

The Rise of Democracy in Europe: The 1848 Revolutions in Europe

*Osmund Mandiluli Kapinga,
Saint Augustine University of Tanzania, Tanzania.*

Abstract

The European Revolutions of 1848 were a series of political upheavals throughout Europe. It was the first Europe-wide collapse of traditional authority, but within a year reactionary forces had won out and the revolutions collapsed. This revolutionary wave began in France and immediately spread to most of Europe. Over 50 countries were affected, but there was no coordination or cooperation among the revolutionaries in different countries. The purpose of this paper is to describe the revolutionary upheavals of 1848 which swept across Europe. The specific objectives gravitated around the context which prevailed at the time of the revolutions. The reasons which prompted the occurrence of the revolutions were explored together with the course of the revolutions. The revolutions were wiped out hence justified the need to explain what prompted their failure, to describe the significance and contribution of the revolutions towards the development of democracy in Europe.

Key words: Revolution, Democracy, Europe, Bourgeoisie, working-class

Introduction

From February to April 1848 the conservative order in Europe which had been in place since the collapse of Napoleon in 1815 was challenged by a wave of revolutions which swept across the whole of Europe except Britain.¹ The conservative regimes were swept by revolutionaries and put liberal and reformist governments to power which were charged with the task of establishing new political order based on principles of civil rights and parliamentary governments. However, the revolutions were short lived because by the end of 1849 all revolutions had collapsed. On the other side these revolutions provided an experiment on the theory and practice of democracy and liberal politics in Europe. The 1848 revolutions provided a fascinating history of democracy in the way different forms of democracy which came in place within a very short period in the political life of Europe in a very short space of time and covering diversity of places.

In this context, we will try to deliberate on the reasons of the revolution of 1848 in the first part, development or course of the revolutions in the European countries in the second part, conclusions of the revolutions in the third part and contribution of the revolutions to the modern political mentality in the conclusion part of the paper.

¹ The existence of parliamentary democracy in Britain meant that it managed to reform peacefully. Example Reform Act 1832, increased suffrage, factory Act 1833 outlawed child labor, Mines Act 1842 prohibited children and women from working underground, British Corn Laws 1846 were repealed because they were unpopular to the people, Chartist petitions to the Parliament 1848

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Conceptualization of European political upheavals of 1848

There have been divergence views in an attempt to explain the simultaneity and regional distribution of the European revolutions of 1848. One of the views posts that, it was economic misery and the fear thereof that triggered them. This resurrection of the economic view of the 1848 revolutions is based on the high correlation between the geographic distribution of economic distress and political turbulence across Europe.² In fact, after identifying the countries that suffered a significant food-supply shock in 1845–1847, and discussing evidence of a propagation mechanism that prolonged the crisis well into 1848, we find that there is an almost perfect geographical match between economic crises and revolutionary activities.³ We also show that institutions, namely the existence or absence of a repressive political regime, while largely irrelevant to the occurrence of revolutionary activity, had a significant influence on the *form* such activity took: revolutions tended to be more violent if the regime was repressive.⁴

The other view holds that political factors were very crucial in precipitating the revolution of 1848 in Europe. Specifically this position identifies the spread of liberal, socialist and nationalist thoughts as a consequence to the occurrence of the American Declaration of independence in 1776, the French Revolution of 1789 and the revolutions of 1830 on the one hand. On the other hand the revolutions were a reaction to the authoritarian system built by the Vienna Congress of 1815.⁵ The third view argues that there were three factors which influenced the eruption of the European revolution in 1848 namely; overall discontent in Europe at the time, secondly the large tide of liberalism in Europe and thirdly the large sense of nationalism created by foreign rule and hopes of nationalism.⁶ According to this view political influence played very crucial in eruption of the 1848 revolutions in Europe.

The right way of understanding and explaining the revolutionary turmoil in Europe during the 1848 is by looking at the overall European transformation because the causes arose out of the dynamic processes of change that were affecting the whole of European society. The dynamic changes were accelerated by the impact of industrialization on the working classes and middle classes, the population pressure and the condition of the rural agricultural society, the breakthrough of the traditional political control and the general crisis of 1840s.⁷ The 1846 to 1847 crisis was most hard hit due to the poor harvests; trade circle went down better known as recession and financial and banking panic. However both factors can be understood as crisis of transition, part of the movement towards expanded industrial production and market oriented agriculture.⁸ This view is partly important as it approaches the issue from a broader perspective.

² Helge Berger and Mark Spoerer, *Economic Crises and the European Revolutions of 1848* Final version: October 2000:3

³ Ibid. 6

⁴ Helge, *ibid.* 9

⁵ Selim Kurt, "The Revolution of 1848 and its Reflections to Modern Political Mentality," *Journal of History School (JOHS)*, Hiziran 2014, Year 7, Issue xviii, pg. 359

⁶ Ibid. pg. 19

⁷ Peter Jones, *The 1848 Revolutions*, 2nd edition, Longman, 1991:10-

⁸ Jonathan Sperber, *The Europeans Revolutions 1848-1851*, 2nd edition, Cambridge University Press, 2005:pp. 1-6

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It is amplified by Eric Hobsbawm a British historian who appeals to the idea of dual revolution in which at the center he places the two revolutions;⁹ the industrial revolution which transformed and enormously affected the economy of Europe in the 19th century. On the other side the French revolution of the 18th century which influenced the political and ideological atmosphere of Europe. The French revolution provided the vocabulary of the issues of liberal and democratic politics for Europe and the world at large.¹⁰

The dual revolution perspective is much more objectively appealing because the two revolutions were basically the process towards affirming capitalism as a dominant and hegemonic mode of production. The process of transition to capitalism involved all aspects of the social formation. As capitalism was trying to exert itself, the remnants of the preceding mode and its tendencies were still clinging to the society. The absolutist elements, repressive tendencies, existence of peasantry in the rural setting were among the remnants of feudalism as the preceding mode of production. The dual revolutions had already unleashed capitalist tendencies within the economic and political spheres which can only survive in a democratic setting. It is therefore out of this process of transition from feudalism to capitalism the 1848 revolutions occurred. The demand for more democracy in the form of different freedoms such as parliamentary rule, freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom of expression, freedom of movement, freedom of trade, human rights, rights to self determination, freedom of individuals and new ideas according to liberal theories and ideas.¹¹ These freedoms are part and parcel of capitalist mode of production and to achieve these freedoms it is a matter of intense class struggle between the forces in the preceding mode of production and the incoming mode of production. To effect this change a revolution which involved complete change of the society setting was an imperative. This was a change whereby old regimes and their decaying and archaic tendencies have to be crashed and new revolutionary tendencies which are compatible to the masses have to be established to fill the gaps of the dying old system. It is within the context of transition from feudalism to capitalism that the 1848 revolutions are situated and hence the reasons and the course can also be explained within this context of transition.

Causes of 1848 Revolutions

Scholars have unanimously agreed that the revolutions of 1848 were a culmination of a series of crisis economic, social and political- which occurred in the late 1840s. Price suggests that it is useful to maintain a balance between the backgrounds factors the preconditions and the actual precipitators of revolution.

There are two sets of reasons

⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution 1789-1848*, Vintage Books, 1996: ix

¹⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, *ibid.* : ix

¹¹ Denis Richards, *An Illustrated History of Modern Europe 1789-1984, seventh edition*, Longman Group Limited 1977, 2006. cf. Kertesz, 1968, pp.77-79, Liberal freedoms as they are enshrined in the constitutional systems

Long term reasons within these factors there are those quite general ones which applied to the whole of Europe and the specific reasons were applicable to specific European countries. In examining the reasons for the outbreak of the 1848 revolutions it is useful to look at long terms factors which as pointed out earlier were embedded in a long much of transition process from the preceding feudal order to the upcoming capitalist order.

Economic and Social Causes

Industrialization

After the British industrial revolution in the 18th century¹² further industrial revolution was taking place in the rest of Europe in the 19th century. The use of machinery was introduced and factories and industrial towns were growing in order to accommodate the new technology. For example, by 1840, British production had tripled since 1800. In Belgium, it had doubled. France's industrial output had increased by 77% in this time.¹³ Although large-scale factories were not commonplace, industrial towns experienced rapid growth, although the overpopulated conditions meant that housing was in short supply, producing terrible overcrowding. The average life expectancy of a worker was very low and the inadequate sanitation led to diseases such as tuberculosis, typhoid and cholera

An explosive increase in population occurred in Europe between 1815 and 1820. This was due to the improvements in food production and the industrial revolution that had taken place in the early 1800s. The urbanization that took place also increased the population in urban areas, which led to almost all of the 1848 Revolutions being urban. Because of the shortage of land in the countryside, many peasants migrated to the towns in search of work. However, there were insufficient jobs and housing to accommodate the rising population. The large increase in population and poor sanitation led to outbreak of diseases such as cholera. The unemployed newcomers started to depend on charity or turned to crime as a source of income. This led to most of the 1848 Revolutions being urban rather than rural.

In the years 1845 - 1847, there was an agricultural crisis all over Europe: there were failures of cereal and potato harvests. This meant a shortage of these foods amongst the poorer populations of Europe. The shortages led to 'panic buying' of these goods as communication was poor between the general population and the government, who did nothing to help. Overall, the food crisis made the standard of living much worse amongst many across Europe. The shortage of food saw prices rise dramatically. As a result of this, people across Europe started to spend a greater proportion of their money on food. The shortages in turn, affected the industrial production badly. Production suffered a steep fall and because there was less money going towards industrial production, a financial crisis ensued. This was made worse by the fact that

¹² Herbert Peacock, *A History of Modern Europe 1789-1981*, 7th edition, Heinemann Educational, 2005:108. cf. Briggs, Asa and Clavin, Patricia, *Modern Europe 1789 – Present*, Pearson Education Limited, 2003, pp.76-111

¹³ Herbert. L., Peacock, *ibid.* 2005:108, cf Habsbawm, *op.cit.* pg. 44

European populations had decided not to purchase manufactured goods in the face of the food shortages.¹⁴

Political Causes of the revolutions of 1848

Conservatism under the age of absolute monarchies

The Congress of Vienna represented the victory of the old conservative order represented by an Austrian Foreign Minister Clemens von Mettenich leadership and policies. The Treaty of Vienna that was decided upon in 1815 can be summarized as a series of compromises made by the 'Big Five' namely France, Britain, Prussia, Austria and Italy with input from smaller nations such as Sweden, and those of the Iberian Peninsula.¹⁵ Napoleon was defeated and was replaced by Bourbons under Louis Philippe a conservative and repressive ruler. The victors at the Vienna Congress agreed to prevent the new forces of liberalism and nationalism from disturbing the conservative order. Above all the concert of Europe was a clear expression of conservatism. There was one specific problem with the Congress of Vienna which would start the tension that would later lead to the Revolutions of 1848: the general population did not like the fact that the leaders made all of the decisions. This began the rise of the middle class who wanted to vote. This was one of the factors that led to the 1848 Revolutions, specifically the one in France.¹⁶

The rise of liberalism which was unleashed by the French Revolution of 1789 gave impetus to the reforms of 1840s.¹⁷ The liberals were open to new ideas and were willing to discard traditional values. Liberalism also provided freedom of press, freedom of speech, and individual freedom. Liberalism attracted the Nouveau Riche and the emerging middle class (lawyers, doctors, teachers, engineers). Because of the freedom provided by liberalism, manufacturers, industrialists and merchants were also attracted to the liberals' ideas. Liberalism became a major force in France during the Revolutions of 1830 and 1848. Liberalism resulted in a number of important reforms in Britain by 1850 (e.g. Reform Bill of 1832 and repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846).¹⁸

Nationalism became perhaps the greatest force for revolution in the period between 1815 and 1850.¹⁹ In Italy, Germany and parts of the Austrian Empire the desire for the creation of a national state and national unification were also powerful factors.²⁰ The idea of nationalism was also spreading throughout Europe. Nationalists believed that if people have something in common, for example a common language, history, or heritage, they should be brought together to form an independent state. Nationalism appealed to literate, educated people such as

¹⁴ Hobsbawm, *ibid.* 169

¹⁵ Jonathan Richard Hill, *The Revolutions of 1848 in Germany, Italy, and France*. Eastern Michigan University, 2005:p. 6

¹⁶ Selim Kurt, pg.368

¹⁷ *Ibid* p. 359

¹⁸ Hobsbawm, *op.cit.* p. 42

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 120

²⁰ [<http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-Revolutions in Europe- Nature and Impacts Idea of History>. Accessed 2019

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professionals and middle classes. Nationalism also appealed to the Italian Risorgimento movement which eventually united Italy. Nationalism is very diverse and can be combined with other ideologies such as liberalism. Italy revolted against Austrian rule in 1830 and 1848. A revolution in Prussia in 1848 resulted in a failed attempt to unify Germany. The Austrian empire saw nationalist revolts by Hungarians and Bohemians. Greece gained its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1832. Belgium won its independence from the Netherlands in 1830. Poland failed in its attempt to gain independence in 1830-31

Socialism challenged the bourgeoisie for its maltreatment of workers during the Industrial Revolution. Advocated a new social and economic order based on equality.²¹ Socialism was an ideology that believed that the way the world works needs to be reorganized so that society becomes fairer. Unlike some other ideologies, social change was peaceful and tried to decide how society is run, as well as pressing for economic change in order to decide how politics are run. But they faced a dilemma: how would they achieve social reform. Socialism mostly appealed to educated artisans who were out of the picture once the industrial revolution took place. Communism was also one of the factors that agitated the middle class; they were angry with the aristocracy and their leaders and wanted the right to vote, especially in France. The utopian socialists in France and Britain, The Communist Manifesto of Communist Party by Marx and Engels was so inspirational to workers

The spread of ideas of liberalism, nationalism, socialism and communism by the liberals of the 19th century believed that the Parliament should have power in the nation; the royal family would no longer have power and neither would the church. They opposed the decisions made at Vienna because the leaders wanted to reinstate the conservative regimes whereas Britain and Belgium did very well with liberalism; they introduced universal suffrage. Italy, on the other hand, retained the ideology that in order to vote, you have to "have income, intelligence and power".²² In the final analysis liberal ideas of 19th century were instrumental in mobilizing the masses to rally behind the revolutionaries in executing their revolutionary struggles for bourgeois democracy which apparently is the requirement of capitalist mode of production.

Short term reasons within which there were those which applied to the whole of Europe and there were those specific reasons which were applicable to specific European countries only. In the kingdom of France the allied powers had restored Bourbon monarchy to power in 1814. They ruled France up to 1830 but the rule had little popular support. Failure of the conservative rule of Louis Philippe who ruled from 1830 to 1848²³ had generated growing discontent among the liberals and the republicans. This situation was made more severe for its corruption, negligence and misappropriation of resources.

²¹ Beginning with the Utopian socialists and later the theory was refined by Marx and Engels in the Manifesto of the Communist Party 1848,

²² HistorySage.com, Ideologies and Revolutions: 1815-1850 "The Age of Metternich" pg 1

²³ Peacock, op.cit. pp. 99-100

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In the Austrian empire there was repressive and oppressive government controlled by prince Clemens von Mettenich from 1809 and 1848. There were popular nationalist movements among the nationalist peoples within the empire especially the Slavs and Magyars.

The German Confederation, a loose alliance of German states was created in 1815 after the Vienna Congress. This confederation was created despite calls for a united German state hence the domination of central Europe by Austrian empire frustrated popular demand for a unified German state.

The Italian states restored the monarchies in all Italian states following a defeat of Napoleon. The northern Italy ended up being dominated by Austrian power. This situation aroused popular nationalist movement demands for a unified Italy and freedom from Austrian rule.

Course of the revolutionary events in 1848

In the early months of 1848, it appeared that the politics of Western Europe had been transformed by an upheaval that had no precedent in terms of extent or impact. These revolutionary movements spread to almost all the countries of Europe and the conservative regimes were forced to accept revolutionaries' man demands in social and political ideas (rights to elect and be elected, constitutional monarchy, individual freedoms, and human rights). The events by countries were as indicated hereunder.

France

Causes of the February Revolution

France was the first country in which revolution broke out. Metternich, an Austrian statesman, came up with the famous expression, "When France sneezes Europe catches a cold".²⁴ There were several causes underlying the French revolution, many of which were short-term in the weeks and months leading up to the revolution:

The Monarchy King Louis-Philippe was the King of France (1830 – 1848) before the revolution took place. Louis-Philippe was becoming increasing unpopular because of some of his policies. These policies led to the growing discontents among the liberals and the republicans in France.²⁵ The middle class had been emerging in Europe for some time, and it consisted mainly of educated people and professionals such as teachers and lawyers. The middle class had wanted the right to vote for a long time, but the King and his premier, Guizot, opposed electoral change. This led to resentment and distrust towards the monarchy.

Reform Banquets

Protests had been forbidden in France since 1835, therefore large reform banquets were organized where people could express their anger and views of the political climate in the after-dinner speeches.²⁶ On the 22nd of February, a banquet planned by a huge socialist party was banned by the government. The attendees were outraged and took to the streets. Minor

²⁴ Selim Kurt, op. cit. pg 168

²⁵ Resistance to the restoration of Bourbon Kings in 1814 by the allies.

²⁶ Mike Rapport, *1848 The Year of Revolution*, Little, Brown, UK. pg. 50

skirmishes with police began to erupt. Workers, who never could have afforded tickets to the banquets, began to set up barricades. The revolution had begun.

Events of the February Revolution were among the actions which constituted the revolutionary events. The February 24th 1848 uprising of the republicans in Paris had managed to overthrow the government and the abdication of King Louis Philippe. In 27th March second French republic was proclaimed by the revolutionaries. The elections were conducted in December 1848 with the following results.²⁷

| Candidate | Votes received |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Louis Napoleon Bonaparte | 5,400,000 |
| General Cavaignac | 1,500,000 |
| Lamartine | 17,000 |

In December 1848 a National Assembly was formed and the election of Louis Napoleon as president who ruled as Emperor Napoleon III of the 2nd French Republic. More liberal measures and revival of parliamentary institutions from 1860 to 1870 were among the steps to consolidate democratic government.²⁸

Austrian Empire

Causes of the Austrian Revolutions

The uprisings in Vienna in 1848 were different from those in Prussia because Austria was not exactly a German state. The industrialism in Austria created similar patterns of social change, growing bourgeoisie and the middle class. The real threat to the Austrian Empire was its multiethnic character. The Hapsburgs ruled an empire that contained eleven diverse nationalities: Croats, Czechs, Germans, Italians, Hungarians, Poles, Romanians, Serbs, Slovaks and Slovenes. All of these groups had aspirations for self-government and national autonomy because the government which was controlled by foreign minister Prince Metternich (1809 – 1848) was so repressive, autocratic and conservative. There was growing popular nationalist movements among the subject's peoples within the empire.²⁹ Grievances of the bourgeoisie, the Austrian autocracy was highly privileged class, an elaborate system of censorship was imposed throughout the empire were among the factors which prompted the outbreak of the Austrian revolution³⁰

Events of the Austrian Revolutions

The initial responses to the French revolutions were surprisingly mild in Austria: the original response was a group of students sending a petition to the emperor requesting freedom of speech and abolition of press censorship. In March 1848, a radical Hungarian Magyar group led by Lajos Kossuth began a vocal independence movement. Kossuth's speeches were soon printed in Vienna, where they started a sensation and soon an uprising. Metternich, monitoring the

²⁷ Peacock, op. cit. pg 118

²⁸ Peacock, ibid. p. 118, Revolutionary measures taken by the new government to consolidate democratic rule.

²⁹ Richards, Denis, *An Illustrated History of Modern Europe 1789 – 1984*, Longman, 2006:109

³⁰ Peacock, op. cit. pp.136-138

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revolutions throughout Europe, had become fearful. Lajos Kossuth addressed the Hungarian Diet on March the 3rd, requesting an imperial constitution that would give autonomy to Hungary.³¹

His inspirational and persuasive speech led to the passing of the 'March Laws' and the first Viennese uprising on March 12. Metternich resigned on March 13, fleeing to England. On March 15, Kossuth's Hungary was granted independence under Hapsburg rule. In March, the Czechs, inspired by the Hungarians, pressed their claim for autonomy. A delegation, headed by history professor Francis Palacky, was sent to Vienna to present the Czech demands - a package of liberal reforms and the unity and independence of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. Back in Vienna, Ferdinand went back to his promise for a constitutional assembly and promoted a constitution on his own, but it was not liberal enough to satisfy the radicals in the city. Vienna suffered a second uprising by students, workers, and members of the National Guard. The imperial family was forced to flee to Innsbruck, where they would plan their own counter-revolution. Vienna was in the hands of the revolutionaries for several months (May to October), but the imperial army remained loyal to the Hapsburg dynasty. While the emperor appeared to cooperate with assembly's efforts to draft a constitution, military leaders encouraged the Commander in Prague to drill his troops in preparation to take back the capital. In April, Vienna agreed to some of the demands made by the Czechs, including abolishing the laws which made it illegal for Czech speakers to occupy high office. It also agreed to establish a parliament in Prague. In June, the first Slav congress was opened in Prague.

Palacky wanted a federal constitution which would give the Czechs a greater measure of home rule whilst remaining under the protective cloak of the empire. Palacky had very little chance of obtaining what he wanted as Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia had significant German-speaking communities who had no wish to be ruled by Czechs. Nor did the Slav congress inspire confidence.³² The Czechs were just one Slav group within the Austrian empire. Mutual rivalries divided Czechs, Poles, Slovaks and Serbs, all of whom were represented in Prague. Unable to agree on a common purpose, the congress achieved nothing and served merely to reveal divisions within Slav nationalism.

On 12 June, riots broke out in Prague. They had almost nothing to do with the congress being essentially a protest by unemployed workers who were joined by radical students. The Prague revolution was in a real sense the revolution that never was. As few as 1200 people out of a population of 100,000 were involved.³³ General Windischgraetz, a commander of the imperial army in Prague, seized the opportunity to stop the revolution. Within five days the uprising was subdued. Most Austrian-Germans felt little sympathy for the Czech rebels and were pleased that the Prague revolt and the forcible closure of the Slav congress proved to be a decisive turning point in the history of the 1848 revolutions in the Hapsburg Empire. The summer of 1848 in Vienna was tense. There were several rival centers of power. Oddly, government ministers thought claiming control over other nationalities had limited influence. A committee of Public Safety set up in May had more authority: it aimed to safeguard the reforms that had already been

³¹ Denis, *ibid.* 110 cf 2008 Mike Rapport, *1848 The Year of Revolution*, Little, Brown, UK. pg 72

³² Rapport, *op. cit.* P.144

³³ Habsbawn, *op. cit.* p.143

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secured and to maintain order.³⁴ Emulating France, it set up national workshops which were supposed to provide useful work with pay. In June and August, further worker protests were suppressed by the National Guard.

An imperial parliament met in July but found it hard to work together, since real power laid with the army. Emperor Ferdinand returned to Vienna in August feeling that the worst of the revolution was over, but he had miscalculated. Jelacic, the Governor of Croatia, invaded Hungary with a Croat army. On the 3rd of October, the March Laws were pronounced illegal and the Hungarian Diet was dissolved.³⁵ Kossuth declared that the revolution was in danger and he called on all of the emperor's opponents to act together to save the cause. Most Austrians had little sympathy with the Hungarians. However, radicals in Vienna sought to prevent soldiers being sent to Hungary to aid Jelacic. Fighting broke out and there were some casualties. Workers and students seized control of the inner city and an angry mob marched on the Ministry of War, brutally murdering the minister, Count Latour. The royal family fled once again, this time to Olmutz. Windischgraetz and his 100,000 troops were sent to deal with the third Viennese uprising and the city was finally liberated in late October. Over 2000 people were killed during the October Days and the rebel leaders were rounded up and shot.

Conclusions of the Austrian Revolutions

Emperor Ferdinand abdicated in favor of his nephew, Francis Joseph, in December. The new Emperor was determined to follow a policy of monarchial absolutism. When the imperial parliament eventually presented a constitution in March 1849 it was ignored. Hungary proved to be the most difficult region to subdue. In April 1849, Kossuth proclaimed the Hapsburg dynasty deposed and Hungary totally independent. Austria requested Russian military assistance in May and Hungary was defeated in August. Kossuth escaped into permanent exile but some 100 Hungarians were executed and 2000 were imprisoned. By 1849, the Austrian empire had emerged from the months of turmoil with a strengthened political leadership and all its territories intact.

In March 13th 1848 the revolutionaries staged an uprising in Vienna which sent Metternich to panic and forced to resign and he ended into exile.³⁶ The government was eventually overthrown. In the series of the revolutionary crusade, in April 13th 1848 the Hungarian Republic was proclaimed by Hungarian independence fighters.³⁷

1848–1849: Internal war Austria versus Hungary and Slavic states; nationalist rebellions suppressed in 1848: Abdication of Emperor Ferdinand I in favor of Francis Joseph (rules to 1916); vigorously repressive regime. Increased hatred of Austrian rule in Hungary 1867: Recognition of Hungarian equality in Ausgleich (Compromise) agreement.

³⁴ Rapport, op.cit. p. 81

³⁵ Ibid. p.161

³⁶ Peacock, op.cit. pg. 141

³⁷ Peacock, op.cit. pp. 149-154

German Confederation

The creation of the German Confederation – a loose alliance of German states, despite calls for a unified German state created conditions for revolts. Revolts started in order to achieve more liberal rights, but the goals were soon replaced with nationalistic sentiments. The Constituent Assembly, under the direction of 800 delegates from the German states, offered Frederick William IV, King of Prussia, the crown of a unified Germany. However, this movement failed as well, as the Constituent Assembly had no actual power and Frederick would not accept a crown "from the gutter". Prussian troops put down revolts in Berlin as well as other revolts throughout Germany. Domination of central Europe by Austrian Empire frustrated popular demands for a united German state.

Course of revolutionary activities in Germany

After the French revolutions in France, there were many minor riots in German states, Austria and Prussia expected to crush these revolts as they were the two biggest states, but the revolution in Vienna led to the fall of Metternich. Prussia was also affected by the Berlin riots. Like other European states German was heavily affected by economic crisis in its cities. The crisis was characterized by two distinct features. The first one was material distress resulting from crop failures in the countryside. Consequently, in 1847 there were bread riots Stuttgart and Ulm, and violence in Berlin which was triggered by the shortage of potatoes. Secondly, German urban revolts were fuelled by the frustration among the traditional artisans who had been under pressure of mechanized production before the depression of 1846-7 hit them. The combination of all these economic factors was in some cases catastrophic.³⁸

Political tensions existed in the states of German Confederation before 1848. Much remained to be done in German which have been achieved in France a generation before.³⁹ Agatha Ramm wrote, that before 1848 Germany 'was a country where to have a political opinion was difficult, to express it almost impossible, and to join with others to promote it, conspiracy punishable by the heaviest prison sentences.'⁴⁰ There was a view that there was much personal unfitness of the rulers of the German principalities.⁴¹ Like his father, Frederick William IV was opposed to giving the people a constitution. As a result on March 1848, there was a demonstration by workers in the palace square in Berlin. Students and workers set up barricades and serious fighting broke out outside the palace.

At least 300 rioters were killed as troops took control of the city. The King agreed to withdraw the troops if the barricades were removed and set up a Prussian Assembly. King Fredrick William IV was forced to promise a new constitution.⁴² The elected radical revolutionaries wanted to unite the German states in order to create a country that could rival Russia. The

³⁸ The Revolutions of 1848 and 1849 in Germany

³⁹ Agatha Ramm, *Germany 1789-1919: a Political History* (1968), 517

⁴⁰ Agatha Ramm, *ibid*

⁴¹ A.J.P. Taylor, *The Course of German History*, 1945:15

⁴² Peacock, *op.cit.* pg 155

Assembly also wanted to grant Polish people in Germany self-government. The King did not like this at all; he decided that the democratic experiment had gone on long enough and dissolved the Prussian Assembly.

The Frankfurt Parliament

The 1848 revolutions inspired a nationalist movement in Germany. In May 1848, a group of German nationalists met at the Frankfurt Parliament. German liberals were overjoyed and the assembly decided that there would be universal suffrage and delegates from mostly the middle class. This Assembly wanted to create a united Germany that was liberal and constitutionally governed. They argued over various topics, such as whether the new Germany would have a Prussian or Austrian ruler.

In December 1848, the Frankfurt Parliament released the declaration, based on similar declarations made in France and the United States. The German declaration ignored the universal rights of mankind, focusing purely on Germany. In 1849, Germany was given to Frederick William IV. He coveted the territory but knew that acceptance would lead to a war with Austria. Frederick William refused the Crown because he thought the offer should come from fellow kings and princes of the Germanic states, rather than from representatives of the states in the Frankfurt Parliament. Frederick William thought there were vital issues which were not totally sorted out by the Parliament.

Conclusions of the German Revolutions ended into *Declaration of Rights of the German People*; however, there was little popular support for change as Prussia was already quite prosperous. In the end, force and military strength decided the outcome of the revolution. The alliance between the liberals and democrats didn't last, many intelligent liberals left and conservatives held their ground. In May 18th, 1848 a National Assembly met in Frankfurt to discuss unification of Germany. In 1848 there were reformed constitutions in many Germanic states, in Bavaria, king Ludwig abdicated and his successor, Maximilian accepted principle of constitutional assembly and as well as ministerial responsibility, a jury system and free press. In Baden all feudal obligations were abolished and in Württemberg the king denounced his hunting rights.⁴³ All these states were represented in the National Assembly. Failure of National Assembly to implement Prussian plan for German unification because of Austrian objections but Prussia becomes center of German hopes for unification. Austria is no longer dominant in German Confederation until 1871 when Unification of Germany was made possible by Prussian landowning Junker class under chancellor Otto von Bismarck.⁴⁴

Italian States

Restoration of monarchies in all Italian states following defeat of Napoleon, Austrian domination of northern Italy and popular nationalist movements were among the pressing reasons for the outbreak of revolution.

⁴³ Op. cit. The Revolutions of 1848 and 1849 in Germany

⁴⁴ *ibid.* The Revolutions of 1848 and 1849 in Germany

In 1848, a series of events led to either the expulsion of Austrian troops or the granting of political concessions in many Italian states. These revolutions were caused by a number of factors. The large sense of nationalism created by foreign rule and by hopes of unification.⁴⁵ The desire to free Italy from the influence and control of the Austrian Empire was one of the major reasons. While the second reason for the outbreak of revolution was the need to unify Italy into a united and independent state. Although Charles Albert (1798-1849) and the armies of Piedmont proved that it was possible for Italians to stand up to the Austrians, accomplishing the second half of this agenda proved to be much more difficult.⁴⁶ Italian nationalists dreamed of a united Italy and opposed Austria's presence in Italy.

There was a general demand for more liberal forms of government. The writings of Mazzini and the actions of the Young Italy movement began to make an impact, especially among intellectuals. Mazzini's call for the removal of the Austrians and the forming of an Italian Republic appealed to many especially in the middle to late 1840s with so much happening in the rest of Europe.

Grave economic difficulties resulted in social conflict in both towns and the countryside. Food costs were quickly rising. In addition, the whole of Europe was experiencing an economic recession, leaving thousands without jobs or a way to purchase the already expensive food stuffs. Those who were hit hardest were those in the working class whose survival was directly linked to their ability to buy food.⁴⁷

Revolutionary Activities in Italy

March 18-22, 1848 there was revolutionary uprising in Milan by the Italian independence fighters leading to the retreat of Austrian forces of occupation. In March 22 1848 the kingdom of Piedmont declared war of independence against the Austrian armies of occupation.⁴⁸ Events in Sicily On 12th January 1848, rebels in Palermo defeated Ferdinand II's (Sicilian) troops. The King was forced to accept the 1812 constitution and to extend it to Naples and grant an amnesty to political prisoners. Between January and April 1848, revolutionaries seized control of Sicily. Their main aim was to secure independence from Naples. A deceleration to this effect was proclaimed in March 1848. However, Sicily was forcibly reunited with Naples in the spring of 1849. In t pg 21he Sicilian uprising, the revolutionaries, as well as revolting against the misrule of their leader, were revolting against the repressive society in which they lived, and demanded the installation of the liberal and democratic 1812 constitution.⁴⁹

Insurrection in Palermo, Sicily, spreads to the mainland and the King of the Two Sicilies was forced to grant a constitution. The 1848–1849 War in northern Italy ended in defeat of

⁴⁵ CivFanatics Forums, The Causes of the 1848 Revolution, Accessed on 6/29/2018, p.1

⁴⁶ Jonathan Richard Hill, *Revolutions of 1848 in Germany, Italy, and France* Eastern Michigan University, 2005:

⁴⁷ Hill, *ibid.* p. 21

⁴⁸ Jonathan Richard Hill, *ibid.* pp. 174-176

⁴⁹ CivFanatics Forums, *op. cit.* 2

republicans by Austria; only Kingdom of Piedmont retains a liberal constitution. Piedmont becomes center of Italian hopes for unification. Despite the noble effort and feelings of many Italians the Revolution of 1848 in Italy was not cohesive enough to achieve its goals.⁵⁰

Revolutions in Other European nations

Many other states were involved in the revolutionary movements in one way or another. These were Denmark, Hapsburg Empire, Sweden, Switzerland, Great Poland, Ireland, Portugal, and Spain, to name some few.

Sweden

During 18–19 March, a series of riots known as the March Unrest (*Marsoroligheterna*) took place in the Swedish capital of Stockholm. Declarations with demands of political reform were spread in the city and a crowd was dispersed by the military, leading to 18 casualties.

Switzerland

Switzerland, already an alliance of republics, also saw an internal struggle. The attempted secession of seven Swiss cantons to form an alliance known as the *Sonderbund* ("separate alliance") in 1845 led to a short civil conflict in November 1847 in which around 100 people were killed.⁵¹ The *Sonderbund* was decisively defeated, and a new constitution of 1848 ended the attempted secession.

Belgium

Belgium did not see major unrest in 1848, although numerous small-scale confrontations did occur. A number of local riots broke out, concentrated in the *sillon industriel* industrial region of the provinces of Liège and Hainaut. The most serious threat of revolutionary contagion was posed by Belgian émigré groups from France. Shortly after the revolution in France, Belgian migrant workers living in Paris were encouraged to return to Belgium to overthrow the monarchy and establish a republic. Karl Marx was himself expelled from Brussels in early March on accusations of having used part of his inheritance to arm Belgian revolutionaries.

Around 6,000 armed émigrés of the "Belgian Legion" attempted to cross the Belgian frontier. There were two divisions which were formed. The first group, travelling by train, were stopped and quickly disarmed at Quiévrain on 26 March 1848. The second group crossed the border on 29 March and headed for Brussels. They were confronted by Belgian troops at the hamlet of Risquons-Tout and defeated. Several smaller groups managed to infiltrate Belgium, but the reinforced Belgian border troops were successful and the defeat at Risquons-Tout effectively ended the revolutionary threat to Belgium.⁵² The situation in Belgium began to recover that

⁵⁰ Jonathan Richard Hill, op. cit. p.31

⁵¹ Rapport, op. cit. p. 117

⁵² Habsbawn, op. cit. p. 306

summer after a good harvest, and fresh elections returned a strong majority to the governing party.

Effects of the 1848 revolutionary movement

“We have been beaten and humiliated ... scattered, imprisoned, disarmed and gagged. The fate of European democracy has slipped from our hands.”

— Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

A movement of 1848 had brought about relatively little lasting change with exception of France where a second republic was erected. In part, this was due to the incoherence of the ‘revolutionary’ groups. The political interests of middle-class liberals rarely coincided with the more fundamental, material requirements of unemployed workers. It had often been possible for liberals in one state to establish common ground with those in neighboring states in terms of their constitutional demands. Yet, in 1848, this community of political interests was often cancelled out by conflicts between the nationalist demands that often accompanied progressive constitutional ideas. The most important element of all in the failure of the revolutions lay in the enduring strength of the governmental systems that they appeared to have overthrown. The traditional forces; the monarchy, the aristocracy, and the regular army recovered their nerve and, reasserted their authority and took back many though not all of the concessions.⁵³ The economic crises affected the populations of Europe far more seriously than they affected the regimes. These retained the resources, and in particular the military strength, to survive. Above all, while individuals such as Metternich abandoned their posts, the governing classes, in general, still had the will to survive. In such men as Franz Josef in Austria, they found new leaders, who were largely willing to preserve the political bases of the pre-1848 regimes.⁵⁴

The revolutions did leave behind certain achievements. Prussia retained its constitutions that its rulers could not easily ignore. Feudal obligations were abolished in parts of Eastern Europe, never to return. In Hungary for example the revolutionaries demanded among other things, that serfdom and nobles’ privileges should be abolished and a constitutional system established. In March and April 1848 a series of laws were (the March and April Laws) were carried through the parliament establishing the main reforms demanded by the revolutionaries.⁵⁵

After many years of living in fear of liberal revolt, the conservatives had now confronted it and survived. It was the conservatives, rather than the liberals, who emerged strengthened by the ‘Year of Revolutions’. The liberal and nationalistic revolutions of 1848 were abortive. Political, economic, and social pressures that had been building since 1815 exploded dramatically, but very few revolutionary goals were realized. The moderate nationalistic middle class were not able to

⁵³ McKay, John P et. al. op. cit. p. 827. This happened in France, in Austria, in Germany and Italy.

⁵⁴ Peacock, op. cit. 141

⁵⁵ Denis Richards *An Illustrated History of Modern Europe 1789-1984, seventh edition*, Longman Group Limited 1977, 2006:111

consolidate their initial victories or elsewhere in Europe. The age of romantic revolution was over.⁵⁶

There can be little doubt that the events of 1848–49 brought profound disappointment for liberals and nationalists across Europe, yet their causes did not perish. Hungarian nationalists, also, proved too influential to be ignored by an imperial regime that had learned few lessons from the events of 1848. In terms of purely political power, European liberals had less cause for satisfaction 20 or 30 years on. Their economic agenda, however, had proved less easy to ignore. There can be little serious doubt, therefore, that the would-be revolutionaries of 1848 acted prematurely and sought to exploit a ‘revolutionary situation’ that did not really exist. The events of this ‘year of revolutions’, on the other hand, provided a clear indication of the evolutionary direction that European politics were following.

Lessons from the 1848 Revolutions

The 1848 revolutions had some common features. They were all revolts against monarchy while the liberals and democrats were the main forces behind these revolts. These revolts were motivated by industrialization which had created greater political awareness among the general population. As a result nationalism was a growing force throughout Europe and caused some revolts (e.g. Hungary). Poor economic conditions were another motivation which led to unrest (e.g. Irish Potato Famine). Finally not a single monarchy was destroyed and Europe returned to its pre-1848 situation.

The failure of the revolutions can be attributed to the working class and rural people failure to fully support the revolutions.⁵⁷ The middle class on the other side deserted the revolutions once they turned violent. Nationalism though a strong unifying force, in some occasions it caused divides among revolutionaries.⁵⁸ The revolutions needed to fully remove the conservatives, however the militaries in many countries continued to support their monarchies. Lastly, the revolutions lacked international support.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be argued that in 1848 revolutionary political and social ideologies combined with economic crisis and the romantic impulse to produce a vast revolutionary upheaval. Only the most advanced and the most backward major countries of reforming Great Britain and immobile Russia, escaped untouched. Governments were toppled, monarchies and ministers bowed or fled. National independence, liberal democratic constitutions, and social

⁵⁶ McKay, John P et. al. op. cit. 832

⁵⁷ History Sage Com.(2008), Ideologies and Revolutions: 1815-1850 “The Age of Metternich

⁵⁸ John Herder (1744-1803) referred to as the father of new nationalism had the notion that every nation should be sovereign. In Clare Thérèse Pellerin, (2006)The Philosophies of History of Herder and Hegel, MA Dissertation, University of Saskatchewan Saskatoon, pg. 40

reforms: the lofty aspirations of a generation seemed at hand. Yet, in the end, the revolution failed.⁵⁹

In France, the monarchy fell and socialists and republicans formed a provisional government. Louis Napoleon became President and later assumed power as Emperor. Despite the revolution in Hungary being crushed, in the longer term it was successful with its own common language, Diet and equality with Austria by 1867.

Although the tide of revolution was turned back in 1849 the events of 1848-1849 left several direct legacies. There was profound reform of the lot of the peasantry over much of central Europe as approved by the Austrian Constituent Assembly on 7th September 1848 (and as retained by the restored Austrian administration). This involved an elimination of the "robot" feudal services which the peasantry had previously to render to local magnates. This led to far-reaching transformations in society where agriculture became more commercial and less feudal and where many poorer peasants were unable to survive economically due to falling prices. A consequent increase in migration of (usually) Slav peasants to (often previously) Germanized urban areas sometimes tended to contribute further to the establishment of conditions for continued "local clashes of culture and language" between German and Slav over large tracts of the Austrian Empire. There was also an imparting of impetus to nationalism in the Italian Peninsula and in "the Germanies." Enduring change towards more inclusive representation or constitutional government occurred in Belgium, Holland, Denmark and Switzerland.

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