

Chapter One: Prologue: the Forest of Bayonets

Underneath a darkening January sky, a convoy of horse-drawn sledges cut trails across a glowing, snow-covered plain. The procession halted at a barrier, passports were inspected by a sergeant and a grizzled old soldier huddling under an oilskin, his rifle slung heavily over his shoulder, raised the barrier: it was the Russian frontier with Prussia. The sledges crunched once again through the snow. Turning his head, the lead passenger, a man named Alexander Herzen, heard a Cossack wishing him a happy journey while he held the bridle of his hardy mount, its shaggy coat hanging with icicles.¹ Herzen did not know it then, but he would not see Russia again. It was January 1847 and he was embarking on a European journey, accompanied by his wife Natalie, their three children, his mother, and two nannies. A member of the Russian gentry but a socialist, Herzen was escaping the stifling environment of life under Tsar Nicholas I and eager to learn more about 'the West', to make comparisons with Russia and, he hoped in vain, to return with the fruits of his learning.²

I

The Europe through which the Herzens were about to journey was a continent on the edge of an uncertain future. Politically, it was dominated by a conservative order. Of the five great powers - Britain, France, Prussia, Austria and Russia - only the first two had parliaments to temper royal power. The other three were absolute monarchies. A parliamentary system had been evolving in Britain – albeit with bloodshed and political opposition – for generations. In 1832 had come the first great modern reform of the system, whereby urban property-owners were given the right to vote, while the cities – many of them hitherto absent or poorly represented at Westminster – were allowed to elect Members of Parliament. This was not democracy – only one in five adult males (women were excluded as a matter of course) was enfranchised in England and Wales (and only one in eight in Scotland) - and the composition of Parliament, which consisted of gentry and aristocratic landowners, remained virtually unchanged.

France had become a constitutional monarchy in 1814, when Napoleon was packed off to his genteel exile on Elba, and then again in 1815, after which the incorrigible Emperor was held under stricter conditions on the remote island of Saint Helena until his death in 1821. The Bourbon monarchy was restored, represented first by the portly Louis XVIII, younger brother of the guillotined King Louis XVI, and then, on his death in 1824, by their younger brother, the slender and ultra-conservative Charles X. The French constitution, the Charter of 1814, provided a parliament whose lower house, the Chamber of Deputies, was elected by the wealthiest 110,000 taxpayers. In 1830,

¹ A. Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts: the Memoirs of Alexander Herzen* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1982). pp. 313-14.

² On Herzen, see E. H. Carr, *The Romantic Exiles* (London: Serif, 1998); I. Berlin, 'Introduction', A. Herzen, *From the Other Shore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. vii-xxv; J. E. Zimmerman, *Midpassage: Alexander Herzen and European Revolution, 1847-1852* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989); E. Acton, *Alexander Herzen and the role of the intellectual revolutionary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

Charles' royal intransigence in the face of repeated liberal electoral victories provoked the final overthrow of the Bourbon dynasty. It is said that Charles had once declared that he would rather be a hewer of wood than rule like a British monarch. It was therefore a sublime irony that, as he made his way towards exile (he would live in Holyrood Palace in Edinburgh), at one staging-post Charles' courtiers had to cut a table down to size so that everyone in the retinue could be accommodated in the small dining room. Back in Paris, the Charter was retained by the new regime. This was the 'July Monarchy', named for the month when the Revolution occurred, under King Louis-Philippe, the scion of the rival Orleans dynasty. The Charter was slightly modified, so that the electorate swelled to include only 170,000 of France's richest men: this was a mere 0.5 per cent of the French population, a sixth of those who enjoyed the vote in Britain after 1832.³

At the other edge of Europe, since 1825 Russia had been in the iron grip of the autocratic Tsar Nicholas I, who had founded the notorious Third Section, the secret police. This organisation had a tiny number of officials, but it worked through the gendarmerie and a larger number of informants, who made as many as five thousand denunciations a year. The very existence of police spies created an atmosphere in which it took a brave soul to express dissent openly. One widely-believed myth held that in one office of the Third Section headquarters in Saint Petersburg there was a trap door: during a seemingly innocuous conversation, a perfectly innocent individual summoned before the police officials could be lured into saying a minor indiscretion, whereupon a lever would be pulled and the victim would fall into a dungeon below to be subjected to all sorts of unspeakable horrors. The real oppression was bad enough on those who dared speak their minds too loudly. In 1836, when the liberal intellectual Petr Chaadaev lambasted Russia for its backwardness, he met the fate which would be shared by some twentieth-century Soviet dissidents: the government declared him insane and confined him to an asylum.⁴ Even (or perhaps, given his quick temper, especially) the great poet Pushkin had to tread carefully: he was tolerated because the Tsar liked his work, but even he was subjected to the occasional rap on the knuckles. Intellectuals and writers cautiously circulated their writings in manuscript among friends first and only later approached publishers – if they approached them at all.

Since 1840, Prussia had been governed by King Frederick William IV, who dashed liberal hopes that he would introduce a constitution. His father, Frederick William III, had promised his eager subjects to abandon absolute rule several times, but that had been during the Napoleonic Wars, when he wanted to arouse the patriotism of his loyal Prussians against the hated French. A generation later, Frederick William IV explained to a disappointed liberal official that 'I feel I am king solely by the grace of God.' A constitution would, he said, make the whole idea of monarchy 'an abstract concept, by dint of a piece of paper. A paternal governance is the way of true German princes.'⁵ Prussia did have provincial estates, but these representative bodies were stacked heavily in favour of the nobles and great landowners and they were not permitted

³ R. Tombs, *France 1814-1914* (London: Longman, 1996), p. 357.

⁴ R. Tempest, 'Madman or Criminal: Government Attitude to Petr Chaadaev in 1836', *Slavic Review* vol. 43 (1984), pp. 281-7.

⁵ Quoted in H. A. Winkler, *Germany: the Long Road West, 1789-1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 78.

to correspond with one another, to avoid any whiff of the very idea that they could merge into a national parliament.

‘Austria’ was the Habsburg Empire, a polyglot assembly of territories enveloping no fewer than eleven different nationalities: Germans, Magyars, Romanians, Italians, and the Slav peoples: Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Ukrainians (called Ruthenians), Slovenians, Serbs and Croats. Conservatives feared that, should constitutional or revolutionary movements have arisen among these peoples, then the very integrity of the Empire would be endangered. In theory, it was held together by the subjects’ loyalty to the Habsburg dynasty, the common institutions of the monarchy (including the administration and the imperial army) and, although there were religious minorities such as Jews and Protestants, the Catholicism of most Austrian subjects. In 1815, perhaps only the Germans, the Magyars, the Poles and the Italians had a deep sense of their own national identity. The first three, in particular, also dominated the other subject-nationalities of the empire, politically and socially. In Hungary, the Magyar gentry lorded over the peasants who in the north were Slovaks and in the east were Transylvanian Romanians and in south were Serbs or Croats. In Galicia, the Poles tended to be the landlords holding the Ukrainian peasantry in such a state of servitude that they were practically beasts of burden. The Czechs, at least, with their high standards of education and (by 1848) the most advanced manufacturing base in the Habsburg monarchy, were beginning to challenge German hegemony in Bohemia, but one of the seething resentments amongst the non-Germans was that since the machinery of the state was centred in Vienna, it was dominated by German officials, whose language was usually the official medium in the law, education and administration. Even so, a developed sense of national identity was primarily shared by the aristocratic elites and the urban, middle-classes, who were of course precisely the people most frustrated that opportunities in the bureaucracy, the law and in higher education were closed off unless one spoke German. This had not yet trickled down to the mass of peasants, many of whom saw the Emperor as their guardian against the depredations of their landlords, but in 1848, the very fact that social difference coincided with ethnic divisions would aggravate the frequently bloody conflicts among the nationalities of central Europe.

The resentment of the Magyars against what they saw as German dominance and overbearing Habsburg authority was potentially very dangerous to the empire. Unlike most of the other nationalities, the Magyars had a constitutional voice: the Hungarians had a diet, or parliament, which was dominated by the Magyar nobility, the clergy and the burghers of the free royal towns. Thus the ‘Hungarian nation’ – meaning in contemporary parlance those who were represented in the diet - made up a small proportion of the total population. The rest were legally defined, with graphic aptness, as the *misera plebs contribuens* – the poor tax-paying plebians (Latin was still the official language of Hungarian politics and administration). The Magyar nobility none the less consisted of a fairly sizeable proportion of the Hungarian population – some 5 per cent compared to an estimated 1 per cent in pre-revolutionary France – and some of them were poor enough to be dubbed the ‘sandalled nobles’, since, it was said, they were so penniless that they could not afford boots. Yet, since these men only had their privileges and titles to distinguish them from the rest of the toiling masses, they were often the most resistant to any reform which endangered their status. Although the Habsburg Emperor, who also held the title of King of Hungary, could summon and dismiss the diet at will

(and Emperor Francis sulkily refused to call the troublesome parliament between 1812 and 1825), it was difficult to raise taxation without consulting it, so it met in 1825, 1832-6, 1839-40, 1843-4 and, most dramatically, in 1847-8. Moreover, even when the parliament was not in session, the Hungarian gentry entrenched their opposition to the Habsburg monarchy in the fifty-five counties, where they elected and salaried the local officials, and where their assemblies (or 'congregations'), which often met annually, were sometimes so bold as to claim the right to reject royal legislation. The Emperor might well have appointed lords lieutenants to oversee the prickly counties, but in practice these representatives of royal power were chosen from among the region's landed magnates - of necessity, since they alone knew the local movers and shakers and had some chance of exerting influence over them. Yet that meant that their sympathies more often than not lay with the local nobles, rather than with the Emperor: they did little to clip the wings of the stubbornly independent Magyars.⁶

In 1815 the Italians of Lombardy and Venetia fell under Habsburg rule. They, too, had an institutional outlet because they both had congregations, chosen from among local landowners and the towns, as well as the united 'Congregations General' which drew together delegates from the two provinces. These assemblies had the right to decide how to implement laws handed down by the government, represented by a viceroy living in Milan, but not to make legislation of their own. The Habsburgs had to tread carefully, for northern Italy was one of the jewels in the Habsburg crown: Lombardy's fertile, irrigated plains were a bright patchwork of wheat, of well-kept vines and of mulberry bushes, upon which silk worms produced their precious fibres. The duchy's capital and, to the chagrin of the proud Venetians, of the two provinces together, was Milan, which was culturally one of the most vibrant cities in Europe, thanks in part to the lighter of touch of the censor, as compared with elsewhere in the Habsburg Empire. Lombardy-Venetia accounted for a sixth of the monarchy's population, but contributed close to third of its tax revenue - a fact which was not lost on Italian patriots. The Austrians worked hard to ensure that northern Italy was well and fairly governed, but the inevitable tensions arose. Educated Lombards and Venetians grumbled that Austrians occupied some 36,000 government posts, preventing Italians from enjoying their fair share of state patronage.⁷

Outside Hungary and Lombardy-Venetia, there were no representative institutions worthy of the name in the Habsburg Empire, which was ruled as an absolute monarchy from Vienna. Since 1835, the Emperor had been the mentally-disabled Ferdinand (in one famous outburst, he yelled at his courtiers, 'I am the Emperor and I want dumplings!'). He was beloved by his subjects, who affectionately referred to him as 'Ferdy the Loony', but of necessity the task of government was left to a council (or Staatskonferenz) which was dominated by one of the giant figures of the nineteenth century, Klemens von Metternich. A long-serving Austrian diplomat, Metternich had been the Habsburg dynasty's foreign minister since 1809 and Chancellor since 1821. He was intelligent, arrogant, aloof and, as a British diplomat once put it, 'intolerably loose and giddy with women'.⁸ He was not Austrian, but was born in 1773 in Koblenz, a town ruled by one of

⁶ I. Deak, *The Lawful Revolution: Louis Kossuth and the Hungarians 1848-1849* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), pp. 3-4, 15-16.

⁷ P. Robertson, *Revolutions of 1848: A Social History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), pp. 335-6.

⁸ Quoted in A. Palmer, *Metternich, Councillor of Europe* (London: Phoenix, 1997), p. 132.

the many states of the Rhineland, the Archbishopric of Trier. Like the other small German principalities, Trier reposed within the protective shell of the Holy Roman Empire, at the pinnacle of which was the Emperor, who was chosen by the prince-electors and who was invariably a Habsburg, since this powerful dynasty was the best-placed to defend Germany. In the autumn of 1794, the French revolutionary armies overran the Rhineland and with the triumph of the blue-coated hordes came the republican retribution against the local nobility. The Metternich estates were confiscated and Clemens fled to Vienna, where he subsisted on an imperial pension and from the income from his last remaining land in Bohemia. His inexorable climb up the ladder of Austrian diplomatic service began in 1801, when he took the post of Austrian minister to Saxony. From now on, he began to develop the idea that the multi-national Empire, held together by a strong monarchy, could be the 'foundations of a European political system'.⁹

By 1815, by which time he had been Austrian foreign minister for six years, Metternich's background and direct experience gave him a strong sense that the Habsburg monarchy was not only a German, but also a European, necessity. In a positive way, Metternich believed that a powerful state in central Europe had a chance of protecting the smaller German states and of playing a leading role in preserving the social and political stability of the entire continental order. In a more negative sense, if the Habsburg monarchy failed in its mission to keep the centrifugal forces of liberalism and nationalism in check, then the multi-national empire at the heart of Europe would fragment and, where once there was order, there would be civil strife and revolutionary conflict, the effects of which no European state could hope to escape. The dominant figure in the Austrian Empire between 1815 and 1848, Metternich was also the main architect of the entire conservative order in Europe. Perhaps his greatest achievement was the diplomatic role that he played at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. After the protracted agony and slaughter of the Napoleonic Wars, this great international conference tried to reconstruct a European political system that aimed not only to maintain international peace, but to keep under the hammer the twin threats of liberalism and nationalism. This attitude was shared by Metternich's fellow-diplomats at Vienna. The legacy of Napoleon Bonaparte and the carnage of the wars which now bear his name (which killed proportionately as many Europeans as the First World War) weighed heavily on the minds of policy-makers right up to 1848. So, too, did the grim, angular shadow the guillotine. For conservatives across Europe, liberalism and nationalism meant revolution - and that could only be the grim herald of destruction and death, whether they came in the shape of revolutionary armies streaming across the continent, respecting neither life, nor religion, nor property, or in the form of a bloodthirsty social war against all those who had a stake in the established order. The post-Napoleonic political system therefore tried to be muscular in the face of subversive threats to its existence, but this was precisely because it was all too aware of what failure might mean.

For the chief organiser of this order, the only monarchy worth the title was an absolute monarchy. In 1820, fearful that Alexander I of Russia was flirting with the hair-raising idea of introducing a constitution, Metternich addressed to the Tsar his 'profession of political faith'. Monarchs, he argued, had to be 'placed above the sphere of passions which agitate society':

⁹ Quoted in Palmer, *Metternich*, p. 35.

it is in times of crisis that they are principally called upon ... to show themselves for what they are: fathers invested with all the authority which belongs to heads of families; to prove that, in dark times, they know how to be just, wise and, by that alone, strong, and that they do not abandon the peoples, whom they have the duty to govern, to the play of factions, to error and its consequences, which will fatally lead to the destruction of society.¹⁰

Among the 'factions' which threatened 'society' were liberals and nationalists who demanded constitutions, national independence and political unity. Sovereigns should not yield to these demands, not even in an effort to make timely concessions to avoid revolution: 'Respect for everything that exists; liberty for all Governments to watch over the well-being of their own peoples; a league between all Governments against the factions in all States; mistrust for words devoid of sense ["the cry for Constitutions"], which have become the rallying cry of the factions.' For Metternich, however, absolute rule did not mean despotism, which was government at the capricious whim of a single man. Rather, monarchs had to rule through a framework of law and regular administration: 'The first and greatest of matters ... is the fixity of laws, their uninterrupted working, and never changing them. So may Governments govern, may they maintain the fundamental bases of their institutions, old as well as new; for if it is always dangerous to interfere with them, it could not be useful to do so now, in today's general turbulence.'¹¹

The Habsburg regime, in fact, was not especially oppressive - at least, not by the standards of modern dictatorships. Its bureaucracy was generally honest and efficient. Moreover (and despite his advice to the Tsar) Metternich used his considerable diplomatic influence to press mild reforms on the more benighted absolute rulers whose intransigence threatened to provoke violent opposition: in 1821 he promised military aid to King Ferdinand I of Naples against his rebellious subjects, on the condition that he made some minor concessions.

Yet the rejection of constitutional reform made repression almost unavoidable, since Metternich's political vision would not admit the legitimacy of any opposition. There was a secret police, which operated out of offices on the Herrengasse in Vienna, but the number of officers was small - some twenty-five including thirteen censors - so in the imperial capital they relied upon the regular police (which also handled a plethora of other tasks), while in the provinces local bureaux had to deal with both regular and secret policing. This was not a particularly intense system of surveillance, but it is also true that the activities of printers, publishers and writers were hemmed in with a range of petty, irritating regulations.¹² Since only one of four categories of books was fully permitted, a climate was fostered in which it was assumed that a publication would be forbidden unless it was explicitly allowed.¹³

¹⁰ Prince Richard de Metternich (ed.), *Mémoires, documents, et écrits divers laissés par le Prince de Metternich*, vol. 3 (Paris, 1881), pp. 440-1.

¹¹ Metternich, *Mémoires*, vol. 3, p. 444.

¹² A. Sked, *The Decline and Fall of the Habsburg Empire 1815-1918* (London: Longman, 1989), pp. 46-50.

¹³ R. Okey, *The Habsburg Monarchy c. 1765-1918: from Enlightenment to Eclipse* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2001), p. 78.

Metternich also cast Austria – even more so than Tsar Nicholas did for Russia - in the role of Europe's policeman. The peace settlement at Vienna in 1815 left Central and Eastern Europe under the domination of the three conservative monarchies of Austria, Prussia and Russia. Since 1795 the old Polish kingdom (except for the Napoleonic interlude of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, established in 1807), had been wiped off the map, partitioned between these three powers – and this was confirmed at the peace congress. The three 'eastern monarchies' therefore tried to asphyxiate Polish nationalism under their combined weight.

Metternich was equally determined to keep German nationalism in check. Austria shared with Prussia a dominant position in Germany, which, after the Napoleonic era which saw the destruction of the Holy Roman Empire and a dramatic reordering of territory, was now divided into thirty-nine states (including Austria and Prussia), bound together in a confederation (Bund), with a diet which met at Frankfurt. This assembly was not a parliament of elected representatives, but rather a meeting of diplomats sent by the governments of the separate states, a sort of German 'United Nations'. Its purpose was not to encourage Germany into closer union – quite the opposite. The Bund was intended to preserve the conservative order and to ensure that disputes between the states were resolved peacefully, which of course reassured the smaller 'middle states' that their interests would be protected against the domineering tendencies of Prussia and Austria. It could call on the various German governments to provide soldiers to defend Germany from foreign invasion, but also against domestic revolutionary threats, so in 1819 it issued the repressive Karlsbad Decrees against the German radical and liberal movements, and especially against the student nationalist organisations, the *Burschenschaften*. These edicts were reiterated in 1832 in response to a wave of revolution and protest that swept across Europe. Behind the decrees stood Metternich, who also looked askance at the constitutionalism that had begun to take root in Germany in the years immediately following the Napoleonic Wars. The southern German states of Baden, Württemberg, Bavaria, Nassau and Hesse-Darmstadt all emerged with constitutions. This process was actually in keeping with the Act which created the German Confederation, which declared that all German states should have 'constitutions of the territorial estates'. This, however, was a deliberately ambiguous term, since it could mean either (as the southern German states interpreted it) a modern, parliamentary monarchy or a more conservative style of traditional 'estates' in which the nobles, the clergy and the good burghers of the towns were separately represented, ensuring that the estates were always weighted towards conservative interests. Metternich exerted his influence on King Frederick William III of Prussia and then on the German Confederation to ensure, first, that Prussia did not join the constitutional dance and, second, that the Bund's 'Final Act' of 1820 interpreted the term 'constitution' in Metternich's sense, to mean estates rather than parliaments. Even then, they were to be stacked in favour of the 'monarchic principle', meaning that the prince would always enjoy most of the power.¹⁴

It was in Italy, however, that Metternich pursued the most active counter-revolutionary and anti-liberal policies. He famously derided the claims of Italian

¹⁴ Winkler, *Germany*, pp. 64-5.

nationalists for unification by calling Italy ‘a geographical expression’,¹⁵ split as it was among ten kingdoms, duchies and statelets. He saw Austria’s role to keep it that way. Besides ensuring that Austria had a strong direct Italian presence, by virtue of its annexation of Lombardy and Venetia in the north, the Congress of Vienna in 1815 arranged Italian affairs so that Austria would be the predominant power in the entire peninsula. After the long experience of Napoleonic occupation, the purpose was initially to ward off French influence, but the role soon developed into one of repressing Italian liberalism and nationalism. Tuscany was ruled by a Habsburg grand duke, while the Duchies of Parma and Modena were also governed by relatives of the Emperor. Beyond these dynastic ties, the Austrians were given the right to garrison the fortress of Ferrara in the Papal States. The Bourbon King of the Two Sicilies (meaning southern Italy and the eponymous island, since 1816 deprived of its separate parliament and ruled directly from Naples) signed an alliance and a military convention with Austria, which bound the kingdom tightly to Habsburg policy. Only the north-western Kingdom of Sardinia (which included the island of the same name and, on the mainland, Piedmont and Genoa) remained completely independent: it was militarily the most powerful of all Italian states and provided a strong buffer between France and the Austrian presence in Lombardy. Yet Austrian power in Italy was such that it was able to intervene militarily against liberal revolutions in both Naples and Piedmont itself in 1820-1. In the aftermath, the Austrians tried over ninety leading Lombard liberals (although they had little to do with the uprisings) and condemned forty of them to rot in the dark Spielberg fortress in Bohemia. Among them was Silvio Pellico, who on his release in 1830 wrote *My Prisons*, a testimony to both Austrian oppression and to the power of religious faith in the face of adversity. The book became a bestseller and contributed to a ‘black legend’ of Austrian misrule in Italy. Metternich merely reinforced the grim image of Germanic oppression when he again sent troops southwards in 1831-2 to crush insurrections in Modena, Parma and the Papal States (where the Austrians had the brass neck to hold onto Bologna until 1838).

Austrian power and influence therefore spread from Germany down to the toe of Italy and into Eastern Europe. It was, Count Anton Kolowrat-Liebsteinsky disparagingly said, a ‘forest of bayonets’. Kolowrat was no liberal, but he was Metternich’s great rival in the Staatskonferenz. He agreed with the Chancellor: ‘that people must strive for conservatism and do everything to achieve it. Yet we differ about means. Your means consist of a forest of bayonets and fixed adherence to things as they are. To my mind, by following these lines we are playing into the hands of the revolutionaries.’¹⁶ Metternich’s more rigid form of conservatism, he fretted, would merely create such pressure that ‘your ways will lead us ... to our ruin’. The British statesman Lord Palmerston – outspoken as always – bluntly criticised Austria’s ‘repressive and suffocating policy’ because it ‘will lead to an explosion just as certainly as would a boiler that was hermetically sealed and deprived of an outlet for steam’.¹⁷ Kolowrat was also deeply concerned about the financial cost of maintaining Austrian power in Europe at such intensity: between 1815 and 1848, the army swallowed some 40 per cent of the government budget, and paying

¹⁵ Quoted in S. J. Woolf, *A History of Italy 1700-1860: the social constraints of political change* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 227.

¹⁶ Quoted in Sked, *Decline and Fall*, p. 10.

¹⁷ Quoted in Sked, *Decline and Fall*, p. 10.

interest alone on the state debt digested a further 30 per cent. One of the great weaknesses of Metternich's 'system' that was exposed in 1848 was that it had inadequate resources left to cope with the worst economic downturn of the nineteenth century and so could do little to soothe the people's distress.

II

The political restrictions imposed on Europe could not help but provoke opposition. Just as Metternich and his ilk felt the heavy weight of recent history in their political calculations, so that same history proved to be an inspiration to their opponents. The French Revolution of 1789 and its Napoleonic progeny had provoked dread amongst conservatives, but – in the true Romantic fashion of the age – their memory could stir the blood of liberals, radicals and patriots who felt constricted in the stifling atmosphere of Metternich's Europe. The first post-war generation of European liberals had personally engaged in the struggles of the revolutionary era. With the final allied victory in 1815, they had lost either because they had supported Napoleonic rule - and its often empty promises of freedom - or because, having opposed the French, they had hoped in vain that from the ruins of the old European order would rise a new, constitutional system. There were unsuccessful revolutionary outbreaks in Italy in 1820-2, led in Naples by liberal army officers (including Guglielmo Pepe, a former Napoleonic officer who would play a central role in 1848), who were members of a revolutionary underground movement called the Carbonari, dedicated to the overthrow of Austrian domination and to the establishment of a liberal order in Italy. The French equivalent, the Charbonnerie, drew much of its strength from the seething resentment felt by former servants of the Napoleonic state who had been purged in the royalist reaction, the violent 'White Terror' of 1815 - so-called to distinguish it from the 'Red' Jacobin Terror of 1793-4. Among those who joined the underground republican opposition was a teenage Louis-Auguste Blanqui, whose family fell on hard times when his father, the Napoleonic prefect of the Alpes-Maritimes, lost his post when the territory (better known as Nice) was returned to Piedmont in the peace settlement of 1815. Blanqui thus began a lifetime of revolutionary activism which would last until his death in 1881. In Spain the liberals yearned for the Constitution of 1812, which had been forged in Cadiz by a parliament which had met not far from the hostile muzzles of cannon belonging to the besieging French army. Yet when King Ferdinand VII returned triumphantly in 1814, he brushed aside the constitution and sent many of the liberals scurrying into exile. They had their revenge in 1820, when they seized power and compelled Ferdinand to rule as a constitutional monarch for three years, until they were overwhelmed by French troops (the '100,000 sons of Saint Louis') sent over the Pyrenees by Louis XVIII, who was intent on restoring his fellow Bourbon to his absolute power. Even autocratic Russia could not remain untouched by the explosive legacy of the Napoleonic epoch. Russian army officers who had marched across Europe during the war, ultimately occupying Paris, had met their French, German and British counterparts and, over the course of the genteel, intellectual conversations with their fellow officers began to wonder at the backwardness of their own country, while absorbing western ideas of constitutional government and civil liberties. This germinating seed finally bore its first, bitter fruit in Russia's first

revolution, the Decembrist uprising of 1825. In the month which gave the insurrection its name, liberal army officers, taking advantage of the confusion following the sudden death of Tsar Alexander I, raised the standard of revolt against his successor, Nicholas I. The insurrection was easily crushed by loyal troops, first in Saint Petersburg and then in the Ukraine, but it was this experience at the very moment of his accession which set the new Tsar on a reactionary course for his entire reign – although there were some occasional, hopeful glimmers that serfdom would be reformed.

The most dramatic wave of revolutions occurred several years later. In 1830 the Bourbon Charles X was overthrown by a three-day uprising in the streets of Paris, to be replaced by the more liberal-minded Louis-Philippe. This was rapidly followed by a revolution in Belgium, where liberals overthrew Dutch rule (imposed in 1815), eventually to secure an independent state with a constitutional monarchy. In Germany the French example inspired liberal opponents of the conservative order to demand – or force – constitutions from their rulers, so that Hanover, Saxony and a few others joined the still small group of German states which had representative institutions. The opposition pressed for more, unleashing a protest movement that culminated in the Hambach Festival of 1832, a mass meeting – the largest in Germany before 1848 – demanding political reform and a united Germany. This display of opposition muscle spurred Metternich into repeating the Karlsbad Decrees. The most dramatic surge of resistance to the conservative order came in Poland, where in November 1830, the patience of the patriotic Polish nobility within the Russian partition snapped when the Tsar mobilized the Polish army in response to the 1830 Revolutions in Western Europe. The insurrection lasted ten months and was crushed – after some bloody and intense fighting – by a 120,000-strong Russian army under General Ivan Paskevich (who would help repress another revolution in 1848). In the retribution which followed, a staggering eighty-thousand Poles were dragged off in chains to Siberia. There were also revolutions in Italy, but these were flattened, mostly by Austrian troops. The revolutions of the 1830s were nowhere near as widespread as those of 1848, but on a European scale they loosened Metternich's grip on the conservative, international order. When the Austrian Chancellor heard the first news of the revolution in France, he collapsed at his desk, moaning, 'My entire life's work is destroyed.'¹⁸ His despair was exaggerated, however, for the cautious behaviour of the July Monarchy, which rapidly swung on to a conservative tack, would do much to bury his worst fears. He was not troubled, either, by another crack in the conservative edifice, in the shape of Greek independence. After a brutal, atrocity-ridden war which lasted eight and a half years between 1821 and 1829, the Greeks won their freedom from Turkish rule. Yet Metternich's international system did not descend into crisis because the final Greek victory had been secured, first, with military intervention by Russia, Britain and France and then by the diplomatic recognition of the great powers at the Treaty of London in 1830. The new kingdom of Greece was therefore rapidly enveloped within the folds of the post-Napoleonic order.

Metternich saw revolution as an essentially French disease: in late 1822, he had written to the Tsar that 'nationality, political boundaries, all have disappeared for the [revolutionary] sect. Without doubt, it is in Paris that the directing committee of the radicals of all Europe is today established'.¹⁹ Metternich was once again overstating the

¹⁸ Quoted in Palmer, *Metternich*, p. 246.

¹⁹ Metternich, *Mémoires*, vol. 3, p. 629.

case, but he illustrates the truth of the cliché that just because a person is paranoid, it does not mean that some people are *not* out to get him. The 1830s, witnessed the emergence of very real and resilient underground networks of revolutionaries. These were energized by a new generation of intellectuals, romantics and patriots who were not old enough to have any direct recollection of the French Revolution, but who lived and breathed the glorious memories of its liberating promise. For the French republican historian Jules Michelet, born in 1798, and writing the preface to his epic history of the French Revolution in 1847, that great historical moment was driven by the entire people - an unstoppable, providential force whose destiny was to spread the benevolent gospel of liberty, equality and fraternity across the globe.²⁰ Following the exhilarating example of 1789, some visionaries believed that revolution would be the means by which a freer, more equitable world would be born and they now dedicated their entire lives to bringing about that glorious day.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, this epoch therefore witnessed the birth of the 'professional' revolutionary. Those of France in 1789 had been unexpectedly hurled – often from obscure, drab provincial lives - into the maelstrom which eventually convulsed Europe for more than two decades: they became revolutionaries by accident and often quite reluctantly. Those of this new generation were self-consciously and actively trying to provoke a revolution. Foremost among them was the inspirational, if rather Quixotic, figure of Giuseppe Mazzini. Born in Genoa in 1805 and a member of the *carbonari* from 1829, Mazzini was devoted not only to expelling the Austrians from Italy, but also to unifying the country in a democratic republic. Although this Italian patriot was far from giving his unqualified admiration to the Revolution of 1789, he held that the French had proclaimed the rights of the individual, while demonstrating that great revolutions were possible even against the odds and in the most unexpected of places. Even failed uprisings, Mazzini argued, had their purpose, because 'ideas ripen quickly when nourished by the blood of martyrs' – and the ideas would ferment even as the insurgents were mown down by cannon and musketry.²¹ The modern-day revolutionaries, he wrote in 1839, 'labour less for the generation that lives around them than for the generation to come; the triumph of the ideas that they cast on the world is slow, but assured and decisive'.²² Mazzini was convinced that the next great revolution would bring genuine liberty to all the oppressed peoples of Europe. In this vision, he cast the Italians in the leading role – this was a people who, on ridding themselves of their Austrian and princely masters, were predestined to unleash their immense but as yet untapped energies and resources for the good of the entire continent: 'It is in Italy that the European knot must be untied. To Italy belongs the high office of emancipation; Italy will fulfill its civilizing mission'.²³ Mazzini's dream was of a Europe of nationalities, equally free and each with their own character: indeed, from the mid-1830s, he used the term 'nationalism' as a term of abuse, declaring that while struggles for national freedom

²⁰ R. Gildea, *The Past in French History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 35.

²¹ D. Mack Smith, *Mazzini* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 33-4.

²² Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 35-6.

²³ Quoted in L. Riall, *Garibaldi: Invention of a Hero* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 10.

against foreign oppressors was absolutely necessary, patriotism should never, stand in the way of 'the brotherhood of peoples which is our one overriding aim'.²⁴

Mazzini's ideas were very influential on his countrymen. His underground organization, 'Young Italy', founded in Marseille in 1831 after the failure of the *carbonari* movement, probably (by Metternich's own estimate in 1846) had no more than a thousand active members in Italy itself, but many thousands more offered their moral support and read its banned literature. Mazzini also enjoyed more open support amongst Italian expatriates, including some five thousand subscribers to its journal in Montevideo and Buenos Aires. Among them was another professional revolutionary named Giuseppe Garibaldi who had been exiled from Piedmont since 1833 and was now fighting for revolutionary causes in Brazil and Uruguay, a role which made him well-known in Italy.

Mazzini proved to be a truly inspiring figure for revolutionaries of all nationalities. The perceptive Herzen met Mazzini on a number of occasions (in this instance, in 1849):

Mazzini got up and, looking me straight in the face with his piercing eyes, held out both hands in a friendly way. Even in Italy a head so severely classical, so elegant in its gravity, is rarely to be met with. At moments the expression of his face was harshly austere, but it quickly grew soft and serene. An active, concentrated intelligence sparkled in his melancholy eyes; there was an infinity of persistence and strength of will in them and in the lines of his brow. All his features showed traces of long years of anxiety, of sleepless nights, of storms endured, of powerful passions, or rather of powerful passion, and also some element of fanaticism – perhaps of asceticism.²⁵

Such was his attraction as a theorist and an apostle of revolution that Mazzini felt able to draw revolutionaries of all nationalities into a pan-European movement. While in exile in Berne in 1834, he gathered around him a small number of political refugees from Poland and Germany, as well as Italy, to create an organization called 'Young Europe', aimed at liberating the oppressed nations and at coaxing the peoples of Europe – eventually – to settle their differences peacefully. This glorious vision proved, tragically too elusive, but 'Young Italy' and 'Young Europe' inspired a wealth of imitators in other countries: there was a 'Young' Ireland, Switzerland, Poland and Germany and eventually the world would boast a Young Argentina and a Young Ukraine. Metternich was not, therefore, being entirely unreasonable when he lost sleep over the existence of a revolutionary network: it was just that it did not take its orders from Paris. He was perhaps nearer the mark when he castigated the Italian as the most dangerous man in Europe – and certainly some anxious European rulers wholeheartedly agreed. In 1834, Mazzini, Garibaldi and other members of Young Italy were condemned to death *in absentia* by a Piedmontese military tribunal, while the Pope ordered his police to be watchful over the 'immense designs of this extraordinary man'.²⁶ There were even some sweaty palms in the Belgian and Dutch governments when they learned that Mazzinian propaganda was circulating in the Low Countries, yet as parliamentary regimes they almost certainly had much less to

²⁴ Quoted in Mack Smith, *Mazzini*, p. 13.

²⁵ Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*, p. 366.

²⁶ Quoted in Mack Smith, *Mazzini*, p. 12.

fear from its influence. By the crisis year in 1847, Mazzini had become such a bogeyman for the authorities that there were simultaneous sightings of him in Malta, Switzerland, Germany and Italy.²⁷ For all this, when faced with the golden opportunities which 1848 appeared to present, the great visionary proved capable of political pragmatism.

The revolutionaries were not merely romantic dreamers, but were willing to take grave personal risks in the single-minded pursuit of their visions. Many of them also sacrificed comfort and financial security: Mazzini relied heavily on his parents for money (they kept paying up in the hope that - someday - he would get a 'proper' job). While living in exile in London in the ten years or so before 1848, he lived austere, bemusing his British friends and patrons by eschewing the expense of taking cabs, so appearing at social events spattered with the mud of the filthy city streets. Herzen was better off, since he was living off his inheritance from his father, but his friend, the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, another scion of the Russian gentry, had burned his bridges with his well-heeled family and had an irritating habit of asking his new acquaintances for loans. When not being paid for his military services in South America, Garibaldi, who came from a seafaring family in Nice (which then belonged to Piedmont), earned a living, variously, as a sailor, as a cattle drover in the Argentinian pampas and as a ship's broker.²⁸

The revolutionaries did not create the conditions for revolution in 1848, nor were they responsible for the initial outbreaks of violence that year, which arose from a confluence of much broader circumstances. Yet these expectant people were poised for action when the moment did arrive and, more importantly, they had the support of organisations which could mobilise significant numbers of activists when the time came for insurrection. More importantly, this organized, revolutionary opposition to the conservative order could not have flourished if it had been the work of only a few thousand isolated fanatics. It was, rather, rooted in the frustrations of a wider, civil society. While the vast majority of Europeans had no intention of becoming active revolutionaries - and indeed they dreaded the violence and social dislocation which an insurrection would bring - the grievances and aims of the activists found sympathetic echoes among the more passive majority of the population. In this sense, the lurid picture of a bloodthirsty, all-embracing revolutionary movement, painted by conservatives to justify their repressive policies, became something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Legislation which struck at genuine revolutionaries may have been acceptable to most people, but much of it - like the Karlsbad Decrees in Germany - also struck more broadly at the press, at education, at public associations, at workers' unions and at cultural societies. In many countries, censorship, government or church interference in education and restrictions on the freedom to assemble, to form associations and to discuss politics freely frustrated many educated, articulate and ambitious people who genuinely felt that they had something positive to contribute to both state and society. There was also a sense that the existing political systems - constitutional or absolutist - did not represent the interests of those social groups such as the manufacturers, artisans and educated middle-class people like lawyers, professors and low-ranking officials, who felt, firstly, that they performed roles useful to the state and, secondly, that the political system was not arranged to protect or further their own interests. Consequently, there were broad

²⁷ Mack Smith, *Mazzini*, p. 50.

²⁸ Mack Smith, *Mazzini*, p. 31-2; Carr, *Romantic Exiles*, p. 29; J. Ridley, *Garibaldi* (London: Phoenix Press, 2001), pp. 105-6.

segments of society which, while they may have abhorred the prospect of revolution and social upheaval, at least understood the revolutionaries' grievances and shared some of their aims.

Underlying this wider dissatisfaction with the conservative order was the growth of public opinion. Since the eighteenth century, new concepts of 'civil society' had been emerging, fostering the idea that there was – or should be – a cultural and social space independent of the state, where individual citizens could engage in discussion, debate and criticism of everything from art to politics. Civil society was to be the independent arbiter of artistic taste and the legitimate source of political opinion and judgment. This, of course, assumed the existence of an educated, cultured and politically conscious section of society that could sustain such interests. By the nineteenth century, that did indeed exist everywhere, although it varied in scope and size from one part of Europe to the next. Among the great powers, it was perhaps broadest in Britain and France, where censorship was lighter (or where there were ways to avoid it) and literacy was higher. In France by 1848, some 60 per cent of the population could read (a figure closely matched by the Habsburg Empire, which boasted 55 per cent), whereas in Russia the figure was a lowly per cent. In Prussia, where there was a well-established tradition of state schooling, an impressive 80 per cent of people were literate.²⁹ Public opinion was expressed not only in print, but in societies and clubs, with their membership drawn from among the progressive middle-classes and nobility. These often covered their political purposes with more innocuous activities, including scientific discovery (a favourite in Italy), gymnastics (popular with the perennially healthy Germans), music and shooting (although this last of course had its revolutionary uses). 'Public life', wrote one German observer, 'stormed and raged in the theatre and the concert hall because there was nowhere else it was allowed to storm and rage.'³⁰ This observation was a matter of perspective, however: in Prussia, Herzen – for so long used to the oppressive atmosphere of Russia – was so delighted by the caricatures of the Tsar on sale in a bookshop that he bought 'a whole stock of them'. For him he came back from a grubby theatre exhilarated not by the play, 'but by the audience, which consisted mostly of workmen and young people; in the intervals people talked freely and loudly'.³¹ From 1839, the annual Italian scientific conference gathered together hundreds of the most learned minds from up and down the country to discuss the latest developments in technology, medicine and science. In the particularly tense year of 1847, it was held in Venice's Doge's Palace: the name of the national hero of the day, Pope Pius IX, was invoked as often as possible and even discussions of agriculture provided opportunities to fulminate against the Austrians, since the northern Italians traditionally nicknamed the Habsburg soldiers 'potatoes'.³² That there were ways around government restrictions none the less did nothing to soothe the resentment when governments tried to determine what people could and could not read or discuss and how, when and with whom they could meet. German liberals liked to joke that a typical conservative sign would read 'It is permitted to walk in this field', the assumption being that people were not allowed to do anything unless explicitly allowed

²⁹ M. Rapport, *Nineteenth Century Europe, 1789-1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), p. 66.

³⁰ Quoted in D. Blackbourn, *The Fontana History of Germany 1780-1918: the Long Nineteenth Century* (London: Fontana, 1997), p. 128.

³¹ Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*, p. 321.

³² J. Keates, *The Siege of Venice* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2005), pp. 61-2.

to do so. In other words, there was a parting of ways between the conservative state and civil society.

This was perhaps to be expected in absolute monarchies like Prussia and Austria, but it was also true in liberal France. This was because the July Monarchy did not meet the expectations of a wide section of French society. King Louis-Philippe had solid liberal credentials: as ‘Général Égalité’ (General Equality, as he was briefly known), he had distinguished himself in the opening campaigns of the French Revolutionary Wars in 1792, before fleeing to Belgium at the end of the year, as Louis XVI was put on trial for his life. When he was persuaded (above all by his strong and devoted sister, Adélaïde),³³ to take the throne in 1830, Louis-Philippe initially held fast to his own liberal convictions. When he arrived in Paris to take the throne, he embraced the aged Lafayette, hero of both the American and French Revolutions, on a balcony at the Hôtel de Ville, the seat of Parisian municipal government. The July Monarchy reconnected with France’s revolutionary heritage by restoring the tricolour – never again would the Bourbon white banner flutter as the national flag. There was no lavish coronation, but a simple ceremony in which the new ‘Citizen King’, dressed in National Guard uniform, promised to uphold the Charter of 1814, albeit with some changes, including a mild extension of the suffrage, the expunging of the crown’s emergency powers and the deletion of phrases in the preamble making reference to divine right.

Yet these moderately liberal reforms did little to please those Parisian artisans who had done most of the fighting on the barricades in 1830. For them, Louis-Philippe’s Orléans dynasty was no better than the Bourbons who had just been deposed. During the insurrection, cries of both ‘Long live Napoleon!’ – meaning the Emperor’s ailing son, Napoleon II, living in gilded captivity in Vienna – and ‘Long live the Republic’ were heard above the rattle of musketry. With Louis-Philippe’s enthronement, the artisans now received very little in return for shedding their blood, for the new order wanted to avoid what it saw as the extremes of democracy (which evoked memories of the braying Parisian mob of the 1789 Revolution) and Bourbon absolutism. Amongst the people, however, was a strong sense that ‘their’ revolution had been ‘stolen’ (the word used was ‘escamotée’: filched) by the complacent rich landowners, industrialists and financiers. There were, moreover, other powerful undercurrents in French society resentful at their exclusion from political life, including middle-class professionals, officials and entrepreneurs whose fathers or grandfathers had been the backbone of the 1789 Revolution. This opposition found expression either in republicanism, which looked back nostalgically to the democratic days of the First Republic of the 1790s, or in Bonapartism, which wanted to restore the dynasty which, while preserving some of the heritage of the Revolution, also recalled the glorious days when Napoleon took Europe by storm. This nationalist vision of a France exporting the libertarian principles of 1789 to the wider world had widespread appeal. The opposition to the July Monarchy bore with impatience the humiliation of the peace treaties of 1815, which had reduced France (after more than twenty years of warfare) back to its frontiers of 1792.

Yet the July Monarchy by and large sought to avoid foreign adventures; in fact, it tried very hard to be unheroic and rather boring. This was because it wanted peace abroad and stability at home so that France could grow and prosper economically. The

³³ M. Price, *The Perilous Crown: France between Revolutions 1814-1848* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2007), pp. 165-71.

regime would therefore do little to try to reverse the 1815 peace settlement, but it succeeded in prodding France into some of the fastest economic growth in its history. In the late 1830s it expanded and improved the road system. In 1842, the government embarked on the construction of a railway network, laying some nine hundred miles of track, which made new demands on heavy industries like coal, iron, steel and engineering, so that they expanded in turn. For this reason, some economic historians identify the 1840s as the period of 'take-off' in French industrialisation.³⁴ Karl Marx would describe the July Monarchy scathingly as a joint stock company for the exploitation of French national wealth. Indeed, the stolidly 'bourgeois' nature of the regime was represented by Louis-Philippe himself, the 'citizen king' who usually appeared in public not in royal regalia, but in a plain suit and carrying a black umbrella. This was precisely the safe image that the monarchy wanted to impress on the world, but it did not impress the republicans, who seethed at both the regime's unadventurous foreign policy and its resistance to wider political participation. Republican uprisings in 1832 in Paris and two years later in Lyon and again in the capital were crushed. The April 1834 insurrection in Paris - the inspiration for the uprising in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* - ended with a massacre on the rue Transnonain, when enraged soldiers clearing revolutionary snipers from a tenement room-by-room indiscriminately slaughtered twelve civilians whom they found sheltering there.

The killing of innocents left an indelible stain on the July Monarchy, but at least the regime had the support of the well-heeled electorate, which was petrified by the prospect of another revolution. The government therefore felt strong enough to prosecute republican newspapers and imposed restrictions on political associations and workers' unions. Among the organisations proscribed was the paramilitary Society of the Rights of Man, which was founded in 1832 and recruited from workers. It was divided into small revolutionary cells called 'sections' – a term recalling the Parisian wards (which were the hotbeds of popular militancy) of the 1789 Revolution. This was not an organisation devoted to peaceful persuasion: rather, it sought to drill and discipline its artisanal membership in preparation for an insurrection to establish a democratic republic. It planned the Parisian uprising of 1834, and so it suffered accordingly in the repression: no less than 1,156 arrests were made in the initial swoop by the police, although 736 were released within five months.³⁵ The republicans reacted with more violence, including, in 1835, a truly horrific assassination attempt on the King by a twenty-five-barrelled gun, dubbed an 'infernal machine', in which some fourteen people were killed – but not Louis-Philippe, who escaped with a single bruise. This was one of eight efforts on his life, a frequency that prompted the satirical magazine *Charivari* to quip on one occasion that the King and his family had returned from an outing 'without being in any way assassinated'.³⁶

The years 1834-5 represented the start of a cycle of violence and repression, in which the republicans became increasingly embittered by the regime, while the monarchy

³⁴ F. Crouzet, 'French Economic Growth in the Nineteenth Century Reconsidered', *History*, vol. 59 (1974), pp. 167-79.

³⁵ J. Harsin, *Barricades: The War of the Streets in Revolutionary Paris, 1830-1848* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 101-2.

³⁶ Quoted in T. E. B. Howarth, *Citizen-King: the life of Louis-Philippe, King of the French* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1961), p. 229.

had abandoned its original liberal principles and became ever more repressive. The September Laws of 1835 imposed press restrictions: newspapers could be prosecuted for proposing another system of government or for insulting the King - although that did not stop the great caricaturist Honoré Daumier from transforming Louis-Philippe's jowly features into a pear shape, an image which stuck. Legal procedure was also changed to make it easier to pursue political prosecutions.³⁷ The liberal monarchy had, albeit with misgivings from the King himself, abandoned some of the very principles that had differentiated it from the Bourbons. This transformation seems to have been encapsulated in the very slogan used in support of the September Laws: 'Legality will kill us'.³⁸

At the same time, the violence and repression split the republican opposition into the moderates, who wanted to use legal methods to persuade the regime to grant political reforms (this tendency took its name from its newspaper, *le National*), and the radicals, who wanted to destroy the monarchy by revolution. Amongst the organisations which this militant tendency formed out of the wreckage of the Society of the Rights of Man was the insurrectionary Society of Seasons, founded by Blanqui and his friend Armand Barbès, which was so-called because to keep the identities of its members secret from the prying eyes of the police, its cells consisted of seven revolutionaries, each named after a day of the week. Four weeks were bound into a month and three months were grouped into the largest unit of all - a season. The catechism to which its members had to subscribe condemned all society as 'gangrened', which justified 'heroic remedies ... to achieve a healthy state', by which was meant not only a revolution, but also a period of 'revolutionary power' - that is to say, a form of authoritarian rule until the 'people' were ready for democracy and the old ruling elites were exterminated. This was an early, grisly herald of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. Indeed, Blanqui was beginning to insist that ensuring all citizens the 'right to existence' would involve some distribution of wealth.³⁹ The Seasons was on the most extreme left of the republican movement and was responsible for an abortive uprising in May 1839, in which Barbès fell wounded, bleeding from a head wound. Despite the failure - and the captivity which followed - Blanqui remained convinced that revolutions could be made by acts of will: insurrection alone was enough to begin the process of extirpating the old order and of building the world anew. The rest of the republican left was not so sure: in 1843, the left-wing newspaper *La Réforme* was founded, backed with the money of Alexandre Ledru-Rollin, who was rich enough to have been elected to the Chamber of Deputies, but whose sympathies were with the left. The journal's editors and journalists saw themselves as 'the General Staff' of the coming revolution, but their main thrust was persuasion through propaganda. *Réforme* advocated not only political democracy (as did the *National*), but social reform. Although in 1845 it denounced what it called 'communism' (whereupon Blanqui and his followers castigated the paper as 'aristocratic'), it certainly entertained socialist ideas.

In Italy, Germany and the Habsburg Empire, liberalism coincided with nationalism. The idea of Italian unification had developed under the ideological impact

³⁷ Tombs, *France*, p. 363.

³⁸ Quoted in R. J. Goldstein, *Political Repression in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), p. 148.

³⁹ Harsin, *Barricades*, pp. 114-15.

of the French Revolution of 1789 and the practical experience of Napoleonic rule, under which previously separate states had been lumped and administered together. Yet there were divisions between those who wanted to retain the existing princes in an Italian confederation and republicans who sought a unitary, democratic state. Perhaps the leading intellect behind the former vision was Vincenzo Gioberti, who in 1843 published an influential book, entitled *Of the Moral and Civil Primacy of the Italians*, which by 1848 had sold no less than eighty-thousand copies, making it a bestseller by nineteenth-century standards. The title alone could not fail to appeal to a people who were largely under the heel of a dominant Austria. For Gioberti, the *Risorgimento* – Italy's 'resurgence' – was not encouraged by the French Revolution, but interrupted by it. The French, in fact, were not the great people many took them to be, for (Gioberti argues crushingly) 'France is not inventive, not even in the ranks of error'. Italy's primacy stemmed not from imported ideas of nationhood, but from the Pope, for religion by its very nature dominated all that was human. Gioberti therefore proposed a federation of the existing Italian states led by the political and moral authority of the Pope: it was this which would give Italy, 'the most cosmopolitan of nations', its rightful place in the world.⁴⁰ The unitary, republican vision was of course expressed by Mazzini, who in explaining Young Italy's goals, declared:

Young Italy is republican and unitarian - republican because theoretically every nation is destined, by the law of God and humanity, to form a free and equal community of brothers; and the republican government is the only form of government that ensures this future: because all true sovereignty resides essentially in the nation, the sole progressive and continuous interpreter of the supreme moral law ... Young Italy is unitarian, because, without unity there is no true nation; because, without unity there is no real strength; and Italy, surrounded as she is by powerful, united, and jealous nations, has need of strength above all things.⁴¹

German nationalism was also divided between liberal and radical wings, as became eminently clear at the Hambach Festival in 1832. There, republican orators proclaimed, under streaming black, red and gold banners, the goal of a unitary, democratic German republic. This horrified liberals, who, like their moderate Italian counterparts, wanted to persuade the existing German states to grant constitutions and join a German federation, which would guarantee individual and political liberties. This vision was driven in part by a sincere belief that this was the best way of reconciling freedom with unity. As one Baden liberal put it in a tongue-tied turn of phrase, 'I desire unity only with liberty, and I would prefer liberty without unity to unity without liberty.'⁴² For the liberals, the radical vision of a unitary republic would lead to such an uncertain future that constitutional and individual freedoms would be put at risk. Many of them sought simply to develop the Prussian-sponsored customs union, the Zollverein (in existence since 1833 and which excluded Austria), into something more than just a common German market. The

⁴⁰ Extracts in D. Beales and E. F. Biagini, *The Risorgimento and the Unification of Italy* 2nd edn (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2002), pp. 229-33.

⁴¹ H. Kohn, *Absolutism and Democracy 1814-1852* (Princeton: van Nostrand, 1965), pp. 156-7.

⁴² Quoted in Winkler, *Germany*, p. 75.

divisions between radicals and liberals would prove to be among the gravest weaknesses of both the Italian and the German nationalist movements in 1848.

In the multi-ethnic Habsburg Empire, Metternich had initially encouraged the local elites to engage in literary activities, to explore the language of their people and to research their national past, because it seemed like a harmless diversion from political activity.⁴³ It transpired that he was playing with fire, for it was precisely such cultural life among the Magyars, Czechs, Croats, Serbs, Romanians and others which fed into a developing sense of national identity. Sooner or later, these identities would be given political expression, and in 1848 they would endanger the very fabric of the Habsburg Empire. Metternich started to understand this sometime before the cataclysm. He fell particularly hard on the Hungarian liberals. The lawyer and nobleman Lajos Kossuth, elected to the Diet of 1832-6, had circulated in manuscript form his 'parliamentary reports' which argued for a root-and-branch reform of both Hungarian society and the Habsburg monarchy in general. He was arrested in 1837 and was imprisoned for three years. Undeterred, he went on to publish his own newspaper, the *Pest News*, from 1841 and emerged as one of the fiery leaders of the Hungarian revolution. To offset Magyar opposition to the Habsburgs, in 1835 Metternich gave government support to the Croatian intellectual Ljudevit Gaj in publishing the journal *Danica* (Morning Star), which argued in favour of the 'Illyrian ideal', or a united kingdom of southern Slavs (Serbs, Croats and Slovenians). Metternich initially approved of this because it would offset the far more dangerous challenge of Magyar nationalism. Yet, by 1842, southern Slav nationalism itself became sufficiently worrying for Metternich to change his mind and withdraw his support for Gaj.

The liberal and radical opposition may well have been confined in each country to a few thousand intellectuals and the alienated gentry and middle classes, but opposition to the conservative regime was popularised by one of the most pressing issues of the age: the 'social question'. This meant the problem of poverty and the social dislocation caused by the painful economic transformation that was under way. Pauperism stemmed mostly from the sustained rise in population, which had begun in the mid-eighteenth century and had continued relentlessly ever since. Ultimately, economic growth, stimulated by industrial capitalism, would ease the pressure by creating a wide range of different types of jobs and by raising standards of living, but in most parts of Europe these benefits became apparent only after 1850, primarily in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The decades prior to 1848 certainly saw the onset of industrialisation (defined as the application of large-scale technology to manufacturing processes concentrated in factories, bringing sustained economic growth). Indeed, the European landscape across which Herzen and his family travelled in 1847 was in the first stages of a transformation that would only accelerate in later decades: factories on the outskirts of cities belched fumes into the air, mingling with the more familiar smoke rising from the chimneys of the increasingly crammed working-class tenements. Telegraph wires were just beginning to thread their way across the landscape and railway tracks, with their engines travelling at speeds hitherto unthinkable to most people, were spreading across Europe like an incipient spider's web.

The boom in the heavy industries which supported the railways and the mechanization of textile manufacturing (which experienced the first phase of

⁴³ C. A. Macartney, *The Habsburg Empire 1790-1918* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), p. 218.

industrialization in the west) were particularly intense in isolated pockets, namely in Britain, Belgium, parts of northern and south-eastern France, some regions of Germany (particularly the Rhineland and Silesia), and in the enclaves in the Czech lands of the Habsburg Empire and around Vienna. Even so, artisans and craft-workers, who had formerly enjoyed existences as small-scale producers, found that their skills and independence were being threatened not only by the introduction of machinery, but by new ways of organising production, in which unskilled or semi-skilled workers – including women – could produce the same goods in greater numbers and at lower cost, although (the beleaguered artisans argued) of poorer quality. Desperation pushed some craft workers into revolt. In June 1844, the Silesian hand-weavers, sinking underneath the tide of competition from both the British textile industry and recently-established Polish mills, rose up against the merchants who were profiting by driving down the prices of their homespun wares. Roughly three-quarters of the 40,000 weavers simply did not have enough money on which to feed their families. Factories were sacked, but no one was hurt until the Prussian army stepped in to crush the weavers, killing ten of them.⁴⁴ Moreover, artisans and craftsmen and women faced with the prospect of succumbing to the factory system found little to recommend life in service to the machine. The working day, which previously had followed gentler rhythms, was now relentlessly timed by the clock. The introduction of gas lighting may have been a boon in a domestic setting, but for European workers it meant that they regularly spent fourteen to fifteen hours a day at the machine, since it meant that there was no longer any reason to knock off when daylight faded.⁴⁵

The industrialisation was not sufficiently widespread to create a middle class or bourgeoisie that owed its wealth primarily to large-scale capitalism. Such bourgeois did exist, of course, but the European middle classes were a much more variegated and a far from socially-united group of people. Many of them were landowners, often pretentiously imitating aristocratic lifestyles. In France the wealthiest landed bourgeois fused with the older nobility to form a fifteen-thousand-strong class of super-rich *notables* who dominated political life under the July Monarchy. In Prussia, over 40 per cent of landed estates were held by non-nobles. Beneath this stratum of bourgeois landowners, there was a plethora of smaller proprietors, professionals, officials and businessmen, as well as a lower middle class of retailers and master-craftsmen. The main problem facing the middle class was that while many of them had enjoyed a good standard of education, there were enough positions in the professions and the government to provide them all with employment. So the middle classes experienced the population pressure in the shape of ‘an excess of educated men’. As one French satirist put it, there must have been a population explosion because ‘there were twenty times more lawyers than suits to be lost, more painters than portraits to be taken, more soldiers than victories to gain, and more doctors than patients to kill’.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ J. Droz, *Les Révolutions Allemandes de 1848* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957), pp. 106-7.

⁴⁵ J. Polišenský, *Aristocrats and the Crowd in the Revolutionary Year 1848: A Contribution to the History of the Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Austria* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1980), p. 39.

⁴⁶ Quoted in L. O’Boyle, ‘The Problem of an Excess of Educated Men in Western Europe, 1800-1850’, *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 42 (1970), p. 488.

In social terms, therefore, the collapse of the conservative order in 1848 was a crisis of 'modernisation' in the sense that the European economy and society were changing, but they had not yet been adequately transformed to absorb the intense pressures of population growth and, above all, to address the desperation of artisans, craft-workers and peasants. In the countryside, overpopulation threatened to create a crisis of Malthusian proportions in some parts of Europe, leaving much of the population living on the margins of existence and especially vulnerable to famine when poor harvests struck. Landless labourers saw their wages driven down by proprietors who could draw from an ever-increasing pool of rural workers desperate for jobs: the growth of the rural population was such that between the Napoleonic Wars and 1848, the number of landless agricultural workers in Prussia grew at almost double the rate of the overall population. Even peasants who had some land struggled to scratch out a living: dividing what fields they owned amongst their children meant that their holdings were ever more subdivided and unproductive, until there was nothing left to do but to sell to a landowner rich enough to buy up these parcels of land: it has been estimated that a hundred thousand Prussian landowning peasants disappeared in this way, joining the struggling masses of the rural labourers. Such pressure on the land was also acute in France.⁴⁷

There was also the problem of the peasantry, who in some parts of Central and Eastern Europe were well and truly oppressed. They were either serfs (as in Russian-occupied Poland and Austrian-ruled Galicia) or were obliged to pay heavy dues to their landlords while also being forced to perform compulsory labour services (the *robot*) on their lord's land, as in Bohemia and Hungary. Besides the *robot*, Czech peasants were also weighed down by payments in money and kind to their landlords, all in the name of compensating them for the use of the land and for acting as local judge and administrator – and this was in addition to taxes owed to the state and the tithe paid to the Church. Moreover, peasants were meant to be subservient in their behaviour: right up to 1848, they had to address state officials as 'gracious lord' and their landlords could strike a peasant with their fist at will, although beating with cane required the formal approval of the district government official.⁴⁸ Outside the Russian Empire, the Ukrainians of Galicia almost certainly bore the worst conditions of all European peasants. On average, more than a third of all days of the year were spent performing the *robot* on their (usually Polish) landlords' estates, but they also had to work for the government repairing roads and using their draft animals for transportation. Serfdom (for such it was) was enforced through violence: although since 1793 landlords were not permitted to use cudgels with which to batter their serfs, the prohibition was almost universally ignored – so much so that the government had to reiterate the ban repeatedly – the last time in 1841. A Polish democrat despaired on seeing the way in which his compatriots – aristocratic landlords – treated their Ukrainian subjects: 'the peasant in the eyes of the magnate was not a man, but an ox, destined to work for his comfort, whom it was necessary to harness and thrash with a whip like an animal'.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Droz, *Révolutions Allemandes*, p. 81.

⁴⁸ S. Z. Pech, 'Czech Peasantry in 1848', M. Rechcigl, Jr., *Czechoslovakia Past and Present* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1968), pp. 1277-9.

⁴⁹ J.-P. Himka, *Galician Villagers and the Ukrainian National Movement in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 2-3, 11, 13-14.

Compared with the peasantry, workers were much better off, but they, too, had reasons be fearful. The growth of industry was fitful, rather than sustained, so there were 'boom and bust' trade cycles, in which production overtook demand, causing a collapse in prices and commerce, leading to unemployment and despair. One such crisis arose prior to the 1830 revolutions. The worst of them struck in the years before 1848. Even outside these periods of crisis, the conditions in which the poorest people lived shocked observers. Rural poverty meant that many peasants either had to face hunger – and perhaps starvation – in the countryside, or take their chances either in emigration to North America (some 75,000 left Germany in the crisis year of 1847)⁵⁰ or to the cities. The latter course was not an easy option. While manufacturing did offer wages higher than those gleaned by rural labourers, the costs of living were also greater. One estimate suggests that food and drink for a working-class family swallowed up between 60 and 70 per cent of its income, which left little for rent and clothing.⁵¹ Indeed, studies conducted by worried middle-class philanthropists in the 1840s suggested that German workers did not have half the income required to live decently: some noted that workers survived essentially on potatoes and on hard spirits, providing a standard of living below that of convicts in prisons – an observation which was echoed by similar studies in Prague. German workers also wore the same clothes in the summer as they did in the winter, with no additional layers against the bitter cold. The towns and cities were teeming with poverty-stricken masses crammed into hideously overcrowded tenements. In Berlin, a city of 400,000 people by 1848, there were no less than 6,000 paupers being helped by the state; 4,000 beggars, 10,000 prostitutes and 10,000 'vagabonds' (meaning people of no fixed occupation), while, it was thought, a similar number were engaged in criminal activity. Collectively, these people living on the margins outnumbered the established burghers of the Prussian capital by two to one.⁵² The building of affordable housing, of sanitation and of a clean water supply did not keep pace with the migration of the rural poor from the countryside. People were stunned at the sight of half-naked children playing in filthy, narrow streets: close to a half did not live to see their fifth birthday, while those who survived could expect, on average, to live until their fortieth.⁵³ In 1832 a report on the northern French industrial town of Lille described the squalor in which the poorest workers lived: 'In their obscure cellars, in their rooms ... the air is never renewed, it is infected; the walls are plastered with garbage ... If a bed exists, it is a few dirty, greasy planks; it is damp, putrescent straw ... The furniture is dislocated, worm-eaten, covered with filth.'⁵⁴ That same year, miserable lodgings such as these, a contaminated water supply and open sewers running down the middle of narrow streets provided the unsanitary conditions in which a new disease, cholera, would make its first appearance in western Europe. Since poverty was seen by liberals and conservatives alike as a sign not of economic circumstance but of idleness, vice and even stupidity, there was no welfare state or safety net of social security. Rather, there was some relief in public works in times of dire emergency, but otherwise paupers had to rely on

⁵⁰ Droz, *Révolutions Allemandes*, pp. 78.

⁵¹ Polišenský, *Aristocrats and the Crowd*, p. 39.

⁵² Droz, *Révolutions Allemandes*, pp. 79-80; Polišenský, *Aristocrats and the Crowd*, p. 54.

⁵³ Polišenský, *Aristocrats and the Crowd*, p. 39.

⁵⁴ Quoted in W. H. Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France: the Language of Labour from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 224.

assistance in the harsh conditions of the workhouse or on handouts, both of which were organised at parish rather than state level. Otherwise, they could beg for help from private charities.

Some intellectuals therefore pondered the question of poverty and emerged with a wide range of ideas which collectively came to be known as 'socialism'. This term, first used by the French radical Pierre Leroux in 1832, arose because its adherents gave priority to resolving the 'social question' rather than to political reform. Some 'utopian' socialists, such as Etienne Cabet and Charles Fourier, envisaged ideal communities that would erase inequalities of wealth, but there were other, 'scientific' socialists, such as Karl Marx and Henri de Saint-Simon, who tried to analyse society as it was and to offer a practical vision for the future. Poverty - and the fact that there were people willing to exploit it for political purposes - deeply alarmed anyone who had something to lose from a social revolution. In the 1840s, a British observer remarked about the masses in Hamburg that their 'lack of well-being encourages the pathological lust for destruction which ... turns against the possessions of the better-off'.⁵⁵ Such psychological fears amongst the well-to-do were given material evidence by some serious outbursts of working-class violence. In 1844 - the same year as the Silesian uprising - the cotton printers of Prague rose up and the authorities lost control of the city for four days until they were crushed by troops under General Alfred Windischgrätz, an act which shrouded him in notoriety which was still remembered by the Czechs four years later.

These workers were driven to such extremes because the mid-1840s was a period of dire economic distress. A cyclical trade slump combined with harvest failures ensured that the bleak era would be remembered as the 'hungry forties'. The crisis began in earnest 1845, but then continued unabated until almost the end of the decade. The great tragedy was that, while the grain harvests failed, so too did the potato, which was the main back-up crop. It was afflicted by a fungus, popularly called the 'blight', which turned the tubers into a rotten mush. The disease affected almost all of Europe, from Ireland to Poland. It was in the former that the results were the most tragic, for the blight unleashed the Potato Famine, during which up to 1.5 million people died. In Germany there was a wave of food riots and hunger marches,⁵⁶ while in France the price of bread, the main staple of the bulk of the population, rocketed by close to 50 per cent, provoking angry scenes at the bakeries and food riots. Furthermore, since people had to spend even a greater proportion of their earnings on food, unemployment in the industrial and artisanal sectors spiralled dangerously upwards, since demand for their manufactured goods slumped. In the northern French textile-manufacturing towns the numbers of jobless reached catastrophic proportions: in Roubaix some eight thousand out of thirteen thousand workers were thrown onto the street; in Rouen, people endured wage cuts of 30 per cent to stave off the calamity of unemployment.⁵⁷ In Austria, ten thousand workers were laid off in 1847 in Vienna alone, which, at a time when food prices were reaching all-time highs and there was no government help for the poor, was disastrous. To

⁵⁵ Quoted in R. J. W. Evans, *Death in Hamburg: Society and Politics in the Cholera Years, 1830-1910* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 119.

⁵⁶ M. Gailus, 'Food Riots in Germany in the late 1840s', *Past and Present*, No. 145 (1994).

⁵⁷ Price, *Perilous Crown*, pp. 326-7.

compound the misery, there were outbreaks of typhoid in many of the cities of the empire.⁵⁸

In January 1847, surveying the deep and widespread distress, a Prussian minister wrote, 'the old year ended in scarcity, the new one opens with starvation. Misery, spiritual and physical, traverses Europe in ghastly shapes – the one without God, the other without bread. Woe if they join hands!'⁵⁹ This possibility of the political opposition to the conservative order harnessing the economic despair was not just a phantom conjured up by conservative imaginations. Popular anger focused, not unnaturally, on the conservative order – and the liberal opposition was quick to capitalize on this. Economic despair, which had always simmered threateningly beneath the delicate surface of the social order, now reached an intensity which the political structures of the old regime were scarcely equipped to contain. The distress of the masses combined with long-nourished frustrations, anxieties and aspirations of the liberal opposition to the conservative system. Metternich's Europe, which had seemed so triumphant in 1815 and which had weathered so many storms since, suddenly seemed extraordinarily vulnerable and the liberals smelled its blood. The confluence of the acute social crisis with the sense that political change was now possible led even the more cautious opponents of the old order to press for reform, if not for revolution.

In France, the hostility to the July Monarchy was channeled by the republican movement into a campaign for parliamentary reform, demanding universal male suffrage. Since 1840, the French political landscape had been dominated by the figure of François Guizot, whose ministerial portfolios had included education, the interior and foreign affairs but who in 1848 was effectively prime minister. An historian, he was Protestant, bourgeois, eloquent, bright and rather arrogant: when pressed with demands to extend the right to vote, he famously replied, 'Enrichissez-vous' – 'get rich' – in order to qualify for the suffrage. Yet an indication of the extent to which civil society was excluded from formal political life was the fact that in Paris for every man who had the right to vote, there were ten who subscribed to a newspaper. In other words, a great many people had political opinions, but could not participate directly in the parliamentary system. Guizot's intransigence therefore did much to alienate the July Monarchy from the mass of public opinion. In 1847, the government's opponents – both republicans and members of the 'dynastic opposition' (the latter meaning those who did not want to topple the monarchy, but rather wished to take the existing ministry's place) – pressed their demands. They avoided an official ban on political meetings by arranging a series of banquets across the country. At these frequently massive gatherings, speakers would harangue the revellers with calls for reform. In Britain, such an activity might have seemed harmless, but in France, where there was such a chasm between government and public opinion, it was explosive.⁶⁰ Among the more sought-after speakers was the historian and poet Alphonse de Lamartine, whose *History of the Girondins*, a narrative of the 1789 revolution published in 1847, had tapped into the *Zeitgeist* and become a bestseller. At a packed, rain-drenched banquet at Mâcon in July that year, Lamartine addressed the people who also happened to be his constituents (for he was their

⁵⁸ Sked, *Decline and Fall*, p. 76.

⁵⁹ Quoted in L. Namier, *1848: the Revolution of the Intellectuals* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 5.

⁶⁰ E. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848* (London: Abacus, 1977), p. 370.

representative in the Chamber of Deputies). With a reference to the great revolution of 1789, he declared, 'It will fall, this royalty, be sure of that ... And after having had the revolution of freedom and the counter-revolution of glory, you will have the revolution of public conscience and the revolution of contempt'.⁶¹ Thus, Lamartine expressed what many people felt about the July Monarchy and the fate it deserved.

Elsewhere in Europe, the liberal opposition tested the strength of the conservative order, sometimes with tragic consequences. In the Habsburg province of Galicia, Polish nobles tried to raise the standard of patriotic revolt against Austrian rule in 1846. Although they promised in their proclamation to free their serfs, the mostly Ukrainian peasantry did not listen. Instead, they killed and mutilated some 1,200 Polish nobles - men, women and children alike - and set ablaze or plundered some 400 manor houses. The serfs' loyalties remained fixed on the Habsburg Emperor who, it was said, had used his divinely-ordained authority to suspend the Ten Commandments, allowing the peasants to kill their hated landlords with impunity.⁶² The upshot of this abortive Polish insurrection was the annexation by Austria of the last tiny candle that burned for Polish independence, the free city of Kraków, which was the epicentre of the revolt.

More positively for European liberals, in 1847 a civil war in Switzerland between the liberal and conservative cantons ended. The conservatives had formed themselves into a league, the *Sonderbund*, which Metternich had supported with Austrian money and weapons, but the liberals emerged victorious in the struggle. In Italy patriotic enthusiasm was aroused with the election of a 'liberal' Pope, Pius IX, in 1846. 'Pio Nono' was known to have read Gioberti's popular book, and when he took power in Rome he immediately relaxed censorship, freed all political prisoners and promised to look into political reform. For Italian nationalists, here was a figurehead who could unite all strands of Italian opinion, provide moral leadership for the campaign to free Italy from Austrian domination and give the country some sort of political unity. Metternich responded in 1847 by reinforcing the Austrian garrison at Ferrara, but this merely gave Pius the chance to show off his liberal and patriotic credentials by protesting vehemently; his star among Italian liberals soared even higher. In northern Italy the opposition engaged at first in a 'lawful struggle', the *lotta legale*, seeking to work within the limits of the Congregations to secure political reforms from the Habsburgs. Metternich's intransigence, however, would ensure that the Italian patriots would be forced to choose between abandoning the struggle or plotting a revolutionary course. In Lombardy this opposition was led by the nobility frustrated by the lack of opportunity for status and position in the Austrian court and bureaucracy in Milan, but which was also the backbone of the liberal movement in the various societies that had been formed in the city. Foremost of these was the 'Jockey Club', an imitation of a British club, which also had a serious political and cultural purpose.

Elsewhere in the Habsburg Empire, the elections to the Hungarian Diet in 1847 returned a parliament which included radical liberals like Kossuth and was willing to debate peasant emancipation and the abolition of the nobles' tax privileges. In Austria the cash-strapped monarchy summoned the Estates of Lower Austria for March 1848.

⁶¹ Quoted in P. Robertson, *Revolutions of 1848: a Social History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 11

⁶² S. Kieniewicz, *The Emancipation of the Polish Peasantry* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1969), pp. 113-26.

This became the focus of the hopes of liberals who pored over one of the few permitted foreign newspapers, the *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung*, for news of the outside world, and met in Vienna's Juridical-Political Reading Club, among others. In Germany, where nationalism had reached boiling point with an anti-French war scare in 1840 (provoked by one the July Monarchy's rare bouts of sabre-rattling), membership of liberal organisations had swollen dramatically: the 'gymnastic societies' by 1847 could claim 85,000 members in 250 branches, while choral clubs boasted 100,000 adherents, who met annually in national festivals between 1845 and 1847. In constitutional states such as Baden, Württemberg and Bavaria, the liberals began to flex their parliamentary muscles, but it was in Prussia that their resurgence would have the most dramatic effect. King Frederick William IV needed money to pay for one of his pet schemes, the development of the railways, but a law of 1820 stated that, if the monarchy wanted to raise new loans, the estates of the whole kingdom would have to be consulted. In 1847, therefore, the United Diet met, chosen from among members of the provincial estates. This assembly became a platform from which Prussian liberals could press for permanent constitutional reform, and the irritated King dismissed it in June. Yet public interest had been aroused and the question of the Prussian estates and of constitutional reform became the subjects of excited and expectant conversations in cafés and social clubs across the country. In September, the radical wing of the opposition, pressed by the expansive and eloquent figure of Friedrich Hecker and the renegade aristocrat (and vegetarian) Gustav von Struve, gathered together other democrats at a meeting in Offenburg in the grand duchy of Baden. They stopped short of calling for a unitary German republic, but called for (among other things) the repeal of all repressive laws passed by diet of the German Confederation, the abolition of censorship and an elected assembly for a federal Germany. The moderate liberals – among them the stalwart Heinrich von Gagern – responded the following month with a gathering at Heppenheim in the grand duchy of Hesse. They proposed that the already extant customs union (the *Zollverein*, which included all German states except Austria) be converted into a political body, with the people having a say through elected representatives, so that over the course of time it would bring greater German unity.

With the pressure on the conservative order – and with actual breaches being knocked through its ramparts – almost everyone expected a great revolutionary crisis to sweep across Europe. As a priest in Rome declared when giving his oration at the funeral of the great Irish reformer Daniel O'Connell in mid-1847, there was arising a 'revolution which threatens to encompass the globe'.⁶³ This was a source of great hope for some, including Herzen, who later wrote of a 'dream' which he had on his arrival in Paris in 1847, but which, two years later, would prove to be a shattered illusion:

I... was carried away again by the events that seethed around me ... the whirlwind which set everything in movement carried me, too, off my feet; all Europe took up its bed and walked – in a fit of somnambulism which we took for awakening ... And was all that ... intoxication, delirium? Perhaps – but I do not envy those who were not carried away by that exquisite dream.⁶⁴

⁶³ Quoted in Namier, 1848, p. 3.

⁶⁴ Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*, p. 332.