
UNIT 6 EUROPEAN POLITICAL MOBILIZATIONS: 1830-1848

Structure

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6.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to explain:

- the logic behind the formation of the Congress system and what happened thereafter,
- the developments leading to the secret society movements and the revolutionary uprisings in the 1820s and the 1830s,
- the emergence of nationalist movements in various parts of Europe, and
- the background of the revolutions of 1848 and its consequences.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In the name of stability and peace the great powers of Europe-Austria, Russia, Prussia and England, were engaged in redrawing the political map of Europe after the fall of Napoleon-I. Through a system of alliances which came to be known as the 'Concert of Europe' the great powers agreed to consult each other in order to maintain the peace of Europe. Attempt was made to restore the old monarchical order in Europe. However, nationalism and liberalism had already emerged as powerful forces in the 19th century Europe. This resulted in revolutionary movements challenging the authority of the monarchical rule. The period between 1815 and 1848 witnessed a number of such revolutionary movements in Europe. With the revolutions major treaties were overturned, conservative solidarity was eroded. This Unit first introduces you to the system of alliances and its consequences. Then it takes into account the secret society movements and the revolutions of the 1820s and the 1830s. Finally we have discussed emergence of the nationalist movements and the revolution of 1848.

6.2 THE CONGRESS SYSTEM AND ITS FALLOUT

In 1815, at the Congress of Vienna, the protagonists of the old European order, inspired by the Austrian Chancellor, Count Metternich, tried to create a permanent barrier against national and liberal movements. Popularly known as the Metternich system, the origins of this system of alliances can be traced from the Holy Alliance, brought together by Tsar Alexander-I, and its rival, the Quadruple Alliance, which was a British creation to counteract the Tsar. These two different systems of alliances set the stage for what came to be known as the Congress system, which in the period after 1815, envisaged a series of international congresses of the great powers to decide on European issues and problems.

After 1818, following the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle, there was a growing inclination towards great power intervention in the domestic politics of a country threatened by liberal movements. At the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle, French territory was evacuated and France gained readmission to the Concert of Europe. This was looked upon as a success of English diplomacy and was much to the annoyance of Tsarist Russia. Interventionism emerged as one of the contentious issues at Aix-la-Chapelle. At the Congress, English diplomacy prevented European intervention in Spain, which was disturbed by liberal movements. But in 1820, when a similar outbreak occurred in Naples, the Powers conceded to Metternich's demand for intervention. He obtained recognition of the need for a military expedition to restore order threatened by liberal opposition. Subsequently at the Congress of Troppau (1820), this principle of European intervention came to be formally endorsed. At the Congress of Laibach, 1821, Metternich was allowed to intervene in Naples and Piedmont to restore the absolutist regimes. This was the greatest triumph of the Metternich system.

Undoubtedly, the Concert of Europe was a formidable combination of the great powers. Yet the triumph of the old order was more apparent than real. However, much the makers of the post-Napoleonic settlement sought to restore the pre-revolutionary European order, what eventually emerged was a combination of the old and the new. Some of the crucial institutions that the Napoleonic Empire had created in France or elsewhere in Europe could not be altogether removed. Even though the landed aristocracy and the Church felt rejuvenated by the Restoration of the traditional dynasties, it was still impossible for the restored monarchies to ignore popular sentiments. The dynasties became conscious of the need to cultivate in some form popular political support. All this was an inevitable consequence of the failure of the peace makers of 1815 to find adequate means, within the restored monarchies, to prevent the contamination of their subjects by liberalism, nationalism and radical political ideologies. The pressure against the measures that were taken soon became so inexorable that they began to crumble within a few years after the Restoration, facing the early stirrings of liberal and national movements within these states, as well as in many parts of south-western and south-eastern Europe. For these movements the ideas that the French Revolution had already unleashed remained acutely relevant. In fact, these ideas were reenacted during the three successive stages of revolutionary upheavals between 1815 and 1848 that sought to undo the Restoration. In each of these stages there were three different strands of the revolutionary experience to which activists would hark back during that stormy period which eventually dismantled the Restoration of 1815. These "strands" were moderate constitutionalism that would accept a monarchy in a popular guise, radical

republicanism which verged on democracy, and an inchoate egalitarianism that anticipated socialist ideas of the future.

Between 1815 and 1848, the character of the opposition to the restored regimes, however, underwent a significant transformation. What in the 1820's, looked like an elitist, somewhat conspiratorial opposition without any roots in a larger society became linked by 1848, with a range of popular political movements. In the process, however, the opposition also became divided. The lineaments of their divergent ideas were, of course noticed even at an earlier period. The main elements in the opposition were the liberals who were tolerant about monarchy but were keen to see absolutism reformed into a constitutional monarchy. A classic representative figure of such liberalism in France was Francois Guizot, who was involved in successive French governments under the Orleanist monarchy of Louis Philippe. But there were also left wing liberals who were implacable adversaries of not just the nobles and the church but the institution of monarchy itself. Against the ultra royalists, who were slowly returning to power, this radical left wing tendency in the opposition fell back on the memory of the revolution. For them, representative government was not enough; it had to be wedded to republicanism. Men like Benjamin Constant for instance, wrote about the spectre of an aristocratic reaction. Besides the radicals, there was a small group of socialists in France. Saint-Simon had been able to gather around him a fairly sizeable group of followers who were not only critical of the restored regimes but were equally resentful of bourgeois individualism. Theirs was a vision of an egalitarian republic where a rational society could be built by removing inequalities. Such resentment about the Restoration, which was most virulent in France but no less strong elsewhere in Europe, came to be reinforced by popular unrest arising from periodic bouts of economic crisis in the course of the trade cycle. Even though the elitist constitutionalists were always suspicious about the masses, the latter could no longer be ignored as the struggle against the Restoration was undertaken in right earnest.

In the immediate aftermath of 1815, the main theatre of anti-Restoration politics was Spain, where between 1815 and 1820 a powerful movement was constituted against the restored absolutism by a combination of army officers and liberal politicians. The liberals hoped to implement the aborted Constitution of 1812 only to be disillusioned by the refusal of the new regime to grant this concession. Their allies, the liberally inclined junior officers of the army, made a series of pronouncements against the restored regime. Gradually this opposition politics acquired a conspiratorial character through the emergence of secret societies modeled after Masonic and military lodges.

6.3 THE SECRET SOCIETY MOVEMENT

The secret society movement was a European phenomenon. Everywhere, such secret conspiratorial formations developed partly because of the restrictions on organized politics imposed by the Restoration regimes. Radical secret groups with their initiations ceremonies, hierarchical chain of memberships, secret symbols and codes were sometimes direct off shoots or Masonic lodges. In some cases, they were established to counteract equally covert right wing formations that had emerged to reinforce the Restoration with a kind of Ultra royalism.

The secret societies had varied dimensions as well. Very often the secret societies represented the more radical sections of a fairly widespread liberal movement in Europe with the main political objective of constitutional government. This was true, for instance, of Portugal, which was reformed already by the enlightened despotism of Pombal, the agent of King John who had taken up permanent residence at Brazil. The secret society movement stimulated more assertive action in 1820 when liberals, infected by the Spanish example, liked up with a military garrison to demand a liberal constitution forcing the dynasty at least to take certain half measures. In France, republicans who had retained their emotional loyalty to Napoleon were the main elements in the French Charbonnaries and frequently planned a seizure of power. Around 1820-21, some junior officers of the army were also drawn into the conspiracy and planned a rebellion which was stillborn. The secret societies included as important elements French socialists, especially the St. Simonians.

In Italy, secret political groups had already emerged during the Napoleonic occupation, partly as an antidote to the French invasion. In addition to other ideals, the societies reflected incipient nationalist mobilization. The most important secret group was the Italian Carbonari that had been established in Sicily to work for a national constitutional government in the whole of Italy against the French regime of Murat. The movement subsequently spread to Naples. In Northern Italy, there was another secret group called the Adelfia which was established in 1796 by Buonarrotti, as associate of the radical Jacobin Jacques Babeuf. During the Restoration, the activities of these secret groups were stoked by their failure to achieve the constitutional objectives in view of the repressive policies of the Bourbon rulers of Sicily and the governments of the adjoining Italian states. Nationalism slowly emerged as another source of ideological inspiration.

In this early stage of the anti-Restoration mobilization, contrary to the fear of the restored regimes, elite politics and popular unrest were not linked. The constitutional movements in Spain and Portugal and the two Sicilies in 1820, or the risings in Piedmont and Greece in 1821 were all elitist affairs which had certainly the support of sections of the army but which were at the same time weakened by internal division between moderates and radicals and a lack of popular following. Such weakness accounted for the relative success of the European Concert of power to impose its will on the rebellious countries. Since the conspiracies failed ultimately to create a popular movement despite a whole range of social grievances of the ordinary folk, it was easier for the restored regimes to contain such mobilizations. In 1823, against the backdrop of the Madrid uprising when the liberal officers of the army wished to seize and restore Ferdinand to power. A similar pattern unfolded also in Italy in the early 1820's. There were a series of revolts which were suppressed by the Austrian forces. The great powers had promised to maintain the settlement of 1814. Not unnaturally they responded to these activities of the elitist revolutionaries through interventionism endorsed by the Congresses at Troppau and Laibach. At Laibach in 1821, the anti-revolutionary combination supported Austrian intervention to prop up the conservative regime of the kingdom of the Two Sicilies. A year later at Verona, they sanctioned French intervention to suppress the liberal rising in Spain that had begun in 1820. In the Italian peninsula the period 1820-21 witnessed a series of revolts centred on the secret societies. Alike in Spain, these uprisings involved a section of the elite, sometimes within the army, who looked

for the imposition of a constitutional government. In Naples, the liberal revolt was launched in July 1820 by military and civilian carbonari units. A fortnight after the revolt in Naples, there was a spontaneous uprising in Palermo. In March 1821, the Austrian army easily suppressed these risings. The Piedmontese revolt of 1820 was preoccupied with Italian issues but cripplingly divided between moderates and radicals. Moderates tried to persuade the king to grant a constitution supported by army and civil officers close to Carlos Alberto, the heir to the throne. Victor Emanuel was persuaded to grant a constitution but the situation was distorted by the proximity of Austrian troops and the constant threat of invasion to restore the king's full powers. In March 1821, when the liberal revolt collapsed in Naples, the carbonary units in Piedmont formed a provisional government and proclaimed a constitution. This revolt once again was suppressed subsequently by Austrian troops. The intensity of such repression of course varied from state to state but, overall in Italy, it had a devastating effect on the liberal revolutionaries while in France during the same period, ultra royalism was on the ascendant.

In the larger European context, the secret society activities of course became a part of the nascent nationalist politics, the full implications of which were realized during the 1830's. Until then, nationalism was not very clearly defined except in a series of romantic dreams about cultural autonomies. French invasion certainly aroused nationalist sentiments early in the century. The Napoleonic institutions too had a positive impact in the sense of carving out larger political units in Italy and Germany. It is well known that the Napoleonic invasion had been the context of Italian Risorgimento or the German intellectuals' search for the spirit of the folk. Yet the political unrest in Europe from 1830's onward succeeded in lending a concrete form to such inchoate feelings.

Check your Progress 1

- 1) Explain in five sentences the reason for the formation of the Concert of Europe.

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- 2) Identify some factors for the failure of the system of alliances. Answer in 50 words.

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- 3) Briefly discuss the importance of the secret society movements. Answer in 10 sentences.

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6.4 REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS OF THE 1820S AND THE 1830S

Around the middle of the 1820s, a fresh bout of revolutionary fever came with the failed Decembrist uprising in Russia and the relatively successful Greek revolt. In Russia, radicals who wanted the abolition of Tsardom and the republican transformation in Russia were organized in secret societies. There was one society of the north which was based in St. Petersburg and its counterpart of south was located in the garrison town of Tulezyn in the Ukraine, in which the army officers were dominant. These outfits were not simply content with constitutional idea but wanted to go beyond constitutionalism by anticipating an egalitarian and republican transformation. They were the Decembrists who attempted a military coup d'état in December 1825 when the death of the Czar provoked the uprising of the soldiers in St. Petersburg. The Russian artillery could easily disperse this uprising while a similar action a few days later in the Ukraine was suppressed in the same manner. The leaders of the uprising including Colonel Pestel were hanged and many more exiled to Siberia.

The Greek revolt which fatally compromised the monarchical alliance taking place around the same time was, however, more successful. Initially, rich Greeks who lived in foreign ports and had formed the secret society called Hetairia planned the Greek war of independence. In March 1821, when the Italian states had risen in revolt, the Greek rebellion also broke out. The rebels, however, came up against the hostility of the non-Greek population in the Danubian basin. The movement gained strength when it spread to the mainland. In early 1882, the Greek assembly at Epidaurus proclaimed the independence of Greece. Characterized as savage, the Greek struggle became fiercer when the Turkish Sultan Mahmud appealed for help to Mehmet Ali of Egypt who took this opportunity to undertake an invasion of Greece. Initially, Metternich treated the Greeks as rebels and therefore, an object of indifference. But later, when the Greeks were massacred in Constantinople the Turkish sultan was reprimanded for the destruction of the Christian places of worship. For some time, Metternich was reluctant to express any support for the Greek cause by placing greater emphasis on the unity of the monarchical order, but from 1826, the situation began to change. First, the growth of the Philhellenic movement that revived the memory of classical antiquity aroused wide spread sympathy in Europe for the Greek cause. European aristocrats were involved with many of the Philhellenic communities. The violent repression unleashed by the Turkish monarchy irritated European feelings. This was perhaps the reason why in April 1826, England and Russia—who had conflicting interests in the Balkans—came to an agreement about Greece. By this agreement, Greece was allowed a considerable measure of autonomy within the Turkish Empire. The French government which had supported the Turks for a long time, also had to change its policies so that in July the Anglo-Russian agreement became the Anglo-Franco-Russian treaty on Greece in which the three powers pledged to establish independent commercial relations with Greece and promised military intervention in favour of the Greeks unless there was a cessation of Turkish repression. The three powers sent their fleet to the Mediterranean and the navies subsequently destroyed the Turko-Egyptian fleet in Navarino bay in October 1827. The battle of Navarino provoked the Sultan to declare a holy war against the Christian states. As Russia declared war on Turkey in retaliation, England took alarm but thanks to French mediation, the

Russian intervention in the region was accepted. Finally after a difficult war, the Russian succeeded in imposing the treaty of Adrianople on Turkey by which Turkey agreed to the autonomy of Serbia, the Danubian principalities and Greece. Later in 1830, by the Treaty of London, Greece's complete independence was recognized.

The result of all this was the complete collapse of the Metternich system even though Austria managed to retain its sphere of influence in Italy and the Balkans. Despite his obsession with legitimism, Metternich was unable to prevent a European combination against the Turkish Monarchy. The collapse of the system in the end was hastened by a fresh spurt of revolutionary upheavals. At one level, the revolutionary situation in France and other parts of Europe was a product of a general period of acute and widespread economic and social unrest. Consequently, the ordinary people were aroused into political action once the conflict between the rebels and the monarchists on the contentious issue of parliamentary representation set in motion political unrest. For some time, the French liberals had been complaining of devious manipulations by the monarchy to deprive them of their electoral power alleging that the government officials were manipulating the electoral rolls to ensure the victory of the Royalists. The opposition against such deception was galvanized in 1827 under the leadership of the renowned academic Francois Guizot. An elaborate campaign was undertaken to inform the electorate about the electoral rules. For this purpose, a steering committee was set up in Paris with a string of local committees established through out France. Against this background, a general election was held in November 1827 which returned as many liberals as royalists. The new Government of Martignac was inclined to conciliate the liberals since, by 1829, the liberals were a majority in parliament. Yet the government and the liberals ran into conflict because of their different views about the reform of the local councils. Disagreements also occurred over taxation issues especially during the Prime Ministership of the ultra royalist Polignac who had succeeded Martignac in the summer of 1829. While the choice of Polignac was criticized, the delay in convening parliament became a contentious issue. In March 1830 after the delayed session opened, the parliament was quickly dissolved as the chamber of deputies voted an unprecedented motion of no confidence in Polignac's Government. In the elections of July 1830, however, the liberal representation rose from 220 to 274. In retaliation, towards the end of July, ordinances were passed by the French government which banned liberal newspapers, dissolved parliament and reduced the electorate to a quarter. The new elections were then called in which the rich only had the vote.

This was the trigger that provoked open defiance quickly turning into resistance by barricades. In 1830, the barricades became the symbol of popular insurrection, made possible by the economic crisis that had made the streets of Paris the focus for protests by artisans during the last three years. As protests grew into barricades, fighting ensued and continued into the next three days when soldiers who were deployed to suppress the revolution joined the rebels. The July revolution was a brief and quick affair. The restored monarchy failed to defend itself against the popular combination of liberal parliamentarians, the Parisian mob and disgruntled soldiers. The provisional government was established and on 30 July, the king's cousin, the Duke of Orleans was asked to take over as the head of the state. In the first week of August, a crown of the French people was offered to the Duke of Orleans. In France, the 1830 revolution was completed with the establishment of a constitutional monarchy.

The French example was an inspiration for Europeans with constitutional and liberal aspirations. The Belgians were encouraged by the French example to rise against the Dutch. The Poles revolted against their Russian overlords. The Belgians were able to put together an independent nation state while the Polish rebellion floundered. The Carbonari in Italy started plotting the unification of the land. When the July revolution brought about a constitutional regime in France, the Italians felt optimistic about an indulgent French policy of non-intervention to eliminate Austrian domination. This turned out to be misplaced optimism. At any rate, in February 1831 constitutional movements in the Papal States followed an uprising in Modena. At Bologna, a constitution was proclaimed in March 1831. Severe repression in Naples and Piedmont prevented unrest spreading into these areas as well. The intervention of the Austrian troops ruined these plans. The French Government of Louis Philippe, frightened by the revival of Bonapartism in Italy, at once recognized that Austrian intervention was after all a family affair. In March as Austrian troops moved in to crush the Italian revolt the provisional government at Bologna capitulated. In an otherwise bleak scenario, the only tangible success outside France was achieved in Spain. In September 1832, by way of a concession to the spirit of liberalism, a liberal government was set up in Spain with the declaration of an amnesty for the Spanish exiles. The revolution of 1830, however, though important on its own terms, was only a dress rehearsal for a more widespread and formidable revolution eighteen years later.

6.5 NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS

During the 1840s nationalism emerged as the dominant political ideology. Under its impact European liberalism too was substantially radicalized. In France nationalist sentiments spawned the Napoleon myth concerning the anticipated return of the Bonaparte to forge the unity of the French people. French opposition during the Orleanist monarchy also came up with the demand for extensive suffrage reform so that citizenship could be extended even to ordinary Frenchman. On the eve of the Revolution of 1848 banquets were organized to support this demand for extension of franchise. In 1848 the French radical Alexandre Ledru-Rolland went a step further by speaking in favour of universal manhood suffrage indicating that constitutional reform as a central issue in political discussion was slowly giving way to an acute sensitivity to democratization. The nationalist mobilization in Central and Eastern Europe did not escape the impact of this emerging democratic ideology articulated in different kinds of radical politics.

Moving east and south towards Italy and Germany we find the developments of a sense of common destiny appropriate to a nationalist movement. Political loyalties still could be moulded by dynasticism, regionalism and confessionalism, especially in the rural areas; yet, the nation emerged as a powerful competitor. Thinkers began to visualize the emergence of an integrated nation-state in the existing situation of political division. Many Germans and Italians regretted the fact that their lands were divided into so many smaller units. Here, as elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe such sentiments began to mould liberal politics. The Liberals everywhere were divided into Moderate and Radical factions. The Moderate Liberals in Germany were optimistic about the leadership of German princes in the movement for integration, relying substantially on Prussian initiatives. The Zollverein which had been established by Prussia in 1834 ostensibly for breaking economic and commercial barrier within Germany

convinced the Liberals of the feasibility of a Prusso-centric plan of integration, even though, until Prussian dynastic interest suited it, the Prussian monarchy had no interest in such a plan. Some of their friends, however, had entertained similar hopes for Austria. But since Austria's primary concern was to maintain a multi-national empire this strategy was not likely to yield any results.

Italian liberals lacked a corresponding state in which to place their hopes, excepting perhaps the Piedmontese monarchy, which had traditional dynastic rivalries with the Austrian Hapsburgs. But in reality Piedmont in comparison to Prussia was a small and relatively powerless kingdom. The result was that some Italian intellectuals even proposed the creation of an Italian federation under Papal leadership only to be frustrated by the persistent refusal of the Pope to respond to these overtures.

Radicals in Germany and Italy, however, had a different idea of how to bring about national unity. They saw the monarchical governments as obstacles to the politics of integration; to them, their overthrow was the precondition for a unified nation-state. Radical nationalism in Italy found its greatest exponent in Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) who had earlier joined a branch of the Carbonari in 1827 but soon became disillusioned by their lack of clear purpose. He felt that Italy's freedom from Austrian domination depended entirely on the destruction of aristocratic privilege and clerical authority. With this objective he founded the Young Italy (Giovine Italia) in 1832 and envisioned a republican form of government for a united Italian state. After a failed armed uprising at Savoy in 1834 Mazzini went into exile in London. Political strife in Italy, however, was recurrent through the late 1830s, although the movement still was narrowly based without the active involvement of the masses. The events of 1848 would change this situation and open new prospects for nationalist upsurge in other parts of central and southern Europe as well.

This was also the period when smaller, mostly Slavic nationalities, of the Austrian empire in the eastern reaches of the continent-the Czechs, Slovaks, Croats, Slavs, Ukrainians and Romanians- began to assert their identities as nations by reviving their historical and folk traditions. The literary societies in these regions, although representing a small intellectual elite, started disseminating nationalist sentiments often running against the barrier of traditionalism among the large majority of peasant population. In this regard the Poles and the Hungarians were a little more fortunate. In Poland and Hungary representative institutions like the provincial Diets provided the institutional focus of nationalist mobilization. In Poland and Hungary the craving for a nation-state was dovetailed with an elaborate program of democratization, abolition of feudalism, and imposition of central control over peripheral regions and local governments. But in either case this movement was stonewalled by peasant indifference and opposition of smaller nationalities living in the Hungarian part of the empire that did not like the prospect of political and cultural domination of the Magyars.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Write a note on the Greek Revolt. Answer in 10 sentences.

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- 2) Write about the July Revolution in France in five sentences.

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- 3) Briefly explain the emergence of nationalist movements in Italy and Germany. Answer in 100 words.

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6.6 REVOLUTIONS OF 1848

In 1848 Europe made its cautious entry into ‘the age of the masses’. Political mobilizations— whatever be their nature— began to acquire a popular following in an attempt to overcome the limitations of politics of secret societies that had dominated different phases of political unrest earlier in the century. Economic distress certainly contributed to this process of mobilization. Speaking in general terms, poverty increased in most parts of the continent from the 1830s. In part it was an inescapable consequence of a more serious problem of transition from a predominantly subsistence economy dominated by agriculture to a market economy tuned with some form of industrial capitalism. Very often the peasants looked upon the market-oriented agriculture as pernicious complaining frequently about oppression by middleman traders. The urban artisans failing in competition with cheaper factory products viewed the new large-scale industries as threats to their existence. Between the two revolutions the artisans and craftsmen in weaving, construction and printing trades participated in intermittent strikes and demonstrations; and later played a critical role in the revolutionary upheavals in the urban areas in 1848.

Against this backdrop of endemic social strife, the years between 1845 and 1847 were particularly difficult due to a run of poor harvest and an economic recession. In 1845 the potato blight caused acute food shortages, followed in 1846 by worse grain crop in a severely hot summer. The consequent steep rise in the prices of foodstuffs resulted in food riots in many places. Such distress was aggravated by economic recession, which produced urban unemployment.

Indeed, the economic crisis adding to popular resentment about a fall in the living standards fed into political unrest. Yet, an equally, important ingredient in revolutionary politics was the sharper political consciousness of Europeans who in the mid-19th century were somewhere better educated than in earlier times. Some people actually wrote about 'an educational boom' around the middle of the century; and many contemporaries did not fail to see a connection between the rising level of literacy and a rebellious spirit. Giuseppe Mazzetti, an Italian educationist, in a tract on educational reforms even called for a system that would prevent "the movement of the masses, restrict the number of the literate, make them good and tranquil, which would exclude them from any instruction making them useless and harmful". To a proposed expansion of public education in the countryside an Austrian aristocrat replied: "Shall we found schools in the country, so that peasants can direct complaints against us to government officials?"

It seems that the revolution of 1848 was a multi-dimensional event if we take the varieties of the revolutionary experience in Europe into consideration. The European revolts in 1848 began with the Swiss Civil war in which the radically inclined Protestant cantons were locked in a battle with the conservative Catholic cantons. The confrontation reached its peak in 1847 and initiated the first of a series of political confrontations historians generally group together under the heading the Revolution of 1848. In this battle the radical Protestant Cantons were ultimately victorious as Metternich's attempt to bail out the conservative Catholic Cantons failed. The events in Switzerland clearly demonstrated that the defenders of the established order were incapable of stopping the tide of the revolution.

The revolutionary events began in January 1848 in Sicily where a group of conspirators planned an uprising in the provincial capital of Palermo. In the conditions of 1848 the uprising had a more explosive impact, quickly spreading to the southern Italian mainland. Naples, the capital city of the kingdom of The Two Sicilies witnessed street fighting before the king yielded to the revolution by promulgating a liberal constitution. Events in Piedmont and Tuscany in February 1848 followed the same pattern. Later in March the news of the fall of Metternich provoked Northern Italy to try to shake off Austrian domination.

The next decisive stage in the chain of uprisings took place in Paris where the banquet campaign begun in mid-1847 gave way to street demonstrations. Barricades were built, and soldiers deployed to crush the rebellion joined them, forcing King Louis Philippe to abdicate and flee the country. On the 24th February 1848 a Republic was proclaimed in response to such demands by the revolutionary crowd. In March the contagion spread to southern and western Germany. In the same month a rising took place in Munich followed by similar events in Vienna, Cracow, Milan and Berlin, repeating the familiar confrontation between insurgents and armed forces on the two sides of the barricades.

Political changes came in their wake. The Prussian and Bavarian monarchies dismissed their conservative ministers and appointed Liberals in their place. Metternich, the great symbol of the old order, went into exile in London. Emperor Ferdinand reluctantly appointed liberal ministers in Vienna. The provisional governments in Venice and Milan proclaimed their independence from Austrian rule and expressed their desire to become a part of a united Italian state. The new government in the Hungarian capital asserted its autonomy within the empire.

In Germany, unlike Italy where Carlo Alberto, Piedmont's ruler, had started a war of unification, taking advantage of the collapse of Austrian control. In Northern Italy the movement towards integration continued in a peaceful and parliamentary fashion. A group of parliamentary deputies from different German states representing the liberal and radical opposition assembled at Frankfurt on Maine at the end of March 1848. They issued an appeal for elections to a Constituent National Assembly, which was to write a constitution for a united German national-state. The elections were subsequently held in May and the Frankfurt National Parliament started its deliberations, opposed, however, by the Czech nationalist who were suspicious of a prospective German domination of Central Europe. Further east in Hungary the Diet under the leadership of Kossuth carried out significant reform by introducing civil liberties, abolishing serfdom and illegitimate taxation imposed by the Catholic clergy. This was followed by a decision to hold elections on the basis of a liberal franchise. Even though the property qualification was retained, the special privileges for the nobility were abolished. Consequently, an autonomous Hungarian national government was created within the framework of the empire that claimed independence from the control of the central Imperial bureaucracy in Vienna and pledged responsibility to the Hungarian legislature.

6.7 AFTERMATH OF THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS

Despite the revolutionary euphoria all over Europe, and a significant move towards parliamentary government, the revolution ultimately "stopped at the foot of the throne". In most parts of the continent, monarchical government remained in place with very little changes in even their administrative structure. Except in France, where republicanization made some headway, elsewhere important state functionaries of the old regime retained their positions. Even when authorities conceded the principle of parliamentary responsibility of the Crown's ministers, rulers were inclined to create parallel sources of power in their personal entourage. The revolutionary dream of setting up a citizen's army remained elusive. Franchise reform, which was certainly the most important achievement of the revolution of 1848, benefited more the conservative political groups in European society than the champions of political equality. The newly enfranchised rural people who had had no experience in dealing with elections continued to be swayed by their traditional loyalty to the land owning classes. Certainly the elections provided a much greater opportunity for political participation; they did not automatically contribute to the much-expected democratization of European societies. In France, elections to the Constituent assembly were held on a fairly broad franchise which had entitled adult males to vote but the end result of this trial run at democracy was a strange discrepancy between the advocates of democracy and its beneficiaries. Everywhere in Europe including France a large number of candidates with conservative views were elected with peasant support in the rural constituencies. The radicals who were the supporters of democracy and had always pressed for the broadest possible franchise were the big losers in elections held under the very same franchise they advocated.

From mid-1848, the revolution began to stage its retreat with a certain weakening of the liberals. The second half of 1848 was a period of the resurgence of the party of order. In a series of dramatic confrontations, the revolutionary forces

were overwhelmed. Moderate factions within the liberal movement worked out compromises with conservatives and monarchists, and together played a crucial role in suppressing the second round of revolutionary insurgency in 1849. The turn of the tide was unstoppable. In Naples for instance, in response to the radical demands for greater parliamentary control over foreign policy in order that the Neapolitan troops could be deployed against the Austrians in northern Italy, King Ferdinand decided to retaliate with repression. In the street fighting that ensued, the Lazzaroni, the devoutly pro-monarchist casual labourers of Naples supported their rulers. In the month of June in Paris, the turn to the right was clearly visible. Earlier in April, some of the radicals had established national workshops modeled on the social workshops of the well-known socialist Louis Blanc. The amount of additional expenditure that the provisional government incurred in maintaining these workshops became a major issue in conservative propaganda against the republican left, when fiscal difficulties set in, provoking tax riots in some areas of rural France. By the end of May, the provisional government decided to abolish them. This became a focus of an increasingly militant opposition in early June when the republic faced an insurrection from its supporters. The repression by the provisional government was severe. Repressive measures, including the use of the artillery, was obviously directed against the lower classes and had the support of the richer sections of Parisian society, providing Karl Marx with a certain perspective about class struggles in France. The events of the June days in Paris were certainly a defeat for the left in France.

By August 1848, the situation in the Habsburg Empire, which had appeared hopeless few months earlier, began to improve. Most of northern Italy was reconquered. The Emperor and his Court were back in Vienna, discussing the future with a Constituent Assembly. Only the Hungarians remained defiant. This change in the position of the Austrian Monarchy was no less significant than the June days in Paris. Restoring the authority of the Monarchy involved a systematic suppression of the Revolution in the different parts of the Empire. In the province of Bohemia, the hostility between the German and Czech nationalists enabled, Prince Alfred Windischgratz, the commander-in-chief of the Prague garrison, to impose martial law and to order the dissolution of the Prague National Committee. In Southern Europe, the victories of the armies of General Radetsky in northern Italy were the most decisive military triumph responsible for the survival of the Empire. The way the Piedmontese monarchy hesitated in closing in on the Austrian forces was largely responsible for the ultimate defeat of the Italians. In the decisive battle of Custoza (July 1848), the Piedmontese army was routed, removing the barrier to the capitulation of the Republican regimes that had been established in northern Italy. Milan fell at the beginning of August. A truce was concluded between Piedmont and Austria - which enabled Austria to retrain its control over the region. In 1849, the same pattern was repeated following a revolutionary upsurge in the Papal States, when the Roman Republic was proclaimed by a group of radicals who were now trying to devise a new strategy for a mass movement for national unification. The Piedmontese monarchy was forced by the democrats to renew the war with Austria. The June 1849, the war between Austria and the Piedmontese army ended in a resounding defeat for the latter at the battle of Novaro. Carlos Alberto, the King of Piedmont, abdicated in favour of Victor Emmanuel, who, apparently, agreed to suppress democratic movements in his territories. The Pope, who had earlier fled Rome, and had taken refuge in Sicily, was reinstated under the protection of the army of the French President, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte.

The success in Italy encouraged the Austrians to impose their will on the Hungarian National Assembly, which in any case, had already been sufficiently plagued by the irredentism of smaller nationalities, such as Croats. It was within this context that Vienna planned to regain its control. The Hungarian government in Budapest was ordered to give up its plans for an independent Hungarian army. Austrian authorities also indirectly encouraged the Croat Ban, Count Jelacic, to take military action against the Hungarian government. As Jelacic's forces crossed the border between Croatia and Hungary, the Hungarian government faced war on three fronts. Magyar constitutionalists, who were still hoping for a link with the Austrian Empire were, now, decisively discredited by Austrian machinations. The radicals in Budapest demanded a revolutionary response to this situation, and appointed a National Defense committee, led by Lajos Kossuth, the veteran leader of Hungarian opposition to Habsburg absolutism. The Hungarian government was never consulted. A few days later, the authorities in Vienna dissolved the Hungarian parliament and government, forcing the constitutionalist ministry to resign, and a confrontation with the National Defense Committee ensued. In the initial stages of the military conflict, the Hungarians were successful; but finally, with Russian support, the Hungarian nationalist resistance was suppressed.

In Germany, the liberal program of national unification, had already run into rough weather. With the conquest of insurgent Vienna in August, and the November crisis in Prussia, the plan for a German national government was undermined. The Frankfurt National Assembly, which had shown a degree of tolerance concerning Prussian absolutism, ceased to be of significance now. For the King of Prussia refused to lead it, leaving the pro-Prussian constitutional monarchists in the assembly no means for the creation of a German national state without Austria. The Prussian Constituent Assembly meanwhile had emerged as a threat to the Prussian King. The republicans were a minority, but the constitutional monarchists were a force to be reckoned with. It was important for the Prussian monarchy to deal with this opposition decisively; and the King did so in November 1848 through the repressive measures of the ultra-monarchist Prime Minister, Count Brandenburg. Brandenburg unilaterally proclaimed a constitution, while the Constituent Assembly continued its debates. In this way, the Prussian conservatives adjusted their traditional ideas to the altered political conditions of 1848. In any case, the authority of the monarchists ultimately triumphed over the revolutionary forces by establishing a new constitution in Prussia. The constitutionalist regimes in south-western Germany, however, survived, to provide inspiration for the liberal nationalists in the ensuing decades before Unification (1871).

In the story of the European Revolutions of 1848-49, the final defeat of the revolutionary forces took place in France. In December 1848, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte was elected as French President, enjoying enormous executive power, invested by the Constituent Assembly in the office of the President. Bonaparte's electoral success had much to do with witless support from the peasants, and expectant indulgence from monarchists. Very soon, the French bourgeoisie, which had by then become tired of revolutionary unrest, fell in line with Louis Napoleon's dictatorial pretensions. In the middle of 1849, the suppression of the last strands of radicalism sealed the fate of the Revolution, not just in France, but also elsewhere in Europe. The plebiscite which confirmed Louis Napoleon as President for Life, after his coup d'état of 2 December 1851, was the appropriate end to this story of defeat.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Explain in five sentences the economic crisis behind the revolution of 1848.

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- 2) What was the impact of the revolution of 1848 on the Habsburg Empire ?
Answer in 50 words.

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- 3) Was the revolution of 1848 successful in France? Answer in five sentences.

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6.8 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit you have learnt about the development of the Congress system by the great powers. Their emphasis was on the restoration of the old order. Unfortunately for them, the ideas of liberalism and nationalism had already influenced the minds of the people. Secret society movements, revolutionary upsurges in different parts of Europe reflected the general attitude towards the restoration of the old order and the territorial settlements reached at 1815. The European revolts in 1848 despite focussing on parliamentary government failed to change much the character of monarchical government. Even in France the revolutionary forces failed to check the rise of Louis Napoleon's dictatorship.

6.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) To maintain balance of power, to preserve peace, to restore the monarchical regime, etc. See Sec.6.2.

- 2) Clash of interest among the great powers, influence of liberalism and nationalism, growing demand for constitutional monarchy, etc. See Sec.6.2.
- 3) See Sec.6.3

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Sec.6.4
- 2) See Sec.6.4
- 3) See Sec.6.5

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Growing poverty, oppression by middlemen, resentment among artisans, craftsmen because of competition with cheaper factory products, etc. See Sec 6 6.
- 2) See Sec.6.7
- 3) See Sec.6.7

