

The 1820s and the 1830s witnessed several important revolutions, not to mention disorders between the revolutions. This violent period culminated in the "Year of Revolutions," 1848. For the major revolutions and developments during the 1820s and 1830s follow the link.

Continuous Revolution

The period following the Congress of Vienna was all but peaceful, despite the lack of major wars for almost a century. The era from 1815 to 1861-1871 witnessed a long series of revolutions and, between the revolutions, disorder. During the 1861-1871 decade, Italy and Germany were unified. Thus the changes that occurred during nineteenth century in domestic and foreign affairs set the stage for the twentieth century, and perhaps also for the movements and conflicts that shook that century.

Revolutions of 1820: Spain

In 1820, an army officer, Rafael del Riego (http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/encyclopedia/r/ra/rafael_del_riego.htm), connected with the forces that were supposed to reconquer the Spanish colonies in the New World, issued a "pronunciamiento" (a declaration associated with liberals), revolted against the Spanish government, and proclaimed the Spanish Constitution of 1812. Ferdinand VII had alienated the army because he had



reduced its funding and had also alienated liberals by persecuting and arresting them. Active in the liberal opposition were Masonic lodges.

The 1820 revolution under Riego was successful at first. The king pretended to go along, but he could never accept the constitution because it reduced his power too much. As time went on, the revolutionaries forced more radical ministers on Ferdinand, which stiffened his resolve to defeat the revolution. There was widespread chaos, royalist uprisings occurred in the provinces, and radicalism on the left increased. Nevertheless, the only hope for the king's returning to power was French intervention.

It took time for intervention to come. From the beginning of the revolution, the existence of a constitutional regime in Spain challenged the conservative structure that had been set up in Europe in 1815. The revolution was imitated, for example, in both Naples and Piedmont in Italy, and there were stirrings of revolution in other countries. The French, however, were wary of intervening because of the memory of the guerrilla war in which they had lost so many soldiers during the Napoleonic Era. In addition, Louis XVIII had not yet succumbed completely to the influence of his reactionary brother Charles. However, by 1823 Charles had enough influence in France to make an expedition against the Spanish a fact. The French invaded during that year and met little resistance. They put down the revolution and Riego was executed (despite a promise of amnesty).



Why did the revolution fail? The Constitution of 1812 was a prime reason. The king could not accept it, but in part the unpopularity of the revolution was beyond the revolutionaries' control. Yellow fever, droughts, unemployment—all alienated the people. However, the liberals also divided the country by estranging the Church—the Jesuits were expelled, regular orders were put under the control of the bishops, and monks who harbored royalist plotters during the revolution were summarily shot. The press and radicals created an atmosphere of violence. These factors combined with the involvement of foreign powers which spurred the French invasion to end the Spanish Revolution.

Revolutions of 1820: Naples

In Naples the secret society known as the Carbonari had made several attempts at revolution between 1817 and 1820. In 1820, however, feelings were intense in Naples because of the revolution that had occurred in Spain and at that time had seemingly succeeded. At the same time there were contacts between the Carbonari and the more moderate Muratists. The Muratists thought they could use the Carbonari to achieve their aims of achieving a constitution. The Muratists, however, wanted a moderate constitution while the more radical Carbonari favored the Spanish Constitution of 1812. Because Naples, the capital, was so well guarded, the revolution began in the provinces (Avellino) under a radical priest and head of a Carbonaro lodge, Luigi Minichini, in July 1820. The king sent his army to put down the revolt, but the soldiers went over



to the rebels. The revolution was successful and the Muratists jumped on the bandwagon.

Having lost the game, King Ferdinand I promised to issue a constitution in eight days and appointed his son “vicar general” (this was a ruse, because, in this way, the king could repudiate what his son did during the revolution). The rebels, however, demanded immediate issuance of the Spanish Constitution of 1812, and the king and his son were forced to accept it and to swear allegiance to it.

The Spanish Constitution was to prove the undoing of the Neapolitan Revolution of 1820, because King Ferdinand could not really accept it, even though he swore allegiance to it, and neither could the large powers. Unlike Spain, the Austrians could easily intervene in Italy, but they went slowly because king was in the rebels’ hands and they feared for his life. The Muratists recognized that the revolution would eventually be defeated and, knowing that they could not get a more moderate constitution, asked at least that the Spanish Constitution be revised and made more moderate. The Carbonari, however, refused to let anyone touch it.

The Spanish Constitution was ill-adapted to Naples, not only because it drastically weakened the king’s power but because the Sicilians did not favor it. The Sicilians preferred the Sicilian Constitution of 1812, a more moderate instrument that, unlike the Spanish Constitution, mandated a bicameral legislature (that is, with two houses) instead of a unicameral one as was the case



for the Spanish Constitution (the Sicilian Constitution had been given during the British occupation of the island and therefore resembled the British system).

As soon as a Parliament was elected under the Spanish Constitution, the Sicilians revolted. The island wanted autonomy and its own Constitution of 1812. The revolutionary Neapolitan government refused and sent its army down to subdue the Sicilians. This event served as an excuse for the Austrians to intervene and put down the Neapolitan Revolution.

The Austrians had not intervened immediately because there were diplomatic issues to resolve with other powers, in addition to the threat to the Neapolitan king. However, they succeeded in solving the diplomatic problems at the Congresses of Troppau (1820, <http://www.bartleby.com/65/tr/TroppCon.html>) and Laibach (1821, http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/encyclopedia/c/co/congress_of_laibach.htm), and the rebels, knowing they were in trouble, let the king travel to speak to them after he had promised to try to convince the Austrians not to invade; in fact, he wanted an Austrian invasion. Thus this revolution came to an end because of international intervention, as was the case in Spain and in Piedmont.

Revolutions of 1820: Piedmont

In Piedmont, there was also opposition to the government, which was reactionary. The Carbonari were important there as well. The Piedmontese liberals (less radical than the Carbonari, but who had contact with them) wanted



a constitution and a war against Austria for the liberation of Lombardy-Venetia from Austria and formation of a strong North Italian Kingdom under the Piedmontese Savoy dynasty. These liberals had contacts in Lombardy-Venetia and a revolution was supposed to be coordinated with them, but the Austrians arrested the Lombard conspirators before a revolt could take place. In addition, the Piedmontese discussed coordination with the Neapolitans, demonstrating that there was national feeling in the country and the idea that, at least, Italy should be liberated from Austrian control.

The plans of the Piedmontese liberals had a fundamental defect: they depended on cooperation with members of the ruling Savoy family. Thus they attempted to get help from Charles Albert, heir to the throne after Victor Emanuel I and his brother Charles Felix. Charles Albert became a central figure in the revolution of 1821 in Piedmont, although it is still not clear whether he agreed to support the rebels (as they claimed) or not.

In January 1821, student riots in the capital of Turin took place. Liberal nobles were encouraged to go ahead with a conspiracy they were hatching and met with Charles Albert. Later Charles Albert turned against the conspiracy and told a government minister all about it. On March 10, 1821, the rebels took over Piedmont's chief fortress, Alessandria, and proclaimed the Spanish Constitution of 1812. Victor Emanuel I abdicated and named Charles Albert as regent. Victor Emanuel's brother and heir Charles Felix was out of the country at this time (probably the king and his brother knew about the conspiracy). The abdication of



Victor Emanuel hurt the rebel cause because now they had to deal with the reactionary Charles Felix.

The rebels pressured the regent, Charles Albert, to promulgate the Spanish Constitution, which he did. As soon as that happened, Charles Felix ordered him to proceed to a loyal city and await orders. In April 1821, the Austrians invaded Piedmont and put down the liberals. The revolution was over.

Charles Albert remained in disgrace and there was even a question as to whether Charles Felix would allow him to become king after his death. Charles Albert had to reestablish his conservative credentials, which he did in 1823 by joining the French force that invaded Spain to defeat the revolution there. Later he would become king of Piedmont and have an important role in that country.

Successful Revolutions: France 1830

The defeat of the revolutions of 1820 and 1821 did not end opposition and further revolutions. The next wave of revolutions struck Europe in 1830-31.

In France, the July Ordinances of 1830, already discussed, caused the overthrow of King Charles X and of the Bourbon dynasty. The crucial question was whether France would become a republic or remain a monarchy under a different dynasty. The people who had done the actual work of ousting Charles wished a republic. However, the bourgeoisie (remembering the history of the First Republic that had been established in 1792 and had that been brought to a formal end by Napoleon's declaration of himself in 1804) thought that solution too



radical. The Republicans offered the presidency of the “republic” to American revolutionary hero Lafayette, but he refused. He and Talleyrand, in fact, believed that France should remain a monarchy, but have a dynasty that would be more flexible than the Bourbon dynasty had been.

They favored a younger branch of the Bourbon dynasty, the Orleans branch, led by Louis-Philippe. On July 29, 1830 sixty deputies called upon Louis-Philippe to become “Lieutenant-General” of the realm, a position he accepted on July 31. The Chamber of Deputies proclaimed him the holder of that position and Louis-Philippe presented himself to the crowd at the Paris City Hall. The crowd, however, greeted him with hostility. At that point, Lafayette joined him on the balcony and wrapped himself and Louis-Philippe in a flag: the flag was not the white flag of the Bourbons, which had become the French flag after 1814, but the French tricolor. At that point, the crowd changed completely and cheered him as king. The symbolism meant that Louis-Philippe had accepted the French Revolution.

The mood of the Republicans (who had made the revolution), however, soon changed again as they realized that they had been hoodwinked by the liberals. The people turned against Louis-Philippe. In his 18 year reign, there were 18 assassination attempts against him, an average of one a year.

Successful Revolutions: Belgium 1830



At the Congress of Vienna, it was decided by the big powers that Belgium should be united with Holland under the control of the Dutch as the Kingdom of Holland.

The two peoples did not get along. The Dutch were (mostly) Protestant, the Belgians (mostly) Catholic; Belgium was highly industrialized, Holland agricultural; the Belgians spoke French, so there were differences of language. Furthermore, the Dutch dominated the union, with Dutch being the official language. There were also monetary issues, because the Dutch had a large national debt necessitating high taxes that the Belgians also had to pay. There was constant friction between the two peoples and constant Belgian opposition to the Dutch government.

In August 1830, following the French Revolution of that year, an opera was given in Brussels that portrayed a revolution in Naples in the 17th century. This opera served as the spark for the Belgian revolution. It was in the French interest to break up the union and they therefore opposed a Dutch reconquest of Belgium. However, the British and other powers were alarmed at the talk of Belgium becoming independent and possible being put under a son of Louis-Philippe as king—or even annexation by France.

As a result, the big powers came to an agreement to resolve the situation: Belgium would be independent and would be put under a king from a secondary house. In addition, between 1830 and 1839, the countries around Belgium signed a series of treaties that guaranteed Belgium's neutrality in case of war



(this included a treaty with Prussia that Germany, the successor state, violated during World War I). Belgium was thus neutralized.

In February 1831, the Belgians promulgated a constitution that was the most liberal in Europe, and the country became a magnet for exiles from all over the continent.

Unsuccessful Revolutions: Italy 1831

In Italy after the revolutions of 1820-21 there began a period of violent reaction. The French Revolution of 1830 encouraged subversion in Italy, but revolts broke out only central Italy.

On February 9, 1831, a revolution broke out in Modena and quickly spread to Parma. More importantly, the revolution spread to Bologna, in the Papal State, where a Provisional Commission was set up to rule the city. From there it spread to other regions of the Papal State. However, the capital, Rome remained quiet. The real question was one of Austrian intervention. Only France could stop the Austrians from intervening to end the revolution, and the rebels (inspired by the French invasion against the native rulers in 1792) hoped that the French would come to Italy to help the Italians win their liberty. When the French declared that they would not—their foreign minister stating that French blood would be shed for France alone—the Italian revolution was doomed. Hoping to forestall an Austrian invasion, the Italians refrained from attempting to spread the



revolution, but this policy turned out to be a mistake. In March 1831, the Austrians intervened to suppress the revolutions in central Italy.

These revolutions, although less widespread than those of 1820-21, were important because they stated the desire of all patriotic factions for Italian unity and independence more explicitly than had the previous revolutions.

Unsuccessful Revolutions: Poland 1831

The French Revolution recalled for many people the wave of liberty that had followed the French Revolution of 1789. News of this revolution moved eastwards through Germany which, however, did not break out in revolution. In 1830, the revolution in the East occurred in Poland.

Poland had been declared an “independent” kingdom by the Congress of Vienna, but the Russian Tsar was also Polish king and Poland a de facto Russian possession. As news of the revolutions in Paris and Brussels reached Poland, so did news that the reactionary Tsar Nicholas I was preparing to send Polish and Russian troops to those cities to help suppress the revolutions there. This information and strong anti-Russian feelings touched off the Polish Revolution on November 29, 1830, led by army officers and students.

The Poles did not have a chance against Russian power, and illnesses in the Russian army and the need for troops along the Turkish frontier are the primary reasons the revolt lasted until September 8, 1831, when the Russian army took Warsaw. However, the Polish aristocracy refused to grant land reform



to gain peasant support for the revolution, the revolutionary leaders missed chances to take offensive measures, and, as in Italy, misplaced faith in French intervention also help account for the Polish revolution's defeat.

Nicholas instituted a reign of terror after his army took Warsaw, meting out summary executions and forcing revolutionary leaders to flee to Western Europe (among them the great composer and pianist Frederic Chopin). Following the Russian victory, Nicholas abrogated Poland's "independent" status granted at the Congress of Warsaw and ruled the occupied areas of Poland under martial law.

Despite these setbacks, however, the revolutionary tradition in Europe would continue and an even greater wave of revolution would soon sweep the continent.