the spring of 1848, by peaceful, parliamentary means if possible, by a violent, second revolutionary uprising if need be. These clashing aspirations of the resigned political forces stood behind much of the confused and continual conflict occurring in the mid-century revolution from the late spring of 1848 through its final confrontation at the end of 1851.

5 Polarization and confrontation

Patterns of confrontation, May–November 1848

The second half of 1848 was a period of the resurgence of the party of order and of the decline of the party of movement in Europe. In a series of dramatic confrontations the revolutionary forces were overwhelmed, sometimes by an alliance of conservatives and liberals, sometimes by a resurgence of elements of the pre-1848 regime. Following these confrontations, governments were reshuffled and public policy took a strong turn to the right. If the revolutionary movement had suffered a severe setback by the end of 1848, counter-revolution had not yet completely triumphed. Constitutional monarchists retained some influence on government policy, basic civil liberties and the constitutional form of government, those major accomplishments of the spring of 1848, remained, precariously, in place. While increasingly harassed by the police, radical and democratic forces were still able to reorganize themselves and seek out new supporters, preparing a new round of political struggles in the first half of 1849.

First steps in southern Italy

The 1848 revolutions began in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies; the reaction against them also took its first major step there. As always in Italy during the mid-century revolution, the war against the Austrians in the north set the background for political action. Radicals in the capital city of Naples and more militant members of the kingdom's parliament meeting there demanded that its armed forces be sent north to join the nationalist war, and that the constitution granted by the king at the outbreak of the revolution be modified to increase parliamentary control over foreign affairs. King Ferdinand responded by moving troops into Naples to intimidate the opposition. Barricades were built and on 13 May there was street fighting, quickly decided against the insurgents, when the lazazzari, the devout and pro-monarchist casual laborers of Naples, supported
their ruler. The liberal government ministers resigned in protest, but Ferdinand simply replaced them with conservatives closer to his heart.

Foreshadowing future events, the most vigorous opposition to the royal putsch appeared not in the capital but in the provinces. While there were demonstrations against the king and debate in the political clubs in a number of towns, opposition was most determined in Calabria, where democrats created a revolutionary government, enjoying substantial popular support and exerting its authority for about one month, until it was suppressed by royal troops sent against it. A modern detailed study of the Calabrian uprising is lacking, but historians have noted two basic reasons for the strength and popularity of the radicals in Calabria. One was circumstances in the countryside—a vigorous peasant movement, showing early signs of politicization (rustics shouting "death to the royalists!" as they seized disputed forests), interacting with a politically left-wing group of notables, themselves agricultural proprietors but less afraid of peasant movements than their counterparts elsewhere in southern Italy. The second was the presence in the province of a religious minority, a number of Greek Orthodox villages, whose inhabitants were strong supporters of the revolution and opponents of their Roman Catholic king's authority.

Ferdinand's actions, although a blow against the revolution, had not restored the pre-1848 situation. Social conflict in the countryside continued throughout the Italian south; oppositional newspapers and political clubs remained legal, if increasingly persecuted by the authorities, and Naples saw occasional anti-monarchist demonstrations, like the crowd that gathered on the evening of 29 January and marched to the fishermen's quarter to chant democratic slogans. The kingdom's parliament still met after 13 May, although the events of that day had decided against its claim to a voice in coordinating foreign policy. Most of all, the insurgents in Sicily whose January 1848 rising had begun the wave of revolutions had gained control of virtually the entire island. Ferdinand's troops, rather than fighting the Italian national enemy in the north, would instead spend the rest of 1848 and much of 1849 restoring his authority in the rebellious offshore province. The Kingdom of the Two Sicilies was very much on the margin of European politics, yet the result of its struggles in May–June 1848 would be typical for more central regions. The forces of order were strengthened and the revolution was weakened but not yet destroyed. Future political struggles would, however, be centered in different regions from those in which they had previously occurred.

Polarization and confrontation

The June Days

Unlike Calabria, Paris was at the very center of political life in mid-century Europe; political confrontations there would have ramifications throughout the continent. Tensions had been rising in the capital city from April through June 1848 over two issues, one expressly political, one indirectly so, via tangled social and economic questions. Although interrelated, the two issues came to a head separately, reflecting the division between the labor movement and political radicalism during the early months of the 1848 revolution, decisively weakening the strength of the party of moderate change.

The political issue was centered on the conflict between the left-wing republican activists, who had overthrown a king in February 1848, with the support from the politicized lower classes in Paris, and a center-right, monarchist constituent national assembly chosen in the democratic elections of April 1848 called by the new republican regime. The second issue concerned the socialist plans for the "organization of labor." No sooner had Louis Philippe been overthrown, than the provisional government of the republic had created "National Workshops," ostensibly modeled on the "social workshops" of the well-known socialist Louis Blanc. Soon employing 100,000 of the unemployed, these workshops had little to do with the state-supported consumer cooperatives of Blanc's socialist theory, but were much closer to the old regime "charity workshops," public works to keep the unemployed from starving. Forcing the socialist version, the politicized Parisian unemployed found instead meaningless activities—digging holes and filling them up— for minimal pay. At the same time, employers were increasingly unhappy with these institutions. They saw them as encouraging the already considerable labor unrest, since workers could support themselves while on strike by taking jobs with the workshops.

To make matters worse, the workshops became mixed up with difficulties in fiscal policy. Coming to power in February 1848, the new republican authorities discovered a very substantial budget deficit, a result of low tax receipts during the previous, recessionary year. To balance the state budget—an action which even extreme leftists then regarded as necessary and appropriate—they introduced a temporary 45 percent surcharge on the property tax, the "forty-five centimes." Most painfully affected by this measure were small farmers, already burdened by payments on the debts they had contracted during the years of bad harvests and high food prices in 1845 and 1846. A wave of tax riots swept through southwestern France and monarchist politicians hastened to turn the peasants' anger against the Parisian workers, announcing that the
increased taxes were going to pay for supposed socialist experiments in the capital.

The political issue came to a head in the mass demonstration of 15 May 1848, organized around a traditional demand of the republican left—freedom and independence for Poland and the starting of a great European war if necessary to achieve it. Socialist slogans were absent from the event. This separation between political radicalism and the labor movement could be seen organizationally as well. The demonstration was an affair of the political clubs; the trade associations and their representatives in the Luxembourg Commission played no role in it. Workers employed in the National Workshops remained at work, rather than take part.

The demonstration’s organizers were intending, following Jacobin precedents of 1793, to intimidate or possibly to overthrow the constituent assembly. Their precise plans were unclear at the time and have remained so today, but in any event they were a failure, the demonstrators invading the assembly but turned back by the National Guard. The government retaliated swiftly, closing some clubs and arresting prominent figures in them, including the veteran revolutionary Luc-Auger Blanqui, the recognized leader of the extreme left. Under prodding from the conservative parliamentarians, the authorities went further and used the demonstration as a pretext to strike a blow at the labor movement as well, abolishing the Luxembourg Commission and placing Louis Blanc under indictment.

By late May, all the forces of the left in the capital, both the radical democrats and the socialists (remember the two were by no means necessarily the same), had been defeated, their organizations weakened or dissolved, many of their leaders in jail or in hiding. The government resolved to follow up its victory by abolishing the National Workshops. Now up to this point the workshops had been, for all their left-wing implications, a force for the preservation of order. Under the energetic leadership of the young engineer Albert Thomas, the unemployed in the workshops had been kept at work and away from the anti-government demonstrations. Thomas had banned socialist or radical political agitation in the workshops during the elections of April 1848, while encouraging propaganda in favor of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte.

Abolishing the workshops would complete the victory of the moderate republican government and the monarchist assembly over the leftists, but it would also destroy a key means for the preservation of public order in a city rife with social and political tensions. In view of the anti-government and disorganized state of the left following the fiasco of 15 May, the government might have succeeded in peacefully eliminating the workshops had it not moved to do so in a clumsy and provocative way. Characteristic of the authorities’ actions was their response to Albert Thomas’s objection to the proceedings. When he sensibly pointed out the dangers to public order inherent in dissolving the workshops and leaving 100,000 unemployed in the streets, the government hustled him out of town secretly, under cover of darkness on the night of 26 May.

The following day, when the unemployed discovered how the popular director of their program had been disposed of, they mounted large demonstrations in his favor and against the government. Over the following weeks, petitions in support of the workshops were circulated, and mass meetings in support of them were held, encouraged by the remaining, as yet unarrested leaders of the trade associations and activists in the political clubs. From being a force for order in the capital, the National Workshops had become the center of an increasingly determined opposition to the regime. The tensions reached a peak on 21–2 June, when the government announced that the workshops were to be dissolved and the unemployed would either be drafted into the army or sent to the provinces to drain swamps. Two days of mass meetings and demonstrations against this decision climaxed on the morning of the 23rd, when a group of demonstrators began building barricades. Within hours, they were to be found throughout the poorer neighborhoods of Paris. No one knew exactly how many people were manning them; estimates ranged between 15,000 and 50,000.

The republic born in the February 1848 revolution now faced an insurrection against it. The street fighting in June was far more bitter and violent than in February, and resulted in many more casualties. Unlike Louis-Philippe, the republican government and the constituent assembly were determined to fight. They allowed the insurgents to set up their barricades. These were then systematically bombarded by artillery, blowing up the barricades and a fair portion of the houses surrounding them. Once a breach had been made, the infantry was sent in, for three days of hand-to-hand street fighting. In the end, some 1,500 combatants on both sides had been killed, as had been the Archbishop of Paris, struck by a stray bullet while trying to arrange a truce. The forces of order, embittered by the fighting and quite out of control, shot 3,000 captured insurgents on the spot; 12,000 more were arrested, 4,500 of whom were eventually deported to Algeria.

Here was front-page news for the press across the continent, newly expanded and freed from the constraints of censorship, an event for everyone to know about and debate. One version of the events, widely spread in both conservative and liberal circles, saw it as a communistic rising of the lower classes, out to destroy authority, property, the family
and religion, seeking to loot and pillage, and to install anarchy and godlessness. Substantial Parisian property-owners certainly shared these views, cheering on the soldiers fighting the insurrection, and gloating at the firing squads for the defeated insurgents. Some 100,000 members of the National Guard from the provinces converged on Paris to help fight the insurrection: bourgeois hoping to preserve their property, peasants eager to settle with the unemployed eating up their extra 45 centimes in tax.

Oddly enough, there was one leftist in Europe who shared these views, if from a reversed perspective. Karl Marx, at the time of the uprising in the pages of the newspaper he edited and a few years later in his classic studies on Class Struggles in France and The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon, described the June Days as a colossal class struggle, pitting the working class of Paris against all other classes in French society—the capitalist bourgeoisie, the small property-owning petit bourgeoisie and the peasants. While noting that the uprising was doomed, owing to its lack of leadership and appropriate support, Marx praised the heroism of the insurgents, suggested that their struggle revealed the futile character of the democratic aspirations of the spring of 1848 and foreshadowed the coming class struggles whose end would be the triumph of the workers and the creation of a communist regime. Marx’s picture of a struggle between workers and property-owners destroying the initial possibilities of the 1848 revolution and bringing to an end the aspirations associated with them, while initiating a new era of class confrontation, became for many years a standard part of the account of 1848 given by historians from mainstream countries and of different political loyalties.

However, its validity is open to question. To judge by the occupations of those 12,000 arrested for their part in the fighting, the largest group of insurgents were artisans—either journeymen, masters or outworkers, the occupational records not distinguishing between them—and hence typical of the urban lower classes of mid-nineteenth-century France. One might want to call this evidence of a working-class uprising, provided “working class” is understood in the terms of the mid-nineteenth, and not the twentieth century. The enemies of the insurgents, though, were workers as well.

The regular army troops were reluctant to storm the barricades, so most of the fighting against them was performed by the Mobile Guard, a special militia created by the new republican government in February for the unique circumstances of the capital city. Unlike the National Guard, its members were outfitted, fed and quartered at government expense, as well as being offered a modest stipend. Service in such a militia would appeal to supporters of the republic in need of a job—unemployed Parisian workers for instance, the same sort of people who were employed in the National Workshops and were fighting on the other side of the barricades. Insurgents and members of the Mobile Guard were from precisely the same social groups. It is harder to understand the June Days as a workers’ uprising against capitalism, if workers were doing the fighting against the insurgents.

The background to the June Days also does not coincide with Marx’s concept of a class struggle, that is, of a situation in which economic and political antagonisms converge. In the spring of 1848, the Parisian labor movement, the trade associations and the Luxembourg Commission, had gone its own way, separate from that of the radicals in the Parisian political clubs. The clubs and the associations had not cooperated, had in fact worked at cross purposes, in the elections to the Constituent National Assembly in April 1848 and at the demonstration of 15 May. The series of defeats that these movements suffered, from the defeat of their candidates at the elections to the Constituent National Assembly, to the demonstrations of 16 April and 15 May, to the June Days themselves, reflected this lack of unity between political and economic mass movements. The desperate fighting on the barricades of 23–6 June 1848 expressed not the high point of a class struggle but the failure of one to materialize.

Most democrats of 1848 did not share Marx’s view that the June Days pointed toward future political struggles. Some leftists shared the more conservative attitude that the insurgents were enemies of property and civilization, and supported the authorities of what was, after all, a republican government, in their attempt to repress the uprising. Most saw the events as a grave tragedy, pitting a labor movement and a republican government against each other, and placing radicals in the capital city at odds with potential allies in the provinces. Helpless at understanding how two groups who ought to have been friends and allies came into such violent conflict, democrats across Europe expressed suspicions of conspiracy and asserted that behind the uprising stood the machinations of Tsarist or Bonapartist provocateurs.¹

Democrats realized that the labor movement would have to be more closely tied to the political left. In addition, to ensure that the radicalized lower classes of the capital city not be isolated from the rest of the country, leftists would need to consider the economic and social interests of other groups—unemployed farmers. This was the insight behind the formation of Republican Solidarity in France and the parallel efforts

¹ While the long arm of the Tsar of all the Russians hardly reached as far as Paris, supporters of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte were mixed up in the events and slogans in support of Bonaparte were frequently heard on the barricades.
at reorganization undertaken by leftists elsewhere in Europe in the closing months of 1848 and the beginning of 1849. The idea inherent in these efforts of a left-wing political movement was an alliance between classes would characterize the later phase of the 1848 revolution. Twentieth-century socialist movements, whether of the revolutionary, Bolshevist or the reformist, socialist-democratic variety, have also been successful precisely in so far as they have not relied exclusively on the workers but have organized supporters from other social classes.

Marx himself was too sharp a politician not to be aware of these differing interpretations of the June Days. It is generally not realized that, for a while during the 1848 revolution, he toned down his own glorification of the Parisian insurgents and moved toward the more widely accepted viewpoint. In a speech before the democratic club of the city of Cologne, of which he was a leading member, on 4 August 1848, he told his fellow members that "the denial of mutual concessions and the perverted ideas of the relations between the classes has led in Paris to a bloody outcome." A revolutionary movement and government stemming from it, he went on, would have to have representatives from different social classes; since the rule of a single class was "nonsense."

Whatever interpretations democrats made of the June Days, their outcome was certainly a defeat for the left in France. Following the insurrection, the government came to power in February 1849 was restuffed. The more left-wing of the ministers were forced to resign, the most prominent among them, the former Interior Minister Ledru-Rollin would shortly become the leader of the reorganized parliamentary opposition. The new head of the government was the former Minister of War, General Eugène Cavaignac, who had led the armed forces that combatted and suppressed the insurrection. No one could doubt Cavaignac's republicanism. It was a matter of family tradition, since his father had been a member of the Convention, the radical legislature of the first French Revolution in 1792-5, and Cavaignac itself had accepted setbacks in his military career, including hostility to monarchical rule. Cavaignac, however, had little sympathy for the ideas increasingly prominent in 1848 that a democratic and republican form of government would go hand in hand with the redistribution of income or the rectification of inequalities created by the market economy. He was a "pure republican" who envisaged a republic with a strong executive (the only example he gave, for example, that could secure the protection demanded by liberal social and economic principles. In most of Europe, people with these social and economic viewpoints were constitutional monarchists, seeing a truly strong executive that could protect property only possible with a royal head of state. While certainly not what Cavaignac had in mind, his accession to power set the stage for the emergence of another strong executive figure, with military connections, who would claim to be the defender of property, and a monarch as well—Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte. The June Days pitted workers against workers and republicans against republicans: the outcome of their struggle was the beginning of the end of the republican regime in France and its replacement with a monarchy that would make defense of property against ostensible socialist threats a main point of its rule.

Counter-revolution in the Austrian Empire

By late spring 1848, the Habsburg Empire looked like a hopeless case: the monarchy's northern Italian possessions in revolt, invaded by a Piedmontese army and largely cleared of Austrian troops; three different "national" governments in Vienna, Radetzky and Lombardy, each claiming sovereign authority; Polish, Romanians, Serbs and Slovak national movements aspiring to a similar sovereign status; a mentally incompetent monarch and his court in flight from the capital to the provinces; a state treasury completely bare. Yet by August, the outlook was entirely different. Most of northern Italy had been reconquered; the emperor and his court were back in Vienna and his government was discussing with a constituent assembly the future shape of the monarchy. While financial problems remained, the authority of the central government was recognized; only the Hungarians remained defiant, and steps were being taken to bring them back into line. This total reversal of the monarchy's prospects was the result of a series of developments, nowhere near so clear cut as the Parisian June Days, but equally significant as indications that the initial victories of the 1848 revolution would not be of long duration. As usual, events within the Habsburgs realm were complex and involved violent and peaceful political struggles occurring simultaneously in widely separate places. To provide some conceptual order in this political chaos, it would be helpful to consider some of these struggles separately.

Polarization and confrontation

As we noted in the third chapter, the initial euphoria in the city of Prague, capital of the Austrian province of Bohemia, at the overthrow of
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A confrontation, however, was precisely what the general and those at the imperial court who shared his opinions had in mind. On returning to his post, Windischgrätz took a series of provocative measures, including the doubling of military patrols and the placing of artillery on the hills surrounding the city. Radical activists, predominantly Czech nationalist students, responded with mass meetings and public demonstrations, demanding the general’s resignation, the withdrawal of the artillery and the handing over of rifles from the garrison to the National Guard, so that the citizen militia and not the army could ensure public order. A large crowd of demonstrators marching through the city on the morning of 12 June clashed with soldiers, and within a few minutes barricades were being built throughout the city. Street fighting continued through the 17th, in spite of efforts by the Bohemian Provincial Governor and commissioners sent by the government ministry from Vienna to arrange a truce and a compromise. In the end, artillery bombardments forced the insurgents to surrender.

Not surprisingly, the radical leaders were arrested, but Windischgrätz went further, imposing martial law, purging the city’s National Guard and subordinating it to the army, ordering the Prague National Committee dissolved, and sending home the delegates of the Slavic Congress, bringing that meeting to a premature end. A mixed civilian-military tribunal was created to prove that the uprising was the result of a revolutionary conspiracy; the court’s investigation, taking place while the city was under a state of siege, was not hampered by any liberal safeguards and was designed to preserve the rule of law. These measures, directed against the Czech nationalist movement, might seem at first an odd thing for a government determined to uphold imperial authority to do, since the Czech nationalists were also strong supporters of the emperor, their Slavic Congress, the reader will recall, meeting in a room decorated with the black and yellow Austrian flag and the imperial eagle.

The imperial authority they wanted, however, was one with a constitution and limited executive powers, not an absolutist regime based on the armed forces of the sort favored by Windischgrätz. While the Prague events were a triumph of absolutism over constitutionalism, there was more to them than that: they were a triumph of absolutism occurring to the applause of constitutionalists, owing to the issue of nationalism. German nationalists in Prague, in Bohemia, in Vienna, in the neighboring kingdom of Saxony, in the Frankfurt National Assembly, were throughout the German-speaking world, praised General Windischgrätz’s soldiers for their victory in the German cause against Slavic opposition. The struggles in Prague, as German nationalists saw them, were a major step forward in the creation of a German national state,
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regimes in both provinces. Unable to mobilize popular support for their program of an Italian republic, the radicals had no good argument against King Carlo Alberto’s armies.

More broadly, events in the liberated provinces went along the lines favored by the constitutional monarchists there and in the Piedmontese government. Suffrage was restricted to substantial property owners, as was membership in the National Guard. The rural lower classes in particular were denied any participation in the revolutionary movement, and their attempts to use the excitement as driving out the Austrians to gain access to forest and former common lands, or to improve their position against the large landlords — the latter largely sympathetic to the moderate version of the revolutionary movement — were quickly suppressed. While the Italian revolutionaries were losing popular sympathy in the countryside, General Radetzky’s remaining forces were mounting a vigorous campaign of terror there. On learning, in mid-April, that insurgent forces were stationed in the village of Montebello in Vercelli, Radetzky sent a detachment of soldiers to drive out the insurgents, burn the village and murder every man, woman and child in it. Revolutionary enthusiasm in the countryside faded rapidly under these circumstances; without it, peasant support for the uprising, crucial to a victory over the Austrians, as the veteran revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini had been asserting for decades.

Even without popular support and armed irregulars, the regular army of Piedmont-Savoy and its Italian allies ought to have sufficed to drive out the battered Austrian forces. But Carlo Alberto’s generals were reluctant to close on the enemy. While they waited, the Pope, in April, withdrew his support and his armies; in May, following King Ferdinand’s victory over the oppositional parliament in Naples, his contingents returned home to southern Italy. These delays not only weakened the Italians but gave Radetzky a chance to reconquer his troops and obtain reinforcement from the Tyrol. Austria’s conservative Alpine province. When the two armies finally met in July, the Piedmontese generals displayed such a breathtaking incompetence that Radetzky ordered his marksmen not to fire on them, since their commands were so favorable for the Austrians. At the decisive battle of Custozza, on 23 July 1848, the Piedmontese were routed, and Radetzky advanced victoriously southwards. Milan fell at the beginning of August and by the middle of the month a cease-fire between Piedmont-Savoy and Austria had been arranged, leaving both northern provinces in Austrian hands, with the exception of the island city of Venice, whose inhabitants, under the leadership of the republican lawyer Daniele Manin, defiantly prepared for a siege.  

The disastrous Piedmontese strategy seems more comprehensible when one realizes that Carlo Alberto and his ministers were hoping not to have to fight the Austrians at all. In spite of their boast that Italy would do it alone, they expected that the support of England and France, and the possibility of their armed intervention, would suffice to bring the Austrian government to negotiate the cession of its Italian provinces. The feeble regime in Vienna did make several moves in that direction during the spring of 1848, but, in the end, the government and especially the imperial court decided to fight it out.

British support for Italian national unity proved to be entirely verbal, but the outcome of the war posed a serious dilemma for the regime of General Cavaignac. Along with independence for Poland, Italian national unity and an end to Austrian rule in the peninsula had long been a foreign policy goal of French republicans. There were the memories of the great campaigns in northern Italy fought by the armies of the First French Republic against Napoleon in the 1790s; more prosaically, Austrian withdrawal would remove a Great Power presence from France’s southeastern border and perhaps open up the possibility of regaining the French-speaking territory of Savoy, that France had ceded in the Treaty of Vienna in 1815. At the end of July and again at the beginning of September 1848, Cavaignac and his ministers debated French intervention, coming within a hair’s breadth of starting a campaign that could easily have led to a great European war.

Rather than going to war, the French government limited itself to diplomatic protests. A number of reasons determined this position, but the most important was probably the government’s fear of the potentially radicalizing effects of a major war. The precedent of the early 1790s, when the war between revolutionary France and the major European states had brought the Jacobins to power and led to the reign of terror, weighed heavily on statesmen in the mid-nineteenth-century revolution. It was precisely this precedent that led radical leftists to call for war (think of the demonstrations in Paris on 15 May 1848), and moderates, such as General Cavaignac and King Carlo Alberto, to shrink from it. No Great Power ever came under the rule of a radical regime in 1848, willing to wage such a revolutionary war. The Habsburgs’ forces, many struggles against smaller insurgent armies were thus always localized, another factor allowing the Austrian Empire to survive.

Northern Italy was now in effect under a dictatorship of General

Radek. He began his rule hoping to gain popular support. Tradition has it that peasants disguised with the property-owning revolutionaries who had migrated in the two provinces since March 1848 called out on sight of the Austrian troops, “Hurrah for Radek!; down with the lords!” The financial exigencies of the monarchy quickly changed the situation. Radek was ordered by the government in Vienna to treat the provinces as conquered territory, have his troops live off the land, and extract their pay directly from the population. They did so with a vengeance, and although the general tried to direct their reactions against the large landowners, whom he held responsible for the movement against Habsburg rule, the organized and unorganized lootting quickly cost the Austrians initial popular sympathies. Young men called to the colors took to the hills and forests en masse; a sullen silence settled over the region. Attempts by some of Mazzini’s followers to begin new uprisings in the fall of 1848 were unsuccessful; northern Italy was subdued, held down by armed force, but deeply alienated from its Austrian rulers.

The defeat of Carlo Alberto’s armies had been a major setback to revolutionary forces not just in Piedmont-Savoy but throughout Italy. There were demonstrations in favor of continuation of the war, most prominently in the Tuscan port city of Livorno, which briefly fell into the hands of revolutionary forces, but all were suppressed by the authorities. In Germany, on the other hand, the exploits of General Radek were regarded as great nationalist victories. Opinion was more divided than had been the case with General Windischgrätz’s triumphs in Prague; German democrats, in particular, were sympathetic to Italian nationalism and were more likely to see in the events a victory of counter-revolution—a realistic appraisal. Constitutional monarchists, and a majority of the Frankfurt National Assembly, on the other hand, celebrated Radek’s feats of arms, seemingly unaware that their nationalist enthusiasms were cheering on the destruction of their own nationalist aspirations.

Toward war with and in Hungary

In August 1848, the imperial court returned in triumph to Vienna. The emperor’s authority had been re-established in northern Italy; Slavic nationalist movements had been neutralized or enlisted in the imperial cause. Much the same was true of the German nationalism; the Frankfurt National Assembly had re-chosen a Habsburg prince to be Imperial Regent, head of state in a provisional German central government. All that remained from the concessions made in the spring of 1848 was the Hungarian national government in Budapest. Court and central government in Vienna now resolved to revoke these concessions and destroy the
Hungarian government: the political scene in the Habsburgs' realm during the following year would be dominated by this effort. In the meantime, circumstances certainly seemed favorable to it, as the ministers and National Assembly in Budapest were having substantial difficulties in asserting control over their 'national' territory. Conflicts in Transylvania and the Banat, combining clashes between Magyar nobles and restive serfs and Hungarian against Romanian or Serbian nationalists, were continuously worsening, heading for civil war. Habsburg officials and army officers offered the anti-Hungarian regulars both covert and open support, as well as promises of further aid from Vienna. From the point of view of power politics, however, the most significant conflict within the lands of the Crown of St. Stephen pitted the Hungarian against the Croatian national governments, since the Croatian authorities in Zagreb controlled regular armed forces, the troops of the border regiments.

Painfully aware of this, the Hungarian government ministers attempted to resolve the Croatian situation in the summer of 1848 through negotiations with the imperial court. They attempted to gain imperial support against Ban Jelačić and the Croatian government by offering to send Hungarian regiments to reinforce Habsburg forces in Italy, an offer that was accepted but made superfluous by Radetzky's victories. This was a constitutional monarchist strategy, tying the Hungarian government to the fortunes of the House of Habsburg. When the offer was discussed in the Hungarian National Assembly, the radical minority angrily denounced it, insisting that Hungarian troops should stay at home to guard Hungarian national self-determination, rather than being sent to fight Italians attempting to exercise the same rights. The vote in the Assembly supported the government, and crowds, led by Budapest radicals, attempted to storm the parliament, but were narrowly turned back.

In related yet independent negotiations, the Hungarians attempted to conclude terms with Ban Jelačić himself.1 These negotiations proved abortive, since the Ban rejected all Hungarian offers, even for Croatian independence, insisting as a pre-condition for negotiations that the finances and the armed forces of the entire Habsburg monarchy be placed under a unified central command. Such a pre-condition had little to do with Croatian national self-determination, but a lot to do with preserving Habsburg authority. It was certainly possible that the Hungarians were negotiating in bad faith, and had no intention of granting Croatian independence, but Jelačić's reply shows the extent to which the man could be manipulated, the circumstances certainly seemed favorable as their leader was more than anything else a loyal servant of the imperial crown.

Jelačić would become the center of the court's and the Vienna ministry's plan to regain control of Hungary. At the end of August, they officially reinstated him as Ban and commander of the border troops; at the same time, they ordered the Hungarian government in Budapest to give up its plans for an independent Hungarian army. While no formal order was sent, word reached Jelačić from the court that it would look favorably on his taking military action against the Hungarian government. On 11 September, his forces crossed the Drava River, the border between Croatia and Inner Hungary.

This invasion brought on the great crisis of the Hungarian revolution of 1848. The Hungarian government was facing war on three fronts; fighting against it on all of these fronts were soldiers of the Habsburg monarchy, the nominal Hungarian Croatian head of state. The survival of an independent Hungarian regime and the constitutional monarchist project of a Hungary headed by a Habsburg ruler could no longer be reconciled. Radicals in Budapest realized that their moment had come. Mass meetings sponsored by the Society for Equality – itself meeting and acting in defiance of a Hungarian government order for its dissolution – demanded a revolutionary response to the situation; large crowds surrounded the parliament building as the National Assembly debated about the crisis situation.

Unlike many other such tense situations during the mid-century revolution, the crisis of September 1848 in Budapest did not lead to a confrontation between radical liberal capital city and a moderate parliament. Instead, the parliament made concessions to the radicals; bypassing the Hungarian government, it appointed a National Defense Committee, headed by Lajos Kossuth, the veteran leader of militant Hungarian opposition to Habsburg absolutism. Kossuth was himself not officially connected to the Budapest radicals, but he acted decisively to meet their key demand, the raising of an army to fight the invading imperial forces.

The final break between Vienna and Budapest followed a few days later, when the imperial government appointed Field Marshal Count Lamberg as special commissioner in Budapest and commander-in-chief of the Hungarian armies in Hungary – that is, of Jelačić's forces and of the Hungarians marshalling to oppose his advance. Arriving in the Hungarian capital on 28 September, Count Lamberg was attacked by an infuriated crowd, stirred up by radical activists, dragged from his carriage, beaten and lynched. The court and the Vienna government

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1 The reader should recall that the Hungarian government, claiming sovereignty over Croatia, had got Emperor Ferdinand (the official Hungarian head of state) to sign a decree, deposing Jelačić from office, but the government ministers had no difficulty distinguishing between legal claims and the realities of power.
responded by declaring the Hungarian parliament and government dissolved and by officially appointing Jelačić to replace Lamberg, thus giving the official government the war against the Austrian regime long covertly if erratically sponsored by the court. The constitutional monarchist government ministry in Budapest resigned, its policy of conciliation with the emperor completely destroyed, and power passed into the hands of Kossuth and his National Defense Committee. 

War between Austria and Hungary had begun. Against a scarcely organized army, it at first seemed that Jelačić’s troops would quickly occupy Budapest. They conducted the campaign as they would a border skirmish against the Bosnians, looting massively as they went. Infuriated Hungarian peasants resorted to guerilla warfare, threatening the invaders’ communications and supply lines. The meeting of Jelačić’s troops with Hungarian regulars proved that cattle rustling was really the formers’ forte. The Hungarians were victorious in several encounters in late September and early October 1848, forcing the Croatians to retreat along the Danube toward Vienna. The war continued and became more embittered on the other two fronts in Transylvania and the Banat, but the Hungarians had rebuffed Austrian efforts at a quick victory.

**The crisis of September 1848 and the Frankfurt National Assembly.**

Through the summer of 1848, Germany had escaped the large-scale violent clashes that marked the mid-century revolution in France, Italy or the Habsburg monarchy. Rather, the leaders of the constitutional monarchist majority in the Frankfurt National Assembly seemed to be succeeding in their program of national unification and peaceful reform. The major issue dividing them was the vexed question of whether the future united German state should include the Germans of the Habsburg Empire. Consequently, liberal parliamentarians, particularly the dominant figure among them, the Assembly’s president, Hessian estate-owner Heinrich von Gagern, decided to leave this most difficult issue for last, setting the assembly to work on first drawing up a constitution and declaration of basic rights for a future German state, before considering its boundaries. To lend additional authority to the assembly while it worked at this task, Gagern had it create a Provisional Central Power, an interim national government that had won widespread support in the mass meetings characteristic of the year of revolution. It also involved yielding to the tsar, regarded by liberals and radicals alike as the great enemy of political progress. Democrats in particular regarded the Prussian government’s
action as proof of the growing influence of the conservative camarilla on the king, evidence that he would rather have his troops fight with the Russians against the revolutionary movement, rather than against the Russians for the nationalist cause.

Throughout Germany there were mass meetings and demonstrations against the Prussian government's decision and demands that the National Assembly continue the war and expand it to a broader war against Russia if necessary. These were particularly common in the western regions of central Europe, including many in and around the city of Frankfurt itself, where the Assembly was meeting. The Assembly voted to condemn the Prussian government and to continue the war; for a moment it seemed as if the German National Assembly would take a course similar to the Hungarian one at the very same time, renouncing its alliance with monarchical authority in favor of waging a revolutionary war.

The German parliamentarians shied away from this, reversing their previous vote and endorsing the Prussian government's actions. Rather, deputes to the National Assembly sponsored an enormous mass meeting in Frankfurt on 17 September 1848, vigorously denouncing this decision. The following day, an enraged crowd tried to storm the Assembly and purge its right-wing members, in an action similar to the one in Paris the previous May. Prussian troops sent to refurbish this assault immediately alienated the politicized lower-class inhabitants of Frankfurt, who began building barricades and fighting with them. In street fighting similar to the Parisian June Days, if on a smaller scale, the insurgents were defeated by artillery fire followed by infantry assaults, although not before they captured and lynched two conservative deputes.

The street fighting in Frankfurt was part of a broader wave of demonstrations and mass movements throughout western Germany, including an abortive insurrection in Cologne, the largest city in the Rhineland, and a quickly suppressed republican uprising in the Grand Duchy of Baden. The result of the crisis was a defeat for the democrats, whose partly spontaneous, partly poorly planned insurrections were easily defeated. Both the provisional central government and the individual German states made suppression of the democratic movement a major political priority, attempting to harass or prohibit clubs and their activities. The crisis was no victory for the German constitutional monarchists either, since it brought into question their program of creating national unity via cooperation with the individual German states. How could such a program succeed if the individual states, particularly the Great Powers among them, Austria and Prussia, were increasingly coming under the influence of conservative court figures, hostile to the entire liberal program, including national unification?

Crises occurring within these states in the two months following the street fighting in Frankfurt would increase the strength of conservative movements and make the liberals' dilemma more painful than ever.

**The October crisis**

Nothing better indicates the complex interconnection of events in the Habsburg monarchy during the mid-century revolution than the October crisis, sparked by the war in Hungary that is by the attempts of the court and the government ministry in Vienna to assert their authority over the lands of the Crown of St. Stephen. It provoked a major challenge to imperial authority in the capital city itself and, to a lesser extent, in the non-Hungarian provinces of the empire. The outcome of the crisis would go far toward determining the post-revolutionary shape of the empire and to settling the fate of the German and Slavic nationalist movements within and beyond its borders.

The crisis began on 6 October 1848, when the government ordered troops of the Vienna garrison to march toward Hungary in support of Jelačić's battered forces. As the troops were leaving the city, they were surrounded by a crowd of Viennese civilians, responding to the appeals of the city's well-organized and active democrats. The Viennese radicals, having a low opinion of the strength of the Austrian Constituent Assembly, and its constitutional monarchist majority and mostly Styrian deputies, doubting its ability to stand up to the court or the ministry, saw the Hungarian government was the one barrier between the court and the return of pre-1848 absolutist rule.

The soldiers mutinied and refused to march, supported in their disobedience by many detachments of the Viennese National Guard. A mob seized the Minister of War, Count Lator, on the street, and hanged him from a lamppost. The court packed up Emperor Ferdinand and once more fled Vienna, this time heading for Olmütz (German: Olomouc) in Moravia. There, they were joined by the conservative and centerist deputies to the Austrian Constituent Assembly, and almost all of the government ministers. The imperial capital came under the control of a Committee of Public Safety, whose members were mostly democratic activists and radical parliamentarians. The radicals' rule was likely to be of short duration, however, as orders went out from Olmütz to General Jelačić's retreating troops, already on the way back to Vienna, to make the city their new military objective. They were to be reinforced by the soldiers of the Prague garrison under the command of General Windisch-
grätz. This was far more force than the insurgent Viennese could muster, and the insurrection's leaders engaged in a desperate search for allies. Hans Kudlich, the most active author of the proposal to abolish serfdom in the empire that the assembly had passed in September 1848, was sent out on a mission to raise the countryside in support of the radicals in the capital. There was support for insurgent Vienna in the provinces, only it was largely confined to the largest cities—Graz, Linz, Salzburg, Brno (in Moravia, German name Brünn) and to a lesser extent Klagenfurt—where democratic clubs had been formed. Radicals forced government officials to declare a state of emergency, raised money for the Viennese or sent armed contingents to join in the fight. Among the peasants, the Viennese democrats met with at best indifference, at worst outright hostility.

There was still considerable rural social discontent at the time, and in the mountainous areas of the small province of Bukovina, situated between Galicia and Hungary, a massive peasant movement against the nobility. Peasants did not connect this with the politics of the capital, though; some, prompted by the Catholic clergy and local officials, even denounced the democrats for opposing the emperor, the man they thought had abolished serfdom! Radicals returned the hostility, condemning peasant stupidity and ignorance, but Kudlich pointed out that the rural situation reflected the democrats' own failings.

In October [1848] we were punished for our sins of omission...the Viennese party of movement had only agitated in Vienna. It had built up the revolutionary explosive force to the most extreme levels but had neglected the hinterland, the provinces completely. There, the network, the organization, the clubs were lacking...[under these circumstances, Kudlich's attempts to gain support for the Viennese revolutionaries] disappeared in the great sea of indifference and phlegma.

The last hope of the Viennese lay with the Hungarian army. Paradoxically, the nationalist logic of the revolutionary Hungarian government discouraged intervention: an independent Hungary, after all, ought to have nothing to do with Austrian affairs. Finally, under Kosuth's urging, the Hungarians did make an attempt at the very last minute, after Vienna had been completely surrounded and besieged. They reached the suburb of Schwechat on 30 October, and were driven off.

The following day, Hamburg troops stormed the insurgent city. There was fierce fighting, second only to the Parisian June Days among major urban insurrections during 1848, but once again the combination of artillery bombardment followed by infantry assaults brought victory for the armed regiments and disaster for the insurgents on the barricades.

Leaders of the uprising were taken out and shot. The victorious imperial troops looted their own capital as if it were an enemy city conquered in wartime, which perhaps it was.

The conquest of insurgent Vienna marked a defeat for the German nationalism of the radical leaders there, but was also a rebuff to the German nationalist movement beyond Austria's borders. The Frankfurt National Assembly had sent deputies as commissioners to mediate between the Austrian court and the Viennese revolutionaries, only to have the court treat its intervention in the crisis with open contempt. One of the commissioners sent to Vienna, the Saxon radical Robert Blum, a leading figure among the Assembly's leftists and a prominent democratic activist, was captured by imperial troops, brought before a court martial, and shot. After the Prussian government returned this to the National Assembly's authority in the crisis over the armistice in Schleswig-Holstein in September, six weeks later the other central European Great Power rejected in clearer and more brutal fashion the Assembly's claim to the exercise of sovereignty over German "national" territory.

In a reversal of the situation in June 1848, Czech nationalists cheered the exploits of General Windischgrätz's troops and saw the events in Vienna as a victory for Slavic forces over German nationalism. This was a misinterpretation of events even more blameworthy than that professed by German nationalists after the street fighting in Prague. Once again, Germans were not pitted against Slavs, Windischgrätz's forces being ethnically mixed and the lower classes of Vienna, the bulk of those fighting on the side of the insurgents, including many Czech- or Slovenian-speaking migrants from rural areas, who had come to the capital city looking to work. As in June, the victory of the imperial forces was not a triumph of the nationalist movement but a victory over all of them and their plans for a constitutional Austrian Empire.

Even before the street fighting was over, the constitutional monarchist government ministers were forced to resign; their replacements, above all the new Prime Minister, General Windischgrätz's brother-in-law, Prince Felix Schwarzenberg, scarcely hid their intent to revert to absolutism. The Austrian Constituent Assembly was not immediately dissolved but was reconvened at the end of November, far from the turbulent imperial capital in the Bohemian provincial town of Kremerski (Czech: Kroměříž). The Czech constitutional monarchists, the leading element in the Assembly, quickly discovered how wrong their interpretation of the
fighting in Vienna was. Court and ministers presented them with a fait accompli when the parliament reconvened, the abdication of the mentally retarded emperor Ferdinand and his replacement by his eighteen-year-old nephew Franz Joseph. Coming to the throne young, Franz Joseph would reign for an astonishing sixty-eight years, his death in 1916 heralding the end of the monarchy itself. For the beginning of his reign, though, the significant factor was that the court decided, behind closed doors, to make him head of state, without consulting the Constituent Assembly.

This change at the very top signified the new state of affairs. The parliamentarians continued to debate a new constitution for the empire, but their discussions had no bearing on state policy, that was devoted to removing the last obstacle to the reassertion of imperial authority. An army of 70,000 men under the command of General Windischgrätz was sent to reconquer Hungary for the Habsburgs. It made rapid progress, and by the end of December the Hungarian government had been forced to evacuate Budapest. The Austrian Empire seemed to have survived all the threats of 1848 and emerged stronger than ever.

The November crisis in Prussia

Encouraged by the victories of the Austrian court, Prussia’s monarch, Friedrich Wilhelm IV, resolved in November 1848 to take a step that he had long contemplated and remove any countervailing forces to his authority. The main obstacle to his rule came not from the German National Assembly in Frankfurt, that had shown in the September its inability to challenge Prussian policy, but from the Prussian Constituent Assembly, sitting in the monarchy’s capital Berlin, and debating a constitution for the kingdom. Republicans were a minority there, as they were in Frankfurt and Vienna, but the Berlin deputies pressed their constitutional monarchism more aggressively than other central European parliamentarians. Their proposals that army officers take an oath of loyalty to the constitution, not the monarch, that titles and privileges of nobility be abolished, and that the words “by the grace of God” be struck from the royal title angered the monarch and were seen by his conservative advisors in the court camarilla as a direct attack on Friedrich Wilhelm’s authority—as they indeed were.

Early in November, the king replaced his constitutional monarch prime minister, General von Prittwitz, who had been striving to reach an agreement with the Constituent Assembly, with Count Brandenburg, a Prussian version of Prince Schwarzenberg. The new prime minister promptly moved 50,000 troops into Berlin, ostensibly to “protect” the Assembly from the danger of a republican uprising, in reality to carry out a monarchist coup d’état. Intimidated and surprised, the civic guard of Berlin and the city’s well-organized democrats provided no armed resistance. A majority of the Assembly voted to defy the king, calling on Prussians to boycott taxes as long as their representatives could not meet freely without military intimidation.

A wave of mass meetings and demonstrations in support of the Assembly swept through a number of regions in Prussia. Particularly in the monarchy’s southeastern province of Silesia, and its western province along the Rhine, this discontent took on more serious form, with attempts by demonstrators, usually led by radical activists, to seize government buildings and clashes between soldiers and armed insurgents or members of the civic guard. There were incidents and attempts at organized resistance elsewhere, but the capital remained quiet, and, in the end, the army was able to restore order throughout the country.

The government of Count Brandenburg then followed a somewhat different course from its counterpart in Austria. Rather than allowing the Constituent Assembly to continue debating, it sent the deputies home and issued its own constitution by decree. Prussia’s conservatives thus made a bow in the direction of the 1848 revolution, conceding that both estates and royal absolutism were no longer acceptable forms of government. The constitution, however, eliminated all the offending proposals of the dissolved Constituent Assembly and put few limitations on royal power as possible. Like Franz Joseph, the new Prussian constitution would have a long life, remaining in force until the end of the monarchy in 1918. While the authority of the court ultimately triumphed over the revolutionary forces in both central European Great Powers, it did so in Prussia by establishing a new constitution, in Austria by bringing a new emperor to the throne.

The election of Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte as French president

The string of violent defeats suffered by the revolutionary forces in the second half of 1848 came to a peaceful conclusion in December of that year with the elections for the presidency of the French Republic. Since the suppression of the June uprising and the appointment of General Cavaignac to lead the government, it had been a foregone conclusion that the Constituent Assembly would create a strong executive power; and an equally foregone one that General Cavaignac would put himself forward to fill the post. When both these eventualities came to pass, the election of General Cavaignac seemed a sure thing to virtually all political observers.

Neither liberal nor conservative monarchists put up their own candid-
date, and left-wing opposition to the general, if more apparent, was less effective. Following in the Jacobin political tradition, French leftists opposed the very idea of a strong executive power set against the legislature. The newly formed Republican Solidarity was still too busy trying to establish itself nationwide to take part in a campaign many of its members disapproved of, so that the three left-wing politicians who launched competing presidential candidacies could count on little organized support.

All calculations were upset by the candidacy of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte. The imperial pretender received the tacit support of the other French monarchists, who saw him as a stalking horse for their dynastic wishes, making him the candidate of all those political forces, the right and much of the center, opposed to the republican form of government. He also received a substantial left-wing vote from politicized urban workers, who had bitter memories of Cavaignac’s role in suppressing the June insurrection. Finally, Napoleon’s nephew ran fantastically well in the countryside, peasants of all political sympathies—and especially those with none at all—casting their votes for the man who would lower their taxes and bring back the wonderful days of his great uncle. Louis-Napoleon was swept into office with 75 percent of the votes cast.

While unique in his ability to garner support from voters across the political spectrum, as well as those outside it, once in office Louis-Napoleon followed an increasingly conservative political course. The government ministers he appointed were exclusively monarchists and under their direction the judicial and executive officials set out to suppress the political left, closing down political clubs, and banning Republican Solidarity in January 1849. These were not entirely different from the policies carried out by General Cavaignac, but the new strong man at the head of the regime lacked his predecessor’s republican principles. Louis-Napoleon’s election suggested that by the end of 1848 even France, the country revolutionaries throughout Europe looked for guidance and leadership, was turning toward the restoration of monarchical authority, if perhaps in the form of a different dynasty from the one which had ruled before the revolutionary events began.

The second wave of revolution

Many histories of the 1848 revolutions conclude in December of that year, with the defeat of the revolutionary initiatives of the spring. The account of seemingly uninterrupted setbacks to the revolutionary forces given in the first section of this chapter certainly seems to fit this interpretation. But this explanation also has its weaknesses. If the revolutionary forces were defeated by the end of 1848, why were there six more revolutionary regimes in Europe (five usually last)? Why did the spring of 1849 see a new round of uprisings, barricade fighting and small-scale civil war? The events of the first half of 1845 are only understandable as a new initiative of the forces of revolution, arising from the development of political organization and agitation occurring over the previous year. As a consequence of them, new social groups could be enlisted by the party of movement and it could act in regions less affected by the defeats suffered in 1848. Since counter-revolutionary political forces had also had the opportunity to develop and organize over the course of 1848, the second wave of revolution involved clashes between two fairly well-organized political camps. The elements of spontaneity and surprise, so characteristic of the events of the spring of 1848, while not entirely absent a year later, did not play the same major role that they had at the outset of the revolution.

New political initiatives

Even before the dreary string of defeats of the revolutionary forces had come to an end, democrats throughout much of Europe were preparing new political initiatives, based on their previous and continuing organizational efforts. In France and Germany, these efforts were largely peaceable or in nature, directed forward forthcoming elections. Republican Solidarity and its informal successor groups, created following its prohibition, looked toward the first elections to the legislature created by the Constituent Assembly. Held in May 1849, they produced a monarchist majority, but showed the existence of substantial left-wing minorities. As contemporaries said, a “red France” was revealed, in Paris and vicinity, and in the central and southeastern parts of the country, where the candidates of the “democratic,” the reorganized left wing, scored strong and unexpected victories.

German democrats and the Central March Association took somewhat different tack. Frustrated with the weakness and the right-of-center politics of the Frankfurt National Assembly, they turned away from it, concentrating their energies on elections to the parliaments of Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony and a number of the smaller states. They achieved results at least as good as, and usually better than, the ones obtained in elections to the Frankfurt Assembly the previous spring.

Events in Italy were more dramatic: organizational initiatives combined with mass demonstrations and overthrow of established govern-
ments. The movement was at its most radical in Rome, and it began in lurid fashion with the public slapping on 15 November 1848 of the Pope's constitutional monarchism. The revolution, following on the heels of the assassination by dagger might bring back memories of the days of the Borgias or Julius Caesar, what happened on the 16th was more significant and more in line with the politics of the mid-nineteenth century. Some 10,000 demonstrators, led by the city's democratic clubs, and including much of the civic guard, conversed on the Quirinal Palace, the Pope's residence, demanding the appointment of a new, democratic council of ministers. Pope Pius IX bowed to the threat of force but fled the city a week later, to exile in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, pronouncing anathemas on the revolutionary government in his state. The Roman revolutionaries responded by holding elections in January 1849, under universal manhood suffrage, for a constituent assembly in the Papal States. The elected deputies voted the end of Papal rule and proclaimed a Roman Republic.

The ramifications of the Roman revolution, as its leaders intended, were not limited to the Papal States but reached throughout Italy. Following the defeat of Piedmontese forces in the war with Austria, Italian democrats had gradually been developing a new political strategy, based on combining a mass movement toward national unification with actions to liberate the northern provinces from foreign rule. Their idea was to see the election of a national constituent assembly, a sort of Italian version of the Frankfurt Parliament, that could negotiate a government capable of resuming the war with the Austrians and do a better job of it than the Piedmont and the other Italian states had done the previous spring.

The new regime in Rome provided a basis for these plans. The Roman Constituent Assembly became the precursor to the planned all-Italian one. Giuseppe Mazzini, veteran leader of the Italian revolutionaries, who had endorsed the new political strategy, came to Rome on the creation of the republic there. The formation of a central committee of Italian political clubs in revolutionary Rome was another aspect of this idea as well.

The central committee, readers will recall, owed a good deal to democrats in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, who also supported this strategy. One of the more moderate democrats, Giovanni Montanelli, had been named by the Grand Duke to his ministry in October and had made the idea of an Italian constituent part of official state policy. But both Montanelli and the Grand Duke hesitated to go along with the anti-Papal Roman revolutionaries, so the Tuscan democrats turned up the pressure. After the clubs organized mass demonstrations in the capital city of

Polarization and confrontation

Florence in January, Montanelli resigned from office, more radical ministers came to power and the Grand Duke fled, leaving a second central Italian state monarch of a minority government.

While in the spring of 1848 the main struggles of the Italian revolution had been in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in the south, and in the provinces of Lombardy and Venetia in the northeast, the democratic initiative six months later began in central Italy and moved on into the Northwestern kingdom of Piedmont-Savoy in early 1849. The democrats were victorious in parliamentary elections held there, and government policy began to consider cautious rapprochement with the revolutionary regimes in the center of the country and a renewal of the war with Austria—once again, the main point of Italian politics during the mid-century revolution.

By February 1849, democrats could claim varying degrees of influence in four different Italian states—Piedmont-Savoy, Tuscany, Rome, and the city state of Venice, last survivor of the anti-Austrian insurgent governments of the spring of 1848. These four governments were far from a smooth cooperation. Conservatives and constitutional monarchists retained a substantial influence at the Piedmontese court and Carlo Alberto toyed with the idea of marching on the anti-monarchical and anti-Papal governments of central Italy before or while assaulting the Austrians. The Piedmontese and the Venetians, both on the front line against Habsburg troops, distrusted the central Italian regimes, fearing that they would get too close and no action when it came to the war. These latter governments, politically more to the left, suspected the northerners of not being revolutionary enough, and being willing to subordinate Italian national unity to Piedmontese dynastic interests. Yet in one way or another, all these regimes supported steps toward national unity and resumption of the war with Austria, common elements of the politics of the party of movement in Italy during 1848-9.

The new initiatives were least successful in the Habsburg Empire. Any attempts at a resurgence of the revolution there, even at resistance to a return to absolutist rule, would involve uniting previously mutually hostile nationalist movements, a difficult task in view of the feeble state of political organization, the subordination of many elements in these movements to dynastic and counter-revolutionary interests, and bitter memories of the months of often violent confrontation just past. Under these circumstances, it is surprising that any efforts were undertaken at all, and their modest success compared with similar initiatives further west in Europe is understandable. As was the case elsewhere in Europe, it was the democrats who were responsible for these new initiatives,
constitutional monarchs preferring to cling to both their nationalist
hostilities and the increasingly dubious chance of cooperation with the
imperial court.

One example of this new mood was the banquet organized by the
students at the University of Graz on 13 March 1849 in honor of the first
anniversary of the revolutionary barricade fighting in Vienna. German,
Slavic and Italian students celebrated a "festival of fraternity" in a large
beer hall, and then, joined by inhabitants of the town, marched to the
railroad station, to hear radical speeches denouncing the monarchy. On a
more serious level, German and Czech democrats in the province of
Bohemia began laying plans with radicals in the neighboring Kingdom of
Saxony for a revolutionary uprising. Frankly amateurish in nature, this
conspiracy is best known for its participation in it of two colorful and
dubious figures, the Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin and the
composer Richard Wagner, yet their presence should not obscure the more
interesting point that some German and Czech nationalists were willing
to put aside their mutual hostilities to confront a common enemy.

Potentially the most consequential if ultimately the least successful
attempt at reconciling conflicting nationalities came in embattled Hung-
ary. With its armies retreating from the assaults of Habsburg forces in
the valley of the Danube, late in 1848, the insurgent government faced
military disaster on another front in mountainous Transylvania. Partisan
guerillas, loosely led by Romanian nationalists, backed up by the Habs-
burg regulars (including many Cossack guards) of General Puchner, had largely driven the Hungarian national
army from the province. Fighting had been particularly bitter, involving
the burning of the villages of the Magyar nobility by the peasants, assaults
and murders on noblemen, and retaliatory arson and murder of peasant
villagers.

In desperation, the Hungarian government turned to a new military
commander, the exiled Polish officer General Josef Bem. Bem raised fresh forces,
including many Romanians from the neighboring Banat, and marched
into Transylvania, and in a series of battles during the late fall of 1848 and
winter 1849 subdued most of the peasant insurgents, drove the Habs-
burg regulars out of the province, and even defeated a small Russian expedi-
tionary force sent to support the Austrian government. Bem belonged to the
democratic wing of the Polish emigration; he sympathized with the
Romanian peasants' opposition to Magyar nobility. Trying to bring the
cycle of arson and murder to an end, he annulled defeated peasant
insurgents, and, quite exceeding his orders as a military commander,
tried with the idea of recognizing Romanian nationalist demands and
granting some form of autonomy to the Romanians in Transylvania in
return for their support against the Habsburgs.

For some of the more left-wing of the Romanian nationalists, this was
not an entirely unattractive proposition. Throughout much of 1848 they
had pursued a nationalist goal of creating a greater Romania, linking
the Hungarian provinces of Transylvania and the Banat, where the Roma-
nian-speakers were mostly peasants, with the Austrian province of
Bukovina, where the peasants spoke Ukrainian and the nobility Roma-
nian, and possibly with the two principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia,
on the other side of the Carpathian mountains from Transylvania, then
under nominal Turkish rule. However, these plans had gone badly astray.
When Habsburg authority was threatened in the spring of 1848, imperial
generals and officials were willing to make all sorts of promises to the
Romanians; the new government of Prince Schwarzenberg, on the other
hand, feeling more secure and increasingly determined to restore absolu-
tist rule, even more openly ruled out such concessions. Russian troops had
entered the two trans-Carpathian principalities and put an end to any
Romanian nationalist stirrings there.

Negotiations between the Hungarian government and the Romanian
democrat Avram Iancu, leader of the last group of unsubdued peasant
guerillas, were carried on sporadically, between April and August 1849.
The legacy of almost a year of bloody warfare proved too great an
obstacle: each side deeply mistrusted the other and neither was willing to
make decisive concessions. In August 1849, on the eve of the defeat of the Hungarian
forces by Austrian and Russian troops, the National Assembly
voted to grant Romanian demands for national autonomy and Iancu
responded by vowing that his forces would remain neutral in the conflict.
By that time, however, it was too late; both Hungarian and Romanian
nationalist and democratic aspirations were destroyed.

The crisis of the spring of 1849

It was fortunate for the Habsburgs that the revolutionary movements in
their realm were least able to reorganize themselves, because the cumulative
effect of the second wave of revolution in the spring of 1849 was above
all to threaten once again imperial authority, so painfully and bloody
restored the previous autumn. There were three components to this
challenge, coming from Italy, Hungary and the German states respecti-
vely. Each component combined military confrontations, diplomatic
maneuvering and revolutionary mass movements, although in different
proportions...
The Italian component was the most purely military. Pressed by the democratic movement within and outside the kingdom, the government ministers of Piedmont-Savoy and King Carlo Alberto increasingly felt that they had no choice but to resume the war with Austria. On 20 March 1849, they refused to renew the armistice of the previous summer and sent their forces marching toward the two northern provinces.

As the Habsburgs’ war in Italy was beginning again, their war with the Hungarians was taking a drastic turn for the worse. In a brilliant campaign, fought during the winter in the mountains of Slovakia, Arthur Görgey, the Magyars’ best general, had defeated the Austrian forces in northeastern Hungary. In the spring, he came down from the high country into the Danubian plain. Rendezvousing there with other elements of the Hungarian army, he attacked the main Austrian forces and in a series of battles early in April defeated them and drove them back toward Vienna. By mid-April 1849, the Austrian army and its Slavic and Romanian nationalist allies had been almost completely defeated on all three Hungarian fronts.

Future prospects for the Austrians in the war were not encouraging. The renewed military efforts were destroying what little remained of imperial finances. Attempts to raise fresh troops had led to conscription riots in the provinces of Carinthia and Bohemia, where young peasants, and townsmen, encouraged by the democrats, had refused to join the colors and had assaulted the recruiters. Troops had to be diverted from the front to quell these outbursts.

The final challenge to Habsburg authority came from the nationalist movement in Germany. Having finished writing its constitution for a united German state by the beginning of 1849, the Frankfurt National Assembly finally had to face the awkward problem of what to do about the potential state’s boundaries, in particular whether or not to include the Germans of Austria. The government of Prince Schwarzenberg solved its problem, by insisting on the unity of the Austrian Empire, and demanding that the entire empire—including Hungary and the Slavic provinces—be united with the German states. As everyone realized, such a union could not be a national state, or any unified state at all. It could only be a revival of the pre-1848 German Confederation, instrument of Metternich’s domination of central Europe, consistent with Schwarzenberg’s plans to return to absolutist rule.

This decision created an opportunity for the pro-Prussian constitutional monarchists in the Assembly, who supported the creation of a German national state without Austria, the “little Germans,” as their enemies dubbed them. Up until this point, the little Germans had always been a decided minority: deputies from Catholic regions and southern

Germany, suspicious of both Prussia and Protestants, had opposed them, as had almost all of the democrats. The clearest test of sentiment on this point had come in June 1848 when the Assembly had debated which prince should be chosen as head of state of the provisional national government. Archduke Johann of Austria had been elected by a huge majority, while one deputy’s proposal to name Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia to the post had been greeted by widespread and derisive laughter.

For their minority status, the pro-Prussian constitutional monarchists were a well-organized and politically effective caucus. They moved swiftly to capitalize on Schwarzenberg’s obstinacy by making a deal with the Assembly’s democrats, agreeing to their demands for universal manhood suffrage for elections to a future German parliament and a strengthening of this parliament vis-à-vis the executive. In return for this, most democrats agreed to support the little Germans’ proposal to make the King of Prussia the head of this new national state, that is to elect him Emperor of the Germans. The Assembly did this at the end of March 1849.

Such a step was in line with the constitutional monarchists’ program of creating a German national state in cooperation with the independent German monarchs and their governments. It was also, for the Austrians, a diplomatically threatening move. If the Assembly’s offer was accepted by Friedrich Wilhelm IV, it would mean that the military power of Prussia, the Habsburgs’ century-old rival for hegemony in central Europe, would be placed in the service of the German nationalist movement. The Austrians would then be facing nationalists combined with regular armed forces on three different fronts.

The outcome of the spring crisis

The situation of conflict existing in March 1849 between the Habsburg Empire and the three nationalist movements was resolved by May of that year, with the victory neither of the empire nor of the nationalist movements, but with the transformation of the situation into a conflict between a group of revolutionary regimes and the party of order, dominating each of the Great Powers of continental Europe. We can begin to see how this outcome emerged by considering the situation in Italy. The Piedmontese return to war was very brief. On 23 March 1849, three days after the resumption of hostilities, General Radetzky’s soldiers met Carlo Alberto’s troops, little improved from the previous summer, at Novara, and decisively defeated them. The hapless Carlo Alberto abdicated the throne in favor of his son, and Piedmont-Savoy was forced to sue for peace. This left the revolutionary regimes in Venice, Florence and
have been negotiated away. Had Friedrich Wilhelm become emperor of a
German state with a constitution similar to the one his ministers had
decreed for his Prussian kingdom in December, it would have meant a
substantial increase in the power of the Hohenzollern dynasty by means
of a favorable compromise with the most moderate elements in the party
of movement.

Prussia’s king refused to give a definite answer to the Assembly’s offer
for almost a month, before finally condemning it at the end of April and
announcing his counter-revolutionary intention of dissolving the
Assembly. Austrian pressure on him to decline the offer had been
substantial, but with the Habsburg court wondering if it would have to
even invade Vienna before the advancing Hungarians, accepting Frankfort’s
offer would have meant little risk. In the end, it was the king’s own
extreme conservative political convictions, strengthened by the counsels
of his unofficial advisors, the equally conservative court camarilla, that
brought the decision.

The news of Friedrich Wilhelm’s refusal to accept the constitution
sparked a mass movement in its favor. Throughout central Europe—
particularly in the southeastern, central and western parts of Germany,
there were mass meetings and demonstrations in support of the constitu-
tion. Members of the public as well as armed civic guards and army
reservists gathered and took an oath of loyalty to the constitution,
pledging to fight, weapon in hand, in its defense. Curiously, at these
gatherings held in support of a monarchical constitution, observers
noticed the presence of many red flags, the symbol of radical republic-
nists. Even more curiously, speakers at the meetings denounced Fried-
rich Wilhelm, their erstwhile emperor, as a tyrant and blood-soaked
murderer.

What was happening at the end of April and early May 1849 was that
the architects of the constitution, the pro-Prussian constitutional monar-
chists, were giving up on their efforts toward national unity, since the
Prussian king’s refusal even to negotiate with the National Assembly
ruined the plans for cooperation between the assembly and the German
monarchs. Steadily increasing numbers of moderate deputies left the
National Assembly and returned home. The movement in favor of the
constitution had been taken over by the democrats and would be
conducted in extra-parliamentary fashion. The demonstrations and mass
meetings for the constitution occurred primarily in leftist strongholds;
the whole campaign was closely coordinated by the democrats’ national
political federation, the Central March Association. As the left wing of
German politics came to dominate the movement for national unity, it
took on increasingly radical, republican overtones.
By the second week of May, demonstrations had given way to armed conflict, complete with the seizure of arsenals, the building of barricades and fighting in the streets. Most struggles occurred in the provinces and the countryside; capital cities, previous centers of street fighting, Berlin, Frankfurt, Munich, Vienna, remained quiet. One highpoint of this activity was in Saxony. Always a stronghold of the left during the revolution, the democrats, some of whom were already planning an uprising with Czech radicals, brought 20,000 people into the streets of the capital city of Dresden, forced the royal family to flee, and created a revolutionary regime. It was short lived, suppressed in a few days by Prussian troops, after street fighting in Dresden, in the familiar pattern of artillery bombardments followed by infantry assaults.

The revolutionaries achieved their greatest success in the extreme southwestern corner of Germany, in the Palatinate, the Bavarian province on the west bank of the Rhine, and, on the other side of the river, in the Grand Duchy of Baden. As with Saxony, both areas had been centers of radicalism during the revolution, and, also as in Saxony, the radicals seized power in both of them, creating revolutionary regimes. Crucial to the success of these uprisings was the behavior of the armed forces in these medium-sized German states. Rather than trying to suppress the insurgents, many of the Bavarian soldiers stationed in the Palatinate, and the entire army of the Grand Duchy of Baden, went over to them. It would require Prussian soldiers to suppress the revolutionary movement in southwestern Germany, and while these soldiers were busy from mid-May through mid-June 1849 putting down the radicals concentrated for a march on the southwest, the two insurgent regimes had a chance to consolidate their rule.

The rule of the insurgent governments and their ultimate defeat

The three Italian, the two German, and the Hungarian insurgent governments of the spring of 1849 were the closest leftists would ever come to seizing power in the mid-nineteenth-century revolution. All these regimes, from their very beginnings, faced the threat of invasion by the forces of counter-revolutionary Great Powers. Programs of social reform and political democratization had to be put aside; preparation for or actually waging war overshadowed everything else. This meant securing the authority and enforcing the rule of revolutionary governments for two main purposes: conscripting an army and raising funds to pay for it.

This task was least difficult in Hungary and in Venice, which had been at war with Habsburg forces for up to a year; at most, all that changed was the name of the government in whose name it was being carried out. The other regimes had to create their own governmental apparatus, especially as the state officials, left over from the regimes that had just been overthrown, were, at best, reluctant to carry out the revolutionary authorities’ orders. To enforce their rule, the revolutionary regimes turned to sympathetic political activists, members of local democratic clubs. The extent and activity of these clubs, formed in the political organization and agitation of the previous year, marked the limits of the authority of the insurgent regimes.

The governments would need every bit of that authority, since they were forced to take unpopular and openly dictatorial measures: the conscription of young men into their hastily organized armed forces, the financing of these armed forces by imposing special taxes or forced loans or by printing paper money, and the requisitioning (i.e. the seizure with only the most nebulous promises of compensation) of food, clothing, shelter, transport vehicles and animals for their armies. All these measures sparked resistance. Young men, particularly in the countryside, fled into the forests and hills rather than join the armies; shopkeepers and businessmen refused to accept the paper money, or would only use it at far below its face value; the affluent inhabitants tried every trick of delay to avoid paying the forced loans.

These conditions were exploited by the democrats’ conservative enemies, supporters of the overthrown governments. In the southern provinces of the Papal States, most devout and loyal parts of Pius IX’s realm, the Catholic clergy denied the sacraments to anyone participating in the elections to the constituent assembly called by the Roman revolutionaries. Following the proclamation of the republic and its ever more rigorous preparations for war with Austria, this discontent became more widespread and violent. One of many examples would be the villagers of Ginistretto, who refused to report for conscription, instead gathering at the parish church, ringing its bells, tearing down the republican flag planted there, and raising the Papal insignia in its place. Similar incidents were common in all the revolutionary regimes.

There was some talk of attempting to conciliate the disaffected, the democrats of Bologna, for instance, suggesting to the government in Rome that it gain support of the peasants by repealing the tax on grain and making up for the loss of revenue by dismissing all the forest watchers, “evil men ... of no usefulness or true service.” The state of emergency

* Cited in Domenico Demarco, Una rivoluzione sociale. La repubblica romana del 1849 (Naples, 1944), p. 129. In all the areas governed by insurgent governments, peasants – whether radical, conservative or apolitical – once again took advantage of the situation, as they had so often during the mid-century revolution, to raid the forests on a massive scale.
6 Revolutionary regimes in the spring of 1849
Polarization and confrontation

participated in the 1830 uprising against the Pope's rule. In mid-April 1849, he had sent a French expeditionary force to the territory of the Roman Republic, with a noticeably ambiguous mission: it was unclear if it was to defend the republic or suppress an opposition regime there against a forthcoming Austrian intervention, or to overthrow it and restore the Pope. The first six weeks of the force's presence were equally ambiguous. An assault made on the city of Rome was turned back by the revolutionary armed forces, under the command of Giuseppe Garibaldi, the latter beginning a long and glorious career as a military insurgent that would make him one of the most celebrated figures in Europe. The expeditionary force then turned to diplomacy, but negotiations between its representative and the Roman Republic on restoring Papal authority brought no results.

At the beginning of June, under steadily increasing conservative pressure, Louis-Napoleon issued his troops unequivocal orders to destroy the republican government in Rome and reestablish Papal authority. This created a crisis in French politics, bringing to a head the issue of French intervention in the ongoing wars between the insurgent regimes and the other Great Powers. Ledru-Rollin, leader of the leftist caucus in the legislature, denounced the president's action as unconstitutional—for the constitution included a clause stating that the republic would never use its armed forces "against the liberty of any people"—and demanded Louis-Napoleon's impeachment. Voted down by the monarchist majority, Ledru-Rollin and the other radical parliamentarians called for a mass demonstration in Paris against the government's foreign policy.

On 3 June 1849, the demonstration proved a fiasco, the 6,000-8,000 marchers vastly outnumbered by the troops sent against them. Most of the leaders were arrested; to evade arrest, others, including Ledru-Rollin himself, had to flee the country. The protest found little echo in provincial France, with the exception of Lyons, where it was strongly supported by the city's silkweavers who went from demonstration to insurrection and built barricades in their neighborhoods. The army was scotched against them, and after ten days of renewed street fighting, including the liberal use of artillery, their movement was suppressed.

The outcome of events in France sealed the fate of the revolutionary governments elsewhere in Europe. Prussian soldiers marched into southwestern Germany and, in a six-week-long campaign from mid-June through late July, defeated the armies of the revolutionary governments there.10 French troops, after a month long siege, captured Rome, restoring

10 Increasingly isolated from events, the remaining members of the Frankfurt National Assembly had fled to Stuttgart, capital of the Kingdom of Württemberg, hoping for support from the government there. Instead, on the news of the Prussian victories, the kingdom's government dissolved the assembly and dispersed the deputies.
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called "Erfurt Union" of 1850. Prince Schwarzenberg's government was having none of this anti-Austrian diplomacy, backed up by the tsar, it thought and won the war. Having missed the opportunity to co-opt the
major wave of revolution had ended with a decisive victory of the counter-revolutionary armies.

Epilogue: in the underground, 1849–51

The victorious powers sealed their victory over the revolutionary regimes with a subsequent repression. Several hundred captured insurgents were shot on the spot or executed after trials before military tribunals. Thousands more were brought before civilian courts, or forced to flee to Great Britain or the United States, finding no refuge from persecution on the European continent. If we neglect some acts of sadistic brutality—for instance, whipping Hungarian officers in the public square—that seem to have been favored by certain Austrian officers, the repression was relatively limited and, by the standards of the mass murders committed by twentieth-century dictatorships, quite mild.

Contemporaries, naturally, did not see it that way. They were visibly intimidated, and ever fewer dared to assert openly democratic viewpoints. One by one, the remaining left-wing political clubs were closed down by the police, and the democratic press suppressed. By 1850, leftists had been forced underground, conspiring illegally, maintaining loose ties with émigré leaders in London. They counted on a current of popular discontent and hoped that a revolutionary situation would soon re-emerge.

Politics remained an open concern for the center and the right at the beginning of the 1850s, the main question being whether government policy would be overtly reactionary, returning to its pre-1848 ways, or if it would incorporate some of the anti-Habsburg elements from the revolution itself. This was an issue particularly salient in the states of Germany and Italy; it was usually equivalent to the question of the degree of Austrian influence, the Habsburgs throwing their diplomatic and military weight behind a policy of reaction. Constitutional monarchists retained the most influence on government policy in the two traditionally anti-Habsburg powers, Prussia and Piedmont-Savoy.

Overall, the moderates could make little headway against the forces of reaction. The one major constitutional monarchist policy initiative was the attempt of the Prussian government to create a "little German" national state by negotiations with the other German kingdoms, the so-
different dynasties. Although Legitimists and Orléanists might have been able to reach a compromise, as conservatives and constitutional monarchists had elsewhere in Europe, the presence of the Bonapartist pretender in the presidency created a very different situation. Louis-Napoleon skilfully maneuvered in the years 1850-1 to present himself to the French bourgeoisie as the man of order, who would suppress the dangers to property emerging from the underground democrats and socialists, while simultaneously portraying himself to the common people as the friend of democracy, the enemy of monarchist parliamentarians’ efforts to limit the suffrage. All the while, he was using his constitutional power as commander-in-chief of the armed forces to move generals favorable to his ambitions to key commands, while sending hostile ones off to the Algerian desert.

By the second half of 1851, the tension in French politics had mounted noticeably. Presidential elections were scheduled for the following spring. The democrats placed their hopes in them, while for Louis-Napoleon they were a political deadline, since the constitution prohibited the re-election of the president, and opposing monarchist legislators had thwarted Bonapartist efforts to amend the constitution and allow Louis-Napoleon a further term in office.

The solution for the president was a coup d’état, to make himself first president for life, and, following that, emperor. Launched on 2 December 1851, the coup met scattered resistance in Paris, but the few barricades erected there were quickly taken by the army. There was massive opposition, not at the urban sites of previous insurrections but in rural areas and small towns where the secret societies called out their members to fight. Opposition to Louis-Napoleon’s coup followed closely on membership in the secret societies, and the insurgents, about 100,000 in all, marched into battle waving red flags and chanting slogans of the “democrati” left. It was, in many ways, a belated version of the second wave of revolution that had encompassed much of the rest of Europe in the spring of 1849, and it shared the same fate. The poorly armed insurgents, while able to take on and overpower the gendarmes and seize local government offices, were no match for the regular army, which crushed the uprising in a few days.

The uprising enabled Louis-Napoleon to legitimize his coup retrospectively, proclaiming himself the man of order, who had destroyed the red menace. With this final defeat of the left in the country that was the center of the party of movement, the European revolutions of the mid-nineteenth century came to an end. The reaction era of the 1850s began, and the hopes raised in the spring of 1848 seemed buried once and for all.

The mid-century revolutions in European history

The anatomy of a revolution

The origins of the 1848 revolutions are best understood in terms of the coming together of longer- and shorter-term socioeconomic and political causes. A basic precondition for the revolution was the gradual decline in property standards of living over the previous twenty to twenty-five years. To a great extent, this state of affairs reflected the decline of an agrarian-artisan economy, and its replacement by a more efficient one, characterized by a more productive agriculture, an improved market network and a growing industrial sector. In central and eastern Europe, these structural changes were accompanied by a gradual movement toward changes in those property relations, particularly serfdom and the guild system, that hindered the development of a market economy and society. While historians might understand these changes as part of a favorable transition, leading to increased economic growth and higher standards of living, contemporaries had no way of knowing that their troubles were transitional, that after mid-century things would gradually improve. All that could be perceived was the decline, creating a permanent and widespread discontent.

The harvest failures of 1845-6, followed by the recession of 1847, topped off and intensified these long-term changes. Starvation was avoided in continental Europe, although for the poorer, mountainous areas it was a near thing, and for those of modest means, already suffering from the gradual declines in their real income, the years of high food prices meant taking on a heavy burden of debt. The unemployment and falling price levels, caused by the recession and the rich harvests of 1847-50, made that debt difficult to pay off. The upshot was a chronic state of dissatisfaction, an essential background to the initial disorders and uprisings of the spring of 1848, but remaining throughout the revolutionary events and helping to explain some of the impetus behind the further surges of revolutionary activity.

There were two long-term political causes of the mid-century revolu-