

## CHAPTER 22

## The Revolutions of 1848

## TIME LINE

February 1848	A revolution in Paris results in the overthrow of King Louis Philippe and the proclamation of the Second Republic
March 1848	A revolution breaks out in Vienna, leading to Metternich's resignation The Magyars approve the March Laws as a constitution for Hungary King Charles Albert of Sardinia-Piedmont issues a constitution, the Statuto of 1848 The March Days mark the outbreak of revolution in Prussia.
April 1848	The Austrian government promises the Czechs a constituent assembly for the Kingdom of Bohemia
May 1848	The German National Assembly begins its deliberations in Frankfurt
June 1848	Radical workers in Paris rise up in revolt Austrian forces crush the Czech revolution
December 1848	Louis Napoleon Bonaparte wins election to the presidency of the Second French Republic Ferdinand I abdicates as Austria's emperor and is succeeded by Francis Joseph
March 1849	The German National Assembly completes its draft of a constitution for a united Germany
April 1849	The Hungarians proclaim the establishment of a republic King Frederick William IV of Prussia declines to accept the crown as Germany's emperor
August 1849	Austro-Russian forces crush the Hungarian revolt
November 1850	In the Humiliation of Olmütz, Prussia accepts Austria's demand for the reestablishment of the German Confederation

## VIAULT

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*In 1848 widespread and growing discontent with reactionary rule resulted in a wave of revolutions in Europe. The revolutions of 1848 threw the conservative rulers off balance, and almost everywhere it appeared that the cause of revolution would triumph. It seemed that France would become a democratic republic, that Germany and Italy would achieve unity as liberal national states, that the Magyars of Hungary and perhaps other subject peoples of the Austrian Empire would gain their independence or at least a greater measure of self-rule, and that Austria itself would achieve a liberal, constitutional government.*

*As the months passed, however, the conservative rulers gradually regained their confidence. When the revolutionary idealists manifested their inexperience and divisions, the rulers began to reassert their control.*

*By the early 1850s the defeat of the revolutionary idealists appeared complete, and almost everywhere the conservative order had been restored. Nevertheless, despite the defeat of the revolutionary idealists, their ideas lived on and in the course of the next two decades, Europe would be profoundly transformed.*

### **Background of the Revolutions**

Beneath the apparently tranquil surface of the conservative order in Europe, discontent had been simmering for several decades. Then, during the 1840s, economic problems intensified the discontent. The European economies had not fully recovered from the depression of 1837, and in much of Europe the 1840s were appropriately called “the hungry forties.” Crop failures increased the misery of the masses, and the workers in Europe’s developing industries experienced continuing hardships.

### **Western European Liberals**

Workers and peasants did not, however, play the dominant role in the revolutions of 1848. Instead, these revolutions were mainly liberal, middle class, and urban. Western European liberals desired, above all, to establish constitutional governments where

the power of monarchs would be limited by elected parliaments and guarantees of civil liberties. This was the liberal ideal that had taken shape during the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Of the major countries of Europe, only in France did many liberals favor the replacement of the monarchy by a republic. Furthermore, only in France did many liberals embrace the cause of democracy, which included, in particular, universal manhood suffrage. Elsewhere, liberals generally favored property qualifications for voting.

### **Liberal Revolutionaries in Central Europe**

In Central Europe – the Austrian Empire and the German and Italian states – the liberal revolutionaries also sought to promote the principle of nationalism. While the German and Italian liberals hoped to unify their people, in the Austrian Empire, the liberal leaders of the subject nationalities hoped to win independence from the Hapsburgs and to create separate national states.

## **The Revolution in France**

### **The February Revolution**

In France, discontent had been mounting against the increasingly arbitrary government of King Louis Philippe. On February 22, 1848, a large banquet was scheduled to be held in Paris by middle-class opponents of Louis Philippe and his chief minister, François Guizot (1787-1874). When the government attempted to prohibit the banquet, spontaneous rioting broke out in the streets.

On February 23, Louis Philippe responded to liberal demands and dismissed Guizot. Nevertheless, unrest continued among the city's workers, and the rioting intensified. In an attempt to avoid more bloodshed, Louis Philippe abdicated on February 24 and fled to England.

### **The Provisional Government**

Following the king's abdication, the Chamber of Deputies formed a provisional government, and the Second Republic was

## VIAULT

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proclaimed. The provisional government was split into two factions. The moderate republicans, whose aims were primarily political, were led by Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869), a statesman and poet. The socialists, led by Louis Blanc (1811-1882), regarded the republic as a means to an end: the creation of a socialist society.

### **Socialists Versus Moderate Republicans**

In an attempt to placate the socialists and the workers of the capital, the provisional government placed Blanc in charge of establishing a system of national workshops to provide assistance to unemployed workers.

Although the socialists and other radical elements dominated Paris and drew support in other cities such as Lyons and Marseilles, the rural areas and small towns remained basically conservative. When elections for the National Assembly, which would draft a new constitution, were held in April, the moderate republicans won an overwhelming victory. In the wake of their electoral triumph, the moderate republicans in the provisional government ordered the national workshops to shut down.

### ***Suppression of the June Days Revolt***

In Paris, the workers responded to the closing of the national workshops by rising in a revolt, which lasted from June 23 to June 26. Acting on the orders of the provisional government, General Louis Cavaignac (1802-1857) crushed this June Days revolt.

### **Constitution of the Second Republic**

In November 1848, the National Assembly completed the drafting of the constitution of the Second Republic. The constitution provided for a president and a one-house parliament, both to be elected by universal manhood suffrage.

### **Louis Napoleon Bonaparte (1803-1873)**

In December 1848, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, whose name stood for order, stability, and national glory, polled over 5 million votes and won the presidency. The combined votes for his

opponents, including Lamartine, Cavaignac, and the socialist Alexandre Ledru-Rollin (1807-1874), totaled less than 2 million. From the beginning, Louis Napoleon desired to follow his uncle's example and establish a dictatorship.

## **The Revolutions in the Austrian Empire**

### **The Revolution in Austria**

In 1848, the Austrian Empire was ruled by the feeble-minded Ferdinand I (r. 1835-1848). Political authority was in the hands of a triumvirate, led by the reactionary Prince Metternich.

News of the February Revolution in France gave rise to revolutionary fervor in the Austrian capital of Vienna. On March 13, rioting broke out in the city. Responding to pressure from his opponents in the government, Metternich resigned and went into exile.

#### **Abolition of Robot**

In July 1848, an Austrian constituent assembly met and began to draft a constitution. The most enduring act of this assembly came in September, when it voted to abolish the robot, the system of obligatory peasant labor. The major source of the peasants' discontent had been eliminated, and they now ended their revolutionary activity.

#### **End of the Revolution**

As the revolutionary disturbances subsided, the Austrian government began to recover its confidence. At the end of October, troops loyal to the emperor regained control of Vienna. In early December, Prince Felix Schwarzenberg (1804-1852), who was now the leading figure in the imperial government, arranged for the abdication of Ferdinand I and his replacement by his eighteen-year-old nephew, Francis Joseph (r. 1848-1916). The government announced that the new emperor would not be bound by any commitments made by his predecessor.

#### **Restoration of Centralized Government**

In March 1849, the constituent assembly proposed the establishment of a decentralized system of government for the

## VIAULT

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Austrian Empire, which might have satisfied some of the demands of the subject nationalities. Schwarzenberg rejected this proposal, however, and produced his own version of a constitution providing for a more highly centralized system. It was announced that, for the time being, Francis Joseph would rule without this constitution. In 1851, the constitution was suspended without ever having gone into effect. The old system of centralized government that had prevailed prior to 1848 was thus restored.

### **The Revolutions in Hungary and Bohemia**

In 1848, the Austrian authorities were also confronted with revolutionary upheavals in Hungary and Bohemia.

#### **Hungary**

On March 3, 1848, the radical Magyar nationalist Louis Kossuth (1802-1894) demanded self-government for Hungary. In mid-March, the Magyars approved the March Laws, which established an elected parliament to replace the Hungarian diet and abolished serfdom. Faced with the revolution in Vienna, the Austrian government was forced to accept the March Laws, recognizing the virtual independence of Hungary.

#### **Bohemia**

Revolution also erupted among the Czechs in Prague, the capital of Bohemia. On April 8, the Austrian government promised the Czechs a constituent assembly for the Kingdom of Bohemia.

#### **Other Revolts**

Other anti-Austrian revolts broke out in Dalmatia, Galicia, Moravia, and Transylvania.

#### **Suppression of Czech and Hungarian Revolutions**

In early June 1848, the first Pan-Slav Congress met in Prague, urging Slavic solidarity against the Austrians and promoting the cause of independence for the subject nationalities in the Austrian Empire. Only a few days later, on June 17, Austrian forces commanded by Field Marshal Alfred von Windischgratz (1787-1862) crushed the Czech revolution and established a military government in Bohemia.

In the autumn of 1848, the Austrians moved against the revolution in Hungary. Kossuth enlisted thousands of volunteers in his Home Defense army, which soon drove the Austrian forces from most of the country. In April 1849, the Hungarian diet declared Hungary's independence of Austria, established a republic, and elected Kossuth as its first president.

In June 1849, Emperor Francis Joseph accepted the offer of assistance made by Tsar Nicholas I of Russia. Some 100,000 Russian troops invaded Hungary, reinforcing the Austrian army there. On August 9, the combined Austro-Russian force defeated Kossuth's army in the Battle of Temesvar. Kossuth fled to Turkey, and Austrian control was restored over Hungary.

## **The Revolutions in Italy**

### **Outbreak of the Revolutions**

In early 1848, revolutions against both the princely rulers and Austrian domination swept the Italian states. In February, revolutionaries forced Ferdinand II (r. 1836-1859), the Bourbon ruler of the Two Sicilies, to grant a liberal constitution.

News of Metternich's fall on March 13 led to the outbreak of rioting in Milan, the capital of Lombardy, which Austria had annexed along with Venetia in 1815. The Milanese revolt of the Five Days from March 18 to March 22 forced the Austrians to withdraw from the city. On March 22, an anti-Austrian government, led by Daniele Manin (1804-1857), was proclaimed in Venice, the capital of Venetia.

In Sardinia-Piedmont on March 4, King Charles Albert (r. 1831-1849) of the House of Savoy granted his subjects a liberal constitution, the Statuto of 1848. Charles Albert also embraced the cause of Italian nationalism.

### **Suppression of the Revolutions**

As early as May 1848, the revolution was suppressed in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Then, in late July, an Austrian army commanded by General Joseph Radetzky (1766-1858) defeated

## VIAULT

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the Piedmontese in the Battle of Custoza. Shortly thereafter, the Austrians restored their control over Lombardy.

Elsewhere in Italy, however, the revolutionary upheavals continued. In February 1849, revolutionaries, including Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) and Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882), proclaimed the establishment of the Roman Republic in the Papal States. In March, Piedmont renewed the war against Austria. Once again, the Austrians defeated the Piedmontese, this time in the Battle of Novara on March 23. King Charles Albert was now forced to abdicate in favor of his son, Victor Emmanuel I (r. 1849-1878).

In April 1849, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte sent French troops into action against the Roman Republic, as a part of his efforts to win support among French Catholics. The French took Rome at the end of June. In the meantime, the Austrians crushed the revolution in Tuscany in May and in Venice in August.

## **The German Revolution** **Outbreak of the Revolution**

As news of the French February Revolution spread through the German states, agitation mounted in the cause of liberal reform and national unification. In Berlin, the rioting of the March Days led Prussia's King Frederick William IV (r. 1840-1861) to initiate some liberal reforms, including abolition of censorship. He also announced his intention to summon an assembly to draft a Prussian constitution. This assembly met in May and continued its deliberations until autumn.

Elsewhere in Germany, liberal nationalists from several states agreed in March to convene a preliminary assembly (Vorparlament) to discuss the possibility of unifying Germany. This preliminary assembly decided to call for the election of a national assembly to draft a constitution.



## **The German National Assembly**

Elected by universal manhood suffrage, the German National Assembly began its deliberations in Frankfurt on May 18, 1848.

One major issue facing the assembly was the question of whether Austria should be included in the new united Germany. Some of the more conservative delegates favored both including Austria and inviting the Hapsburgs to accept the German imperial crown. Others opposed the inclusion of Austria, arguing that the Hapsburgs would almost inevitably oppose a liberal constitution and pointing out that the Austrian Empire included large areas that were inhabited by non-Germans. The view of those who wanted to exclude Austria prevailed.

## **Collapse of the Revolution**

### ***The Prussian Constitution***

While the National Assembly debated the nature of the new Germany, King Frederick William IV lost his initial enthusiasm for the revolution and began to suppress it in Prussia. With the support of his army, the king dissolved the Prussian constitutional assembly in December 1848. By royal decree, the king issued his own constitution for Prussia, which remained in effect until 1918. This constitution established a two-house parliament. The upper house consisted of the Junker nobility, while the lower house was elected under a three-class voting law that enabled the wealthiest 20 percent of the voters to elect two-thirds of its members. The king retained an absolute veto over legislation, along with the authority to suspend civil liberties and rule by royal decree.

### ***"Humiliation of Olmütz"***

In March 1849, the Frankfurt National Assembly completed its task of drafting a constitution and voted to offer the imperial crown of a united Germany to Frederick William IV. The king declined the offer. Instead of becoming Germany's emperor, the Prussian ruler attempted to form a Prussian-dominated federation of north German states. Austria opposed this project and forced the Prussians to give way in the Humiliation of Olmütz of November

## VIAULT

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1850. The Austrians then proceeded to reestablish the German Confederation.

*By 1850, the revolutions had been suppressed and the conservative order had been restored. The changes brought about by the revolutions had been slight. In France, the arbitrary rule of Louis Philippe was replaced by that of Louis Napoleon. In the Austrian Empire, a young emperor, Francis Joseph, had replaced his mentally incompetent predecessor, Ferdinand I, and the traditional highly centralized government of the Hapsburgs had been reestablished. Obligatory peasant labor had been abolished, but that was among the few enduring changes that revolution had brought to Austria. In Italy, the Austrians assisted in the restoration of conservative governments, although Sardinia-Piedmont retained its liberal constitution. In Germany, the Austrians reestablished the German Confederation.*

*Everywhere the revolutionary idealists had been defeated. But the revolutionary ideas of liberalism and nationalism lived on and continued to win adherents. And only a few years after the defeat of the revolutions of 1848, many of the goals of the revolutionaries had been achieved. Italy was unified in 1861. Hungary gained the right of self-government in 1867, while a united German Empire was proclaimed in 1871.*