

# Chapter 4: The Politics of the Nineteenth Century

The nineteenth century is, among many other things, a study in contrasts. On the one hand, it witnessed spectacular political, economic, and social changes that saw the birth of new nations and the demise of old kingdoms. On the other, even its newborn nations often looked back to the most traditional form of political sovereignty: dynastic identity. One of the great historians of the period, Eric Hobsbawm, noted in his *The Age of Empire* that Europe had never seen so many states ruled by “emperors” as it did at the turn of the twentieth century: the Empress of the British Empire, the Kaiser of the German Reich, the Kaiser of the Austrian Reich, and the Tsar of the Russian Empire were not just contemporaries, they were all related by dynastic marriages. And yet, each emperor ruled over a profoundly different “empire” than had his or her predecessors, ones in which (even in Russia by 1905) at least some men voted to elect representatives with real political power.

At its simplest, nineteenth-century European politics can be seen as a series of struggles and compromises between different political ideologies and their corresponding movements. From 1815 until 1848, those struggles normally pitted conservatives against liberals and nationalists. A series of revolutions shook much of Europe in 1848, but in their aftermath conservative monarchs regained control almost everywhere. After 1848, conservatism itself slowly adopted liberal and nationalistic traits, culminating in the conservative-led national unifications of Italy and Germany. Of the new political movements considered in the last chapter, only socialism failed to achieve its stated goals at least somewhere in Europe, instead becoming an increasingly militant movement opposed not just to conservatives, but its occasional former allies: liberals and nationalists.

The backdrop of these struggles was a wholly uncharacteristic state of peace that held for most of the nineteenth century. After the Napoleonic wars, the great powers of Europe deliberately crafted a new political arrangement whose purpose was, in part, to maintain peace between them. That peace was broken occasionally starting in 1853, but the subsequent wars were shorter, less bloody, and less frequent than those of any previous century. Historians have often noted that the nineteenth century *technically* ended in 1900, but in terms of its prevailing

political, social, and cultural patterns, it *really* ended in 1914, with the advent of the horrendous bloodshed and destruction of World War I.

## The Congress of Vienna

This period of peace began as a product of the post-Napoleonic order. When Napoleon was first defeated in 1814, representatives from the victorious states gathered in the Austrian capital of Vienna to establish what was to be done in the aftermath of his conquests. Napoleon's escape from Elba and inconvenient attempt to re-establish his empire forced the representatives to suspend their meetings while British and Prussian armies finally ended his reign for good. The conference, known later as the Congress of Vienna, was then re-convened, finally concluding in 1815. While various states in Europe, including the Ottoman Empire, sent representatives, the Congress was dominated by the five "great powers": the Austrian Empire, Great Britain, Prussia, Russia, and (by the end) France itself.

By its conclusion, the Congress of Vienna had redrawn the map of Europe with the goal of preventing France from threatening the balance of power again. But unlike the conference that ended the First World War a century later, the Congress of Vienna did not impose a huge penalty on the aggressor. Once it had been agreed to place Louis XVIII, the younger brother of the executed Louis XVI, on the throne of France, the powers that had defeated Napoleon had the good sense to see that it would be illogical to punish the French (not least because the French might opt to have yet another revolution in response). Much of the credit was due to a wily diplomat, Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, himself a former official under Napoleon, who convinced the other representatives to include France as an equal partner rather than an enemy to be punished. Instead, the victors deprived the French of their conquests and imposed a modest indemnity, but they did not dismember the country. They did, however, redraw the map of Europe.

The powers that defeated Napoleon had a few specific goals at the conference. They sought to create a lasting conservative order in France itself. They hoped to restrain French ambition and stave off the threat of another revolution. They sought to reward themselves with territory taken from weaker states like Poland and the formerly independent territories of northern Italy. And, finally, they devoted themselves to the suppression of future revolutionary movements. The political order that emerged in 1815 became known as the Congress System (also known as the Concert of Europe): a conservative international political network maintained by the five great powers.

The Congress System was devoted to peace, stability, and order. While Great Britain was content with any political arrangement that prevented a disruption like the Napoleonic wars from occurring again, the more conservative states were not: led by the Russian Tsar Alexander I, Russia, Austria, Prussia, and France (the latter under its new Bourbon monarch Louis XVIII) joined in a “Holy Alliance” that promised to put down revolutions wherever they might occur. Now, war was to be waged in the name of dynastic sovereignty and the conservative political order, not territorial ambition. In other words, the next time France invaded Spain and Russia invaded Hungary, they did so in the name of restoring foreign conservative monarchs to their “rightful” position of power, not in order to enrich themselves.

## Revolts and Revolutions

As it turns out, they did not have long to wait to put the military commitment of the Holy Alliance into action. The first liberal revolt against a conservative monarch occurred in the immediate aftermath of the Congress of Vienna in what had traditionally been one of the most conservative states of Europe: Spain.

During the Napoleonic period, Spanish liberal intellectuals had been stuck in an awkward position. Their country was ruled by a foreign power, France, one that taxed it and extracted resources for its wars, but it was also one that represented the best hope of liberal reform. The French Revolution was the symbol, for liberals all over Europe, of progress, even if they had misgivings about the Terror. When the Spanish resistance sprung up against the French under Napoleon, it was an alliance of conservative priests and peasants, along with conservative nobles, who spearheaded it. Most Spanish liberals did end up supporting the resistance, but they still hoped that the post-Napoleonic order would see liberal reforms to the Spanish monarchy.

Toward the end of the Napoleonic period, the Spanish representative assembly, the *cortes*, approved a liberal constitution. Once he was back in power, however, the restored Spanish king Ferdinand VII refused to recognize the constitution, and he also refused to summon the *cortes*. With the approval of the other conservative monarchies of Europe, Ferdinand essentially moved to turn back the clock in Spain to the pre-revolutionary period.

Ferdinand was able to force Spain back toward the old order, but he proved unable to squelch independence movements in Spain’s American colonies. In 1816 an anti-Spanish uprising in Argentina began and soon spread to the other colonies. By 1824 all of Central and South America was independent. In the midst of the failure of Spanish military expeditions to

stop the revolutions, in 1820 an alliance of liberal politicians and military officers staged a coup against Ferdinand and began remaking Spain as a liberal state.



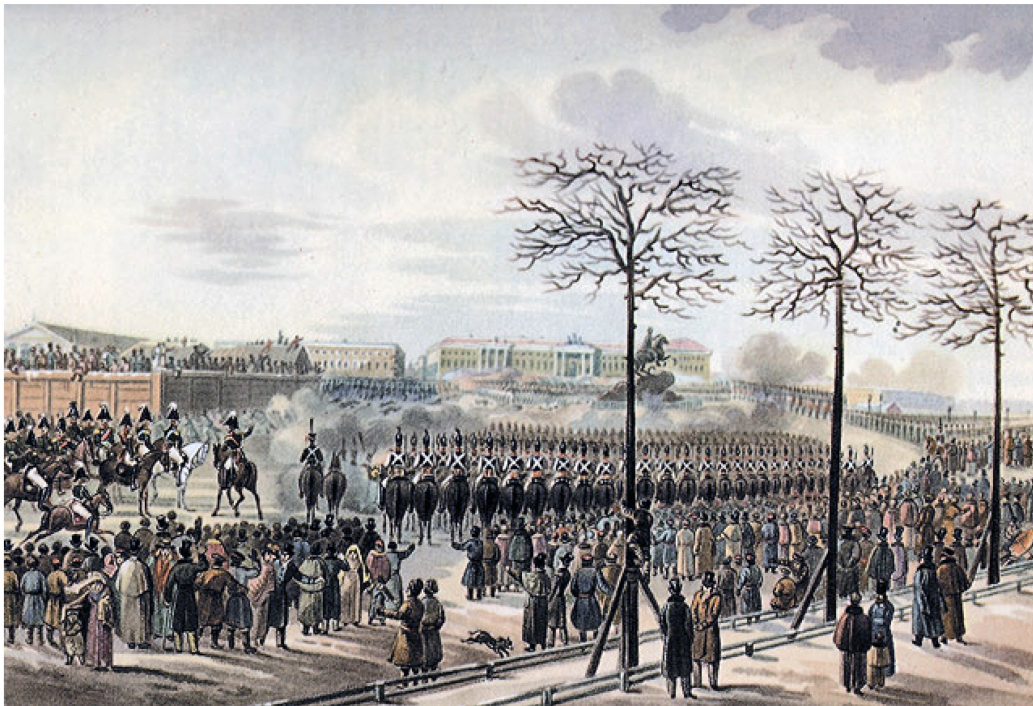
*The Arch-Conservative Spanish King Ferdinand VII*

The Spanish liberal coup of 1820 was the first major test of the Holy Alliance's commitment to prevent revolution anywhere in Europe. True to form, the continental members of the alliance supported a French army of 200,000 in invading Spain and restoring Ferdinand to the throne. The liberals were persecuted and hounded, and Spain was essentially ruled by an arch-conservative order for the next few decades. Incidentally, it was in this context that the American president James Monroe issued the Monroe Doctrine, which forbid European powers from interfering in the politics of the Americas. Monroe was afraid that the Holy Alliance would try to extend its intervention to the now-former Spanish colonies and he thus issued a proclamation that any attempt by a European power to intervene in the western hemisphere would be considered a threat to US peace and safety.

The next liberal revolt occurred in the *most* conservative political context in Europe at the time: that of Russia. Late in the Napoleonic wars, some Russian officers in the Tsarist army underwent a pair of related revelations. First, they came to admire the bravery and loyalty of their soldiers, all of whom were drawn from the ranks of the serfs. In turn, they experienced the

west firsthand as Russian armies fought Napoleon's forces and then during the occupation of France. There, the sheer backwardness of Russia stood in contrast to the dynamism and vitality they discovered in French society (especially in Paris itself). The officers came to see serfdom as both fundamentally immoral and as totally incompatible with any hope of progress for Russia. Thus, as Russian armies returned home after the Congress of Vienna, a conspiracy of liberal officers emerged, intent on creating a liberal political order for the Russian state once the aging, fanatically religious, and arch-conservative Tsar Alexander I died.

Ten years later (in 1825) he did die, and the result was the "Decembrist" uprising. During the years that followed Napoleon's defeat, the conspiracy of army officers put plans in motion to force the government to accept liberal reforms, especially a constitution guaranteeing basic rights and freeing the serfs. When the new Tsar, Nicholas I, was crowned in December of 1825, the officers staged a rebellion in the square in front of the royal palace in St. Petersburg, hoping that the army as a whole would side with them and force the Tsar to accept reforms. Instead, after a tense day of waiting, troops loyal to the Tsar opened fire and crushed the uprising.



*The Decembrist uprising, depicted at the moment troops loyal to the tsar opened fire.*

The Decembrist uprising was the one and only attempt at implementing liberal reform in Russia in the nineteenth century; it would take until 1905 for the next revolution to come to pass. Nicholas I was the ultimate reactionary, personally overseeing the police investigation of the Decembrist conspiracy and creating Europe's first secret police force, The Third Section. He

would go on to a long rule (r. 1825 - 1855) guided by the principles he defined for the Russian state: autocracy, orthodoxy, and nationality. In the decades that followed, the slightest sign of dissent from a Russian subject was grounds for imprisonment or exile to a Siberian prison-village, and the political and social changes that swept across the rest of Europe were thus held at bay. Tsarist power remained intact, but Russian society (and the Russian economy) stagnated.

Even as the Decembrist uprising failed, another revolt was being fought in the heartland of "Western Civilization" itself: Greece. The Balkans, including not only Greece but territories like Bosnia, Serbia, and Macedonia, had been part of the Ottoman Empire for hundreds of years. There, the predominantly Christian subjects of the Ottomans enjoyed official religious toleration, but chafed at the tax burden and, increasingly by the late eighteenth century, resented the "foreign" rule of the Turks. This resentment coalesced around the new political ideology of nationalism by the early nineteenth century - just as "Germans" resented the conservative Austrian regime and Poles detested the Russian and Prussian states that had divided up Polish territory, Greeks (as well as Serbs, Croats, and the other peoples of the Balkans) increasingly saw themselves as autonomous peoples artificially ruled by a foreign power.

In 1821, a Greek prince named Alexander Ypsilantis organized a revolt centered on the demand for a Greek state. A series of uprisings occurred in Greece and on various islands in the Aegean Sea. Despite the fact that the Ottoman Empire was a nominal ally of the members of the Holy Alliance and an official part of the Congress System, and despite the fact that the Greek uprising was precisely the kind of thing that the Holy Alliance had been organized to prevent, Europeans soon flocked to support the rebellion. European scholars wrote impassioned articles about how Greece, as the birthplace of European culture, needed to be liberated from the "oriental" tyranny of the Turks.

After reports of a Turkish massacre of Greeks were publicized in Europe, the Holy Alliance demanded that Turkey grant Greek independence. The Ottomans refused, so in 1827 a combined fleet of Britain, France, and Russia sunk an Ottoman fleet. Fighting continued between the rebels and the Ottomans for a few years, with support going to the rebels from the European powers (and Russia actually declaring war in 1829), and in 1833 the Ottomans finally relented and granted independence to Greece.

Thus, in this case, the cultural bias pitting European Christians against (perceived) non-European Muslims proved stronger than the pragmatic, conservative concern with suppressing revolutions among the European powers. Following the Greek uprising, the

Ottoman Empire entered into a period of marked decline in power, its territories attracting the unwanted attention of the European states. Europeans soon referred to the Ottoman Empire as the “sick man of Europe,” and squabbling over Ottoman territory became an increasing source of tension between the European great powers by the middle of the century.

While the Greek uprising was raging in the eastern Mediterranean, revolution was brewing once again in France. King Charles X, the arch-conservative and nearly delusional king of France from 1824 – 1830, was one of the most unpopular monarchs in Europe. Under his watch the small group of rich politicians allowed to sit in the French Chamber of Deputies passed a law making religious sacrilege punishable by death (no one was ever actually executed), and he re-instituted harsh censorship even as French society had become increasingly literate and liberal. In July of 1830, angered at the growing strength of liberalism, Charles disenfranchised most of those who had been able to vote at all and further clamped down on the freedom of the press.

The result was a kind of accidental revolution in which angry crowds took to the streets and the king lost his nerve and fled. Just as they had in the first French Revolution, the army sided with the crowd of protesters, not with the king. Charles X fled to exile in England, the last ever Bourbon monarch to have held the throne of France, and his cousin Louis-Philippe of the Orléans branch of the royal line became the king. The “citizen king” as he was called expanded the electorate, reinstated freedom of the press, and abandoned the kind of medieval court etiquette favored by Charles X.

The irony of the “July Monarchy” of Louis-Philippe is that it demonstrated some of the limitations of liberalism at the time. The electorate was very small, comprised of the wealthy (both noble and bourgeois). The government essentially ran like a company devoted to making the rich and connected richer and better connected, while leaving the majority of the population without access to political power. Workers were banned from forming unions and even relatively prosperous bourgeois were not rich enough to vote. Louis-Philippe himself became increasingly unpopular as the years went on (satirical cartoons at the time often depicted him as an obese, spoiled pear). The July Monarchy only lasted fourteen years, toppled during the revolutions of 1848.

Meanwhile, in Great Britain, it seemed possible that a revolution might come to pass as well. Britain as of 1815 was comparatively “liberal” already, having been a constitutional monarchy since 1689, but there was still plenty for British liberals to attack. There was limited representative government in the parliament, and the electorate mostly represented the landowning gentry class. Furthermore, the electoral districts were either totally out of sync with

the British population or were, in fact, complete nonsense. Voting districts had not been revised to reflect changes in population since the eighteenth century, and thus, the north was sorely underrepresented. Also, there were “rotten boroughs,” electoral districts with no one in them which were controlled remotely by a lord. One was a pasture. Another, called Dunwich, was literally underwater; due to changes in sea walls, it had been inundated for centuries. It still sent a lord to parliament, however, namely the descendant of the lords who had controlled it before it was submerged.

A series of reforms in Britain, however, staved off a revolution along continental lines. First, in 1828 and 1829, separate bills made it legal for Catholics and non-Anglican Protestants to hold office. Then, the Great Reform Bill of 1832 expanded the electorate to encompass most of the urban middle class and eliminated the rotten boroughs entirely; it only passed the arch-conservative House of Lords because the lords were terrified that the disgruntled middle class would join with workers in an actual revolution. The newly liberalized parliament that followed swiftly voted to end slavery in British territories (1833), passed the controversial Poor Laws that created public workhouses (1834) for the unemployed, and eliminated corrupt and archaic city governments and replaced them with elected councils. A decade later, the hated Corn Laws were finally repealed after a protracted political struggle (1846). Thus, the pattern in British politics in the nineteenth century was a slow, steady liberalization, even as Britain clinched its position as the most powerful single state in Europe by the middle of the century.

## The Revolutions of 1848

The new political ideologies that had emerged from the backdrop of the French Revolution and Napoleonic period coalesced in 1848. That year, all across Europe, there were a series of revolutions that combined the liberal, socialist, and nationalist movements in a temporary alliance against the conservative order. Starting in France, but quickly spreading to Prussia, Austria, the smaller German kingdoms, and regions like Italy and Hungary, coalitions rose up and, temporarily, succeeded in either running their monarchs out of their capital cities (as in Paris) or forcing their monarchs to agree to constitutions and rationalized legal systems (as in Prussia and Austria).

In February of 1848 in France, the unpopular king Louis-Philippe unwisely tried to crack down on gatherings of would-be reformers. A revolutionary crowd gathered and, after panicked soldiers fired and killed forty protesters, began to build barricades and prepare to fight back. The king promptly fled the city. A diverse group of liberals and socialists formed a provisional



government, declared France to be a new republic, and began to draw up plans for a general election for representatives to a new government. There would be no property restrictions on voting - although women remained disenfranchised, as they did everywhere else - and never again would a monarch hold the throne of France simply because of his or her dynastic birth.

Meanwhile, in Austria, crowds took to the streets of Vienna after learning of the revolution in Paris (telegraphs now carried information across Europe in hours; thus, this was the first time revolutions were tied together via "social media"). Peasants marched into the capital demanding the end of feudalism. Workers demanded better wages and conditions. Liberals demanded a constitution. In non-German areas like the Czech lands and Hungary, after learning of the news in Vienna, nationalists rose up in the regional capitals of Prague and Budapest demanding their own independent nations. For a time it looked like the Austro-Hungarian Empire itself was on the verge of collapse.



*Europe in 1848. Note the red marks on the map - those denote major revolutionary outbreaks.*

In Prussia and the other German kingdoms, a series of revolutions saw a gathering of hundreds of would-be politicians in the city of Frankfurt. The first popularly elected national assembly in German history gathered to draw up a constitution based on the principle of

German unity and a liberalized legal order. Not only Prussians, but representatives of the various other kingdoms of Germany came together and began the business of creating a unified state. The representatives, however, had to debate some thorny issues. Should the German liberals support free enterprise or a guaranteed "right to work," as demanded by German socialists? Should they support the independence of Poland at the expense of the German minority there? Should they favor Bohemian independence at the expense of the German minority in the Czech lands? There were about 800 delegates gathered, elected from all over the German states, operating without the official sanction of any of the kings and princes of their homelands, and they *all* wanted the chance to speak.

In turn, the major debate that broke out among the delegates was about the form of German nationalism that should be adopted: should Germany be a "smaller German" state defined by German-speakers and excluding Austria, or a "greater German" state including Austria and all of its various other ethnicities and languages? It took months for the former position to win out in debate, and the final conclusion was that any state could join Germany, but only if it "left behind" non-German territories (like Hungary). It should be noted, however, that the delegates agreed that Polish and Czech nationalism had to be crushed because of German "racial" superiority, an early anticipation of the Germanic ethnocentrism that would eventually give rise to Nazism almost a century later.

This flowering of revolutionary upheaval, however, proved shockingly short-lived. The coalitions of artisans, students, and educated liberals who had spearheaded the uprisings were good at arguing with one another about the finer points of national identity, but much less good at establishing meaningful links to the bulk of the population who did not live in or near capital cities. The Frankfurt Congress was the quintessential expression of that form of dysfunction: impassioned, educated men, most of them lawyers, with few direct links to the majority of the German population, despite the growing popularity of German nationalism. The problem for the revolutionaries across Europe was that only in France did the king stay out of power permanently. In the German kingdoms, Italy, and Austria, monarchs and their officials worked behind the scenes to re-establish control of their armies and to shore up their own support while hastily-created assemblies were trying to draw up liberal constitutions.

Likewise, revolutionary coalitions soon discovered that their constituent elements did not necessarily agree on the major political issues that had to be addressed in creating a new government. The first sign of this dissent was in France: the socialists in the new French parliament (called the National Assembly, just as it was in the first French republic half a century earlier) created new "National Workshops" in Paris that offered good wages to anyone in need

of work. Soon, however, the alliance between liberals and socialists broke down over resentment at the costs of running the workshops and the Assembly shut them down. The workers of Paris rose up in protest and a series of bloody street battles called the June Days broke out in which thousands of Parisian workers were killed or imprisoned. Conservative peasants were sent by railroad from the countryside under orders from the Assembly and in just a few days, the great socialist experiment was crushed.

In the aftermath of the June Days, the government of the Second Republic was torn between liberals, socialists, and conservatives (the latter of whom wanted to restore the French monarchy). In the midst of the chaos, Napoleon Bonaparte's nephew, Louis Napoleon, successfully ran for president of the Republic, winning in large part because of the simple power of his name. Posing as a unifying force above the fray of petty politics, he was genuinely popular across class and regional lines throughout France. In 1852 he staged a coup and declared himself Emperor of France, just as his uncle had decades earlier. And, also like the first Napoleon, he had his power ratified by bypassing the Assembly entirely and calling for a plebiscite (vote of the entire male population) in support of his title, which he won by a landslide. He took the title of Napoleon III (Napoleon II, the first Napoleon's son, had died years earlier). Thus, in a few short years the second experiment in democratic politics in France ended just as the first one had: a popular dictator named Napoleon took over.

In both Austria and Prussia (as well as the smaller German kingdoms) conservative forces turned the tide as the revolutionary coalitions wasted time debating the minutia of the new political order. Forces loyal to the Austrian emperor, aided by a full-scale Russian invasion of Hungary in the name of Holy Alliance principles, restored Habsburg rule across the entirety of the empire by the autumn of 1849. In the meantime, by the time the representatives had finally drafted a constitution for a united Germany under Prussian rule, the Prussian king Wilhelm IV had verified the loyalty of the army. When he was presented with the constitution, he simply refused to accept it (he called the offered position a "crown from the gutter"), and one by one the kings of the smaller German states reasserted their control across the German lands.

Ultimately, all of the revolutions "failed" in their immediate goals of creating liberal republics, to say nothing of socialist dreams of state-sponsored workshops for the unemployed. One prominent historian, much later, noted that 1848 was the year that European history (specifically, German history, although the comment was often applied to the whole revolutionary enterprise) "reached its turning point and failed to turn." That is not entirely true, however. Even though conservative regimes ultimately retained power, the very definition of conservatism and the methods conservatives used were altered by the revolutions.

First, some limited constitutional and parliamentary reforms did occur in many kingdoms. Even though (again, relying on Russian support) the Austrian Empire had been restored by conservative forces, the new constitution of 1849 did institute a parliament, and elected representative bodies became the norm across Europe by the latter decades of the century. Electorates were almost always limited to property-owners, and nowhere did those electorates include women until the twentieth century, but they still represented a major shift toward a key element of liberal politics. Likewise, the very fact that conservative monarchies accepted the need for written constitutions, and the final end of the old feudal obligations of peasants in areas where those still existed, were marked steps toward liberalism.

Second, just as significantly, the power of nationalism was obvious to everyone in the aftermath of 1848, conservative monarchs included. Only Russian invasion had prevented Hungary from achieving its independence, and Italian uprisings against Austria had been contained only with great difficulty. Subsequently, conservatives themselves began to adopt some of the trappings of nationalism in the name of retaining their own power - as considered below, the most noteworthy success stories of nineteenth-century nationalism, those of Italy and Germany, were led by conservative politicians, not by utopian insurgents.

## National Unifications

The most spectacular successes of the nationalist movements of the nineteenth century were in Italy and Germany, two areas with ancient regional identities but a total lack of political unity. Italy had last been united during the period of the Roman Empire, whereas Germany had *never* been truly united. Each term - Italy and Germany - referred to a region and a language, not a kingdom or nation, places where people spoke similar lingual dialects and had some kind of a shared history, but were divided between various kingdoms, cities, and empires.

This very lack of unity was, however, a source of inspiration for the nationalists of the first half of the nineteenth century. One of the great nationalist thinkers was an Italian, Giuseppe Mazzini, whose Young Italy movement inspired comparable movements all over Europe in the 1830s. Mazzini was the quintessential romantic nationalist, someone who believed that nations would organically emerge to replace the tyranny of the old feudal order of conservative monarchs. Young Italy was just one of a number of "Young Europes" (e.g. Young Germany, Young Ireland) that shared this essentially optimistic, even utopian, outlook. In turn, many Germans dreamed of a united Germany that might escape the oppressive influence of censorship and oppression. Those kind of radical nationalists had their day in the Revolutions

of 1848, but then saw their hopes dashed when the conservative kings of Prussia and Austria rallied their military forces and re-took power.

That being noted, in the aftermath of 1848, even kings came to accept that the popular desire for nations was too strong to resist forever, and at least in Prussia, the idea that a conservative monarch might “use” nationalism to enhance his power came to the fore. Instead of allowing a popular uprising that might permanently replace them, conservative monarchs began maneuvering to co-opt the very idea of nationalism. This was not a great, sinister master plan, but instead a series of pragmatic political calculations, usually led by high-ranking royal officials rather than the kings themselves. Through a combination of deliberate political manipulation and sheer chance, the first nation to unite under conservative leadership was Italy.

Italy had been dominated by foreign powers since about 1500, when Spain and France jostled for control and extinguished the independence of most of the Italian city-states of the Renaissance during the Italian Wars. Later, it was Austria that came to dominate in the north, adding Italian regions and cities to the Austrian Empire. The south was an essentially feudal kingdom, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, dominated by lesser branches of first the Habsburg and then the Bourbon royal lines. In the middle was the Papal States, ruled directly by the pope and still controlling Rome as of the 1850s (after a short-lived republic in 1848 was dismantled by the French under Napoleon III). Despite the popularity of the concept of nationalism among the members of the small northern-Italian middle class, it had relatively little mass support (and less than 3% of the population was literate in the standard “Italian” language, the dialect spoken in the region of Tuscany).

The core of Italian unification was the kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia, a small kingdom consisting of a large island in the Mediterranean and a chunk of land wedged between France, Spain, and the Austrian-dominated northern Italian states. Its king, Victor Emmanuel II, was from the old royal house of Savoy, and the kingdom retained independence following the Napoleonic period because it served as a useful buffer state between the French and Austrian spheres of influence. Victor Emanuel enjoyed interfering in foreign policy and took pride in his military prowess, but he was too lazy to become involved in domestic affairs, which he left to his ministers. In turn, the most intelligent and important of his ministers was Count Camillo di Cavour (1810-1861), the true architect of Italian unification.



*Victor Emmanuel II of Piedmont-Sardinia. Even by the standards of the time, he favored an impressive mustache.*

Cavour was determined to increase Piedmont-Sardinia's power, and he used Italian nationalism to do it. He did not have any sentimental attachment to the concept of "Italy." Instead, he wanted to make Piedmont-Sardinia the center of a larger, more powerful kingdom. As of the 1850s, a war (the Crimean War, described below) had torn apart the system of alliances that had been so crucial in maintaining the balance of power after the Congress of Vienna, and Cavour knew that he could play one great power off against the other to Piedmont's benefit. His plan was to use the rivalry between France and Austria to his advantage, by having France support some kind of Italian independence from Austria in order to weaken the Habsburgs. Cavour successfully bargained with Napoleon III, the new emperor of France as of 1852, and in 1859, with French military support, Piedmont-Sardinia pushed the Austrians out of northern Italy and gained political ascendancy in the name of a new "Italian nation." Cavour gave France the city of Nice in return for continued support in holding the Austrians in check.

Out of nowhere, another figure entered the story: Giuseppe Garibaldi, an unexpected political leader who brought southern Italy into the equation. Garibaldi was an adventurer, a romantic nationalist, and a revolutionary who had spent most of his adult life as a mercenary battling in independence campaigns and wars, mostly in South America. He rushed back to Italy during the Revolutions of 1848 only to see his hopes of both a united Italy and freedom from foreign control dashed thanks to the machinations of the Austrians, the French, and the papacy.

Following Piedmont-Sardinia's success in pushing Austria back in the north, however, Garibaldi returned. In May 1860, Garibaldi, with a tiny force of 1,000 red-shirted volunteers (mostly townsmen from the north, including numerous under-employed professional men and students hoping to avoid their examinations) packed aboard two leaky steamships, set out to invade Sicily. Very rapidly, Garibaldi captured Palermo, the chief city of Sicily. He succeeded because he won the support of the Sicilian peasants by suspending taxes and promising to divide up the large estates and distribute the land. The landowners of Sicily, even those who were most reactionary, were forced to see that the only hope of law and order lay in protection by this radical dictator and his revolution. Their gradual and reluctant transference of allegiance to the insurrection was a decisive event and helped to make possible the next phase of Garibaldi's astonishing conquest.

On August 18 Garibaldi crossed to mainland Italy, entering Naples. He planned an invasion of the Papal States, but Cavour convinced Napoleon III that it was necessary to block the further progress of Garibaldi's adventurers and assured him that the position of the papacy itself (under French protection) would not be affected. Cavour threw the bulk of the Piedmontese army into the Papal States, annexing them and heading off Garibaldi. When he arrived, Garibaldi ceded his conquests to Victor Emmanuel, and Italy thus grew to encompass both Sicily and the south. Thus, in about six months, the northern conquests of Piedmont-Sardinia were united with Garibaldi's bizarre conquest of the south.

Cavour's schemes for a Piedmontese-led united Italy had not included the south, which like most northern Italians he held in contempt. Thus, in a real sense southern Italy emerged as the unfortunate loser of the wars of unification, even more so than did Austria. Taxes had to be increased, because the war of 1859 had to be paid for, and the new Italian state needed a larger army and navy. There was also the fact that the extension of low tariffs from Piedmont to economically backward regions often completely extinguished the few local industries that existed. Nor did the new state have funds to alleviate distress or to undertake public works and infrastructure projects in the south. The rural poor became more totally dependent than ever on

the local landowning class in their adjustment to the new scheme of things. Some refused to adjust and became "brigands" who rose up against the new political order almost immediately. The restoration of order in the south required a major military operation, the so-called Bandit Wars, which over three years that cost more lives than had the wars of the unification itself. In the aftermath of the wars, the south was treated almost like a colony rather than a full-fledged part of the Italian nation, and politics in the south revolved around the growing relationship between the official Italian government and (as of the 1880s) organized crime.

At the time of Cavour's death in 1861 the new state had a population of twenty-two million but an electorate of only half a million, limited to property-owners. Politics in the new Italian state (a constitutional monarchy in which the king still had considerable power) was about patronage: getting jobs for one's cronies and shifting the burden of taxation onto those who could least afford to pay it. In many respects, unification had amounted to the occupation of the rest of the country by the north. It would be many years before the new state would begin serve the needs and interests of the majority of its citizens.

## Germany

In Prussia, it was an official similar to Cavour, but far more memorable, the chancellor Otto Von Bismarck, who was personally responsible for unifying Germany for the first time. Bismarck was ruthless, practical, and completely amoral in his service to the Prussian king. He was the inventor of "*Realpolitik*": a political philosophy that insisted on being completely pragmatic and realistic, rather than pursuing empty goals like "glory" or pulling punches in the name of moral rectitude. He was such a pragmatist that he ended up introducing social reforms to blunt the growth of socialism, even though he was an arch-conservative (and thus detested the very idea of reform). He was from an old Prussian noble family, a *Junker*, and he had no time for romantic nationalist drivel, yet he directly brought about German unification. He once said that "the great questions of the time are not determined by speeches and majority decisions – that was the error of 1848 – but by iron and blood."

After 1815, "Germany" was nothing more than the "German Confederation," a free trade zone containing a number of independent kingdoms. German nationalism, however, was very strong, and in 1848 it culminated in the roughly year-long standoff between the elected group of self-understood German nationalist politicians in Frankfurt and the kings of Prussia and Austria (and those of the smaller German kingdoms). Despite the fact that the revolution failed to create a "Germany" in 1848, it was now clear that a German state probably would come into



being at some point; the question remained, however, of whether it would be a “greater Germany” under Austrian leadership or a “smaller Germany” under Prussia.

During the eighteenth century Prussia had risen from being a fairly poor backwater in the north, lacking natural resources and remote from the centers of intellectual and cultural life farther south, to being one of the great kingdoms of Europe. That was thanks largely to its royal house, the Hohenzollerns, who relied on a combination of ruthless administrative efficiency and a relentless focus on building up Prussia’s military. Whereas the other royal houses sought to live in the style of the glorious French kings, the Hohenzollerns lived like reasonably well-off nobles, pouring state revenues into the army and insisting on brutal discipline. By the middle of the eighteenth century, Prussia was an established Great Power, part of the coalition that had defeated Napoleon, a military equal with Austria, and was poised to exert an even greater role in Central Europe.



*The Holy Roman Empire in 1789. While many of the smallest states of the region vanished during the Napoleonic period, “Germany” remained nothing more than an idea in the early nineteenth century.*

Otto Von Bismarck was an inheritor of these Prussian traditions, a Prussian conservative who served in various diplomatic posts in the Prussian kingdom before being promoted to chancellor by the Prussian King Wilhelm I. Bismarck did not have a master plan to unify

Germany. His goal was always to maintain or, preferably, increase Prussia's power (in that sense, he was a lot like Cavour in Piedmont-Sardinia). He became highly skilled at manipulating nationalist passions to inflame popular support for Prussian wars, but he was, personally, deeply skeptical about a "national spirit" animating the need for unification.

Bismarck achieved German unification through war. He egged Austria on in a conflict over control of a region in northwestern Germany, recently seized from Denmark, and succeeded in getting the Austrians to declare war on Prussia. Prussia's modernized and well-trained army smashed the Austrians in a few months in 1866. Significantly, however, Bismarck convinced the Prussian king not to order a march on Vienna and the occupation of Austria itself; the goal for Bismarck had been to knock Austria out of contention as the possible governing power of Germany, *not* to try to conquer and control it. Conquest of Austria, he thought, would just lead to more headaches for Prussia since the Austrians would resent the Prussian takeover. This decision - not to conquer Austria when Prussia could have - was a perfect example of *Realpolitik*: a bloodless, realistic, coldly calculating approach to achieving greater political power without succumbing to some kind of ill-considered quest for "glory."

After defeating Austria, Bismarck essentially tricked France into going to war. Bismarck had toyed with Napoleon III, ignoring French demands for territory if it came to war between Austria and Prussia. In the aftermath of the war itself, the Spanish throne suddenly became available because of a coup, and Bismarck sponsored a Prussian candidate related to the former Spanish ruling line, none other than the Bourbons of France. Even though Napoleon III was not a Bourbon, this was a direct attack on France's sphere of influence. Napoleon III was infuriated - Bismarck even humiliated Napoleon by leaking a memo to the press in which Napoleon's machinations for territory before the Austro-Prussian War were revealed. Feeling both threatened and belittled, Napoleon insisted that France declare war on Prussia.

The ensuing Franco-Prussian War was short and sweet for Prussia; it started in late 1870 and was over by early 1871. Napoleon III foolishly led the French army into battle personally (sick with the flu and without an ounce of his famous uncle's tactical expertise) and was subsequently captured in the field. French forces were poorly led and could not stand up to Prussian training and tactics, and every important engagement was won by the Prussians as a result. In one fell swoop, the myth of French military supremacy, a legacy from the first Napoleon, was destroyed, and Europeans were confronted with the fact that a new military power had asserted its strength in its stead.

In the aftermath of the Prussian victory, a new German empire was declared at Versailles, with Wilhelm I taking the title of Kaiser (emperor) of the German Reich (empire). The

various smaller German kingdoms renounced their independence and pledged themselves to the newborn state in the process. France lost two important eastern regions, Alsace and Lorraine, and had to pay a considerable war indemnity, inspiring an enormous amount of resentment among the French (and leading to a desire for *revanche* – revenge). The German Empire became a constitutional monarchy in which all men over 25 could vote for representatives in the Reichstag, the parliament, but an unelected federal council held considerable power and the emperor held more. Thus, even though Germany was a constitutional monarchy, it was hardly the liberal vision of a democratic state.

In one of the more bizarre historical episodes of the time, the city of Paris refused to concede defeat and fought on against the Prussians for a short while before the Prussians simply fell back and handed off the issue to the hastily-declared Third Republic of France (Napoleon III went into exile). Paris declared itself an independent city-state organized along socialist lines, the “Paris Commune,” and for a few months (from March through late May) the French army besieged the *communards* in the capital. In the end, a French army stormed the city and approximately 20,000 *communards* were executed.

While Italian unification had redrawn the map of Europe and disturbed the balance of power at least somewhat, German unification utterly destroyed it. Germany was not just Prussia, it was Prussia and most of the rest of what once had been the Holy Roman Empire. It had a large population, a rapidly industrializing, wealthy economy, and proven military might. The period after German unification, from 1871 until the start of World War I in 1914, was one in which the European great powers jockeyed for position, built up their respective military strength, and scrambled to seize territory overseas before their rivals did. Long gone were the days of the Congress System and a balance of power based on the desire for peace.



*Germany after unification. Note that the color-coded regions were the states of the German Empire: they retained considerable autonomy despite now being part of a single unified nation.*

## Russia

In many ways, the histories of Great Britain and Russia were *always* exceptional in the context of nineteenth-century European politics. Neither underwent revolutionary upheavals, and neither had much difficulty suppressing nationalist movements from within their respective empires. And yet, the two countries were in many ways polar opposites: Britain was an advanced industrial economy with a liberal constitution and a monarchy whose real political power declined over time, while Russia was an overwhelmingly agricultural - even feudal - economy with a powerful, autocratic head of state: the Tsar. The modernizing trends that changed much of the rest of Europe over the course of the century had the least impact on Russia of any of the major states.

Tsar Alexander I, who ruled from 1801 – 1825, was present at the Congress of Vienna. He was intensely conservative and had a powerful attraction to Orthodox Christian mysticism.

In turn, he sincerely believed that he had a mission from God to maintain the sacred order of monarchy, nobility, and clergy. In this, he was influenced by timing: he became Tsar shortly after Napoleon seized power in France. To Alexander, the French Revolution was not just a bad idea or a threat to his personal power, it was an unholy abomination, a perversion of the proper order of society as it had been ordained from on high. Ultimately, it was the Russians who defeated Napoleon's armies in 1812, thanks largely to the winter and their brilliant tactical decision to camp out and wait for the French to run out of supplies. Alexander sat in a position of great power at the Congress of Vienna because of the strength of his armies and the prestige he had earned chasing the French forces back to France and aiding in their defeat in 1814 and 1815.

In 1815, Russia, along with Austria and Prussia (and, technically, the restored French monarchy), formed the Holy Alliance that vowed to crush attempts to overthrow the social and political order with force. For Austria, this was a pragmatic gesture because the Habsburgs had to the most to lose in the face of nationalism. For Prussia, it was a way to cement their great power status and to be treated as an equal by the other members of the anti-Napoleonic coalition. For Russia and for Alexander, however, it was nothing less than a true holy mission that had to happen regardless of any practical benefits. Russia did indeed intervene to crush rebellions over the course of the next few decades, most importantly in 1848 when it decimated the Hungarian Revolution and returned Hungary to the Austrians.

Alexander I died in 1825 and his death promptly set off the Decembrist Uprising (noted above). Not only was the uprising crushed, but Alexander's younger brother and heir Nicholas I took a personal hand in interrogating its organizers. Nicholas was much less of a mystic than his brother had been, but he was equally trenchant in his opposition to any loosening of the Russian social order. He went on to rule for decades (r. 1825 - 1855), and during that time he did everything in his power to champion the conservative cause. As noted earlier, not only was he a staunch supporter of the Holy Alliance, but he formed the world's first modern secret police force, The Third Section. Nicholas declared his three principles of government in 1832: autocracy, orthodoxy, and nationality, the last of the three in service to the idea of Russian supremacy over its enormous empire (and the other ethnic groups present in it).

Not only were the Tsars of the nineteenth century arch-conservatives, the vast majority of the Russian population had no interest in political change. They were among the poorest, least educated, and most oppressed in Europe: the Russian serfs. The Russian Orthodox Church was closely tied to the government and preached total obedience to the authority of the Tsar. For that tiny sliver of educated society that could read and had access to foreign books, even to discuss politics at all, let alone advocate reform of any kind, was a punishable crime,

with thousands exiled to Siberia for the crime of having made an off-hand remark about politics or owning a book describing a political concept originating in the west.



*Tsar Nicholas I, architect of nineteenth-century Russian autocracy.*

These people, almost all of whom were nobles, formed the Russian intelligentsia: a small class of educated and very self-consciously cultured people who were at the forefront of Russian literature and artistic creation. They were the ones who began modern Russian literature itself in this period, producing great Russian novelists like Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov. The themes of their art dealt with both the thorny political issues of their time and a kind of ongoing spiritual quest to understand the Russian “soul,” something that was usually identified with both nature and the mystical qualities of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The problem with being a member of the intelligentsia in Russia, however, was that reading or discussing anything to do with politics was itself sufficient cause for arrest and exile to Siberia. Many of the great novelists spent at least part of their lives in Siberia as a result; even Dostoevsky, who ended up being a deeply conservative thinker who was hostile to radical, or even disruptive, politics, spent part of his life in exile. To be an intellectual was almost the equivalent of being a criminal in the eyes of the state. It was a short step for intellectuals to simply act like criminals. It was in large part thanks to the police apparatus that matured under Nicholas I’s rule that this phenomenon occurred.

That being noted, a momentous event occurred late in Nicholas's reign unrelated to Tsarist autocracy per se: the destruction of the Congress System created at the Congress of Vienna, thanks to the Crimean War. From 1854 – 1856, France and Britain fought a war against Russia in the Crimea, a peninsula on the northern shore of the Black Sea. The war was fought over great power politics: Russia tried to take advantage of the political decline of the Ottoman Empire to assert total control in the region of the Black Sea, and both France and Britain recognized those machinations as a threat to the balance of power. The Austrian government unwisely stayed neutral during the ensuing war, which ruptured the alliance between it and Russia (after all, Russia had just put down the Hungarian uprising on Austria's behalf during the Revolutions of 1848).

The Crimean War, while not long by the standards of the Napoleonic period, was nevertheless a major conflict. 600,000 men died in the war, the majority from disease thanks to the abysmal conditions at the front. Russia ultimately lost, and the end result was that the Congress System was finally undone. From that point on, the great powers of Europe were in open competition with one another, fearing and resenting each other more so than they feared revolutionary forces from within - one manifestation of this newfound rivalry was the wars that saw the birth of Italy and Germany, described above.

Nicholas finally died in 1855, and his son Alexander II took the throne (in the midst of the war). In 1861, following Russia's defeat, Alexander made the momentous decision to emancipate the serfs, two years before the Emancipation Proclamation in the United States freed the African-American slaves. It was thought by many Russian elites that one of the reasons Russia had lost the war was its backwardness, a backwardness that Alexander and many others believed could not be mitigated with serfdom weighing down the possibility of progress. The emancipation, however, had surprisingly little immediate impact on Russian society, because the serfs legally owed the government the money that had been distributed to buy their freedom from the nobility. Thus, for generations, serfs were still tied to the same land, laboring both to survive and to pay off the debt incurred with their "freedom."

The emancipation of the serfs was the single most significant reform spearheaded by a Russian Tsar of the nineteenth century. It is thus ironic that Alexander II was the only Tsar assassinated by a radical terrorist group. The group that killed him, The People's Will, believed that the assassination of a Tsar would result in an enormous uprising of the newly-"liberated" peasants (i.e. the former serfs). In this, they were inspired by the anarchist socialism of the exiled Mikhail Bakunin, whose vision of an apocalyptic revolutionary transformation spoke directly to the social and political conditions of his native Russia.

Before the assassination, young members of the intelligentsia formed a social movement known as the Narodniks. The Narodniks advocated going “back to the people,” living among and trying to educate the former serfs, which they did during the spring of 1874. The Narodniks believed that the serfs would form the nucleus of a revolutionary class that would rise up and dismantle Tsarist autocracy if properly educated. Instead, the serfs were deeply suspicious of the urban, educated Narodniks, and in many cases the serfs actually turned the Narodniks in to the local authorities. It was disappointed Narodniks that formed the People’s Will, and in March of 1881 they succeeded in killing Alexander II.

While The People’s Will had hoped that their assassination of Alexander II would result in a spontaneous uprising of the peasants against Tsarist despotism, nothing of the sort occurred. Instead, another reactionary Tsar, Alexander III, came to the throne and ruthlessly hunted down the terrorist groups. What had changed by the 1880s, however, was that there *were* terrorist groups, not just intellectuals guilty of discussing politics, and the one thing that practically every intellectual in Russian society (terrorist or not) believed was that meaningful change would require a significant, even radical, restructuring of Russian society. To many intellectuals and terrorists, there was no room for weak-kneed reformism; it was revolution or nothing. This is the context into which Vladimir Lenin and the other future Bolsheviks, the leaders of the Russian Communist Party who seized power in 1917, were born. Lenin was a brilliant intellectual who synthesized the writings of Marx with the tradition of Russian radical terrorism, producing a potent combination of theoretical and practical political concepts that were realized in 1917.

Thus, by the late nineteenth century Russia had changed the least among the great powers of Europe. Whereas the other states, from Austria to the new Germany to France, had all adopted at least some form of representative government, Russia remained staunchly autocratic and monarchical. The Russian economy was overwhelmingly agriculture and rural, with industrialization only arriving at the very end of the century in and around some of the large cities of western Russia. Russia was, in a sense, stuck in a historical impasse. That impasse would only end with outright revolution, first in 1905 and again in 1917.

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