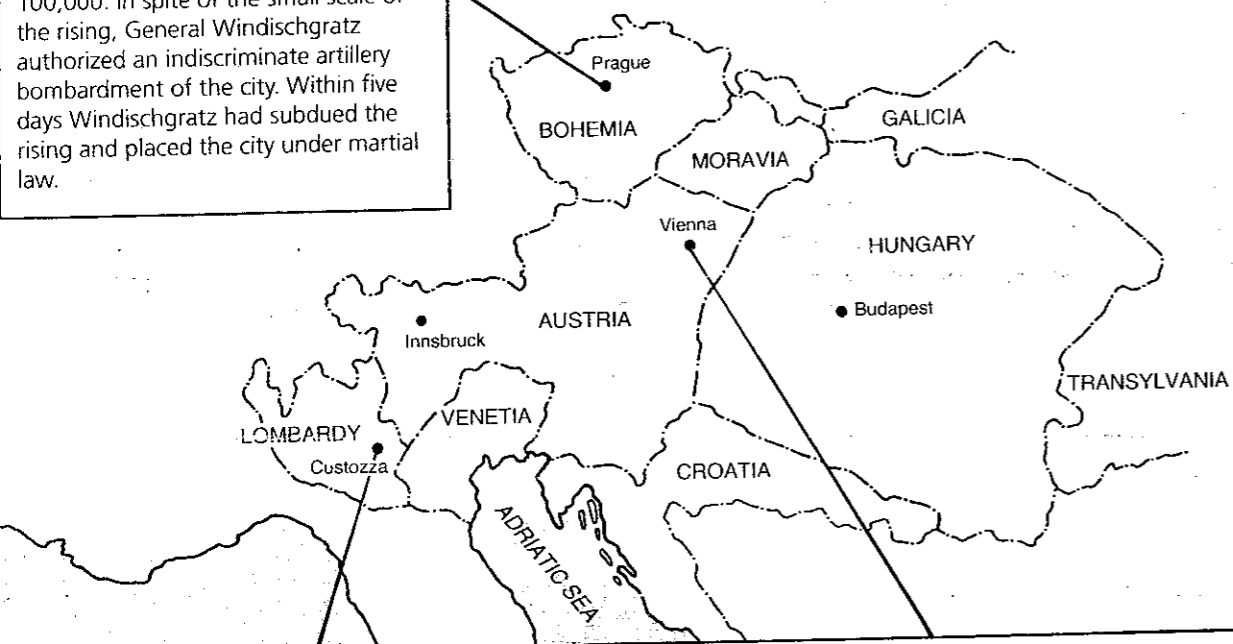


4.1 How did the Habsburgs survive 1848? *continued*

The Role of the Military

On 12 June crowds began street protests in Prague. There were clashes with troops and barricades were erected as the city broke out into revolution. As few as 1200 persons played an active part in the violence; the population of Prague was around 100,000. In spite of the small scale of the rising, General Windischgratz authorized an indiscriminate artillery bombardment of the city. Within five days Windischgratz had subdued the rising and placed the city under martial law.

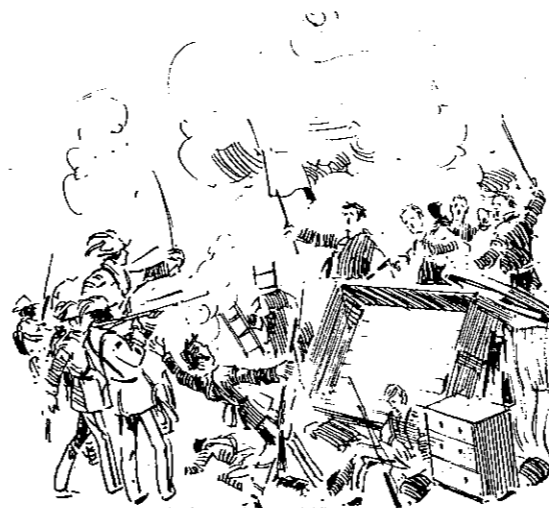
CZECH REVOLUTIONARIES
ERECT BARRICADES IN
PRAGUE (JUNE 1848)



Charles Albert's military campaign against the Austrians was a disaster. On 23 July Radetzky won a decisive victory at Custozza and an armistice was arranged on 9 August. The Italian war against Austria was restarted by Charles Albert in March 1849. Within one week Austrian supremacy on the battlefield had been established with a conclusive victory at Novara. The Venetian republic surrendered on 24 August.

In September 1848 it was decided to send part of the Vienna garrison to assist Jellacic in the subjection of Hungary. This prompted demonstrations by the radicals in Vienna and violence erupted once more in the capital. On 6 October a mob seized Count Baillet-Latour, the Minister for War, and clubbed him to death. His mutilated body was hung from a lamp-post, a gruesome symbol of radical defiance to government authority. By the end of the month, 100,000 troops under the command of Windischgratz had surrounded the city. As with Prague four months earlier, Vienna was subjected to a prolonged bombardment. Troops advanced as the resistance of the radicals evaporated. Between three and five thousand people were killed in the 'October Days' rising and by 1 November the revolt had been crushed.

The restoration of Imperial authority owed much to the loyalty and discipline of the army. The officer class tended to be of noble origin and was generally committed to the values of the old order now being challenged by the revolutionaries. The High Command, under the direction of Radetzky, Windischgratz and Jellacic, was solid and experienced. Regular troops were kept separate from the civilian population and cut off from political debate. Faced with hostile crowds they rarely disobeyed orders.



Hungary proved to be the most difficult region to subdue. Budapest had been captured by the armies of Windischgratz and Jellacic in January 1849. By April, however, the invading troops had been driven out by the Magyar forces. Windischgratz was dismissed and replaced in May by the ruthless General Haynau. Of potential significance was an offer of help from Tsar Nicholas I of Russia. Nicholas acted in the broad interests of monarchical solidarity and also through a determination to sabotage the emergence of an independent and troublesome state so close to his own turbulent Polish lands. In the event, Russian intervention was not decisive and the principal engagements took place between Hungarian units and Austrian troops under Haynau. In these, the ill-equipped and poorly-trained Hungarians were systematically defeated. The Magyars surrendered at Vilagos on 13 August 1849.



HUNGARIANS PROCLAIM THEIR
INDEPENDENCE FROM VIENNA (1849)

In September 1848 the Constituent Assembly elected following the revolution in Vienna made a very significant decision. Delegates voted to abolish serfdom throughout the Habsburg Empire. This was one of the few lasting achievements of the revolution and ironically one of the reasons why it failed. By abolishing serfdom the revolutionaries removed one of the principal grievances of the peasantry and left them with little cause to oppose the Habsburgs. The revolutionaries effectively denied themselves the chance of developing mass support.

ISSUE:

Why were conservative regimes able to reassert themselves?

7 Conclusion

The 1848 revolutions are usually seen as having failed. According to historian G. M. Trevelyan, 1848 was a potential 'turning point when Europe failed to turn'. By 1849 the forces of reaction were once again in the ascendant. The three dynastic empires of Austria, Prussia and Russia continued to dominate central and eastern Europe. No single new nation state had emerged, and radical revolutionaries had been rejected across Europe. Historians have sought general as well as specific explanations for the revolutions' failure.

▼ The revolutionaries were deeply divided. Different social groups had very different interests. While popular movements were at the root of the revolutions, it was the propertied classes who seized power. Once middle-class liberals secured the election of their own assemblies, most were as afraid of social revolution as the conservatives. Working-class movements and the organisations of the radical left were not sufficiently well-developed to force social change in their favour. Most workers had a purely practical revolutionary aim: the removal of the intolerable pressures on their lives. Unlike their 'intellectual', often self-appointed, leaders, they were not concerned with – or even aware of – political ideologies which supposedly espoused their cause. Workers were also divided: master craftsmen and the mass of unskilled workers had little in common.

▼ Europe was still essentially agrarian in 1848. The 1847 and 1848 harvests were reasonably good. The rural populations were thus not generally in a desperate economic situation in 1848–9. This may explain the unenthusiastic support for revolutionary movements among peasants and even their role in suppressing revolution by voting for conservatives, for example, in France, and by serving as military conscripts virtually everywhere. In central and eastern Europe the peasantry lost interest in the revolution once the last remnants of the feudal system had been removed. While the peasants were not necessarily conservative, many felt hostility rather than affinity to the urban revolutionaries. The failure of the peasantry to support revolutionary and nationalist movements – except in Hungary and the Roman Republic – was of crucial importance.

▼ The strongest force in 1848 was nationalism. However, it also proved to be as divisive as it was unificatory. Ironically, the very nationalism which inspired the revolutions was also to destroy their chances of success. Austria was able to play on the antipathy between various national groups to maintain imperial unity. The Hungarians, strongly nationalistic themselves, were strangely blind to the strength of nationalism within their own borders. National consciousness failed in most areas to affect the masses. Moreover, local loyalties remained strong and proved an important obstacle in the way of national unity.

WHAT WAS RUSSIA'S ROLE IN 1848–9?

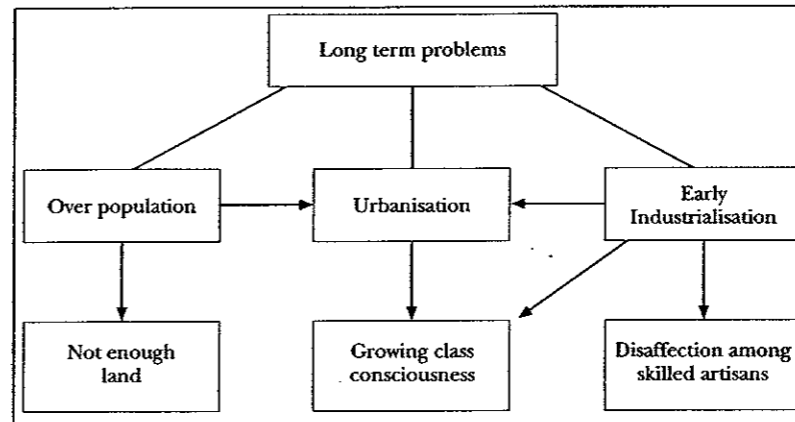
Russia, seen as the chief supporter of autocracy and the 'gendarme of Europe', did little to bolster the conservatives. Tsar Nicholas was more concerned with preventing liberalism from infecting his own domains, particularly Poland, than filled with zeal to stamp out revolution elsewhere. He largely confined himself to sending advice to his fellow monarchs – although he did send troops to assist Austria against the Hungarians in 1849.

- ▼ Liberals and nationalists soon found that they were not necessarily on the same side. Until 1848 it was possible for some nationalists, like the Italian, Mazzini, to believe that the triumph of nationalism would, by some never explained alchemy, usher in an age of international peace and harmony. Events in 1848–9 showed how hollow such expectations were. In both Vienna and Frankfurt, German liberals backed German interests and supported the crushing of 'liberal' revolts in Prague, Italy and Hungary.
- ▼ Across Europe, the army's role was crucial. Everywhere armies remained loyal to the established rulers. Nowhere did any army declare for a constitution. Except in Hungary and the Roman Republic, capable revolutionary armies were not created.
- ▼ The revolutionaries drew little support from Britain or France. The British Foreign Secretary Palmerston, regarded as the champion of liberalism before 1848, had no intention of risking war to further ideological causes on the continent. Expectations of French intervention on the side of revolutionaries also failed to materialise. Ironically, the only French intervention came in 1849 when French troops overthrew the Roman Republic.

The 'failure' of the 1848 revolutions helped ensure that a conservative political and social order maintained its hold on Europe until the First World War; that the unification of Germany and Italy occurred within a conservative rather than a liberal framework; and that violent revolutionary movements, though not anarchism and terrorism, virtually disappeared in Europe (except in France in 1871 and in Russia in 1905) before 1914. The old order was helped by the return of general economic growth and prosperity post-1848.

Working on The 1848 Revolutions

To help draw your thoughts together, try to construct diagrams to explain the main points made in each section. A diagram summarising the main points made in section 1 is done for you. (Figure 3)



DID THE REVOLUTIONS FAIL?

Arguably the revolutions were not a total failure.

- ▼ The remnants of feudalism in central Europe were abolished.
- ▼ Manhood suffrage was introduced in France.
- ▼ Parliamentary government (of sorts) was introduced in Prussia and Austria.
- ▼ After 1848 virtually every monarchical regime accepted the need to modernise, even if it was not prepared to accept a dilution of traditional forms of power.
- ▼ The revolutions had helped stir national consciousness across a wide swathe of Europe.

Figure 3 Long-term problems