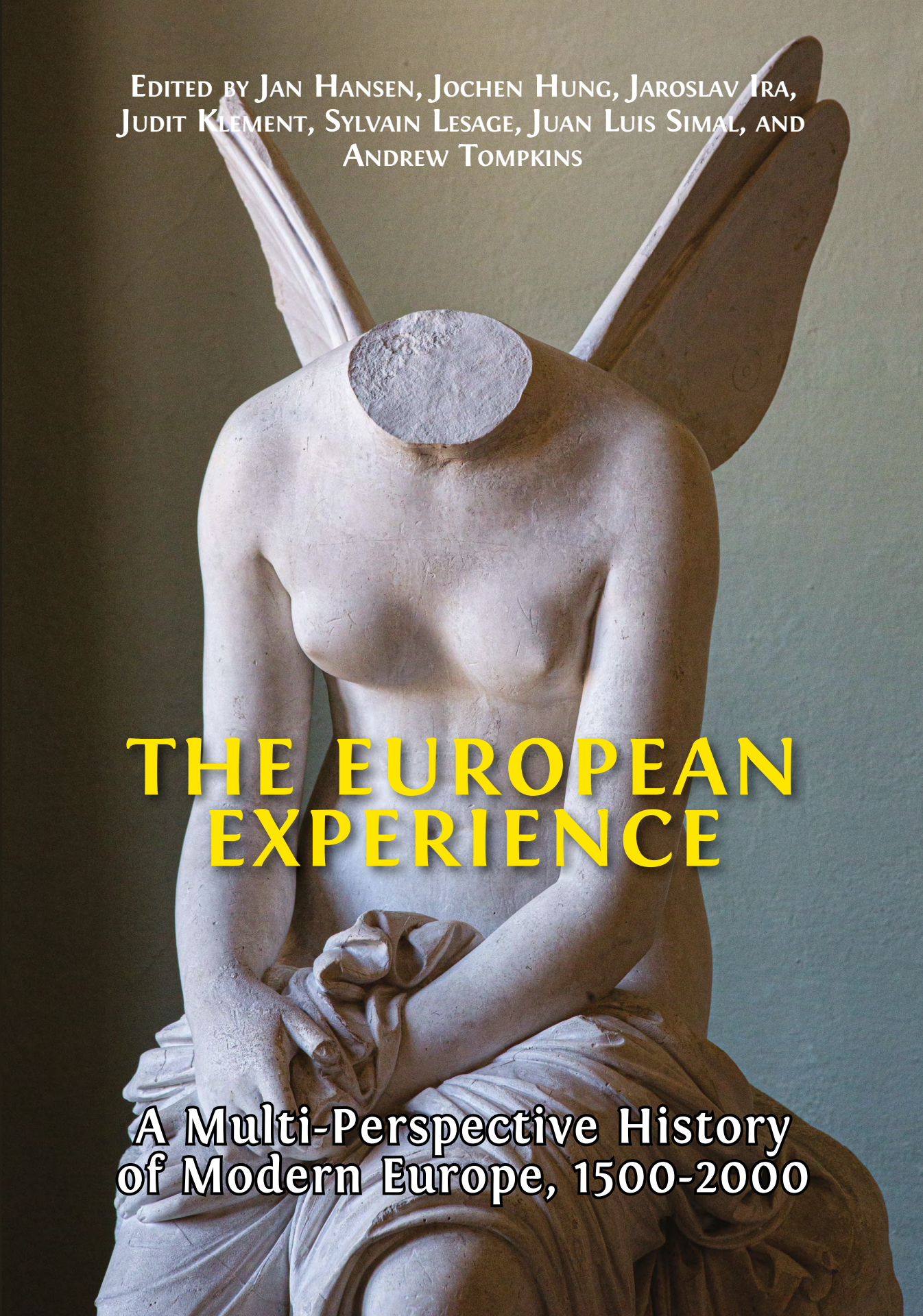
Edited by Jan Hansen, Jochen Hung, Jaroslav Ira, Judit Klement, Sylvain Lesage, Juan Luis Simal, and Andrew Tompkins



The European Experience

A Multi-Perspective History of Modern Europe, 1500-2000

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3.3.2 Revolutions and Civil Wars in Modern History (c. 1800–1900)

Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid, Tomáš Masař, Mónika Mátay, and Juan Luis Simal

Introduction

The nineteenth century was a revolutionary century in Europe. As the French revolution continued to shape the continent, the nation emerged as a major source of political legitimacy for the new liberal states. This momentous transformation triggered reactionary movements that often took the form of legitimism. The result was an almost constant struggle to define the nature and scope of the European new polities, the nation-states, which periodically took the form of clashes between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary actors, resulting in international conflicts and civil wars. In the second half of the century, revolutionary aspirations were promoted by socialist, communist and anarchist movements that aspired to overthrow the bourgeois state.

Revolutionary Waves: 1800s-1840s

The Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1792–1815) spread shockwaves across Europe that on many occasions turned into civil wars. Throughout the continent, local supporters of French-induced changes—whether Jacobins or Bonapartists—fought against self-styled defenders of the nation, who sometimes rejected foreign intervention on account of reactionary legitimism, and at other times attempted to transform their political systems in ways that combined inspiration in the principles of 1789 with local traditions of reformism. Bellicose contexts and foreign interferences brought with them key political, social, and cultural transformations. While many European kings and princes were forced to abandon their realms, national constitutional

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assemblies were formed amid war in places such as Cádiz (Spain) and Eidsvoll (Norway), where liberal constitutions were produced in 1812 and 1814.

After the first revolutionary wave receded, following Napoleon's defeat and the meeting of the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815), several pan-European revolutionary movements would return to the continent in 1820, 1830, and 1848.

The revolutionary cycle of 1820 was associated with demands of constitutional reform by certain sectors of European societies—mostly coming from the urban middle classes—that were dissatisfied with the political situation. The revolution started in Spain in January 1820, where King Ferdinand VII (1784–1833) had six years earlier suspended the Cádiz Constitution. Now, he was forced to accept its reinstalment. The events in Spain immediately triggered similar movements in Naples-Sicily, Portugal, and Piedmont-Sardinia, which replicated the Spanish insurrectionary model of *pronunciamiento* (a bloodless military coup accompanied by a political programme agreed with civilian activists) and adopted the Spanish Constitution. In 1821—disconnected from the events of the western Mediterranean except in the eyes of many European reactionaries who feared a continental revolution—the Greek War of Independence began, after Greeks serving in the Tsar's army revolted in the Danubian Principalities. The rebellion against the Ottoman sultan soon expanded to the south, concentrating in the Peloponnese and the Aegean Sea.

The events in southern Europe impacted public opinion across the continent and alarmed the restored monarchs. France sealed the border in the Pyrenees and gave support to the Spanish counter-revolutionary forces that had plunged the northern part of the country into a state of civil war. The French authorities were afraid of contagion at a moment when they faced several insurrections organised by the Charbonnerie (a secret society central to the Neapolitan Revolution) as well as the assassination of the Duke of Berry, the King's nephew. The Austrian Chancellor, Klemens von Metternich (1773–1859), was more alarmed by the threat coming from Italy, which directly affected Habsburg territories. The reactionary powers (Austria, Russia, Prussia, and France) reclaimed for themselves the right to intervene against liberal revolutionaries. Britain failed to give direct support, but consented to see constitutional regimes being put down by force. Thus, by the end of 1823, all of the meridional liberal regimes had been removed by the combined forces of local reaction and foreign intervention (by Austria in the Italian states, by France in Spain).

Yet even after repression, the events in the Mediterranean continued to impact Europe. In 1825, the Russian Decembrists launched a failed insurrection that was partly inspired by the Spanish pattern of liberal militarism and constitutional reform. The European powers, pressed to react to the presaged

crisis of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans, intervened in the Greek struggle after their support was obtained by a philhellenic campaign. After a long and bloody war with French, British and Russian intervention, in 1830 Greece became an independent state.

A new revolutionary cycle began in 1830. Initiated in France, where the Bourbons were replaced by the 'bourgeois' King Louis Philippe d'Orléans (1773–1850), its effects were felt across the continent. This wave of revolutions combined national and liberal goals. Only one was successful: Belgium obtained independence from the Kingdom of the Netherlands and established a constitutional monarchy. But repression was the norm in the rest of the continent. The Polish insurrectionaries—some moderate liberals, some republicans—were defeated by the Russian Army, initiating a long period of exile. Likewise, uprisings in the Italian Peninsula were suppressed and some of their protagonists joined the increasing numbers of European revolutionary exiles. Germans were also added to this group, although after 1830 some small and middling German states installed constitutional charters and the pan-Germanist movement continued to grow.

In Spain and Portugal, the 1830s was a decade of intense political strife and civil war, as the succession to both crowns became a gruelling political struggle with rival dynastic candidates representing alternative state projects. Thus, Miguel I of Portugal (1801–1866) and Carlos of Spain (1788–1855) attached themselves to legitimism, while the infant queens Maria (1819–1853) and Isabella (1830–1904)—guided by Maria's father Pedro (1798–1834), former Emperor of Brazil, and Queen Regent María Cristina (1806–1878)—looked for the support of liberal forces. Finally, the liberal contenders secured the throne in both countries, although in cooperation with ultra-conservative forces. Yet revolution as a political tool persisted. In 1868 Isabel II would be overthrown by revolutionary forces led by distinguished men from the army, opening a national crisis that would give way in 1873 to the establishment of a short-lived republic.

Fear of revolutionary contagion also reached the United Kingdom. An enduring myth suggested that, while the rest of Europe was buffeted by revolutionary turbulence, British politics were shaped by measured reform and steady progress. The truth is that the United Kingdom was shaped by the threat of revolution as much as by the promise of reform. Between 1830 and 1832, Britain was in deep political crisis, as dissatisfaction with the post-Napoleonic War slump compounded the tensions engendered by early industrialisation. In the context of large population movements into rapidly expanding industrial towns, the inadequacies of the existing electoral system threatened to spill over into large-scale disturbances. The critical turning point came when the government opted for limited, pre-emptive reform rather than

reaction. The Great Reform Act of 1832 removed some of the worst abuses of the electoral system and created new constituencies to reflect changes to the demographic landscape. However, property qualifications continued to determine the franchise, and women were excluded from voting. Pressure continued to build for more radical reform, well-reflected in the popularity of the Chartist movement. Born out of discontent with the 1832 Act, the Chartists aimed to secure full political rights for working class men. Theirs was a movement of the street: protest marches and riots characterised much Chartist agitation, alongside political petitioning and other print campaigns.

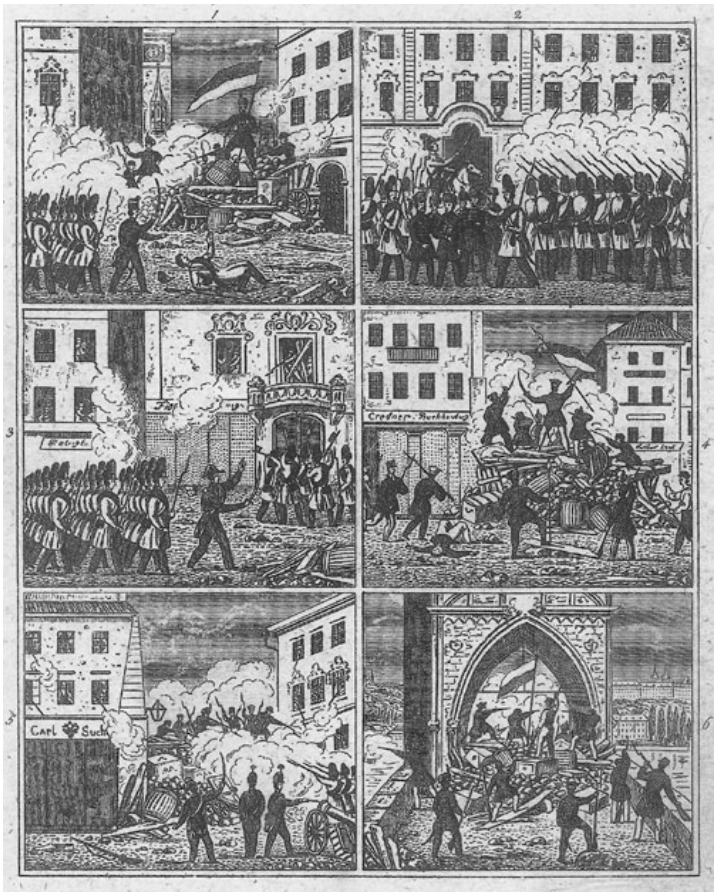

Fig. 1: Joseph Rudl, *Prague, Barricades during the revolution of 1848* (1848), Public Domain, Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Praha_Barricades_1848.jpg.

The 1848 Revolutions

In 1848, the revolutionary wave spread swiftly across Europe. The success of the February Revolution in France, which gave birth to the Second Republic, strongly influenced European public opinion.

Several German states introduced liberal laws and governments and in March the first pre-parliament in Frankfurt am Main was assembled. On 1 May, elections took place in German lands but were boycotted in most of the non-German speaking areas of the Habsburg Hereditary Lands. The electoral system and suffrage differed according to the laws of every state, but around eighty-five percent of male inhabitants could vote.

The social composition of the Frankfurt Assembly was homogenous, consisting predominantly of middle-class academics, officials, and liberal elites. The deputies worked on a liberal constitution and in December a law granting basic rights was introduced. On 28 March 1849, the Prussian King Frederick William IV (1795–1861) was elected the new Emperor of Germany, but declined. Shortly after, the Austrian and Prussian deputies left the Assembly. The rest tried to continue working as a rump parliament, but they were first removed to Stuttgart and then dispelled by the army on 18 June 1849.

The situation in the Habsburg Empire was complicated by its heterogenous national composition. The first clashes between the crowd demanding liberal rights and the army in Vienna in March 1848 led to the outbreak of the revolution and fights on the barricades. Emperor Ferdinand I (1793–1875) promptly released the unpopular Metternich and promised a liberal constitution, which was issued in late April. Public disaffection led to new demonstrations and the frightened Emperor left the capital for Innsbruck. Meanwhile, the situation in other parts of the empire escalated. The Pan-Slavic Congress, held in Prague in June, was attended by several radicals and eventually clashed with the army. Barricades were erected and it took General Alfred I, Prince of Windisch-Grätz (1787–1862) five days to pacify the situation.

Despite disorder across the empire, after the parliamentary elections new representatives started to work on a new constitution. But the adverse situation led to another escalation and the Emperor left the capital again, this time for Moravia. Most deputies left with him and continued in their sessions in Kroměříž. Meanwhile, General Windisch-Graetz managed to pacify Vienna and headed towards Hungary. On 2 December Emperor Ferdinand I resigned, designating his nephew Franz Joseph (1830–1916) as successor. Yet he was not planning to accept a liberal constitution, dissolved the parliament on 7 March 1849 and published an octroyed constitution instead.

In Hungary, although the revolution failed and the War of Independence became a bloody civil war, these events are considered the founding narrative of modern Hungarian national identity. During the last years of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth, the Kingdom of Hungary underwent massive efforts of modernisation organised by a group of open-minded noblemen who aimed to develop the archaic economic system and introduce social and administrative reforms. From the 1820s, in the so-called

age of reforms, the liberal reformers proposed several advancements for the country, led by a young, talented, and strong-willed politician, Louis Kossuth (1802–1894).

In 1848 the progressive demands were summed up in the famous Twelve Points, which provided a common platform for Hungarian liberals. They included freedom of the press, the abolition of censorship, the appointment of government by parliament, annual parliamentary sessions, equality before the law, the abolition of serfdom and of tax exemptions for nobles, and the reunion with Transylvania, separated from the Kingdom during the Ottoman era. The Twelve Points served as the basis of the 1848 April Laws.

The revolutionary events in Paris, Berlin, and most importantly Vienna offered an advantageous international background for Hungarian progressive politicians. Hungary experienced a successful and peaceful sequence of constitutional reforms. The new constitution ratified by Emperor Ferdinand I in April 1848 introduced a new legal and social platform for the Hungarian people. The Austrian military forces, however, remained loyal to the monarch. That condition gained importance when the new emperor, the young Franz Joseph I, revoked the April Laws. The legal offence was accompanied by a military campaign against the revolutionary Hungarian government. The non-violent Spring Revolution of 1848 grew into a total and brutal civil war by the autumn, and in 1849 the Emperor defeated the Hungarian revolutionary forces, aided by a Russian army (the Russian Empire was almost untouched by the revolution). Kossuth went into lifelong exile and the leaders of the army were executed. The failed revolution was followed by a period of authoritarian political rule.

By 1848, the British Chartist movement was widespread, particularly in the industrial north. When news came of a revolution in Paris, the Chartists' moment appeared to have come. Yet, when the expected government clampdown arrived, the Chartist leader Fearghus O'Connor (1796–1855) failed to decide between violent revolution or moderation, and in the process the movement fatally lost momentum. Ireland retained serious revolutionary potential. For years, even moderates like Daniel O'Connell (1775–1847) in his ultimately unsuccessful campaign to repeal the 1800 Act of Union, used the threat of revolution in Ireland to gain political leverage. In his 'monster' meetings, he sent a clear message to the British government: grant reform, or face revolution from these unstoppable forces. In 1848, another potential powder-keg came with a short-lived rebellion in Ireland, then in the grip of a devastating famine. The Young Irelanders clearly saw their abortive action as part of the European wave of revolution, but the result was underwhelming and limited to scuffles in a rural district rather than barricades in Dublin.

Unification Wars as Revolutionary Movements and Civil Wars

In 1848 a key question for the German National Assembly was the form of German unification, which would only be resolved after a German civil war. After the refusal of the Emperor and government in Vienna to be included in the so-called 'Greater German solution', the second variant without Habsburg lands ('Smaller German solution') was accepted. In contrast to these earlier liberal and democratic attempts in 1848–1849, the following two decades saw the unification of Germany forced by the power of the Kingdom of Prussia. The first attempt in 1850—the Erfurt Union—was rebuffed by Austria and Russia, though the opposition of Austria was weakened by its defeat in the Italian War (1859), which was later exploited by the new Prussian Chancellor Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898; appointed in 1862). In 1864, joint Austro-Prussian forces defeated Denmark, which was forced to cede Schleswig, Holstein, and Lauenburg. Two years later, in 1866, Prussia knocked down Austria, annexed several northern German states and founded the North German Confederation. The whole unification process was concluded after the crushing defeat of France in 1870–1871. Wilhelm I of Prussia (1797–1888) was proclaimed German Emperor in Versailles and, once the southern German states had joined, the German Empire was founded.

France, Prussia, and Austria were also directly involved in the process of Italian unification, the *Risorgimento*, a cultural and political movement rooted in the experiences of 1820 and 1830. In 1848, even before the French and German revolutionary events, disturbances had occurred in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, which led to the momentary dethronement of the Bourbon monarchy. Elsewhere in the Italian Peninsula, liberal and nationalist forces—divided among republicans and monarchists—found their champion in the King of Piedmont-Sardinia, Charles Albert (1798–1849). In March 1848, he declared war on Austria, which controlled the unruly Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia, but was defeated. Some Italian patriots considered that the Pope should act as a unifying element, but Pius IX (1792–1878) refuted all revolutionary connections after a republic was proclaimed in Rome in 1849. Instead, he was restored by a French army sent by Louis Napoleon (1808–1873) and became a reactionary leader.

The republicans, led from exile by Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–1872) and Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807–1882), still pushed for the unification of Italy on their terms, but finally accepted an arrangement that would assure them the support of the Kingdom of Piedmont, now with Vittorio Emanuele II (1820–1878) as King and Count Cavour (1810–1861) as Prime Minister. Cavour was an adept politician who managed to secure Napoleon III's support against

Austria. War resumed in 1859, this time with the Austrians facing defeat in the battles of Magenta and Solferino. Austria agreed to surrender Lombardy but kept control of Venetia. Soon after, Piedmont annexed the central Italian states of Tuscany, Parma, Modena, and the Papal Legations. The next target was the southern part of the peninsula. In 1860, Garibaldi's 'Expedition of the Thousand' landed in Sicily and a gruesome combat extended to the mainland, with the arrival of Piedmontese troops, and international volunteers joining the army of the Pope. This resulted in the incorporation of Bourbon and Papal territories into the newly created Kingdom of Italy. In 1866, profiting from the Austro-Prussian War, Italy annexed Venetia. Rome was incorporated in 1870, after the French garrison that protected the city withdrew to serve in the Franco-Prussian War. Thus, the unification of Italy was achieved through the entangled developments of revolution, international conflict, and civil war.

Social Revolution

Entangled with political projects for national liberation, those who hoped for social revolution also played a role in the 1848 Revolutions. *The Communist Manifesto* was written immediately before the 1848 outbreak, although it cannot be considered among its causes. After 1848 the socialist and labour movements adopted an increasingly pronounced internationalist outlook, culminating in the foundation of the International Working Men's Association (IWMA) or First International in London, 1864. Leadership was in the hands of French and British workers and socialists, but almost all European nationalities took part, including notable intellectual figures like the German Karl Marx (1818–1883) and the Russian Mikhail Bakunin (1814–1876). The IWMA aspired to coordinate continental groups of what was already a polyhedric left.

As a consequence of France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War and the collapse of Napoleon III's political system, a revolutionary government, the Paris Commune, ruled the French capital between 18 March and 28 May 1871, introducing radical, anti-religious policies. Socialist, communist, and anarchist trends surfaced during this brief political attempt at social democracy. The Commune was suppressed by the French Army during the 'Bloody Week' in late May 1871.

Social revolutionaries did not abandon the national question. In fact, solidarity with the failed Polish uprising of January 1863 was a catalyst for the creation of the First International, and the causes of 'oppressed' nations continued to interest socialists. Marx considered that an Irish uprising would promote a revolution in England. The threat was real, due to the Fenian or Irish Republican Brotherhood, formed in 1858. The Fenians developed into an extensive underground revolutionary conspiracy in the latter half of the

century. Following an abortive rebellion in 1867, the movement turned away from attempting mass revolution, shifting instead to agrarian agitation, and from the 1880s, a bombing campaign organised from the United States. The United Kingdom continued to grapple with the Irish Question, attempting (but failing) to enact measures of devolution in 1886 and 1893, to satisfy Irish demands for self-government in 1886 and 1893. By the first decade of the twentieth century, these demands had reached boiling point. The British Constitution appeared capable of containing them, but its limits were revealed in the Irish revolutionary period of 1912–1923.

The Paris Commune was mythicised by left-wing forces across the continent but also undermined the cohesion of the First International, which suffered from repression and reduced public support. It also endured internal conflicts like the one between Marxist statists and Bakunian anti-authoritarians. After the First's dissolution in 1876, a Second International would be founded in 1889 without the participation of anarcho-syndicalists.

Disagreements between revolutionary and reformer socialists continued to prevent the unification of the working-class political movement and, ultimately, the opposers of the liberal state and the capitalist system failed to revolutionise Europe. Britain was the most industrialised country in Europe and according to Marxism the natural location for the revolution of the proletariat. But union leaders opted for reformist policies within the constitutional system, based on Chartist demands that formed the basis of political reforms in 1867, 1884, and 1918. In Germany, social democracy was hugely successful among workers. Bismarck established anti-socialist laws in the 1870–1880s after two failed attempts to assassinate the emperor, but he also preventively introduced social rights and benefits for workers. In France, reformist Possibilists held a central position within the socialist movement.

It was rather in Southern Europe where revolutionaries who rejected electoral participation in the liberal state's institutions were more active in their attempts to bring about immediate revolution. In Spain (where in 1873 the Cantonalists endeavoured to create a federal republic) and Italy, a robust, clandestine anarchist movement developed against the background of less industrialised societies and state persecution (as in the infamous *Mano Negra* affair in 1882–83). In the vein of some Russian exiles, including Bakunin, influential Spanish and Italian activists rejected the Marxist fixation on the revolutionary role of the industrial proletariat and attempted to exploit rural unrest to urge widespread insurrectional efforts. Eventually, some anarchists translated the 'propaganda of the deed' into terrorist acts, with spectacular attacks like the assassinations of the French President (1894), the Spanish head of government (1897) or the Italian King Umberto I (1900). Another assassination, that of the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, Archduke

Franz Ferdinand (1863–1914), by a Serbian nationalist, ignited the First World War in 1914.

The war confirmed that, ultimately, nationalism was stronger than internationalism. Rather than maintaining solidarity across class lines, most socialists and syndicalists joined the patriotic fervour and supported the war effort of their respective nations. Yet ultimately the general crisis created by the war allowed for the Russian Revolution in 1917 which, indeed, shattered the whole continent.

Conclusion

Revolution was an ever-present phenomenon in nineteenth-century Europe, with many different causes and aims: a unified nation, a constitution, the liberation of the workers, and more. While there were many revolutionary waves all through the century, the Revolutions of 1848 arguably were the most consequential: a pivotal, pan-European event—the so-called Springtime of Nations—that gave the period its character, and would reverberate even across the Atlantic Ocean. It also unleashed a furious backlash of counter-revolutionary forces that would shape the geopolitical face of the continent in the second half of the century and set the stage for the First World War.

Discussion questions

1. What were the main reasons for the revolutionary waves in the first half of the nineteenth century in Europe?
2. What were the main differences between the revolutions in the second half of the century?
3. Can you think of any ways in which the revolutions of the nineteenth century still shape Europe today?

Suggested reading

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