

Chapter 22: The Age of Nation-States

Introduction

1848 – 1870 was a period dominated by nationalism.

Results: Second French Empire, unification of Italy, unification of Germany, end of the Concert of Europe, and transformation of Austrian Empire

Main figures: Napoleon III, Count Cavour, Otto von Bismarck

Politics: *Realpolitik* replaced idealism and romanticism. Realistic, pragmatic, and shrewd (Machiavelli, politics from Religious Wars).

Napoleon III

The February Revolution of 1848 brought an end to the Orleanist monarchy of Louis-Philippe and began the Second Republic. **Charles Louis Napoleon Bonaparte** was elected president of France, but what he did was use the ideals of nationalism and liberalism to strengthen his own power, something that other conservative leaders would do after the failed rebellions of 1848. It was clear what the people wanted, and leaders began to protect their power by giving the masses the illusion of reform.

Louis Napoleon had the support of the military, property owners, business owners, and French Catholic Church. He used the military to enable his re-election to the presidency, and was then declared emperor in 1852 with popular support. **Napoleon III** was now the leader of the **Second Napoleonic Empire** and he ruled, much like his uncle, in an authoritarian manner. The people had elected representatives, but only Napoleon III could introduce legislation.

Napoleon III ushered in a period of domestic reform and industrial expansion. The French government stimulated the economy by investing heavily in industrial infrastructure. Free medicine and better housing was provided for the working class. The most extensive project was the reconstruction of Paris itself. Broad boulevards, public parks, and modern sewage and water systems were constructed. Napoleon III legalized labor unions and granted workers the right to strike. While Napoleon III was successful regarding domestic issues, his failures in foreign policy would lead to his demise.

Napoleon III wanted to reverse the restrictions placed on French expansion by the Congress of Vienna and he viewed the Crimean War as a means to that end. The **Crimean War** took place from 1854 – 1856. The Ottoman Empire's influence in southeastern Europe was declining and France desired naval influence and commercial opportunity in the eastern Mediterranean. War erupted in 1854 between Russia and the Ottoman Empire when **Tsar Nicholas I** attempted to control territory in **Turkey**. Austria was opposed to Russia increasing its power in the region and refused to aid its old ally. Great Britain and France (also opposed to Russian expansion) declared war on Russia to maintain the balance of power.

The war was fought mainly on the Crimean Peninsula in the Black Sea at Sevastopol and casualties were high for Russia, France, and Great Britain (500,000 total). Tsar Nicholas I died during the war, which France and Great Britain were slowly winning, and **Tsar Alexander II** signed a peace treaty that essentially curbed Russia's ambitions in the region. Diplomatically, the conservative Concert of Europe, which had been dominated mainly by Austria and Russia,

disintegrated. Austria had remained neutral, refusing to help Russia fight the war, and their alliance ended. After the war, Great Britain and Austria were less concerned with containing nationalism and liberalism, which opened the door for the unification of Italy and Germany as nation-states.

Napoleon III, however, still feared the creation of a powerful, unified, German nation-state. Tensions between France and Prussia erupted into war in 1870 and Napoleon III was captured by Prussian forces. France lost the Franco-Prussian war and the Second Napoleonic Empire ended. A provisional government was established by moderate republicans, but Prussia forced the French to hold an election based on universal suffrage, which resulted in an overwhelming victory for royalists. The political divide within France was intense: royalists in rural areas who wanted to maintain monarchy and republicans in Paris who wanted representative democracy and popular sovereignty.

Radical republicans, rejecting the election as illegitimate, established the **Paris Commune** to govern Paris. The Paris Commune was led by radical republicans, socialists, and anarchists. The political philosophy guiding the Paris Commune was the ideas of **Blanqui** and **Proudhon**. The working class had effectively taken over Paris. The military began a violent engagement with citizen militias and the Paris Commune was defeated after 20,000 Parisians had died. The political divisions between the middle class and the working class had never been worse. Royalists, seeking to maintain stability, agreed to compromise with the radical republicans and socialists by creating a representative republic rather than a monarchy. The **Constitution of 1875** created the **Third Republic**, which lasted until 1940.

Great Britain

Great Britain remained the symbol of liberalism within Europe. Great Britain had extended the franchise with the **First Reform Bill of 1832** when the **Whigs** (liberals) were in power. In 1837, **Queen Victoria** succeeded to the throne and the political battles between the Whigs and Tories continued as Great Britain experienced rapid economic growth. Most elements of British society believed in competition and individualism, but the political process continued to accommodate and absorb political opposition groups seeking reforms. In the early 1860s, it was widely recognized that the vote would have to be extended to the working class and the Whigs made several proposals while in power, but the Tories refused. In 1867, when power had switched to the **Tories** (conservatives), **Benjamin Disraeli** led a reform effort that extended the vote more than the previous liberal proposals. The **Second Reform Bill of 1867** extended the vote to many working-class males.

Disraeli supported reform because he saw that an extension of the vote was inevitable, and he wanted the conservatives to receive credit for the reform. Disraeli hoped that the growing middle class and elements of the working class would support the conservatives if they proved responsive to social problems. Disraeli's plan proved incorrect as the liberals won the 1868 election and **William Gladstone**, his liberal rival, became prime minister. Gladstone's administration represented the culmination of **classical British liberalism**. Gladstone removed Anglican religious requirements for the faculties of Oxford and Cambridge, introduced the secret ballot, and established government-financed public education. The goal was for all citizens to compete based on ability and merit.

Gladstone's liberalism expanded the role of government, but relied on individualism, free trade, and competition to solve social problems. Disraeli's conservatism did not challenge the liberal view of government, but insisted that social problems be solved through paternalistic legislation.

Disraeli argued that the government should protect the weak in order to alleviate class antagonisms. Disraeli was elected prime minister in 1874, succeeding Gladstone. Disraeli's administration passed legislation improving sanitation and health safety standards, providing housing for the working class, and allowing picket lines by trade unions. In 1880, Gladstone was again elected prime minister and both parties passed the **Third Reform Bill of 1884** that extended the vote to most male farm-workers (essentially universal male suffrage).

The liberals became divided over the independence of Ireland, and both parties became unable to work together on social and political reforms due to their obsession with the Irish Question. The failure of the two major parties to continue to deal in a meaningful way with social and political problems at the turn of the century enabled the **Labour Party** to grow in power.

Austrian Empire

The Austrian Empire, ruled by the Habsburgs, was increasingly challenged by liberalism and nationalism, both from within and from abroad. The Empire remained dynastic, absolutist, and agrarian during a time when nationalism, liberalism, and industrialism were spreading throughout Europe. **Emperor Francis Joseph I**, who restored order during the 1848 rebellions, ruled until 1916 and did not attempt to adapt to the changes taking place throughout Europe.

German-speaking Austrians dominated the empire's bureaucracy, and the Roman Catholic Church controlled education. The empire lost a war to Napoleon III and Piedmont, as well as the support of Tsar Nicholas I in refusing him aid in the Crimean War. Hungary, which had claimed independence in 1848, was ruled as individual military districts. Francis Joseph I responded by attempting to reform government, but the Magyars of Hungary rejected all of his plans due to the fact that each governmental system favored Austria. Francis Joseph was forced to create the dual-monarchy of **Austria-Hungary**, in which Hungary essentially ruled itself as a separate state within the Austrian Empire. The creation of the dual-monarchy was referred to as the **Compromise of 1867**.

The Compromise of 1867 established two types of political legitimacy within the Austrian Empire. In Hungary, nationalism was officially recognized as a legitimate unifying element, whereas other parts of the empire were expected to remain loyal to the emperor. Smaller nationalities began to resent the Compromise of 1867 because it allowed Magyars in Hungary and German-speaking Austrians to dominate all other nationalities and ethnicities. Increasingly, the people defined nationalism based on language and race, which quickly splintered the Habsburg realm into numerous ethnic groups who sought independence. While the Magyars were granted independence, the Slavic peoples within the empire were denied the status they desired within the empire. Slavic discontent continued to pose a significant risk in the Balkans region of Austria-Hungary and would be a factor in the outbreak of World War I. Ethnic minorities within the Russian Empire, Ottoman Empire, and Austro-Hungarian Empire would continue to fight for independence, and all three empires would disintegrate after World War I.

Russian Empire

Russia's defeat in the Crimean War and the death of Tsar Nicholas I in 1855 resulted in drastic domestic reforms initiated by the new tsar, **Alexander II**. Serfdom was abolished under Alexander II in 1861, but the serfs were granted poor land by the government who had already paid the landlords for their financial losses. Peasants became indebted to the state for land that was not profitable. Ultimately, the government cancelled the debts in 1905 during revolutionary unrest.

In 1864, Alexander II issued new legal statutes, which introduced equality before the law, impartial hearings, judicial independence, and trial by jury. The new courts were not perfect, but they were more efficient and less corrupt. Also in 1864, **zemstvos** (local assemblies) were created to promote self-government. Reformers hoped that the zemstvos would lead to the creation of a national legislature. Military service was reformed, as well. In 1874, the enlistment period was lowered from 15 years to 6 years of active duty, followed by 9 years of reserve duty. The Russian army was the largest military in Europe and all males over the age of twenty were subject to military service.

Even though Alexander II became known as the **Tsar Liberator**, Russia increasingly became an **autocratic police state** as Alexander II refused to allow the nobility and upper class to participate in the actions of government. The wealthy resented Alexander's power, and the peasants resented an inadequate emancipation. Radicalism and political opposition flourished. Radical middle class student groups formed a populist political movement called **Land and Freedom**. They desired a social revolution that idealized the communal life of the peasants and went to the countryside to explain the revolutionary role that the peasants would play in the future. The peasants were distrustful of the student revolutionaries and the movement failed to gain widespread support. The students then decided to confront the tsarist regime directly through the use of terrorism.

In 1870s, Land and Freedom was divided over those who wanted to continue attempting to educate the peasants and those who wanted to embrace direct violence against the tsar. Those who advocated violence called themselves **The People's Will** and they were dedicated to overthrowing the tsar. In 1881, a bomb hurled by a member of The People's Will killed Alexander II. **Alexander III** responded by rolling back some of Alexander II's reforms by increasing government centralization, government secret police, and government censorship of the press. The reign of Alexander III confirmed the revolutionary view that the tsar would never bring liberal reform to Russia. Alexander III's son, **Nicholas II**, would be the last tsar and his reign would end in 1917 with the Russian Revolution.

Italian Unification

During the Italian Renaissance, the political theorist Machiavelli had dreamed of a united Italian nation-state that would bring back the glory of the Roman Republic. In 1830s, a group of republican nationalists called **Young Italy** was formed by Guiseppe **Mazzini**. The effort to establish a republic in Italy in 1848 ended in failure, but the nationalist cause of Young Italy continued under the leadership of Guiseppe **Garibaldi**.

The only state that succeeded in passing liberal reforms in 1848 was Piedmont. **Victor Emmanuel II** and his prime minister, Count Camillo di **Cavour**, formed an alliance with Napoleon III to remove Austria from the Italian peninsula. When the French began fighting Austria in 1859, nationalist movements arose in various Italian states and they joined Piedmont to begin the unification of northern Italy. Meanwhile, in southern Italy Garibaldi's **Red Shirts** were uniting the southern states. The two movements would meet up eventually, but their ideals were not the same. Cavour was more of a liberal, while Garibaldi was more of a republican. In 1861, Cavour quickly moved south to gain control of the movement and was successful in uniting Italy under the leadership of Piedmont and Victor Emmanuel II. However, Rome and the Papal States were still controlled by France and the Italians could risk war with Napoleon III. In 1870, French troops left Rome to fight to Prussia and Rome became the capital of the new nation-state of Italy.

German Unification

The unification of Germany was the single most important political development in all of Europe between 1848 and 1914. The creation of a German nation-state fundamentally altered the economic, military, and political balance of power in Europe.

Liberal nationalists had sought unification since the Napoleonic wars, and suffered a defeat in the 1848 revolutions. In 1861, **William I** became King of Prussia and he sought to expand the size and influence of the Prussian military. Doing so required the support of the liberal Parliament, which had to agree to increase tax revenues. The monarchy and the parliament were deadlocked. William I appointed Count Otto von **Bismarck** prime minister of Prussia, and Bismarck aimed to develop popular support for the monarchy and the military by uniting Germany. Bismarck was a conservative, and he sought to limit the power of the liberal parliament.

Bismarck advocated a *kleindeutsch* (small Germany) solution to unification that would exclude Austria. He also pursued small-scale wars to claim territory for Prussia. The **Danish War of 1864** resulted in the acquisition of Schleswig, and the **Austro-Prussian War of 1866** resulted in the defeat of the Austrian army and the removal of the Habsburgs from German political affairs. In 1867, the states of Hanover and Hesse, which had all supported Austria in the war, were annexed by Prussia. The victory over Austria was a turning point because the **North German Confederation** replaced the Austrian-controlled German Confederation that had been created at the Congress of Vienna. William I was the head of state, while Bismarck was chancellor. A bicameral legislature, the *Bundesrat* (appointed members) and the *Reichstag* (elected members), lacked any real power and what existed was essentially a military monarchy that used nationalism to unite the people.

Bismarck had successfully divided the liberals between those who favored unification and those who still demanded liberal reforms. Nationalism proved more attractive as the monarchy and the military became the most popular institutions. In 1870, the North German Confederation went to war against France over diplomatic tensions regarding the throne of Spain. The conflict required southern Germany to join the fight against Napoleon III. The French army was defeated at the Battle of Sedan and Paris was occupied. The rulers of southern Germany declared their desire for unification under **William I**, and at the Palace of Versailles the **Second German Empire** was proclaimed in 1871. France was forced pay for the war and give up **Alsace and Lorraine**. Militarily and economically, the German Empire was far more influential than Prussia and represented a setback for liberalism in Europe. France and Austria were understandably worried about the new nation-state of Germany.

Conclusion

Between 1848 and 1870, the political changes in European governments largely resolved the problems that liberalism and nationalism had presented during the first half of the century. The concept of the nation-state had triumphed with the unification of Germany and Italy. The political systems created during this period lasted until WWI. Loyalty to the state was increasingly based on citizen participation, and ethnic, linguistic, and cultural bonds largely determined national boundaries and identities. The demands of workers to influence the political process and the desire of nationalistic groups to gain independence would remain the major currents of discontent into the early 20th century.