**The Causes of the 1848 Revolution**

**Account for the Revolution of 1848 OR the February Revolution of France, 1848**

The Revolutions of 1848 that swept across Europe were important to the history of the continent. They were social revolutions of discontent that can be put down to three main factors. The first is the overall discontent in Europe at the time. The second is the large tide of liberalism in Europe, and the third is the large sense of nationalism created by foreign rule and hopes of unification. Despite the Paris Revolution of February 1848 being generally considered the cause of the revolutions, this revolution itself was created by the three aforementioned factors and was only the spark that set off the European-wide wave of revolutions.

**Discontent at poor governance and life** was a major cause of the Revolutions of 1848. Bad harvests and economic depression in the years leading up to the 1848 created massive discontent throughout all of Europe, and food riots were common. Unemployment was also created due to the economic crisis. These large-scale problems were obviously a precursor to large-scale revolutions, with building discontent coming with each bad harvest. However, it was not just a lack of food that caused discontent in Europe at the time. Poor governance was also a factor that caused unhappiness for many. The laissez-faire attitude of the French government and monarchy was a factor that caused many to be unhappy. They saw the government as useless. This discontent can be seen in the fact that there were 80 attempts on King Louis Philippe&#8217;s life in his eighteen-year reign.

When the people of Paris first revolted on the 22nd of February, the dismissal of the government leader Guizot was a major step taken by Louis Philippe to placate the Parisian mobs, but an accidental attack from a military unit on the crowds destroyed any chance of reconciliation. The dismissal of Guizot shows that the discontent was directed at the government, and that it was even acknowledged by the monarch. The discontent in France not only came from the poor governance of what is known as the July Monarchy, but also from the violence in the country during this rule. This violence came from the many rebellions and insurrections against the government after it came to power in a social revolution itself in 1830. Throughout Europe almost all governments were the subject of popular discontent. For example, the first major uprising of 1848, in Palermo, Sicily, was an uprising mainly against the poor governance of the ruling Ferdinand II. As you can see, general discontent caused by food shortages, economic depression and poor governance was a major factor in causing the Revolutions of 1848.

The **large tide of liberalism in Europe** leading up to the revolutions of 1848 was the major contributing factor to the unrest. Liberalism was present in all places that experienced revolution during 1848. Firstly, in the Sicilian uprising, the revolutionaries, as well as revolting against the misrule of their leader, were revolting against the repressive society in which they lived, and demanded the installation of the liberal and democratic 1812 constitution. In France, the government had over the previous years of its rule repressed its people also. Universal suffrage was still elusive in France, and many felt excluded by this. This can be seen as a cause of revolution by the fact that after the Paris Revolution, universal male suffrage was installed. The outbreak of the Paris Revolution was also directly related to liberalism. After the liberal opposition in the French Chamber of Deputies had gained ground on the ruling group in elections, they organized a &#8216;propaganda banquet&#8217;. The government banned this banquet, and this caused the masses of Paris to take to the streets. Therefore it can be seen that the repressive nature of the French government and their decision to stop free speech was the major cause of the Paris Revolution.

In Austria, the repressive system of Prince Klemens von Metternich, which can be seen with the exceptionally rigid Carlsbad Decrees of 1819, was despised by the masses, and after the Paris Revolution, the people took the chance to revolt. This forced the resignation of Metternich. As David Thomson writes, &#8220;In the first week of March 1848, the opposition to the long rule of Prince Metternich reached its climax. It was drawn from all social classes&#8230; who had come to detest his rule&#8221;. A week before this uprising, the Vienna Legal/Political Reading Club decided on constitutional proposals, which included religious toleration, the right to petition, and the abolition of censorship. These proposals show that the people of Vienna wanted liberal change. In the Germanic states, similar proposals were made in petitions. On February 27th, the people of Mannheim made out a petition demanding, amongst other things, trial by jury and freedom of the press. Similar petitions in Cologne and Mainz over the next week also demanded these liberal measures, as well as a more extended franchise, religious toleration, free speech, free elections for officers in a citizen&#8217;s militia, and the swearing of an oath to the constitution by the armed forces. These petitions also show what the people wanted. Of course, when the people didn&#8217;t get these changes, they resorted to revolution. These cases of the tide of liberalism were also seen in other countries, such as Spain and Hungary throughout 1848. As you can see, liberalism was a very major cause of the Revolutions of 1848.

The last major contributing factor to the Revolutions of 1848 was the **large sense of nationalism** created by foreign rule and by hopes of unification. The Italian peninsula was an important place in the context of the 1848 revolutions. At the time the peninsula was split up into various kingdoms, such as Sicily and Piedmont, and Austrian satellites, such as Venetia and Lombardy. The Sicilian uprising in February 1848 gave hopes to all Italians who wanted one united Italy. They saw this revolution as a chance to unite the nation, and this caused revolutions to rise up in various cities, such as Milan, where bitter fighting initially forced the Austrians out of the city. Foreign rule was also a major cause of revolution in Hungary in 1848. Hungarians were unhappy at Austrian rule, and in March took to the streets demanding autonomy from Austria, with what Michael Rapport describes as, &#8220;only a dynastic link&#8221; of the Hapsburg monarchy.

The **hope of unification** was a major factor in the revolutions in the Germanic states. The aforementioned petitions of Mannheim, Mainz and Cologne not only demanded liberal reforms, but also called for a general German parliament. David Thomson writes, &#8220;the central revolutionary impulse was one of nationalism- for the overthrow of Austrian domination and of the princely sovereignties which served that domination, and for the unification of German territories into one state&#8221;. As with the liberal demands, when the people did not get these changes, they revolted. This very strong nationalist feeling was summed up in the successful Heidelberg Declaration made on March 5th, which, similarly to the petitions of the previous days (Mannheim and Mainz), demanded a national German parliament. This nationalist sentiment was such a force behind the revolutions that German leaders were forced to give in to the declaration&#8217;s demands.

As well as the sense of nationalism created by foreign rule and hopes of unification was also a small amount of nationalism in France created by the July Monarchy&#8217;s foreign policy. Some saw the government&#8217;s position as weak and compared it not at all favourably with previous monarchies in French history. Although this was only a small factor, it nevertheless contributed to the Paris Revolution.

As you can see, **nationalism** behind the Revolutions of 1848, both due to the hate of foreign rule, and the hopes of unification.

As all this shows, the Revolutions of 1848, and the Paris Revolution that sparked these revolutions, were caused by three main factors. The first was the discontent caused by food shortages, economic depression, and poor governance. The second was the large tide of liberalism in Europe caused by the repressive policies of various governments, and the third was the large sense of nationalism created by foreign rule and hopes of unification. These three factors, in combination with one another, created the stimulus for the Revolutions of 1848.

Bottom of Form