

Between Revolutions: the 1830s and 1840s

Even though no major revolutions occurred during the 1830s and 1840s, these two decades in Europe witnessed unrest, tension, instability, and repression. Major economic changes took place as well, particularly in France but also in the rest of Europe. Increasing industrialization created a proletariat that had few rights that worked under abominable conditions and turned toward revolutionary socialism. During the 1840s, as well, an economic downturn and famines and near-famines (Ireland, Germany) helped create the conditions that would produce a great revolutionary wave that rolled over the continent in 1848.

The July Monarchy

In France, the reign of Louis-Philippe was called the “July Monarchy.” Louis-Philippe, a man of simple manners and conservative attitudes, seemed more a person of the middle class rather than a king. He always brought an umbrella with him, even if the sun was shining, just in case. Advisers such as the historian Francois Guizot, later to become Premier (<http://www.answers.com/topic/fran-ois-guizot>) pointed out to Louis-Philippe that French history could be seen as a steady advance of the middle classes to achieve control of the government. Louis-Philippe favored the industrial classes and pursued policies that encouraged the spread of industrialization. In fact, the



“take-off” period of the industrial revolution in France coincided with the 18 years of his rule; it was also this period that saw the building of the French railway network that greatly stimulated the economy. Louis-Philippe’s appellation of “the Bourgeois King” aptly illustrates his intimate relationship to the industrial class. The industrialists were the backbone of his social and political support. However, when the economy went into a tailspin in the 1840s they turned against him.

Early Reforms

As soon as he became king, Louis Philippe introduced two important reforms demanded by the middle class.

First, he revised the electoral law to allow more people to vote. In general, the vote was given to males who paid direct taxes of 200 francs per year (lowered from 300) and males who paid 500 (instead of 1000) francs in direct taxes could become deputies. These changes increased the number of eligible voters to 190,000, instead of the 100,000 (out of a population of 32.5 million) who had been eligible during the Bourbon restoration. The bourgeoisie remained the only class in Parliament, as it had been under the Bourbons, and during the rest of his reign Louis-Philippe always resisted increasing the number of people eligible for the vote. Second, the National Guard, which had been dissolved by Charles X was reinstated. This was also a demand of the bourgeoisie, which dominated this armed force.



Louis-Philippe initiated these reforms because the bourgeoisie demanded them, but other groups of the population remained dissatisfied. Consequently, unrest characterized his reign. The regime's opponents included the romantics, who were turned off by the "bourgeois" king's unheroic style. Cartoonists portrayed him as turning into a pear, which his face resembled. While the issue of style may seem trivial by modern standards, this feeling would be important in his overthrow in 1848. The Catholics (who supplied much of romantic thought) were also opposed to Louis Philippe. The main opponents in this group were gathered around Lammenais (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08762a.htm>), who believed that the Church could have no real freedom under a royal government. The Legitimists, who wanted a restoration of the Bourbons, and the Republicans—who wanted a republic and felt that they had been cheated by the institution of another monarchy after 1830—also opposed the king.

Even the group that had supported Louis Philippe was divided during his reign, even if they agreed on some basic principles, such as peace at home and abroad, law and order, and an aversion to extreme democracy. The more liberal part of this group (the "party of progress"); however, pressed for more reforms while the more conservative part (the "party of resistance") was not. In March 1831, Casimir Perier (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casimir_Pierre_P%C3%A9rier), head of the party of resistance became prime minister and managed to bring stability to France. However, in 1832, he died in a cholera epidemic.

Instability

Despite appearances, Louis Philippe really wanted to rule by himself as much as possible, usurping the rights of Parliament. Even in early 19th century France, this would prove impossible and the tensions between the rights of kings and parliaments was a hallmark of Western Europe in the 19th century. The king's attempts to override Parliament caused instability and, in the end, the overthrow of the July Monarchy.

After Perier's death, the king did not appoint another prime minister. The republicans and the "party of progress" attacked his attempts to rule by himself and in June 1832 the republicans unsuccessfully revolted against him. Louis Philippe brought in a prime minister (the Duc de Broglie), but republican opposition increased and disorders continued. In 1835, in an attempt to suppress opposition, the government passed the "September laws" restricting the freedom of the press. Louis Philippe and De Broglie quarreled about who should rule and in February 1836, the king appointed a new prime minister, historian Adolphe Thiers (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolphe_Thiers), who he thought would be more cooperative. However, the king could not get along with Thiers either and the prime minister resigned in August 1836. Between 1836 and 1840 there were constant changes of prime ministers.

The major question was how much power the king should have and whether he or the Parliament should be supreme. Several attempts to overthrow the government occurred, two of them by Napoleon's nephew Louis Napoleon,



who would later become Emperor Napoleon III, and others by radical leaders Blanqui and Barbes who would continue to be important in the history of the French left.

In 1840, historian Francois Guizot became prime minister. He managed to keep the Parliament quiet, but mainly through corruption. He strongly opposed demands for an extension of the suffrage and opposed universal suffrage most of all. Here is an excerpt from one of his speeches:

Speech of February 15, 1842

I am, for my part, a decided enemy of universal suffrage. I look upon it as the ruin of democracy and liberty. If I needed proof I would have it under my very eyes; I will not elucidate. However, I should permit myself to say, with all the respect I have for a great country and a great government, that the inner danger, the social danger by which the United States appears menaced is due especially to universal suffrage; it is that which makes them run the risk of seeing their real liberties, the liberties of everybody, compromised, as well as the inner order of their society. . .

Since the government had control of Parliament and refused to initiate reforms, the opposition took more and more to the streets, and opposition spread as the economy went sour. Opponents of all stripes adopted the technique of holding “banquets” in which they spoke against the government. The government, however, refused to budge, and the banquet speakers, especially the radicals, became more vociferous. Because of the spread of industrialization, the bourgeoisie had supported the regime; as the French economy declined in a new kind of crisis typical of more highly industrialized societies, however, the bourgeoisie turned against the government. This created



a crescendo of opposition, which produced the “banquet” phenomenon. The banquets would eventually produce the spark for the revolution of 1848 in France.

Germany

The decade of the 1840s in Germany was one of depression, so much so that this period has been called the “hungry forties.” The bad economic conditions, which intensified the disruption caused by the beginnings of industrial capitalism in the area, allowed the disparate enemies of the Restoration to work together against the restored monarchs. Not only Germany but all of Europe was in the throes of an economic depression during the 1840s, and, in addition, there were famines.

In this situation, however, Prussia, for example, exported much grain while its lower classes starved. The nobles did this in order to take advantage of higher prices abroad for their agricultural products. As a result, the greatest increases in prices occurred for the basic staples of life. The only safety valve was emigration, and this was influenced mostly by economic factors. During the 1840s more than a million persons emigrated from Germany, many to the United States.

These conditions set the stage for the revolutions of 1848 which hit all of the German states and will be discussed later.



From a political viewpoint, the issue of German unity had not been discussed as prominently as it had in Italy and, although Austria dominated Germany, it did so less directly than it did Italy, i.e., through the German Confederation. Also, in Germany a potential rival existed for Austria—Prussia.

Italy

In Italy the problem of the liberals was different than in the other European countries because the problems of independence and unity had been forcefully posed. However, the peninsula was not only divided into several states ruled by conservative monarchs who realized that unity would mean the loss of their power, but, in addition, was directly dominated by a foreign power that had intervened militarily in order to crush any liberal national revolution: Austria.

The Italian patriots during the revolutions of 1848 believed that they could expel Austria from Italy with the help of the people. This thinking was the result of several factors which became important during the 1840s. These factors convinced many patriots that Italy could unify by itself (L'Italia fara` da se"), i.e., without foreign help. What were the significant developments in 1840s Italy?

Giuseppe Mazzini

An important event was the maturation of the thought of Giuseppe Mazzini. Mazzini was a patriot who believed that Italy could gain its independence from Austria and unify by organizing the people to revolt. In the



19th century, this was a revolutionary viewpoint that no one thought possible because civilians were not considered able to fight powerful, organized armies such as the Austrian. Mazzini argued that the Italians had a special mission, given them by God (caution: Mazzini was an opponent of the Catholic Church; his “religious” thought has nothing to do with the Church), and that domination by the Austrians prevented them from fulfilling it. Thus the Catholic Austrians were seen as thwarting God’s will and God was on the side of the Italians. In fact, Mazzini became the champion of oppressed nationalities, arguing that multinational empires such as the Austrian, the Russian, and the Turkish would disappear.

In addition to boosting the morale of Italians and giving them a mission, Mazzini outlined a way to do it. He advocated mass insurrection and adopting guerrilla warfare. He adopted the ideas of a thinker who had fought in Spain and had direct experience of guerrilla war by the name of Carlo Bianco. During the next several decades, persons inspired by Mazzinian thought (although not necessarily sanctioned by him) attempted to overthrow several Italian monarchs. Most of these movements failed, but the popular uprisings that characterized the revolutions of 1848 in Italy were inspired by his followers.

The Italian States

While Mazzini’s ideas were making inroads among Italian patriots, important occurrences took place in different Italian states.



Rome, which had been a secondary center of liberal national sentiment, became of crucial importance in the 1840s.

This was owing to the election in 1846 of Pius IX. Pius gave the impression of being a liberal when he declared an amnesty for political prisoners. This action convinced many people that he also favored Italian independence and unity because Metternich opposed the gesture.

In addition, a strand of Italian thought made people receptive to the Pope. Vincenzo Gioberti (<http://www.cats.ohiou.edu/~Chastain/dh/giob.htm>) had published a book that advocated Italian unity as a confederation of states under the Pope. Gioberti argued that Italy's greatness and decline went hand in hand with that of the Church and that when the Church became great again, Italian greatness would be linked with it (this idea was known as neo-Guelphism.) This rise had been impossible under previous popes, but when a "liberal" pope had been elected, it seemed as if Gioberti's prophesy had been realized.

As a result of these developments, Italians in the Papal States became more convinced that Rome would take the lead in uniting Italy and pushed the Pope for more liberal reforms. The Pope complied, but because of popular pressure, not because he was liberal. As the head of Catholicism he also could not support one Catholic people (the Italians) against another one (the Austrians), no matter what his private feelings might be. Although Rome seemed to be heading in a liberal direction, therefore, the whole system was heading for



the crash that finally came during the revolution of 1848 when the Pope declared his true feelings.

In June 1847, a Council of Ministers was established, but the liberals were upset because no lay person was appointed to it. Tensions increased, and while the Pope gave in to more demands (such as establishment of a civic guard), demonstrations increased as some members of the Papal entourage resisted. Rumors of a possible Austrian invasion of the Papal States and Tuscany increased (in fact, it seems that Austria was getting ready to invade when it occupied a city in the Papal States).

In Piedmont, there were signs that the monarch, Charles Albert, was being converted to the cause of Italian unity. This was important because Piedmont would eventually lead the movement for Italian independence. Historical circumstances would determine that Charles Albert would not lead the movement to fulfillment. His indecisiveness (as always) would determine this, in addition to the course of history, but his reign turned out to be important for the Italian cause. He encouraged economic development in his kingdom, even if he resisted political liberalization. He also gave signs that he would support Italian independence from Austria despite his own (and his dynasty's) Austrian connections. For example, in the summer of 1846, a speaker rose at a congress of the agrarian association being held in Piedmont and stated that if the occasion arose Charles Albert would drive the foreigners from Italy (later the occasion did arise and Charles Albert did try). Charles Albert encouraged this patriotic



sentiment and allowed collections of funds for patriotic causes. During the 1848 disturbances, as we will see, he issued a constitution, even if somewhat against his will.

In Lombardy-Venetia, under direct Austrian control, all groups of the population turned strongly against the Austrians. There were several attempts at revolution that were suppressed. The policies of Pius IX created so much excitement that it was barely contained. The clergy was affected by neo-guelphism and was opposed to anti-clerical Austrian legislation inspired by the late Austrian Emperor Joseph II. Between 1835 and 1840, the Lombard aristocracy, which had been pro-Austrian, became oriented toward the more moderate policies of the Piedmontese dynasty, the Savoys. The bourgeoisie was anti-Austrian and drawn toward liberalism and democracy and wanted to remove the barriers to trade. In fact, the problem that would emerge was that the Lombard bourgeoisie was more liberal than the Savoys, which made it distrustful of the Piedmontese. The artisans and workers in the cities, openly anti-Austrian and pro-democracy, were suffering because of the economic crisis. They would supply the shock troops of the 1848 revolution. The tensions in Milan led to demonstrations and disorder.

Further south, Ferdinand II, monarch of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, was not unintelligent but was opposed to national unity (he feared for his throne) and determined to block any reforms that he believed might threaten his absolute rule. However, changes were also taking place in this Kingdom. On the



mainland, unhappiness with Ferdinand grew among the bourgeoisie, because it wanted a constitution. The bourgeoisie, however, was weak. The reforms of Pius IX gained much support. Among the majority of the population, the peasants, agitation also spread. Many of the aspirations of the Neapolitan peasants were communistic, and these had the support of intellectuals. In Sicily opposition to the Neapolitans was widespread among all classes because they viewed the Neapolitans as conquerors. The commercial relations between Sicily and North and Central Italy was a new factor, however, one which would tie the Sicilian independence movement to Italy. In other words, the prospect was raised that the Sicilians could get out from under Neapolitan control if Italy were united by linking up with the North. Eventually, this view helped the Italian national cause.

Spain

Spain was isolated from the rest of Europe, although the general view of a fight between “liberals” and “conservatives” might be applied. The major problems for Spain at this time were dynastic, because Ferdinand VII had been married three times and did not have children. In 1829, his third wife died. The King married a Neapolitan princess, Maria Cristina. Since he was considered a worn-out man of 45, no one imagined that he could have children, but his wife gave birth to a daughter, Isabella.



There was a question of whether a female could inherit the Spanish throne (women could until 1713, when the French Bourbon dynasty came to Spain).

The throne was claimed by Ferdinand's brother Carlos and it was clear that if Ferdinand did not have a male heir, civil war would break out when he died.

Ferdinand put it best when he said: "Spain is a bottle of beer, and I am the cork!"

Soon after Ferdinand died in 1833, a civil war broke out between supporters of Isabella (led by her mother Maria Cristina) and of Carlos. Since the conservative and absolutist rural areas generally supported the "Carlistas" and the towns supported Isabella, Carlism became identified with conservatism and Isabella's cause with liberalism. This was the starting point of the long struggle in Spain between liberalism and conservatism.

The "First Carlist War" lasted seven years. After it ended Spain underwent a bewildering series of political changes between 1840 and 1860, with revolts and constitutions succeeding each other, with Maria Cristina and Don Carlos being forced to leave the country, and with Maria Cristina returning and Don Carlos bequeathing his heritage to his son. Isabella eventually became queen, but the upshot of these struggles was that Spain ended up being ruled by different generals in conjunction with civilian politicians. Carlism declined but was by no means defeated. In 1870, Spain looked around for a foreign king, a search that provided the spark for a war between France and Prussia in 1870 that was important for German unification.



Postwar Distress and Reform in Britain

The situation in Britain following the fall of Napoleon took a different direction than was the case on the continent. There were problems with Ireland that would steadily worsen, the monarchy did not command respect, and the government was unrepresentative. There were also economic dislocations that had been caused by the wars. It seemed likely that revolution would take place in England as it had on the continent, but the British managed to avoid it despite a period of distress.

The most serious problems, however, were economic, and they resulted from increasing industrialization. New inventions caused technological unemployment and the shift to factory employment was humiliating. Many people thrown out of work destroyed the new machines in the conviction that these were the cause of their problems (“luddism”). There were demands for reform and violence escalated, culminating in the so-called “Peterloo” massacre in 1819.

There was such revulsion at the massacre and the government’s actions among the middle classes and the students—important segments of British society—that the government responded to their demands for reform. Important changes took place in the House of Commons, producing what has been called a “liberal Tory” era.

Robert Peel (<http://www.victorianweb.org/history/pms/peel/peel10.html>) became Home Secretary. He mitigated the rigors of the penal code and in 1829



established an unarmed police in London, what were the “Bobbie.” called after him. The liberal trade measures of William Huskisson (<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/PRhuskisson.htm>) helped the cost of living and improved the prospects for employment.

In 1824-25 a grudging toleration was given to trade unions (banned in the rest of Europe). Later, full civil rights were granted to non-conforming Protestants and to Roman Catholics. Britain was heading toward reforms that would benefit the middle class and, eventually, the working class. These reforms were led by a cabinet of aristocrats and found support in the country from the working class. No parallel existed on the continent.

Reforms of 1832-1850

In 1832, the “Great Reform Act” was passed. This act gave greater power to the wealthy middle class, especially landowners, but did not destroy aristocratic influence in elections, as distinct from control.

The act suppressed the separate representation of very small boroughs and the institution in all boroughs of a single uniform franchise based on the occupation of premises worth 10 pounds a year. Since the 143 suppressed seats were reallocated to the more populous towns and counties, one important effect was to give something like due political weight to the new industrial areas of the North, the midlands, and the newer districts of London.



In 1835, the Municipal Reform Act established a pattern of urban self-government that established a minimum of city services such as street cleaning, lighting, and police. Elected councilors were established, with a mayor acting as chairman. This act set the tone for modern cities.

A number of other important reforms were also implemented. The government began taking over the education of the poor. Registration of births, deaths, and marriages became compulsory (thus cities took on a modern flavor). In 1840, the “penny post” was introduced, based upon prepayment and a new device: adhesive postage stamps. Poor relief was also set up—but the poor were required to work in “workhouses” in bad conditions so that any kind of employment was preferable.

Between 1833 and 1850 a series of laws mitigating working conditions in factories were also passed. These included: the abolition of labor of very young children in textile factories and coal mines; legal protection as to hours and places of employment for women of all ages and boys under 18; enforcement of measures to reduce industrial accidents; regulation of hours of employment of women and young persons; and a de facto 60 hour work week. Workers secured a half-day off on Saturdays.

Voting rights were also increased. In 1867, a new reform bill doubled the electorate, and in 1872 a modern system of anonymous voting was set up.

The “Workshop of the World”



By the 1850s and 1860s, Britain was the “workshop of the world” with rising production, a rising standard of living, rising wages, and a declining work week. However, not everyone shared in this increasing wealth. There were huge numbers of poor and unemployed. In one study it was estimated that in the 1880s, 30% of Londoners lived in poverty. However, this was a much lower percentage than in other countries. Britain was pointing the way to the future.

Austria: A Disintegrating Empire

In the 19th century, the Austrian Empire seemed headed toward disintegration. The two major forces unleashed by the French Revolution—and which still traveled across Europe despite the Revolution’s defeat—were nationalism and liberalism. Both threatened Austria’s existence.

The Austrian Empire was made up of many nationalities. The Germans, Hungarians, Poles, Italians, and Slavs were the major ethnic groups, but there were more. The Germans were a minority of the population, but they ran the Empire and refused to let the other nationalities share in the power (after 1867 there would be an exception for the Hungarians, and the Hungarians would have a similar nationalities problem). What increasingly held European states together after the French Revolution was the principle of nationalism. This principle, however, was anathema to the Austrians, because it would mean the ousting of the Germans from complete power. The Austrians had tried to utilize nationalism as a basis for holding together the state in a war against Napoleon in 1809, but



the attempt had been a disaster. Furthermore, the principle of nationalism favored each nationality having its own nation-state; but if this happened the Austrian Empire would disintegrate.

In addition, liberalism understood as the issuing of constitutions to limit the power of the monarch (e.g., France) by representative assemblies was also detrimental to the Austrian Empire because, if nationalism as a principle could not hold the Austrian state together, what did? The figure and authority of the Emperor. Since liberalism undermined the Emperor's authority it also undermined the only principle holding the Empire together.

These points help explain why Austria was reactionary during the 19th century. It had to contrast both principles, and it did so primarily in Italy where both were threatened most immediately. Italian patriots claimed independence and unity based on the principle that Italians were one nationality and had a right to rule themselves (remember here also that Mazzini said they had a mission given to them by God which domination by Austria thwarted). If the Austrians allowed the Italians to go off by themselves under this idea, what was to prevent other nationalities within the Austrian Empire from doing the same thing when their level of political consciousness reached the same level of that of the Italians? If that happened, the Austrian Empire would disappear. This consideration helps explain why—after the Italians succeeded in creating a united Italy—the Austrians would oppose nationalism even more strongly, eventually sparking World War I, and why the Austrian Empire did disappear.

In addition to nationalism, the Austrians also opposed the granting of constitutions, particularly in Italy (where they used military force to suppress them) and in Germany (where they tried to use more indirect means). They did not want examples of functioning constitutions in Europe where they had the power to suppress them.

A Complex Organization and an Unlucky Succession

Given the disparate parts of the Austrian Empire, each with its own pretensions and claims to ancient rights, there was constant tension between centralization and autonomy. In the 18th century, the Austrians had tried to centralize their empire, and in some places (such as Lombardy) they succeeded. In others such as Hungary they succeeded less well for a variety of reasons. The institutions that were created to run the Empire were very complicated and placed a tremendous administrative burden on the Emperor, who in theory was responsible for everything. In the 1830s and 1840s this situation worsened. Emperor Francis I died in 1835, leaving the throne to his retarded son, Ferdinand I (http://www.xs4all.nl/~kvenjb/madmonarchs/ferdinand/ferdinand_bio.htm). His greatest accomplishment was when he learned to sign his name (dangerous in a monarch whose word was law). Because he was unable to rule, a council of state ruled for him, but its members fought among themselves.

As the 1840s progressed, the Austrian government was on the verge of a breakdown, the bureaucracy was disaffected because of low salaries, and



increasing taxes could not stem the growing deficit. When the disorders of 1848 began, unhappiness in Austria was widespread. The liberals resented government repression and the peasants and urban masses chafed at the poor economic conditions.

When the 1848 revolutions broke out therefore, Austria proved unable to play its customary role of “policeman of Europe”—at least in the beginning—and this fact allowed the revolutions to spread.