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## 5. Europe Surrenders to Nationalism, 1848-1871

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## 5. Europe Surrenders to Nationalism, 1848-1871

### Abstract

As we have already seen, the year 1848 saw the European continent distracted by insurrectionary outbreaks that touched every one of the major powers. Liberalism and democracy contributed greatly to the undercurrents of discontent under the apparent calm of the previous decade, but it was nationalist aspirations that furnished most of the fuel for the revolutionary fires of that fateful year. In England and France, where the struggle for unification had long before been won, nationalism played no part. It was in Germany, Italy, and the Austrian Empire that nationalist agitators filled the larger roles in the several revolutions of 1848. [*excerpt*]

### Keywords

Contemporary Civilization, Revolution, Liberalism, Democracy, Nationalism, Unification

### Disciplines

European History | European Languages and Societies | History | Models and Methods

### Comments

This is a part of [Section XIII: Political Liberalism and Nationalism, 1815-1871](#). The [Contemporary Civilization](#) page lists all additional sections of *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, as well as the [Table of Contents](#) for both volumes.

### More About Contemporary Civilization:

From 1947 through 1969, all first-year Gettysburg College students took a two-semester course called Contemporary Civilization. The course was developed at President Henry W.A. Hanson's request with the goal of "introducing the student to the backgrounds of contemporary social problems through the major concepts, ideals, hopes and motivations of western culture since the Middle Ages."

Gettysburg College professors from the history, philosophy, and religion departments developed a textbook for the course. The first edition, published in 1955, was called *An Introduction to Contemporary Civilization and Its Problems*. A second edition, retitled *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, was published in 1958 and 1960. It is this second edition that we include here. The copy we digitized is from the Gary T. Hawbaker '66 Collection and the marginalia are his.

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As we have already seen, the year 1848 saw the European continent distracted by insurrectionary outbreaks that touched every one of the major powers. Liberalism and democracy contributed greatly to the undercurrents of discontent under the apparent calm of the previous decade, but it was nationalist aspirations that furnished most of the fuel for the revolutionary fires of that fateful year. In England and France, where the struggle for unification had long before been won, nationalism played no part. It was in Germany, Italy, and the Austrian Empire that nationalist agitators filled the larger roles in the several revolutions of 1848.

The ignominious failure of the Frankfurt Assembly did not entirely quash the hopes of patriotic Germans that they would some day be united under one flag. Union, when it came, they saw, could come only by defying Austria, a land inhabited by many non-German minorities. Successful defiance of the Hapsburg power would be realized only under the military leadership of Austria's great German rival, Prussia. Since 1815, the Hohenzollern rulers of Prussia had worked assiduously -- and with notable success -- to make of their relatively small kingdom a highly efficient, disciplined, and militarily powerful state. As such, the Prussian kingdom commended itself to German nationalists as a model for an enlarged and independent Germany. The Zollverein of 1834 had clearly demonstrated the practical advantages to be obtained from political unity, and when the visionary and liberal delegates at Frankfurt failed so miserably, German nationalists turned with understandable logic to embrace Prussian militarism.

Nationalist elements in Germany at length discovered a capable leader in the person of Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898), a landed aristocrat, absolutist, and militarist who became Prussia's chief minister in 1862. Bismarck had little use for parliamentary processes, and his idea of a successful policy was one wrought, as he said, "by blood and iron." He overrode the Prussian parliament, muzzled the press, suppressed opposition factions, and employed diplomatic wiles to beguile other nations into wars which benefited Prussia. Almost without interruption he built up the army, strengthened the economy, and promoted the power of the monarchy.

In 1864, Bismarck obtained the cooperation of Austria in a war with Denmark over the largely German-speaking provinces of Schleswig and Holstein. The Danes were speedily dispossessed of these two territories and, not to Bismarck's surprise, Prussia and Austria quarreled over the spoils. In the Seven Weeks War which followed, Austria could provide nothing to match Prussian military prowess, and as Bismarck had intended, Prussia emerged as the leading German state. Cannily extending generous

peace terms to the defeated Austrians, the Prussian minister succeeded in neutralizing the Hapsburgs as he moved further to unite Germany under Prussian dominance. Two-thirds of Germany joined Prussia in a North German Confederation (1867), governed by a federal parliament and presided over by the Prussian king. Only four other German states (plus Austria) remained outside the Prussian orbit. But one additional obstacle was left which might prevent the final unification of Germany -- the hostile attitude of Napoleon III of France.

Napoleon III faced no problems of national unification in France, yet he defended the benevolent dictatorship which he had imposed as necessary to the country's national salvation. He played up the name Napoleon, proclaiming that it "stands for order, authority, religion, the welfare of the people within, and without for national dignity." Seeking to represent himself as the guardian of the welfare of all the French people, the emperor pursued a policy which was designed to identify him with each of the numerous factions in France's political life. In foreign affairs he extended French colonial holdings, tried to widen trade opportunities, and engaged in doubtful ventures abroad in lands as far apart as the Crimea and Mexico. Napoleon relied successfully on the popular desire in France to see national prestige rehabilitated following the vacillation and squabbling which had characterized the Second Republic (1848-1851). All this required of him, an essentially peaceloving man, that he conduct an aggressive foreign policy. In addition, Napoleon seems to have been sincerely devoted to the abstract principle of nationalism for all the peoples of Europe. This it was, perhaps, that induced him to acquiesce in Prussia's steady absorption of other German states, and it certainly was a factor in his active support of Italian nationalists against Austrian rule in Italy.

By 1869, however, this opportunistic pursuit of a difficult course had lost him friends and won him enemies both within and without France. His dabbling in Italian affairs on the side of the anti-Papal forces alienated Roman Catholics in France. When he at length abandoned the Italian nationalists he lost the support of liberals in his own country. His ill-fated Mexican adventure destroyed his reputation among French ultraimperialists. Eventually he faced the necessity of making liberal concessions to the various opposition groups in France, or else diverting them by a successful venture in foreign affairs. Before he had time to decide definitely on either of these two courses he became involved in a fatal quarrel with Prussia.

For some time the French had been regarding with increasing anxiety the development of the powerful North German Confederation across the Rhine. Their worst fears seemed justified in 1868, when the Spanish people offered their recently vacated throne to a Hohenzollern cousin of William I of Prussia. Confronted with the direful prospect of German Hohenzollerns just beyond both the Rhine and the Pyrenees, Napoleon protested.

Undoubtedly he saw in the occasion an opportunity to bolster support for his crumbling regime at home by an aggressive attitude toward Prussia. In 1870, Napoleon ordered the French ambassador in Berlin to demand that William forever forego support for his kinsman as king of Spain. So insistent was the envoy from Paris that William abruptly dismissed him, and in a telegram (the Ems Dispatch) reported the incident to the wily Bismarck.

Bismarck edited the king's report in such a way that it appeared the French ambassador had insulted the Prussian king, who in turn had curtly and unreasonably rejected the French protest. Napoleon had not wanted war but a surge of German jingoism was more than matched by Parisian crowds who gathered in the streets with cries of "On to Berlin!" As it had been against Austria, Prussian military might was overwhelming. After six weeks of war the inept French army was routed and Napoleon surrendered himself and 86,000 of his troops. Four months later Paris capitulated after a siege, and the Second Empire was brought to an inglorious end. Napoleon abdicated, and like Charles X and Louis Philippe before him, sought refuge in England.

Rid of their emperor, the French convoked a National Assembly which undertook to negotiate a peace settlement with the enemy. It was not with Prussia, however, that the Treaty of Frankfurt (1871) was eventually arranged. During the war the southern German states joined in an alliance with the North German Confederation against their common hereditary foe. The union was completed when an assembly of German princes, gathered in the famous Hall of Mirrors at Versailles Palace, hailed William I as German Emperor (1871). German unification was at last achieved, not under the auspices of liberals and democrats, but by Prussian militarism and the Bismarckian policy of blood and iron. The Franco-Prussian war, while destroying one empire, had created another, the latter dedicated to the proposition that militarism was the most effective weapon of nationalism. Meanwhile, the French, burdened with a humiliating treaty, struggled to form a new government. In 1875, after a stormy period of political turmoil, the Third Republic was firmly established and it endured until 1940.

Italian unification came through a closer cooperation between liberals and nationalists than in Germany, but even here it eventually occurred when more power-conscious men took charge. As we have seen, the exhortations of Mazzini provided the Italian Risorgimento with its articles of faith. But also, as in Germany, liberal idealism suffered a disastrous setback in the failure of the 1848-1849 revolt against Austrian dominance. Farsighted Italians recognized that Austrian influence in Italy, the greatest obstacle to unification, was too strong to be uprooted by Italian effort alone. Two requirements would have to be met to achieve both independence and unity -- a foreign ally must be found and some Italian state would have to

prove sufficiently loyal and capable to provide a rallying point for Italian patriotism. Fortunately, the potential ally was France and the Italian state which became the nucleus for a national effort appeared in the Kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont. The practical politician and sagacious statesman who welded the two together was Camillo di Cavour (1810-1861). By diplomacy and statecraft Cavour accomplished for Italy what Bismarck achieved for Germany.

By the standards of his day, Cavour was a liberal, although as a staunch monarchist he had little sympathy for Mazzini's republicanism. He was convinced that the House of Savoy, which ruled in his native Sardinia-Piedmont, could lead the way to the realization of the dreams of Italian nationalists. In 1850, Cavour became Minister of Agriculture and Commerce, and in this post he sought to make the kingdom both materially and morally worthy of the cause he had in mind. He promoted industrial development, built railways, negotiated commercial treaties, and raised an army from the increased taxes which he persuaded the parliament to levy. Although these policies appear to parallel those of Bismarck in Prussia, Cavour made Sardinia-Piedmont a pattern of liberal government. His reforms were heralded throughout Italy and the rest of the world (as an ex-journalist Cavour was adept at publicity) and Sardinia's efforts won the respect and admiration of western Europe. Particularly in the other Italian states the grossly misgoverned populace regarded the kingdom as a model and looked to it for leadership.

Cavour's external policies were perhaps even more noteworthy and dramatic. Aware that Italian unification would most likely be accomplished by shrewd diplomacy rather than by fervid revolutionary idealism alone, he injected the "Italian Question" into the councils of Europe. His big chance came in 1853 with the outbreak of the Crimean War. Against the advice of many of his compatriots who were less perceptive than he, Cavour persuaded the Sardinian parliament to enter the war as an ally of France and England against Russia. The small Sardinian army gave a good account of itself. "Never mind," declared a Sardinian soldier struggling in the mud before Sebastopol, "of this mud Italy will be made."

For her part in the victory, Sardinia was awarded a seat at the congress of Paris (1856) where the peace was to be made. Cavour went to the French capital determined to introduce the Italian Question into the deliberations. Although he received little more than sympathy from Great Britain, he succeeded in arousing the nationalist sentiments of Napoleon III. In 1858, Napoleon agreed to support Sardinia against Austria in a "War for Italian Liberation." In return for the long-desired provinces of Nice and Savoy, the French emperor pledged military assistance. Not only did Cavour play upon Napoleon's well-known nationalist sentiments, but he dangled before him the prospect of weakening Austria, the country which the French

emperor had long regarded as the chief rival of France on the European continent.

At first the war, which broke in 1859, went well for the allied Sardinian and French troops. The Austrians were driven back in bloody battles, and from all over the Italian boot patriots came flocking. Revolts broke out in other Italian states, and the prospects for Italian unification under Sardinian leadership seemed bright. As this point, however, Napoleon grew alarmed. Sardinia as a strong buffer state was one thing, but a united Italy on his southern borders suddenly appeared to be something else. Moreover, Roman Catholics in France, fearful that unification in Italy would result in the absorption of the Papal States, criticized Napoleon's policy. Fearing also that Prussia might intervene on the side of Austria, almost without warning Napoleon abandoned the campaign and signed a separate peace with the Hapsburgs. The disillusioned Sardinians, unable to pursue the war further without French aid, were compelled to content themselves with the union of most of Italy north of the Papal States under their king, Victor Emmanuel II (1849-1878). As a reward for his short-lived intervention, Napoleon obtained Nice and Savoy, an acquisition later confirmed by a plebiscite.

The Papal States and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies were yet to be joined to the rest of Italy, while Venetia and its historic port of Venice were yet under Austrian control. At this juncture Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882) appeared on the scene. A warrior and seasoned revolutionary, Garibaldi was famous all over Italy for his daring. When word arrived of an incipient revolution on the island of Sicily, this rough free-lance adventurer responded to an invitation to lead the liberation movement. With a volunteer regiment of "red-shirts," Garibaldi led his celebrated "One Thousand" (actually 1,150 men) in an invasion of the island in 1860. Within six months he had won thousands of Sicilians to his cause and had wrested the island from its Bourbon prince. In September, Garibaldi's host, now greatly enlarged, crossed to Naples, met only feeble resistance, and quickly completed the conquest of southern Italy. Cavour feared the repercussions in Europe should Garibaldi invade Rome, and to forestall this Victor Emmanuel II led an army into the Papal States. Garibaldi's devotion to his king persuaded him to surrender his conquests. Plebiscites, a practice increasingly identified with nationalist procedures in Europe, resulted in overwhelming popular approval of annexation to Sardinia. An Italian parliament met in 1861, and proclaimed Victor Emmanuel "King of Italy."

In 1866, Italy entered into a convenient alliance with Prussia in the Seven Weeks War against Austria. Neither the Papal States nor Venetia were yet included within the new realm. Cavour died in 1861, but his successful mixture of opportunism and astute diplomacy formed the basis of the policies of his successors. For their part in this successful struggle, the

Italians acquired Venetia. Rome, although proclaimed the prospective capital of Italy by the Italian parliament, still remained apart, since Napoleon's troops occupied the Eternal City to protect papal interests. However, when France fell before the Prussian onslaught in 1870, French soldiers were removed from Rome, and within a month Italian troops took possession. Mazzini's dream and Cavour's great objective were at last a reality, and for the first time in more than a thousand years Italy was a unified and independent nation.

The Austrian Empire, which had battled valiantly if unsuccessfully against nationalist uprisings in Germany and Italy, confronted revolutionary nationalism at home. After the failure of the Magyar revolt of 1848-1849, the severe and autocratic Hapsburg policy failed to extinguish Hungarian desires for national independence. Extremist revolutionaries, like Louis Kossuth, were broken and discredited by their failure, and the way was now open for the rise of moderate Magyar nationalists such as Francis Deák (1803-1876). A nobleman, lawyer, and statesman, Deák exerted considerable influence through his patient and intelligent policy of negotiation rather than revolution. After the early military defeats administered to Austria in the War for Italian Liberation in 1859, the emperor admitted the need for internal reform. In an effort to stifle the domestic discord which would wreck the empire, Francis Joseph (1848-1916) listened with interest to Deák's proposal for a "dual monarchy." Under it the Magyars would gain autonomy and would share with the German Austrians rule of the remaining subject nationalities within the empire.

This unique arrangement was to make Austria and Hungary virtually independent of each other except for a common sovereign. Each would have its own constitution, parliament, ministry, and postal and monetary systems. An imperial ministry, with representatives from both states, would conduct foreign affairs under the supervision and authority of the emperor. Each would provide revenues for the common needs, and tariffs between them would be settled by direct negotiation. Francis Joseph and his successors would be crowned in both countries -- as emperor in Austria and king in Hungary -- and they would retain practically autocratic powers in each.

Austria's disastrous defeat in the war with Prussia in 1867 led to a quick accession to Deák's proposal. The dual monarchy established in that year lasted until the end of World War I in 1918. Nevertheless, the minority nationalities in Austria-Hungary -- Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Ruthenians, Croats, Slovenes, Serbs, Rumanians, and Italians -- remained restive, a restiveness that contributed greatly to the outbreak of World War I in 1914.

A final word on the development of nationalism in eastern Europe during the nineteenth century should be added. Russia's defeat in the Crimean War led in 1856 to the liberation of the



people of Moldavia and Wallachia from the Russian protectorate over them. Their leaders approached the Congress of Paris with pleas for national union under a foreign prince. A plebiscite was arranged which resulted in the creation of Rumania in 1861. These events struck the spark of nationalism among other Balkan peoples. One by one they cast off Turkish control, and by 1878 Rumania, Serbia, and Montenegro were recognized as independent states by the great powers. Bulgaria, still nominally under Turkish control, gained considerable autonomy.