

Revolutions of 1848

After the defeat of Napoleon in 1815 a conservative order dominated Europe, but nationalism and liberalism continued to challenge the traditions of monarchy, aristocracy, and state religion. The continual expansion of industrial capitalism resulted in many philosophical and political critiques by liberals, socialists, and anarchists. Europe's economy was recovering slowly from the depression of 1837, and the 1840s were called "the hungry forties." In 1848, revolution spread throughout Europe. Most of the revolutions were led by urban, middle class liberals and moderate republicans. They wanted limited monarchies and property qualifications for voting. Again, it all started in France.

February Revolution

An economic depression in 1846 left 1/3 of the workers in Paris unemployed, and the government continued to refuse to extend the vote to the lower and middle classes. King Louis-Philippe's government rejected political reform, and the middle class joined with radical republicans and socialists in opposition. Riots resulted in Paris and **Louis-Philippe** abdicated the throne in February 1848, and the **Second Republic** was proclaimed. The new government was dominated by two groups: the moderate republicans led by **Lamartine** and the socialists led by **Blanc**. The middle class moderate republicans had strictly political goals, while the radical republicans and socialists desired economic and social reform, as well.

The government placed Blanc in charge of establishing a system of **national workshops** to provide jobs for the unemployed. The formal election for the new legislature resulted in the moderate republicans winning a majority of seats; most of the socialist support came from the city, while the rural areas were far more conservative. The result was the closing of the national workshops in June, which had become very expensive (government-funded jobs). The workers responded by rioting and the military crushed the unrest, which is referred to as the **June Days Revolt**. In November 1848, a new constitution was passed that created a unicameral legislature and a single executive, both elected by universal male suffrage. The French people elected **Charles Louis Napoleon Bonaparte**, Napoleon's nephew!

German Confederation and Prussia

News of the February Revolution spread to Prussia, where rioting referred to as the **March Days** resulted in **King Frederick William IV** of Prussia agreeing to liberal reforms that included a new constitution and free speech. Elsewhere in the German Confederation, the numerous territories and principalities were electing by universal manhood suffrage representatives to an all-German parliament that would meet in Frankfurt, the capital of the German Confederation. Nationalism and liberalism were both leading to the formation of a united Germany. A central question among the representatives would be whether or not to include Austria in the new German nation-state. Some representatives supported *grossdeutsch* (big Germany) and others supported

kleindeutsch (small Germany). Ultimately, it was decided to exclude Austria and Frederick William IV was offered the title of “emperor of the Germans,” but he declined the offer and ordered the Prussian representatives of the Frankfurt Assembly to return home.

Austria

News of the February Revolution in France spread to the Austrian capital of Vienna and rioting during the month of March resulted in the resignation of **Metternich**. In July, an assembly began to meet to draft a liberal constitution, and in September the assembly abolished the “**robot**,” the system of obligatory peasant labor. In October, the military regained control of Vienna and in December emperor Ferdinand I was replaced by his nephew **Francis Joseph I**, who would rule until 1916.

Hungary, a territory of Austria, also rebelled in March of 1848. The radical Magyar nationalist **Louis Kossuth** demanded self-government for Hungary, and the Austrian government recognized the independence of Hungary because it was dealing with a revolution in its own capital. After Francis Joseph I became emperor and restored autocratic power in Austria, he allied with Tsar Nicholas I of Russia to crush the Hungarian revolution in 1849.

Italy

News of the February Revolution in France and the resignation of Metternich in Austria sparked widespread political action throughout the Italian peninsula. Rebellion began in Sicily and spread northward, with each ruler being forced to grant a liberal constitution. The leadership of Italy’s political reform movement, called **Young Italy**, was Giuseppe **Mazzini**, an Italian nationalist. In February 1849, Mazzini proclaimed the establishment of the Roman Republic from within the Papal States. The Austrian army gradually regained control of rebellious Italian territories and in April 1849 Louis Napoleon sent French troops to help defeat the Roman Republic. Ultimately, only the territory of Piedmont was able to keep its liberal constitution.

Failures of 1848

The initial unity between the middle class and lower class made the revolutions possible, but once the revolutions succeeded the middle class feared the social and economic equality demanded by the working class. The middle class rejected universal suffrage and desired to protect their property and wealth. Thus, the revolutionaries quickly began to fight with each other and internal divisions undermined the reform movements. Liberalism was a motivation to start the revolution, but then the middle class decided that too much liberalism (in other words, republicanism) was a reason to end the revolution. Also, nationalism was a motivation to start the revolution, but then smaller nationalistic groups emerged who wanted to split off from the original independence movement. Too much splintering amongst ethnic groups led to even more internal divisions.