it was obvious to the tsar and the conservative leadership that Russia was falling drastically behind the western European powers. Tsar Alexander II attempted to address the deficiencies of the Russian system. One of the first reforms was the abolition of serfdom in 1861. Later, in 1864, Alexander II created local assemblies called *zemstvos*, which allowed for limited self-government.

Reformers in Russia demanded further change as the number of radical groups increased in number. Violence against Russian officials grew more frequent, culminating in the assassination of Alexander II by members of the People's Will. Convinced Alexander's death resulted from reform measures he had made, his son and successor, Alexander III, turned back to the repressive rule associated with autocratic Russia.

## **VICTORIAN ENGLAND**

Great Britain did not face the same degree of social and political turbulence as much of continental Europe. In part this was a result of the Reform Act of 1832, which gave political representation to the middle class. The Victorian Age was noted for its middle-class prosperity, which ushered in a period of national pride associated with the reign of Queen Victoria. Not every social group expressed satisfaction with the political situation, however; members of the working class demanded the franchise for themselves, too. This goal was achieved through the Reform Act of 1867, which extended voting rights to urban working-class males.

During much of the Victorian era, British politics were dominated by two politicians: Liberal Party Prime Minister William Gladstone and his Conservative Party counterpart, Benjamin Disraeli. Both parties used reform to attract new voters. Disraeli was responsible for the Reform Act of 1867, while Gladstone and the Liberal Party took credit for policies that opened the doors to civil service employment.

## **INDUSTRIALIZATION AND ITS CRITICS**

As industrialization spread across Europe, many nations experienced considerable economic growth. Great Britain's growth began with its textile industry; the Continent's growth began with railroads. The rail industry, in turn, stimulated growth in iron and coal. Governments also helped encourage economic growth by eliminating trade barriers and promoting financial institutions that could provide the necessary capital for industrial growth.

## **MARX AND ENGELS**

As industrialization swept across Europe, critics of capitalism became more vocal. None were more influential than Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Marx, a journalist, was forced to leave Germany after his newspaper was suppressed. While in Paris he met Engels, the son of a wealthy cotton manufacturer and author of *The Conditions of the Working Class in England*, an expose of industrial life. Marx and Engels collaborated on a treatise to promote a radical working-class movement. *The Communist Manifesto* was intended to stir workers into unified action. The proletariat, they wrote, would engage in a class struggle with bourgeois society in which the workers would prevail and form a classless society. Unlike socialists, communists did not believe that social change was possible within the framework of a democratic capitalist state.

## **THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL**

After the publication of the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848, Marx devoted the rest of his life to developing his ideas concerning history and society. *Das Kapital* examined the foundations of modern political economy. But many of his ideas never found a large audience because his all-consuming efforts to organize the working class left little time for writing. In 1864, he helped establish the International Working Men's Association, or "First International," which promoted the interests of the leading working-class organizations of the time. Dissension among member groups proved the undoing of the First International, and soon Marx's ideas were taken up by national socialist political parties across Europe that advocated planned economies rather than working-class revolution.

## **SCIENCE AND CULTURE**

Science and the arts underwent significant transformations between the years 1850 and 1871. Rapid changes in the world of science led to a great expansion of scientific knowledge and a challenge to accepted Western worldviews. In the world of art, Romanticism gave way to Realism, as writers and artists set out to show ordinary life in the world around them.

## **SCIENTIFIC ADVANCES**

Scientific knowledge had been growing since the advent of the Scientific Revolution. Those discoveries, however, remained in the realm of the scientific community and of little practical consequence to the general public. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the general public was more aware of the expansion of scientific knowledge, as discoveries with more practical applications were made. Advances in thermodynamics influenced inventions such as the electric generator, while discoveries by Louis Pasteur led to advances in public health. Indeed, scientific progress led some to believe that all truth lay in the realm of science and the natural world rather than the spiritual world. The influence of scientists and intellectuals gave rise to a secularization of European society that was reflected in the acceptance of materialism as the

overarching worldview of the period. Truth was to be found in the concrete material existence of human beings rather than the spirituality of the church or the emotionalism of the Romantics.

## CHARLES DARWIN AND THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION

Scion of an upper-class British family, Charles Darwin was interested in geology and biology. In 1831, he joined a Royal Navy expedition as a naturalist. Over the five years the H.M.S. *Beagle* sailed around the world, Darwin studied plant and animal life on islands that had not been touched by humans. His observations led to his theory of evolution through the principle of natural selection, which he laid out in *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859).

Darwin's research while traveling in South America and the South Pacific gave him evidence that plants and animals evolve over a period of time from simpler life forms. Darwin was influenced by the thinking of Thomas Malthus, who held that all species were engaged in a struggle for existence, the result of the population's growing faster than the food supply. Darwin expanded on that notion, believing that individuals can succeed in the struggle for existence only by adapting to their environment through chance variants, in a process called natural selection. Initially, Darwin's ideas were concerned with plant and animal species, but with the publication of *The Descent of Man* in 1871, his arguments dealt with the animal origins of human beings. That unleashed tremendous controversy within European society. Many were troubled by Darwin's direct challenge to the Bible's creation story and the implication that humans are ordinary products of nature rather than exalted beings.

### AP Tip

The AP exam often features questions concerning the repercussions of Darwin's ideas. Although many people were distraught over the implications of Darwin's theories, some, such as Herbert Spencer, created their own theories based on Darwin's notions of natural selection. Spencer's ideas gave rise to Social Darwinism, which used Darwin's theories – incorrectly – to justify a range of political, social, and economic policies. In particular, the phrase “survival of the fittest” was well suited to the growing aggressiveness of the modern industrial economy.

## HEALTH CARE

Breakthroughs in the natural sciences during the nineteenth century significantly influenced advances in health care during the period. Perhaps the most important work was performed by French chemist Louis Pasteur, who by 1857 was able to prove the link between microorganisms and disease. Like many of the scientific discoveries made at that time, this one spurred practical applications put into effect by governments and industry. For instance, the wine industry first used pasteurization to keep its wine from spoiling. Later,

Pasteur's experiments with microorganisms led to the common acceptance of many types of vaccinations.

## SOCIOLOGY

As the role of science grew in importance during the nineteenth century, researchers began to apply scientific principles to other fields. One such area was the study of society. French researcher Auguste Comte examined society through the use of scientific methods and discovered general laws pertaining to social interaction. His ideas eventually gave birth to the field of sociology, which would gain widespread popularity by the end of the century.

## LITERATURE

By mid-century, the literary world embraced the concept of materialism, which had also influenced the scientific community. Novelists turned to the realities of everyday life as subject matter for their works. Romanticism was rejected by authors who sought to find truth through accurate depictions of the common man rather than a romantic hero. Novelists of the Realist movement avoided the ornate and flowery language popularized by the Romantics in favor of representative dialects. For example, French author Gustave Flaubert accurately depicted small-town France in *Madame Bovary* (1857). British Realists William Thackeray and Charles Dickens likewise attempted to distance themselves from the Romantic style, offering true-to-life depictions of the middle and lower classes.

## ART

As was the trend in the literary world, by the mid-nineteenth century many visual artists had rejected Romanticism in favor of the gritty motifs of Realism. French painters Gustave Courbet and Jean-François Millet showed people engaged in everyday activities. This represented a radical departure from the accepted subject matter of traditional art. Courbet depicted the dreary existence of workers and rural peasants as they engaged in mundane activities. Millet's most famous work, *The Gleaners*, depicts three peasant women gathering grain. Showing the connection between humans and nature, Millet was criticized for his crude subject matter. Taking cues from the Realists, later artists continued to challenge artistic norms, leading the world of art to entirely new directions.

The period between 1850 and 1871 witnessed the spread of industrialization across much of Europe, bringing prosperity to many Europeans for the first time. The failure of the revolutions of 1848 brought to power a new breed of conservative leaders who practiced *Realpolitik* to achieve their goals. In addition, scientific and technological breakthroughs provided Europeans with an unwavering faith in progress. National pride accompanied this sense of optimism, continuing to influence European behavior into the next century.