

The Italian Risorgimento

The defeat of the 1848 revolutions did not end the movements for unification of Italy and Germany, even though different auspices successfully unified both countries. In Germany, conservatives did the work of unification and, in the process, “captured” the liberal movement in that German liberals in effect threw over their ideas in the rush to support unification. This situation differed from the one in Italy, where unification occurred under liberal auspices, but with an important—if weakened—radical contribution.

The Decline of Mazzini

The salient fact among Italian patriots during the 1850s was the decline of Mazzini’s influence. Mazzinianism had been a driving force during the 1848 revolutions, spurring its adherents to drive the Austrians out of northern Italy and setting up a republic in Rome. However, the defeat of the Italian movement and the resulting harsh reaction during the 1850s demonstrated to many patriots that Italy needed help. This meant help from an established Italian state, which could only be Piedmont (Note: the official name of this state was the Kingdom of Sardinia; Sardinia is an island, and the region of Piedmont, in northwestern Italy, was the center of the Kingdom).

The crucial development fostering this view was that Piedmont became the center of the Italian unification movement. Piedmont was the strongest



native Italian state, with a good army and a competent Foreign Service and bureaucracy. Piedmont had shown itself ready to act in favor of Italian independence. This fact, along with the failure of Mazzini's ideas, convinced many patriots that the only way to gain independence and liberty for Italy was to support Piedmont. This in turn meant that Mazzini's plan to unite the peninsula by the establishment of a republic must be put on hold or abandoned. The king of Piedmont would not risk his state for the creation of a republic.

The Liberalization of Piedmont

Before 1848, Italian patriots (radicals and liberals) had viewed Piedmont as a backward, reactionary state. Victor Emanuel I and Charles Felix had been reactionaries; Charles Albert had been hesitant in his choice for Italy (he was called "the Italian Hamlet"). After the Battle of Novara, however, the new king, Victor Emanuel II (http://encyclopedia.jrank.org/VAN_VIR/VICTOR_EMMANUEL_H.html), had salvaged the Statuto. This made Piedmont the only Italian state with a constitution and a representative assembly. Even more important, this constitution evolved very quickly into a liberal one and changed the situation in Piedmont in that its progressive political and economic liberalism transformed it into a model for the rest of Italy and appealed to the liberal Italian patriots as a state—and a monarchy—that they could accept.



After the loss at Novara, the left that had control of the Piedmontese Chamber of Deputies wanted to continue the war. Knowing that this would make matters worse, Victor Emanuel II issued a veiled threat (the “Proclamation of Moncalieri”) against a new leftist Chamber in view of new elections that were held in December 1848. While on the one hand this move may be considered interference in free elections, on the other, many more people participated in the elections that gave handed a victory to the king and his policy of signing a peace with Austria (80,000 out of 87,000 eligible voters went to the polls, compared with 30,000 in the previous elections).

Ironically, crucial developments toward liberalism occurred in this conservative chamber. The first step toward political liberalization was passage of legislation to curb the power of the Church in Piedmont, considered too strong by liberals and many conservatives. Piedmont had not adopted the anti-clerical legislation of the Enlightenment and the relationship between Church and State was regulated by the Concordat of 1741 that made the Church too powerful and out of sync with the Constitution of 1848.

This necessity brought about passage of the “Siccardi Laws” in 1850. These laws abolished ecclesiastical courts, equalized the punishment of lay and clerical offenders, and repealed temporal punishment for non-observance of holidays (but retained them for Sundays and major holidays). The passage of these laws provoked division between moderates and hard conservatives, as



Pope Pius IX and the Piedmontese bishops rejected them and sought to resist their implementation; the Archbishop of Turin, for example, went into exile.

The “Connubio” [Marriage]

The divisions caused by the laws—along with a bill to restrict freedom of the press because of newspaper criticism of Louis Napoleon’s coup d’etat in France—brought about a “parliamentary revolution.” Count Camillo Cavour, Minister for Agriculture, Commerce, and Marine, led the moderates. Cavour, the second son of a noble family, had traveled in Europe and had observed democratic systems at work. He had also taken over part of the family estate at Leri and had turned it into a model of efficiency. As Minister, he favored free-trade and negotiated a series of favorable treaties with other countries. Leftist leaders supported Cavour’s politics, despite their membership in different parties.

Because there were shifting political alliances in the Chamber of Deputies, Cavour and the leader of the Center-Left, Urbano Rattazzi (http://29.1911encyclopedia.org/R/RA/RATTAZZI_URBANO.htm) concluded a famous agreement in 1852 known as the “connubio” [marriage]. This agreement stated that the followers of both men would support the monarchy, the Statuto, independence for Italy, and civil and political progress.

This agreement was fundamental for the development of Piedmontese politics. A political faction emerged from it that blocked reactionary attempts to win a majority in the Chamber of Deputies. The forces of liberalism were



strengthened, while the agreement clearly indicated that Cavour meant to link progressive policies within Piedmont to a foreign policy whose aim would be the continuation of the fight for Italian independence. At the same time, the “connubio” split the center-left from the extreme left and it sanctioned the alliance between the most active part of the old aristocracy and the professional, commercial, and agricultural bourgeoisie, bringing them on board for Italian independence.

As a result of this agreement, moreover, Cavour had the support that allowed him to head a government.

Cavour and Reform

Cavour’s policies at the helm of the Piedmontese state were able to reform the country’s politics so as to make it and its monarchy an inspiration and model for many Italian patriots, including leftists, to rally around while abandoning Mazzini. Many leftists now supported the monarchy and gave up, or postponed, their desire for a republic. This political view was reinforced because Piedmont also took the lead in the economic sphere.

Agriculture profited from the free-trade policies of Cavour. Production of wine and olive oil increased. There was also great technological progress as new machines became important and new methods came into use. The silk industry thrived under the free-trade regime. Exports went especially to France. This was Piedmont’s most important industry.



The wool and cotton industries were hurt at first under free trade because of English imports, but after a period of retrenchment, production increased and Piedmontese cotton and wool products were exported.

The steel industry also developed during this period because of the building of railroads and the production of armaments. The railroads had the most spectacular development. In 1848, there were 8 kilometers of railroads in Piedmont compared to 357 in the rest of Italy. In 1859, there were 850 km. of railroads in Piedmont alone, while the rest of Italy had 986 kilometers. Piedmont had 47% of the operating railroads in Italy and 40% of those under construction. At the same time, more roads were built and public works were increased. During this period as well, the national bank (Banca Nazionale) was established and stock exchanges were instituted in Turin and Genoa (1850 and 1855). These helped raise capital for the economy.

This economic development increased foreign trade. For example, in 1850 Piedmontese exports totaled 75 million lire and imports 130 million; in 1859, exports amounted to 236 millions. The Kingdom had 20% of the population of the peninsula but accounted for 27% of its exports and 39% of the imports. In no other Italian state was there such a rapid development of the economy.

Diplomacy

This increased economic power made Piedmont more significant on the European diplomatic scene under Cavour's leadership.



In 1855, Piedmont entered the Crimean War against Russia on the side of England and France. It did so at the behest of the British after they failed to convince Austria to intervene, a possibility that would have hurt Piedmont. After the war (and after considerable diplomatic wrangling), Piedmont was allowed to participate in the Congress of Paris (<http://www.answers.com/topic/treaty-of-paris>), held in the French capital when the war ended in 1856.

This participation was a triumph for Piedmont and Cavour. He reached an agreement with the British and French representatives to bring up Italy's situation. After the problems of the peace were worked out, the French representative brought up other areas of Europe that threatened the peace, especially Rome and Naples, dominated by Austria. The British representative denounced conditions in these two states. Cavour denounced Rome, Naples, and Austria, saying that conditions in Italy encouraged revolution. These were veiled attacks on Austria and brought objections from the Austrian representative.

In fact, Cavour came to the conclusion that the Italian problem could not be solved within the traditional structure of existing international treaties. A new legality founded on the right of all nations to independence and liberty had to be created. Cavour knew that Piedmont could not defeat Austria and resolve the Italian situation by itself. It was important for him to gain the cooperation of France, the only big power in a position to contrast Austria.

Napoleon III and Cavour

Napoleon III (following the Napoleonic legend) had promised to do something for Italy, but he had had his own troubles and his advisers advised against it. In 1858, however, Napoleon was stimulated to act by the attempt of an Italian, Felice Orsini (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Felice_Orsini) to kill him. Orsini's aim was to create the conditions for an Italian revolution. After the attempt, Napoleon decided to do something, since he had just had proof that the Italian revolution could spread to France. Napoleon decided that he could help the Italians achieve independence by ridding Italy of the Austrians and replacing their control with French influence. He did not aim at Italian unification, because putting a united country on the French border would not help France.

Napoleon and Cavour met at Plombieres (http://www.dickinson.edu/~rhyne/232/Five/Cavour_To_Napoleon.html) at the end of 1858 and reached an agreement. The two plotted a war against Austria in which Austria should be made to seem to be the aggressor. After a presumed Franco-Piedmontese victory, the two agreed that the following should happen: 1. a "Kingdom of North Italy" would be formed out of Piedmont plus Lombardy-Venetia, the Legations and Romagna; 2. the Papal State, to consist only of Rome and the surrounding area, would remain under the Pope; 3. the rest of the Papal state, plus Tuscany, would be formed into a kingdom of central Italy; 4. the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies was to remain intact; 4. Nice and Savoy were to go to France. Central Italy was to be put under a French prince, Jerome, who was

to marry a Piedmontese princess, Clotilde, to strengthen French influence in Italy.

The War of 1859

As diplomatic tensions heated up in early 1859, the Austrians sent an ultimatum to Piedmont, touching off a war. The ultimatum was a mistake on Austria's part that alienated European opinion from it even more than usual.

The Austrians proved unable to crush the Piedmontese before the French arrived (by rail; this was the first big war in which the railway played an important part). The combatants fought two major battles, both Franco-Piedmontese victories: the Battle of Magenta and the Battle of Solferino. However, after Solferino, Napoleon suddenly and without consulting his ally signed an armistice with Austria at Villafranca (<http://www.onwar.com/aced/data/india/italy1859.htm>). According to Villafranca, Lombardy would go to Piedmont (after being transferred to France), but everything else in Italy was to return to the way it was before the war. Cavour resigned in protest against this development, but his resignation proved to be temporary.

There has been much speculation as to why Napoleon took the action he did. There are multiple reasons given. One is that Napoleon was shocked at the loss of life. Another, stronger, reason is that revolutions had occurred in central Italy. Unlike the situation in 1848, after the revolutions that occurred in 1859, the populations of the different states declared their annexation to Piedmont instead



of creating independent republics and fighting among themselves. Napoleon feared that Italy might become united, and he did not want that.

Villafranca, however, could not stop Italian unification. The populations of the rebellious states refused to take back their old rulers, as Villafranca demanded. This situation placed Napoleon in a quandary. He either had to accept the fact of merging central Italy to Piedmont or allow Austria to invade to force the inhabitants to take back their rulers, or, perhaps, to join the Austrians in doing so. The last two alternatives were impossible for him, so he chose the first. In return, he demanded that plebiscites be held in the states that would be annexed and that, in return for his assent, Piedmont cede Nice and Savoy to France.

As a result, between September 1859 and April 1860, the states of central Italy (including part of the Papal State) joined Piedmont in a major move toward unification.

Garibaldi and Southern Italy

In May of 1860, Italian freedom fighter Giuseppe Garibaldi set sail with a thousand volunteers to try to take the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies for Italy. This was considered an impossible task, since the Kingdom had an army of about 25,000. Garibaldi, a republican who favored Mazzini, believed that a revolution had begun against the Bourbons and expected it to spread. This did not happen, but many more volunteers flocked to his standard once he began winning. The



crucial battle was the Battle of Calatafimi in Sicily

(<http://www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Bunker/7475/calatafimi.htm>), in which

Garibaldi beat a force twice as large as his own. This battle was crucial in giving him control of Sicily. Garibaldi then crossed the straits to the mainland and began fighting his way up the Italian boot toward Naples.

There was a question about Cavour's attitude. He protested to the other European powers that he could not have stopped Garibaldi. Garibaldi seems to have had some help from Piedmont, but Garibaldi and Cavour were enemies and too big a victory by Garibaldi would have embarrassed Cavour. Indeed, Cavour was discomfited as people forgot his achievement in annexing central Italy.

There was also another, larger problem: Garibaldi was an anticlerical who aimed at attacking Rome and chasing the Pope from Italy. It was clear to many that if Garibaldi won in Naples, he would not stop there. If Garibaldi threatened the Pope, it was probable that the Catholic powers (Austria and France) would have been forced to intervene. Austria would have reestablished its domination in Italy; and this was precisely why France could not allow this to happen.

However, Napoleon was caught in a dilemma.

Cavour resolved the dilemma in a brilliant manner. He said that he would stop Garibaldi, but he had to march across Papal territory in order to do so and to reestablish his own prestige. Piedmont would take over Papal territory in the course of marching over it, but would guarantee the independence of Rome and the Pope. Napoleon told Cavour to do it and to do it quickly.



The Piedmontese army then marched across Papal territory. The Papal army met it but was defeated in the Battle of Castelfidardo (read the Piedmontese commander's official account of the battle at http://members.aol.com/ralbrizio/1860/10_20_60-663.html).

Cavour, Garibaldi, and the South

Because the Piedmontese marched south to meet Garibaldi, however, was no guarantee that Garibaldi would hand over the South to Piedmont or give up his idea of attacking the Pope. A republican who would soon declare himself a Socialist, Garibaldi was under pressure from his friends not to hand over the South. At least, they insisted, there should be elections for a constituent assembly to be held there to determine how the region should become part of a united Italy.

Cavour, who believed that delay would be fatal by giving the Europeans who supported the Pope an opportunity to intervene, responded to this pressure by pointing out to Garibaldi that he was not seen with a good eye because he was a revolutionary and that Austria might intervene. Garibaldi and Cavour did not get along, not only for political reasons but because Garibaldi was from Nice, which, he felt, Cavour had just given away to Napoleon (for example of the differences, see http://members.aol.com/ralbrizio/1860/10_20_60-663.html). Cavour's point was that Italy was closer to unity than it had ever been, and if Garibaldi delayed handing it over to Piedmont, all might be lost by provoking a



European crusade against Garibaldi stimulated by a desire to help the Pope. He thus “scared revolution with Europe” just as he had “scared Europe with revolution” in his dealings with Napoleon. Garibaldi, a patriot above all, yielded to these arguments. His army was also exhausted by a difficult victory against the Neapolitans at the Battle of the Volturno, the final fight to defeat the Neapolitan army.

Garibaldi and King Victor Emanuel II met at Teano (see <http://www.answers.com/topic/giuseppe-garibaldi> and <http://www.pizza.it/eng-site/curiosita/teanob.html>), where Garibaldi handed over the South to Piedmont. This event stimulated a future historiographical debate on whether Garibaldi should have done so.

The Proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy

On March 17, 1861, the Kingdom of Italy was officially proclaimed. Italy, however, was not completely united. The Kingdom lacked Venice (which became part of Italy after a war with Austria in 1866, important for German unification) and Rome (which became part of Italy in 1870, during a war that was also important for German unification, the Franco-Prussian War). Other small, Italian speaking areas remained Austrian and became part of Italy following World War I. Shortly after proclamation of the Kingdom, Cavour died, thus depriving the country of the best statesman of the late 19th century.



Italian unification brought to a close the struggle for unification that had most aroused the enthusiasm of Europeans. In addition, it altered the European diplomatic situation (although not as much as the unification of Germany) because it put a large power on the border of France where weak powers had existed before. Most importantly, however, it eliminated Austrian domination on the peninsula. The Austrians thereby saw in a concrete manner how nationalism threatened their empire. Italian unification served as an example for other peoples who were under Austrian control and stimulated them to follow the example of Piedmont. Conversely, the Austrians saw how—brought to its extreme consequences—nationalism could lead to the disintegration of their empire and determined to oppose it at all costs among their subject nationalities. This determination would contribute to numerous diplomatic crises and, finally, to the outbreak of World War I in 1914.