Editors’ welcome

It is with pleasure that we introduce you to the second online edition of 2014/15. With great consideration, the committee decided on the theme of ‘Revolutions’ due to the wide range of modules the History Department offers on the subject. We thought our November mandate was a wonderful opportunity to showcase the exceptional variety of work that Undergraduates have produced on the subject. Indeed, we wish to thank all those undergraduates who submitted and congratulate those who were successful.

We would also like to take this opportunity to recognise four recent milestones in the life of the Journal. Firstly, November saw the Journal adopt an email at a QM domain: historyjournal@qmul.ac.uk. Secondly, the Journal now has a QMPLUS module, which all full-time History undergraduates have been granted automatic access to. For this achievement, we would like to thank Dr. Chris Sparks. November also witnessed the commencement of the Journal’s monthly academic events. For this we wish to thank Dr. Patrick Longson and Dr. Daniel Peart for accepting our invitation to speak on ‘Revolutionary Anarchism in Britain’ and the ‘American Revolution’ respectively; the powerpoint slides of their talks can be found on our QMPLUS Module. Lastly, November marks the launch of the Queen Mary Undergraduate History Journal Blog, which can be found at http://queenmaryhistoryjournal.wordpress.com. We hope that this initiative will provide students with a platform to discuss their opinions both formally and informally, with the added bonus of a comment section to generate further discussion. You can find the blog on Twitter @QMHJBlog and Facebook under ‘Queen Mary History Journal Blog’. Should you have pieces that you wish to submit, or any general enquiries, please email qmhjblog@gmail.com.

We sincerely hope you enjoy reading this edition as much as we enjoyed putting it together.

Graciously Yours,

Shabbir Bokhari (Editor-in-chief) & Catriona Tassell (Commissioning-editor)
Did the invention of moveable type printing revolutionise European life?

Jake Voller

“We should note the force, effect and consequences of inventions which are nowhere more conspicuous than in those three which were unknown to the ancients, namely, printing, gunpowder and the compass. For these three have changed the appearance and state of the whole world” – Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*.1

‘Surely this man is worthy to be loaded with divine honours by all the Muses, all the arts, all the tongues of those who delight in books, and... is to be preferred [to] gods and goddesses’ – Guillaume Fichet (1470).2

Contemporaries clearly realised the importance of the moveable type printing press. And, it is this issue of whether moveable type printing revolutionised European society that is the focus of this work. Francis Bacon revealingly places it first in his list of the three most important transformative factors ‘unknown to the ancients’.3 Unfortunately modern-day historical consensus is much less definitive; indeed the term ‘consensus’ is more of a hindrance than helpful. Print historiography had become increasingly polarised and fractured; epitomised in the conflict between Elizabeth Eisenstein and Adrian Johns.4 Indeed, our understanding of this important historical innovation is hindered by the lack of dedicated, recent, scholarship devoted to answering specifically this question.5
Before proceeding any further it would be useful to establish a few preliminaries such as: What is moveable type printing? And, what constitutes a ‘revolution’. Contrary to popular opinion Johannes Gutenberg did not invent moveable type printing. It was invented in China by Bi Sheng (circa 1040). Even Gutenberg’s innovation of metal moveable type printing had been invented in Korea a generation before Gutenberg; our earliest surviving metal type printed document is a 1377 Buddhist manuscript. Moveable type printing involves creating a matrix with an individual character. The letters are then placed on a rack, inked, and pressed onto paper. Put simply, it is called ‘moveable type printing’ because the letters can be reused in different combinations multiple times. Now, what constitutes a ‘revolution’? Revolution carries heavy linguistic overtones as an ‘immediate’, ‘short-term’ and ‘dramatic’ event.

This essay shall postulate that moveable type printing did revolutionise European society but it was a ‘long revolution’. In other words, it was revolutionary in scale and impact but it was not an ‘instantaneous revolution’. This essay shall be divided into three stages: the first examines whether there was a ‘reading revolution’; the second, evaluates the three elements of print culture – dissemination, standardisation and preservation – and their impact; the third stage evaluates the impact of print in causing the Reformation – an actual ‘revolution’.

Moveable type’s most obvious consequence was the exponential increase in books; as well as other publications such as newspapers. In the first fifty years of Gutenberg’s invention there were around 8 million *incunables* (‘in the cradle’) published alone. And whilst only 120 books were produced annually in Western Europe during the sixth and seventh centuries in the 1790 alone total production exceeded 20 million. It is true that long-term trends indicate an increasing output and corresponding decline in costs of print even before 1454 (Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press). However, moveable type greatly accelerated this trend and allowed it to reach a scale previously impossible; within a generation printing presses appeared in practically every corner and town of Western Europe and the cost of books had been cut by two-thirds at least. The cumulative effect of this was to revolutionise access to books and thereby moveable type facilitated an unprecedented revolution in intellectual freedom and curiosity for all. Indeed, ‘more abundantly stocked bookshelves increased opportunities to consult and compare different texts’ creating ‘new intellectual combinations and permutations’. Additionally, the simple fact that the printing press led to a wider proportion of society gaining access to knowledge should also not be overlooked – the ivory tower of scholarship was being slowly taken down brick by brick.

It was not simply the accessibility to books which moveable type revolutionised but also the manner in which people read books. It is no longer accepted that the invention of moveable type introduced silent reading (it existed to
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a limited extent in the Middle Ages scriptoria) however it undoubtedly accelerated
this trend and, as a by-product, silent instruction. As Elizabeth Eisenstein has
astutely observed, ‘Gifted students no longer need to sit at the feet of a given
master’ instead ‘they could swiftly achieve mastery on their own’.14 In the Middle
Ages, due to the limited availability of texts, they were read frequently and
intensively; memorisation was deemed proficiency. Due to the explosion in
availability, however, people read more extensively but less intensively.15 The
change in reading mannerisms coupled with the increasing visible frequency of print
would have exerted an influence upon contemporaries’ relationship with
knowledge. No longer could mastery of a few ‘key’ texts be regarded as sufficient.
The sheer increase in production must have caused a realisation, whether conscious
or unconsciously, that there was more to know and this likely provided an important
impetus for the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment.

Whilst the ‘who’, the ‘how’ and the ‘number’ changed so did ‘what’ was read.
Moveable type gave rise to an entirely new purpose for reading and thus new types
of books – books read for pleasure and leisure. This was not immediate; in
South-Western Germany even in the latter half of the 18th century over 90% of the
books listed in peasant inventories were religious texts – a trend mimicked in urban
areas.16 However, the catalogues of the Leipzig book fair, the largest book
distributor in Germany in this period, demonstrate that desire the unprecedented
number of demagogical and religious texts being printed were declining as a

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proportional of the whole. Constituting 38.5% in 1740; 24.5% in 1770 and by 1800
only 13.5%.17 Likewise, whilst in late 16th century Paris religious titles constituted
approximately half of all books published by the 1720s they made up only 33%; in
the 1750s 25% and by the 1790s a mere 10%.18 Furthermore, the widespread
dissemination and its increasing usage in a number of everyday socio-economic, and
even political, interactions meant that the book increasingly usurped the memory. It
acted as a proxy, a repository, for knowledge which caused a fundamental shift in
education and daily interaction. No longer were catechisms, rhymes and mnemonics
devices accorded the same importance.19

Additionally, the explosion in book production caused a societal shift from a
predominately ‘oral culture’ to a ‘print culture’. Albeit, it took a few centuries but
the effect was to revolutionise society; a ‘communication revolution’. On a
fundamental level print became increasingly intrusive in everyday life necessitating
increasing literacy rates; indeed, today print is essential to everyday tasks from
bureaucratic forms to receipts. Thus, it revolutionised the way people
communicated with each other and the manner of their interaction with the world.
Furthermore, due to the efficiency of Gutenberg’s invention he facilitated not merely
the dissemination of information on a hitherto unimaginable scale but also the
wide-scale dissemination of events. In other words, Gutenberg facilitated the ‘news’.
Weekly newspapers first appeared in the 17th century and by 1750 in London alone
there were: five well-established daily newspapers, six thrice-weeklies, five weeklies
and several other periodicals with an official total circulation of 100,000; although due to the practice of public reading and transmission it was undoubtedly significantly higher. It undoubtedly revolutionised people’s understanding of contemporary affairs and played a direct role in allowing the people’s voice to be heard and for them to express their emotions or support for various causes. Causes could not spread and were not so easily suppressed, people could mobilise for support by writing direct, short, pieces and governments became, arguably for the first time, truly accountable to the masses. Overall, print had a dramatic effect on how people read, communicated and even their conceptualisation of knowledge which in itself revolutionised European life and was to exert significant influences on important future developments which would pivotal for Europeans and the wider world.

The dramatic increase in the dissemination of texts facilitated knowledge and information on a mass scale. As Daniel Defoe famously stated the ‘preaching of sermons is speaking to a few of mankind, printing books is talking to the whole world’. In this way moveable type print enabled revolutionary activity to be truly revolutionary in scale and impact. Whilst it is an overstatement to suggest that print caused the Reformation and is thus primarily responsible for the revolutions which occurred afterwards, both physical and conceptual, one must consider a counter-factual. What differentiated Martin Luther’s successful Reformation from the easily quashed attempts of John Wycliffe and Jan Huss? The invention of the printing press and its utilisation. It spread Reformation ideas and propaganda across Western Europe and thus could not be easily suppressed. Due to the commercialisation of printing unprecedented numbers of Luther’s work and Reformation propaganda were printed and distributed; print enabled the written word to be used, for the first time, for a mass-movement and made issues such as indulgences and the decadence of Catholicism truly pan-European issues not simply for the wealthy and literate but for the majority of society.

It is worth briefly discussing the impact of the printing press on the French Revolution — an actual revolution! Whilst, as Mark Curran has drily observed, it seems unlikely that the butcher Desnot was thinking of Mercier when he was bloodily hacking off the head of the Bastille governor the Marquis de Launay print did play a vital role. Print created an intellectual environment which was ready and more than willing to challenge established authority. It introduced ‘dangerous’ ideas such as liberty, equality and fraternity which appealed to many individuals and undermined previously upheld institutions such as the sanctity of the Church and the Monarchy. Furthermore, it contributed to the barbarity which characterised the Revolution and, arguably, ensured its successful completion. For instance, Jean Paul Marat wrote an influential 1790 July pamphlet entitled ‘C’en est fait de nous’ (We’re done for!); ‘if you don’t strike now, millions of your brothers will die, your enemies will triumph and your blood will flood the streets... and their bloody hands will rip out your children’s entrails’. This is not to say that print caused the Revolution but it
created the intellectual stimulus and the existence of a broadly independent public sphere which disseminated these ideas on a large-scale.

Moveable type printing did not remove the human element to printing and publishing. And, thus, inevitably mistakes were made; most famously the Wicked Bible of 1631 which omitted the ‘not’ from ‘thou shalt [not] commit adultery’. Certain historians such as Stephan Fussel have argued along the lines of Erasmus that the standardisation of printing was harmful; ‘in earlier times a single writing mistake would only affect one copy, but now it appears in an edition of thousands’. What Fussel, and those like him, miss is precisely the importance of the standardisation of errors. Various errata could be issued correcting them and due to the uniform nature of printing errors could be methodologically removed with the certainty that they could not reoccur. Whereas with hand copying texts are subject to increasing destabilisation and fragmentation. Printing also revolutionised European life in a directly tangible way. It altered the way people spoke and, subsequently according to some linguistic experts, the way people thought. It codified and standardised vernacular languages, standardised idioms and led to the modern national languages we know today. Printing also increasingly utilised vernacular languages which helped further increase access to books and their content - a major factor in helping various ‘heretical’ and messianic movements. It also revolutionised the language of scholarship; increasingly vernacular languages became popular at the expense of Latin. By 1700 Latin print culture was in full retreat; in Paris 30% of all books in 1600 were printed in Latin but by 1700 only 10% were.

The influence of moveable type print on scholarship was also significant. Coupled with the widespread dissemination of various books, journals and periodicals, and the increasing standardisation of language print provided a uniform, widespread, platform for scholarly interaction. Additionally, the shorter length of articles and their frequent publications would have likely acted as a stimulus for scholarship creating a virtuous effect which helped set the stage for the Scientific Revolution. It also served as a platform for enfranchising the ‘masses’; for instance in Germany 64 new periodicals appeared between 1701-1710 and a further 260 in 1741 to 1750. Overall, between 1700 and 1790 there appeared a staggering 3,494 new periodicals in Germany alone. This would undoubtedly have contributed to scholarship even further ever by a direct contribution to the existing literature or by helping generate interest and thus funding from individuals or organisations. Furthermore, by revolutionising the book’s physicality and creating exactly identical copies the book further contributed to scholarship. For instance, the first printed index appeared in two editions of St. Augustine’s De Art Praedicandi in the early 1460s and by 1500 over eighty-three books had alphabetical indexes. Standardisation facilitated the introduction of the index, uniform chapters and uniform copies – allowing confident discussion regarding a particular point or argument – which allowed scholars to effectively navigate texts for precise pieces of
information; the index was the contemporary equivalent of modern metadata.\textsuperscript{33}

How could preservation revolutionise European life? Well it could not; at least on its own. Yet it was a vitally significant facilitator of creating an intellectual malaise which was essentially to events which did revolutionise European life such as the Scientific Revolution and the Age of Discovery. Moveable type printing reduced the vulnerability of human knowledge to the vicissitudes of nature and man. No longer could a single calamity, such as the Fire of Alexandria, irrevocably set back human progress and knowledge. Thereby scholars could continue to build on previous knowledge instead of having to continually ‘start over’. Bernard of Chartres summaries the importance of preservation in furthering contemporary knowledge: ‘we are able to see more and father than’ our predecessors ‘not because of the acuteness of our sight’ but because we ‘are carried aloft and elevated by the magnitude of the giants [previous generations]’.\textsuperscript{34} Clearly, the various elements of print culture contributed greatly to a wide variety of revolutionary shifts which affected not only contemporary Europeans from the local to the international level but continues to do so even today.

As already mentioned the moveable type printing clearly had significant ramifications for scholarship. Eisenstein’s farthest-reaching claim is that the ‘printing press laid the basis for... modern science’.\textsuperscript{35} In this case Eisenstein does not take into account the impact of the popularisation of harmful texts by the printing industry out of a desire for profit. For instance, the Almagest and Sacrobosco’s Sphaera rather than Copernicus’s De revolutionibus.\textsuperscript{36} Nevertheless, the impact of this popularisation should be overstated. Overall, as Eisenstein correctly asserts printing did not subtract but enlarged the range of titles available and, more importantly, by making widely available discordant texts scholars could now carry out extensive evaluation and analysis and thus note inconsistencies and to discard these pseudo-scientific texts once and for all.\textsuperscript{37} Additionally, the increased dissemination and massive increase in the availability of classical texts, thanks to print, exerted an impact by helping to stimulate scholarship. For instance, Galen’s De Fabrica was disseminated in vast numbers and proved highly influential in boosting the study of anatomy.\textsuperscript{38} An often-forgotten fact is that printing revolutionised numerous scientific fields not merely due to the increase in textual content but also because print standardised and led to improvements in images; particularly anatomical diagrams, astronomical charts as well as cartography. They became more accurate and standardised; drawn by professional draughtsmen and not as susceptible to degradation and fanciful flourishes as that of manuscripts and codices.\textsuperscript{39}

Due to our familiarity with maps the importance of cartography in revolutionising society has often been overlooked in the favour of some of the causes iterated above. Denis Woodward explicitly illustrates the transformative effect of print on cartography; from 1400 to 1476 there were only a few thousand maps in actual circulation but by 1500 this had risen to 56,000 and by the end of the sixteenth century the numbers ran into the millions.\textsuperscript{40}
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Works such as Pliny’s *Historia Naturalis* and Ptolemy’s immensely important *Geographike Hyphegesis* were given an importance far beyond that bestowed upon them by manuscript. Indeed, maps greatly contributed to the European Age of Discovery which revolutionised European life at practically every level and fundamentally altered the course of history. It had a direct impact on Columbus’s voyage and numerous other important voyages in this period. The growth of cartography also had an impact at ‘home’. It enabled states to demarcate national boundaries, undergo more effective logistical and bureaucratic tasks and control their populations more easily.

Clearly the invention of moveable type played a pivotal role in numerous historical developments and revolutionised a wide variety of practices and beliefs. It revolutionised the manner in which people read, what they read and why they read it; as well as their relationship with information. This undoubtedly constituted a reading revolution. In regards to communication print facilitated the development of the news which revolutionised how people communicated and their visualisation of the world. In addition, the development of such communications infrastructure had a profound effect on contemporary society. The 3 aspects of print culture: dissemination, standardisation and preservation clearly had profound impacts on European life and contributed to forming the essential framework for future developments which exerted a truly revolutionary impact. Print even contributed too directly to the formation, conduct and survival of several revolutionary events.

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It is inconceivable to imagine that the Lutheran Reformation could have had the impact it did without their use of print. And, one should not forget the important impact that print had on the Scientific Revolution and on cartography which was to exert a profound influence. Most starkly illustrated in its contribution to the Age of Discovery which, quite literally, redrew the world map.

This essay has attempted to illustrate throughout the true nature of the aforementioned revolutionary impact that moveable type printing had on European life. The invention of moveable type printing clearly did not constitute an ‘instantaneous revolution’; it took time for the revolutionary impact of print to be fully realised and exert its effect. Yet, a revolution it had. Even the most ardent critics of the concept of a ‘printing revolution’ quibble only on the time scale not the actual impact of print. Indeed, viewing society and European life before Gutenberg’s invention and a few centuries afterwards there was a clear revolution in practically every aspect of society thanks to the invention of print. It is one of history’s greatest tragedy that the man responsible for revolutionising European life died penniless and alone. Deprived even of his life’s work – his printing press.

Notes

3. Thackeray, *Modern World*, p.188.

6. Ibid.

7. See Figures 1-4.


10. See Figure 5.


17. Ibid., pp.87-88.

18. Ibid., p.88.


34. Edouard Jeanneau, Rethinking the School of Chartres (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2009), p.38.


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Image Collection

**Figure 1.** Moveable type pieces. The History of Visual Communication, [Link](http://www.citrinitas.com/history_of_viscom/press.html) [3/4/2014].

**Figure 2.** Johannes Gutenberg. Cyberlipid, [Link](http://www.cyberlipid.org/perox/oxid0012.htm) [3/4/2014].

**Figure 3.** Gutenberg Press. ETC, Harry Keller [Link](http://etcjournal.com/2013/07/) [3/3/2014].

**Figure 4**

Figure 65

Figure 6.

Figure 7.
15th century printing places of incunabula. Data is based on Incunabula Short Title Catalogue (British Library) was created by a Wikipedia user: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Printing_towns_incunabula.svg# [3/4/2014].

Figure 8.
During 1848 revolutions broke out in several European societies and soon developed into a pan-European phenomenon. In England however, revolution failed to occur despite the nation experiencing many of the same social and economic problems. For example, England in the years prior to 1848 can be characterised by “remarkable depression ... in society; general illness; great mortality; innumerable failures ... want of money; no society at all.” Given the situation then, it may seem surprising that any form of revolution took place. To explain England’s lack of unrest some historians have argued that political change was inappropriate and unnecessary. Nevertheless, there were some threats posed to the established order. This suggests that the reason for the lack of revolution lies in several crucial differences between England and continental Europe which, in Leslie Mitchell’s view, “emphasized the British sense of separateness from the Continent.” These differences can be split into two main categories; first, the grievances within England and what threats these posed, and second, how these problems and threats were dealt with. These factors combined meant that any threat to power did not amount to as much as it did in other nations, and the actions to quell any threats meant revolution was never able to occur.

As mentioned above, one proposed reason as to why revolution didn’t occur in England was because the citizens already had many of the things that the revolutionaries in Europe were fighting for; therefore revolution was simply unnecessary. For example, successive British governments in the 1840s introduced reforms which are credited with reducing the burdens of indirect taxes on the working class, alleviating discontent and facilitating an increase in living standards. An article in The Times dating from February 1848 emphasised the importance of these developments, stating that the repeal of the Corn Laws, the reform of municipalities, factory acts, and mine acts all suggested that the ruling elite had “thrown themselves into the arms of the people.” This was in contrast to European nations where the ruling class were still restricting the rights of the lower classes and refusing to introduce economic reforms. In France for example, the upper classes saw politics as a chance of “annihilating their opponents.” This view was echoed by both the Queen and the Prime Minister who agreed that Louis-Philippe brought disaster upon himself and his regime by returning to the Bourbon policies as opposed to making concessions and introducing reforms. Timothy Baycroft argues that the July Monarchy were too interested in restricting franchise to the wealthy and guarding power within a limited circle, “paying only lip-service to the people he was supposed to represent.” Therefore, one explanation for why revolution didn’t occur in England in 1848 is that its citizens were enjoying the benefit of reforms denied to those on the continent.
In contrast to the masses of groups and classes revolting within Europe, in England the only significant threat came from the Chartists, who by the 1840s had a substantial following, particularly in London. When we look at this group in comparison to revolutionary groups in France for example, we can see why they didn’t pose such a threat. First, the actions of the Chartists were moderate compared to the protests carried out by many of the French revolutionaries. Although the Chartists were believed to have been preparing for some form of revolution, they in fact intended to establish a moral force to prompt government change, similar to previous successful demonstrations they had carried out in 1839 and 1842. The Chartists showed significant restraint when compared to the revolutionaries in Paris, for example, and this was probably since their aim was purely to exert pressure on the government to enact their proposals rather than topple it altogether. Most Chartist energies were put into planning demonstrations that would emphasise their demands, as opposed to the revolutionary aims of the demonstrations on the Continent. Another important point to note is that they were unarmed, presenting less of a threat than the large armed crowds evident across Europe. In Paris for example, the armed National Guard turned against the government and sided with the revolution. Therefore, when comparing the threat to power in England to the various threats on the continent it is clear that it was relatively insignificant. When looking at the protests of the Chartists, it is also necessary to look at the reactions of those who opposed them as these helped to limit the chances of revolution.

Precautions were taken as soon as it was rumoured that the Chartists were preparing for revolution; these measures included forming large bodies of metropolitan police, patrols of mounted police, and improvements in intelligence communications. Whereas in other nations soldiers were sent out to confront the revolutionary forces, in England military forces were “sensibly confined to barracks for the most part.” Instead large forces of special constables wearing armbands and carrying batons made up the predominant force. As Leslie Mitchell notes, the “contrast with Paris ... could hardly be more striking.” In this respect, the response to protest was much less provocative in England and to some extent may account for the lack of revolutionary fervour.

Furthermore, the strength of the police can partly be put down to the fact that English security forces had already experienced two earlier periods of Chartist agitation, first in 1839-40 in South Wales, then in 1842 in the Midlands and Scotland. Experience of crowd control and collaboration between the military and police led to the forces being “well established and efficient in most areas by 1848.” In this respect, part of the reason why England didn’t experience a revolution was because security forces were strong enough and well prepared to deal with the threat proportionately. Another important factor preventing revolution in England was that the majority of the population remained loyal to the government.
A common view of England in 1848 is that revolution didn’t occur because the middle class, in contrast to Europe, “rallied round the government and helped preserve the status quo.” Throughout the crisis there was an increased willingness of the middle class to enlist as special constables to enforce law and order and this became more noticeable as Chartism advanced. In total, approximately 85,000 citizens were sworn in as special constables after volunteering their services. This is in stark contrast to Europe where few remained loyal to the rulers, and the middle class actually played a substantial part in the revolution. For example, in Paris the National Guard did not defend the status quo and instead sided with the revolutionaries. Forces across Europe who were put in place to defend the old order and should have been interested in preserving it, either did nothing or actively joined the opposition. The fact that the government had substantial backing from its citizens can in part account for the lack of revolution in England.

Another key element of the 1848 revolutions was nationalism. For example, in France the 1789 revolution gave birth to a strong sense of nationalism as a movement for change; this was also a part of the revolutionary cause in 1848. However, in contrast to continental Europe where nationalist sentiments motivated many to join the revolution, in England the result was quite the opposite; it united much of the population in opposition to those calling for change. Around this time, anything seen as threatening to the regime in England was deemed ‘un-English’ and therefore something that the population at large should resist.

Revolution was perceived as something alien and foreign and the involvement of European exiles and Irish migrants in the Chartist movement persuaded many that political upheaval was somehow irrelevant to them.

Also unique to England at the time was the extent to which it could use its colonial resources to prevent the same revolutionary forces erupting. For example, to contain the influence of Chartism on the general population, in 1848 the government renewed the policy of transporting prisoners to the colonies. Miles Taylor cites transportation as “the cornerstone of British state’s containment of Chartism.” At the time, Earl Grey saw this as a means of removing a dangerous criminal class from society altogether. Furthermore, in Autumn 1848 Grey also chose to divert the “ticket of leave” system to the Cape Colony, New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land, meaning that once prisoners were let out on parole, they gained employment within those districts as opposed to returning to England where they could potentially cause more trouble. Hence the government were able to utilise the land they ruled worldwide to prevent the sort of revolutionary situation evolving in England that had happened across Europe.

Coupled with this policy was the use of imperial resources to keep the population loyal to the government. For example, they decreased the size of the colonial army, so that this expenditure could be spent on the national army. This meant that the army could be used as a force to quell any conflicts at home, and also avoided the need to increase middle class taxes to pay for the larger national
army. Working class discontent was eased by “displacing the tax burden from the metropole to the periphery” meaning the inhabitants of the colonies would pay an increased level of tax as opposed to the English working class. This included a shift to free trade and a cut in import duties including the equalization of sugar duties. These had been recognized as a chief example of how colonial producers were subsidised at the expense of the domestic working class who experienced high prices and poor quality food as a result.  

Finally, emigration from England to the colonies increased in the 1840s, relieving the nation of some of the population pressures experienced across Europe such as overcrowding and a lack of crucial land and resources. This migration trend undermined Chartist demands for land reform and restricted their ability to gain supporters. Overall, England was able to utilise resources that weren’t available to many other European nations, caught up in the grip of revolution.

There were many circumstances particular to England that explains the lack of revolution in 1848, even with the rise of the Chartist cause. The most significant factor were the steps taken before and during 1848 by the government that meant that the type of change in Europe was seen as unnecessary and indeed alien by the majority of the population. These included making concessions and reforms, removing threats from society by sending them to the colonies, and installing preventative measures after talk of revolution arose. This meant that whilst other nations were experiencing revolutions calling for change, in England much of this change had already happened. Any citizens trying to pose a threat to the established order were in a minority with weaker claims, and large numbers of people came out to defend the existing order. This ultimately led to the English government maintaining their power with strong support from its citizens, meaning “there was never to be a … revolutionary situation in England during 1848.”

Notes

3. Ibid., p.83.
5. The Times (26 February 1848).
15. Ibid., pp.183-4.
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28. Ibid., p.158.
29. Ibid., p.159.

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Compare and contrast the idea of ‘nation’ developed in two countries in the period before 1848.

László Zorya

In a 1973 essay, political philosopher John Plamenatz identified a distinction between what he described as "Western" and "Eastern" nationalisms, characterised by imitation and illiberalism. Plamenatz argues - whilst neglecting to actually define Eastern Europe - that the nationalisms that emerged there were borrowed extensively from Western nationalisms, and that this necessitated national leaders forcibly imposing these nationalisms on populations. Sceptical of the utility of such a generalisation, this essay will consider the specific nature of Romanian and Ukrainian nationalisms, as a case study. Plamenatz believed "Eastern" nationalisms assumed their defining characteristics at their conception, and thus the essay will focus on the emergence and development of nationalism in the Romanian and Ukrainian lands in the early nineteenth century.

There are obvious semantic issues in using the terms “Romanian” and “Ukrainian” to refer to members of those nations before the nations can be said to have definitively existed. Therefore, for the purposes of this essay, “Romanian” refers to the people of Transylvania and the Danubian Provinces of Wallachia and Moldavia, who were or who would later be considered ethnically Romanian. “Ukrainian” shall refer to the people of the Russian Empire, who were or who would later be considered ethnically Ukrainian. The term “Ruthenian” will be used when mentioning their counterparts in the Habsburg Empire.

The most immediate aspect which ought to be recognised of Romanian and Ukrainian nationalism is that neither can be seen to have been borne out of a struggle, as was French nationalism in the Revolution; German nationalism in the liberation from Napoleon; or Serb and Greek nationalisms in wars against the Ottomans. Rather, the development of both Romanian and Ukrainian nationalism was the result of a protracted campaign conducted by an educated elite.

In Romania, the first step in this development came during the French Enlightenment from Transylvanian Uniate theological students that were educated in Vienna and Rome. Vienna was an enlightened city with the ideals of the French philosophes circulating widely amongst merchants and diplomats who maintained direct connections with French counterparts. These ideals reached and inspired the Transylvanian Uniate students who would later lead the nationalist movement.

The Enlightenment ideals also reached the cultural radius of Constantinople, where it profoundly influenced Greek nationalists to plan the Greek War of Independence (1821).
In turn, these Greek nationalists influenced Romanians who were encouraged to fight on behalf of the Greeks. Romanian nationalists perceived themselves to have suffered equal or greater oppression under the rule of the ignominious Phanariot Greeks than the Greeks themselves did under the Ottoman Turks. Thus, when Greek national leader Alexander Ypsilantis appealed to Romanian national leader Tudor Vladimirescu for help in the fight against Turks, Vladimirescu reportedly offered to help Ypsilantis, “go home, so he could have his revolution there”.

Of vital importance to the nationalist movement in the Ukrainian lands were the intelligentsia, the relative few who possessed an education, and whose ideological convictions motivated them to culturally, socially and politically “improve” the peasantry. Most of the intelligentsia who hailed from this region were of Cossack descent, and whose noble status (starshyna) had been between 1785 and 1835 recognized by the Russian Empire, then rescinded, and eventually granted once more, though selectively so.

In order to justify, and therefore protect, this nobility, many intellectuals of Cossack descent began examining past treaties and chronicles to prove the equivalence of the Cossack starshyna and the Russian nobility (dvoryanstvo). In doing so, these Cossacks inadvertently became the first Ukrainian historians. Their histories exhibit a deep patriotism and nostalgia for the old Cossack Hetmanate. Istoriiia Rusov (1800), for example, asserted that the people living under the Hetmanate enjoyed the same rights and liberties associated with the Enlightenment. However, these early Ukrainian histories generally accepted Ukraine to be an integral component of Imperial Russia and did not attempt to justify or promote succession.

History also became a key component of Romanian nationalism, for as well as absorbing the ideals of the French Enlightenment in Vienna, the Transylvanian Uniate students were inspired by the architectural grandeur of Rome, particularly its Ancient Roman monuments. They were also struck by the similarity of their native Romanian language to that of the Italians and came to view themselves as related to the Italians, and therefore of Roman descent, as Italians were considered to be. It was beneficial that the boundaries of the Roman province of Dacia were considered to have been roughly correspondent to the political boundaries of early nineteenth-century Transylvania. Thus it was at this time that the term “Romanian” became adopted to refer to the people and their language previously referred to as Wallach, emphasising their Latin origins. Histories were written by Uniate priests, such as Petru Maior in History of the Origin of the Roumanians in Dacia (1812), that portrayed Dacia as a cultural and political idyll and attempted to illustrate a clear line of descent between the Dacians and contemporary Romanians. This gave Romanian nationalism a mission, as Romanians were seen to be defenders of an eastern Latin culture; as well as a dignity: a superiority over the Magyars, Germans, and Szekleys.
The Cossack Hetmanate and Dacia were considered by the Ukrainian and Romanian nationalists to be their nation’s Golden Age. The Golden Age is a vital aspect of nationalism, both in imparting a sense of legitimacy to the nation and in imbuing it with prestige. The Golden Age also offers a contrast with the nation’s degraded present and a justification for its elevation to a utopian destiny. In neither the Ukrainian nor the Romanian case, however, can this destiny be seen to have superiority over other nations, but rather, equality. Where Ukrainian nationalists were motivated to attain an equal standing with the Russian nobility, Transylvanian nationalists sought either a revocation or alteration of the medieval pact of “Unio trium nationum”, which granted nationhood and therefore relative political autonomy to Magyars, Saxons and Szekleys, but not to Romanians, thus excluding the latter from political life. Keen to emphasise the Latinity of their nation and thus afford it a cultural eminence, Gheorghe Șincăi and Samuil Micu collaborated on a grammar, The Elements of the Daco-Roman or Wallachian Language (1780), to codify the Romanian language and accentuate its Latin origins. This grammar thus marks the start of a concerted campaign by Romanian intellectuals to replace the traditional Cyrillic alphabet in which their language appeared in religious texts with the Roman alphabet and a purging of words of non-Latin origin from the language. The Ukrainian language experienced no similar reform in the Russian Empire. It was not even being considered a language but rather a dialect of Russian, known as “Little Russian”. In the Habsburg lands, Ruthenian nationalism was handicapped by the near total illiteracy of the peasant population and the almost complete Polonisation of its social and intellectual elite. However, keen to reduce the influence both of the Polish elite and of the neighbouring Russian Empire, the Habsburgs encouraged the development of the Ruthenian language, distinct from Polish and Russian, inadvertently creating a language remarkably similar to Ukrainian. It is because of this that Ruthenians began to identify with Ukrainian nationalism and, despite existing in incredibly different political situations, the two groups empathised with one another so that in 1848 the only Ukrainian uprising was a response to the abolition of Ruthenian serfdom. Historian Stephen Fisher-Galati argues that there was no real liaison between Wallachian and Moldavian nationalists, as existed between Ruthenians and Ukrainians, let alone between them and Transylvanian nationalists; however, it is clear that these different nationalist groups empathised with one another. For example, Transylvanian Uniate priests were vehemently opposed to attempts to alter their Church doctrine in order to assimilate it with the Roman Catholic Church. Given the Transylvanian nationalists’ apparent proclivity towards any other Latinising trend, this seems bizarre until one considers that such a change would have resulted in greater differentiation between the Transylvanians and the Orthodox Danubian Romanians. Prior to the nineteenth century, the Romanian and Ukrainian languages were considered primitive and therefore capable only of expressing the most basic, domestic thoughts. This view was challenged by Romanian nationalists’ assertions.
that, through its Latin links, Romanian was related to Italian and, most importantly, French. Many of these nationalists, such as Ion Heliade Rădulescu and Anton Pann, began to publish original literary works and translated classics into their language to evidence its cultural worth.

The Ukrainian intelligentsia also became interested in developing a literature in their language, inspired primarily by the German Romantic, Johann Gottfried Herder. It was Herder who first challenged the view that some nations were devoid of culture, arguing instead that culture was universal. Herder was also convinced of the primacy of language, wondering, “Has a people anything dearer than the speech of its fathers? In its speech resides its whole thought domain, its tradition, history, religion, and basis of life, all its heart and soul.” This inspired Ukrainians to collate cultural collections. Particularly notable was the collection of Ukrainian folk songs compiled by Prince Nikolai Tsertelev and Mykhailo Maksymovych, who argued that the content and moral quality of the folk songs differentiated them from those of other nations, particularly Russians. However, by 1848 Ukrainian literature was nowhere near as developed, nor as respected, as Romanian literature, hindered by crass works such as Ivan Kotlyarevsky’s travesty of Virgil’s Aeneid, Eneyida (1798) which, written in a jocular, folksy style, appeared to lend credence to claims that Ukrainian was a language unsuitable for discussing loftier themes.

In the 1830s and 1840s the Romanian nationalists became increasingly political, in contrast to the previous generation, whose aims had been primarily cultural. The development of culture apparently indicated a cultural superiority over Magyars, Turks, and Slavs and at least equality with Germans and Greeks. Subjugation under these peoples could no longer be justified. In Wallachia and Moldavia, the revolutionaries of 1848 were primarily concerned with social revolution and political independence, and showed little concern for a unification of the Danubian Provinces with Transylvania. Nor did Transylvanians seek unification, or even independence, but rather a strengthening of the rights of the Romanian middle class and intelligentsia, as well as the emancipation of the peasantry. Romanian nationalism in 1848, then, manifested itself in demands for equality and self-determination, but not for hegemony.

In the Russian Empire, Ukrainian nationalists did not commit to any significant uprising comparable to those in Transylvania and the Danubian provinces. However, demands were made to introduce teaching in the Ukrainian language in areas where Ukrainians were in the majority. Ruthenians, meanwhile, petitioned for their clergy to receive rights equal to that of other nations of the Habsburg Empire and for the establishment of a Ruthenian Council. The emancipation of the Ruthenian peasantry also provoked a small Ukrainian uprising in the Russian lands in support of a similar liberation being granted there. Again, none of these demands can be considered ones which would elevate the Ukrainians or Ruthenians to a standing above other nations.

In summary, prior to 1848, Romanian and Ukrainian should be considered
considered primarily cultural movements involving the invention of languages, research of histories and development of literary movements. Although elements of both nationalisms were borrowed from foreign sources, particularly in the case of Romanian nationalism, there was no attempt to imitate any foreign nation per se. Instead, Romanian nationalism borrowed aspects of Italian and French nationalism to emphasise aspects of the nation which were pre-existing and perceived to be Latin whilst Ukrainian nationalists adopted the thoughts of Herder, not to copy German nationalism but to justify their cultural output. Since neither Romanian nor Ukrainian nationalists had states to support them, they could hardly impose their nationalism on a population unless it was willing and neither group agitated for hegemony, only demanding equal standing with other nations as a natural right of their nation. Plamenatz’s generalisation regarding the nature of nationalism in Eastern Europe is invalid, a predictable conclusion given his failure to even attempt to define the region.

Notes

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How did Marx and Engels envisage the demise of capitalism in the Manifesto of the Communist Party?

Nick Garland

In 1848, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels issued their call to arms in the form of The Manifesto of the Communist Party, opening with the declaration that 'a spectre is haunting Europe - the spectre of communism'. In the manifesto, Marx and Engels set out what they believed to be the inevitable path to capitalism's collapse and its ultimate replacement with communism. Unless otherwise stated, all citations are taken from The Communist Manifesto.

It is important of course to note the context in which Marx and Engels wrote. The year of the manifesto's publication was a year of revolutions across most of Western Europe. Indeed, Marx and Engels played their part: not only did their work influence certain aspects of the unrest, but also actively agitated, for instance with their Demands of the Communist Party in Germany. As such, it is vital to remember that The Manifesto of the Communist Party is not simply a piece of abstract historical, philosophical or economic thinking, but a polemic and essentially a piece of agitprop. The Manifesto famously closes with the declaration (and call-to-arms) that 'the Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained through the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution.
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The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.

WORKING MEN OF ALL CLASSES, UNITE!’ This quite clearly distinguishes the Communist Manifesto from just being an analysis or prediction of how capitalism will come to an end, rather showing it as an attempt to further the process of bringing that system to an end, to tap into proletarian resentment at the inequalities and hardships they suffered under capitalism, and guide them in the direction of the rejection of that economic system and towards a new, just one. It is important to remember that Marx and Engels saw their actions not just as predicting capitalism’s demise, but also helping to create the class-conscious, organised working class that was necessary for said demise. In a sense, the text must be seen as playing a crucial part in the predicted future that it sets out.

To understand the future as the authors of the manifesto envisaged it, one must first understand Marx’s theory of history; historical materialism. The first section of the manifesto famously opens with the assertion that ‘the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles’. In the context of the capitalist system, this referred to the struggle between the bourgeoisie - the owners of the means of production - and the proletariat - the wage labourers. However, class struggles existed long before capitalism came into the ascendancy, and before the bourgeoisie and proletariat came to exist. Society was arranged differently but the same struggles existed, for instance between ‘feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs’ under the feudal system.

Marx and Engels describe capitalism, having replaced feudalisms, as keeping class antagonisms, but also as having simply ‘established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones’. However, they do find a distinction in that ‘it has simplified class antagonisms’. Rather than having a multitude of classes engaging in various struggles between each other, capitalism has just two classes struggling against each other. The division between these classes therefore becomes an extremely simple one, defined solely by one’s relationship to the means of production- whether one controls those means of production, or whether one works for the owners of those means of the production (the bourgeoisie) for a wage. Of course the upshot of this one simple divide between the classes is immense in terms of their living conditions. While the bourgeoisie live lives of relative economic comfort and domestic and social fulfilment, ‘the proletarian is without property; his relation to his wife and children has no longer anything in common with the bourgeois family relations; modern industrial labour, modern subjection in capital, the same in England as in France, in America as in Germany, has stripped him of every trace of national character. Law, morality, religion, are to him so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests’. The proletariat have no stake of their own in society, and society serves only the interests of the bourgeoisie at their expense. It is this state of affairs which Marx and Engels believed to be the very essence of the capitalist system, and which ultimately necessitates a communist
revolution. The bourgeoisie have no private property of their own, and as such the only means through which they can overcome this state of affairs is to ‘destroy all previous securities for, and insurances of, private property’. Only a society in which private property has been abolished can overcome the stratified, class-based and inherently oppressive nature of all previous societies.

Marx and Engels offer an analysis of how the bourgeoisie came to seize their position as the ruling class, with the rise of capitalism necessitating repeated economic and industrial upheavals, and increasing bourgeois influence. Thus, to them, the modern bourgeoisie was ‘the product of a long course of development, of a series of revolutions in the modes of production and exchange’. Ultimately, they saw this as having led to a situation in which ‘the executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie’.

However, Marx and Engels viewed the processes that brought about the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie as ultimately laying the foundations of their downfall. In other words, the bourgeoisie ‘cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production’. That is to say, the capitalist class’ continued prevalence on capitalism continuing to succeed as an economic system, and for this economic growth must be kept essentially constant, which can of course only occur with constant innovation: newer, faster means of production and exchange must be created, and the workers must be exploited further: working longer, in poorer conditions, for inferior wages.

To Marx and Engels, the capitalist need for productive growth without end creates the conditions under which it begins to falter. As the conditions which led to the demise of feudalism were created within the feudal system- ‘the means of production and exchange, on whose foundation the bourgeoisie built itself up, were generated in a feudal society’- so those conditions requisite for capitalism’s collapse would be created within the capitalist system. To Marx and Engels, this would be a previously unprecedented kind of problem: ‘an epidemic that, in all previous epochs, would have seemed an absurdity- the epidemic of overproduction’.

Overproduction’s inevitable outcome is that the bourgeoisie’s interests are no longer furthered by the constant production revolutions of capitalism. As the value of the products the bourgeoisie needs to sell is so deflated by the excess supply that they respond in two ways. On the one hand, they carry out the ‘enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces’, so as to attempt to reduce the surplus production, while on the other hand ‘by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones’. Essentially, in their response to the new crises of capitalism, the bourgeoisie set the stage for greater crises of capitalism, and also weaken the means through which crises might be prevented. Thus, capitalism creates crises and each one begets a greater crisis. In the words of the authors, ‘the weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself’. Revolution made capitalism and revolution will destroy it.
Marx then goes further than this and explains that not only have the bourgeoisie created the circumstances under which capitalism might be destroyed but also that they have created those who will overthrow them: the proletariat, or industrial working class. The industrialisation that comes with the evolution of capitalism necessitates the mass migration of the peasantry to urban areas, thus creating the class that will bring about their downfall. Marx and Engels make clear that the proletariat are subject to every whim of the capitalist system: they must ‘sell themselves piece-meal, are a commodity, like every article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market.’ When the capitalist economy performs badly, it is the proletarians who suffer from the ensuing poverty and starvation, and as such they essentially depend upon the system which subjugates them to the dominance of the bourgeoisie.

Marx and Engels outline the alienation that occurs between workers and their labour as a consequence of the capitalist division of labour, as outlined by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*. Indeed, the two authors essentially adopt one of Smith’s own critiques of the workings of capitalism. To Smith, the division of labour causes the ‘mental mutilation’ of workers—*the man whose life is spent in performing a few simple operations, of which the effects are perhaps always the same... has no occasion to exert his understanding or to exercise his invention in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur.*

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He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to be. Similarly, Marx and Engels saw the process of carrying out minor, repetitive tasks, without feeling as if one is taking part in the production of a whole thing rather than a mere component, as serving to alienate workers from their labour: ‘the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character and, consequently, all charm for the workman.’

Furthermore, this creates a spiral in which the wages of the worker again are progressively reduced: the sheer simplicity and lack of skill required for the work means that the price of a worker’s labour only provides him with the means for bare subsistence, while the cost of production becomes ever cheaper, leading to workers’ wages falling further and further. In Marx and Engels’ words, ‘in proportion therefore, as the repulsiveness of the work increases, the wage decreases... as the use of machinery and division of labour increases, in the same proportion the burden of toil also increases, whether by prolongation of the working hours, by increase of the work exacted in a given time or by increased speed of the machinery etc.’ Capitalism is bolstered as the quality of life of the workers is depleted further and further. Indeed, this distinguishes the proletariat from all previous classes: ‘the serf... raised himself to membership in the Commune, just as the petty bourgeois... managed to develop into a bourgeois. The modern labourer, on the contrary, instead of rising with the progress of industry, sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class.’ As time goes on, those in the lower ranks of the
bourgeoisie - who rely on carrying out skilled labour - gradually sink into the proletariat as technological innovation reduces the need for skilled workers and their capital assets are no longer sufficient to match that of the richer ranks of the bourgeoisie. In this way, the revolutions of capitalism cause the proletariat to continuously grow, and 'the proletariat is recruited from all classes of the population.' We see another example of Marx and Engels' notion that capitalism's ruin lies within itself here.

Marx and Engels then proceed to set out the development of the proletariat in its struggles with bourgeoisie. This begins on the level of individual workers, 'then by the workpeople of a factory, then by the operatives in one trade, in one locality, against the individual bourgeois that exploits them.' They do this by targeting the means of production: 'they destroy imported wares that competed with their labour, they smash to pieces machinery, they set factories ablaze, they seek to restore by force the vanished status of the workman of the Middle Ages'. At this stage the workers' actions are basically futile: they are disorganised and pursuing essentially conservative ends, idealising and longing for a time that has long since passed and which they cannot return to. They cannot overthrow the capitalist order while they 'still form an incoherent mass scattered across the whole country, and broken up by their mutual competition'. The only form of organisation among the proletariat seen at this point, they claim, is brought about by the bourgeoisie, using them to fight their enemies: 'the remnants of absolute monarchy, the landowners, the non-industrial bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie. Thus the whole historical movement is concentrated in the hands of the bourgeoisie; every victory so obtained is a victory for the bourgeoisie'. We can perhaps see an example of this in modern neoliberal governments - often ostensibly conservative ones - railing against traditional institutions, the establishment or, as Tony Blair termed them, 'the forces of conservatism', offering the working class an enemy distinct from those who really hold power in society, what might be termed the 'bourgeois liberal establishment'.

Perhaps this can be best seen in the Blair government's mantra that 'we are all middle class now' - seeking to establish that the working class' interests really did not exist outside those that were in common with the bourgeoisie (any other values perceived to be in the interest of the working class were surely labelled 'anti-aspiration') - while setting their sights on alternative targets, perhaps most significantly underpinned by the removal of the vast majority of hereditary peers from the House of Lords. In this way, we can certainly see the wider significance of this part of Marx and Engels' analysis.

According to Marx and Engels, as the proletariat grows, 'it becomes concentrated in greater masses, its strength grows, and it feels the strength more'. The proletariat is also brought closer and closer together and develops a greater organisation and unity as the fluctuations and competition within the capitalist system progressively worsens their lot. On the one hand, 'conditions of life within the proletariat are more and more equalised, in proportion as machinery obliterates
all distinctions of labour, and nearly everywhere reduces all wages to the same low level.’ On the other hand, competition amongst the bourgeoisie ‘makes the wages of the workers ever more fluctuating’. In creating an equality of suffering of sorts between the proletarians, the bourgeoisie drive them closer together, and increase the scale of the clashes resultant from the disparities in the capitalist system. Thus, ‘the collisions between individual workers and individual bourgeois takes more and more the character of collision between two classes’. This leads to the beginning of workers really organising themselves in resistance to bourgeois society: trade unions are formed, they fight together to protect their wages, associations are formed to provide for revolts. Distinct battle lines are thus drawn for class war.

However, Marx and Engels make very clear that victory does not come easily nor quickly to the proletariat— even their occasional victories are temporary: ‘now and then, the workers are victorious, but only for a time’. Perhaps this can be best seen in the greatest victory (to date) of the British working class: the creation of the welfare state in the aftermath of World War II, which provided them for the first time with free healthcare, universal education, and so on. Within little more than a generation, the process of dismantling these gains for the workers was well underway, from the late 1970s onwards, with commitments to full employment and a collectivist, compassionate society replaced by the Thatcherite drive to privatise and to ‘roll back the frontiers of the state’.

However, Marx and Engels saw the value of these struggles as lying not in the rare and all too evanescent victories ‘but in the ever-expanding union of the workers’. They note also that the growing union is helped greatly by the development of new technology— communication, transport, etc. — which allows the workers to ‘centralise the local struggles, all of the same character, into one national struggle between classes.’ Yet again, it is the bourgeoisie’s constant revolutionary innovations that serve to equip their enemies to challenge their dominance.

Similarly, Marx and Engels recognise the difficulties of keeping the proletariat organised as a class and as a political party, and specifically the risk of the united front being torn apart by competition between workers. However, ‘it ever rises up again, stronger, firmer, mightier’, and ultimately achieves many successes ‘by taking advantage of the divisions among the bourgeoisie itself’. They note that the bourgeoisie is ‘involved in a constant battle’ with the aristocracy and those parts of the bourgeoisie ‘whose interests have become antagonistic to the progress of industry’, and always with the bourgeoisie of other countries. The inevitable consequence is that the bourgeoisie must call upon the proletariat to help it in these struggles, and in doing so it must ‘drag it into the political arena’. An example of this can be seen in the Russian Provisional Government’s decision in 1917 to turn to the Bolsheviks in response to the Kornilov Coup: in turning to their natural opposition to resist another enemy from within their own class, the bourgeoisie simply served to empower those who would overthrow them. But this also stretches to the
bourgeoisie ‘providing the bourgeoisie with its own elements of political and general education, in other words, it furnishes the proletariat with weapons for fighting the bourgeoisie’. The enlightenment and political consciousness of the bourgeoisie are also at this stage bolstered from two other sources: those members of the lower ranks of the bourgeoisie who ultimately sink into the proletariat, and the phenomenon of those members of the bourgeoisie who opt to join the workers – in particular ‘a portion of the bourgeois ideologists who have raised themselves to comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole’. This is surely an instance of Marx and Engels seeking to in some way excuse, or at least explain away, their own positions in the least humble terms possible. They choose to place themselves as those more privileged individuals (Marx a lawyer, Engels an industrialist himself) who happen to have achieved a level of intellectual understanding so much greater than almost all others that they naturally choose to join the side of the proletariat. Of course, these ‘champagne socialists’ arguably form a majority of those who would call themselves ‘socialists’ and almost certainly ‘Marxists’. It also allowed the writers to distinguish themselves from the ‘conservative’ members of the bourgeoisie, who they denounced as being unable to be revolutionary because ‘they fight against the bourgeoisie to save from extinction their existence as fractions of the middle class’.

Ultimately, the continuous decline in the living conditions of the proletariat bring about a situation in which ‘it becomes evident, that the bourgeoisie is no longer fit to be the ruling class in society... it is unfit to rule because it is no longer able to assure an existence to its slave within its slavery... society can no longer live under this bourgeoisie’. That is to say, the state in which the working class finds itself in is so intolerable and the bourgeoisie so unsympathetic or unable to offer any kind of relief to their plight, that the proletariat finally comprehend that the bourgeoisie are incapable and undeserving to remain as the ruling class in society, and their removal from that position is necessary. In concluding the first chapter of the Manifesto, Marx and Engels underline the consequences of the bourgeoisie’s own actions in upholding the capitalist system: in advancing industry, creating a greater equality and less competition between workers, the bourgeoisie unite the enemies that they keep down by keeping them isolated: ‘the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces its own grave diggers.’

Once this level of consciousness has been achieved, the Communists come into play. They serve as ‘the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all the others’ who have the advantage of ‘clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement.’ Marx and Engels emphasise that the one key distinguishing factor between the Communists and the other working-class movements is the Communists’ full understanding of history and their very specific goal: while multiple groups might seek to abolish property, it is the Communists’ goal is to abolish bourgeois property.
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All these factors together facilitate a situation in which Marx and Engels believed the proletariat could seize control of society. The bourgeois economic revolutions bringing about the creation of the class and then in its relentless drive for economic expansion sinking more and more people into the proletariat, and sinking the proletariat further and further down, with poorer wages and living conditions. The equality of suffering amongst the proletariat bringing them together, breaking down barriers of individual competition and opening the door for working class organisation. Finally, an alliance between workers and those who have joined them either out of naked self-interest or out of comprehension of historical materialism is in a position to overthrow the bourgeoisie and seize power.

The method through which the proletariat do this is ‘to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all means of production in the hands of the state i.e. of the proletariat organised as the ruling class; and to increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible’. It is worthwhile to note that Marx’s belief that ‘the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat’ - and that such a dictatorship is merely a healthy transitory stage en route to a classless society- strongly distinguished him from many of his contemporaries and fellow radical thinkers such as Mikhail Bakunin.¹ Through this period of despotism, Marx and Engels predicted proletarian governments would carry out a series of economic reforms that would abolish the old class system and old inequalities: for instance, abolishing private property, introducing progressive taxation to facilitate the rapid redistribution of wealth, abolition of inheritance, introducing free universal education, and placing control of essentially whole national economies in the hands of central government.

Ultimately, they predicted that once ‘class distinctions have disappeared and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character’. That is to say, essentially, the dictatorship of the proletariat would cease to exist once it was rendered unnecessary. They justify this claim by asserting that ‘political power, properly so called, is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another’. Therefore, once they have destroyed that which defines the divisions between the classes, the power will simply cease to exist for there will be no need for the proletariat to oppress a bourgeois class that no longer exists. Unlike all prior classes, the proletariat is able to achieve a state in which it ‘will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class.’ Thus, Marx and Engels believed capitalism would perish. Everything necessary for the bourgeoisie to maintain capitalism would cause the development of the situation in which they would ultimately - inevitably to the writers - be unable to avert their own defeat.
Lauren Hughes

Nationalism as a cause of the 1848 Revolution

How important was nationalism as a cause of revolution in 1848?

Lauren Hughes

The 1848 revolution was a pan-European phenomenon with a variety of causes; some were particular to one state, whereas others were generic to large parts of Europe. Nationalism was certainly one of these pan-European factors; citizens were gaining more of an idea about what it meant to be part of a nation and felt that their current rulers were infringing their rights. Within this ideology there appear to be two distinct strands; one was a political sense of nationalism, and the other, cultural. Also a number of other issues developed alongside this to help lead to revolution. Historians such as R. J. W. Evans look back to the Napoleonic Revolution as beginning a trend for revolution claiming that the ‘French Revolution set an agenda...for the nineteenth century.’ However, there were also more immediate causes such as poor harvests and crises in the countryside, economic downfalls and problems caused by industrialisation in the urban centres. Such factors when combined with the long term issues, led to a widespread revolutionary movement across Europe during the 1840s.

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Notes


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One of the main issues for many nationalist movements was the problem of foreign rule. Ernest Gellner notes how ‘nationalist sentiment...is most acutely offended by ethnic divergence between rulers and ruled.’ An example of this was the inferior treatment of Slavic populations under German rule. As the idea of nationalism developed, many believed that they were entitled to be ruled by someone of the same ethnicity and hoped that this would give them more freedom and rights. The situation in France regarding foreign rule was slightly different. The problem here was that monarchs were often associated with France’s enemies; this idea was certainly reinforced by the restorations of 1814-1815. In the case of the Bourbons, they were seen to be restored by national enemies and their constitution was viewed as an ‘English implant’. There was already an anti-monarchical political culture developing, so this was exacerbated by the fact that the French felt they would be losing their national identity. Despite differing situations, the key issue here was that citizens were opposed to being ruled by someone of a different nationality and were willing to protest for change.

Linked to this was the issue of political representation. During 1848, the idea of nationalism moved into the political realm with the phrase ‘nation state’ appearing more frequently in the language of the political sphere. Walter Schmidt claims that ‘the revolution was the most important attempt to constitute the German nation on a democratic and revolutionary basis.’ However some nationalists were more concerned with the nation in relation to Europe as a whole.

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A key example of this was Giuseppe Mazzini who promoted a republican sense of nationalism, and when referring to the current states believed, ‘so long as their national banner merely represented the interest of a dynasty or caste, will gradually become more and more intimately associated through the medium of democracy.’ In his view, it was only by making all nation states democratic and compatible with one another that Europe would function peacefully. For Mazzini and his followers, the new Europe would involve a Supreme Council, where members from each nation would form a national council with a president representing them at the Supreme Council. This ensured that the needs of all nations were recognised on a pan-European scale, thereby avoiding future national grievances. In this respect, although nationalism was a key factor in the cause for revolution, it was combined with other factors such as the call for democracy.

National culture was another aspect that many revolutionaries aimed to protect. Within the German states, the German population emphasised the superiority of German over Polish culture. They went on to form a civilising mission of the Germanic people in Slavic Eastern Europe, which prompted strong reactions from Polish and Slavic nationalists. Many people felt that as long as their state was under the rule of another nation, anything to do with their own culture was deemed inferior and therefore at risk. In this respect, the solution was for populations to be free from foreign rule by living within their own nation. This displays how significant cultural nationalism was to the issue of 1848.
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The cultural aspect of language was another motivating factor within nationalist movements. In Germany, a new ‘nationalistic presumption’ was developing that anyone who spoke German should be considered a German, accelerating the growth of a national consciousness, alongside a culture of ‘the others’. This was the prevailing view of Johann Fichte who stated that ‘those who speak the same language are joined to each other by a multitude of invisible bonds…the German nation placed sufficiently united within itself by a common language.’ The main idea was the unity of all peoples with common cultural ties, such as language. In this respect, we can see how this problem developed into a cause for revolution; those nationalists who wanted to be united under one nation by language felt threatened by rulers who refused to let this happen and were no longer willing to accept the situation; they would protest for change.

For many historians with a classical interpretation of 1848, the cause was actually something that had emerged from the previous century. In the case of France, if we look first to 1789, then to the July Days, then finally to 1848, we see periods of revolution briefly calmed by some form of established new power, only to be renewed when grievances arose. In William Fortescue’s view this was because the revolutionary changes were so profound that the ideas were passed on from generation to generation, meaning objections would always lead to attempted revolution. Other historians dispute this idea noting that in many respects, the revolutionary tradition of previous eras had very little impact during 1848. Richard Evans notes that ‘France, though its initial change of government provided a crucial impulse to others, furnished…no model.’ Furthermore regarding Germany, although the 1789 Revolution did have a political impact on many groups, there were no actual imitations during 1848. Therefore although events in France can be seen as significantly inspiration to newer movements, they had their own aims and strategies, and so revolution wouldn’t have occurred in 1848 if it wasn’t for new problems.

Peasant grievance is often suggested as a key contributing factor to the 1848 revolution by hastening the collapse of the old order. Rudolph Stadelmann stated that ‘if one seeks the anonymous masses who subterraneanly determined events…then one must seek them…among the peasant class.’ In the eastern states they rose up against serfdom, whilst in the west they protested against taxation, low wages, and restricted freedoms. In the case of the Czech lands one key demand of the revolutionaries was the abolition of the remnants of feudalism. Similarly, in Hungary the real aims of the revolutionary movements were the beginnings of modernisation, which in terms of the countryside included abolishing the feudal system, and liberating the serfs. Looking to the west, the abolition of serfdom was further under way with peasants becoming more aware of their rights as citizens. In Germany, those deemed the ‘rural proletariat’ emerged as ‘the source of social disturbance and discontent…which decomposed the social order by announcing demands.”
Revolutions Issue
Now free from the ties of feudalism, they wanted more personal freedoms, be it political rights, or more control over their economic situation, and they saw the emerging revolutionary movement as an opportunity to advance this. On the whole however, when looking at the issue of peasant nationalism, it was rarely a significant issue; their grievances were more to do with their personal rights and the living conditions they were forced to be in.

When looking at the countryside in general, the poor harvests of the 1840s were a substantial issue. The grain harvests failed first, followed by the back-up crop of potatoes, causing severe crises such as the Irish Potato Famine. These general crop failures then impacted on Europe’s urban centres, sparking food riots in both France and Germany, and creating higher levels of unemployment; people were spending more money on food due to rising prices which in turn, decreased the need for manufactured goods. As the poor harvests affected both the peasants who were unable to make profit from their labour, and the urban workers whose cost of living rose alongside the threat of unemployment, this hardship would have provoked many to join the cause for revolution that the nationalist movements had established. In this respect, although the nationalist movement may have encouraged revolution, it wasn’t for nationalist reasons that these lower classes were rebelling.

The process of industrialisation is also seen to be a cause for grievance. With industrialisation came many new job prospects, and given the poor rural conditions, many villagers soon travelled to urban centres, creating a new ‘industrial underclass’ that became central to 1848 in many areas. Evans claims that the ‘effect of social dislocation and radical thought was to create…the preconditions for modern urban riot.’ This view gains more weight if we accept the view Timothy Baycroft holds that workers were supposedly at the heart of every crisis. In many urban centres living conditions were poor, meaning many workers were willing to revolt. For example, in Berlin from 1840-47 the population increased by 30%, leading to a deterioration of social conditions, with food prices doubling or tripling. In France, many cities also experienced extreme population expansion. From 1801-1846, the population of Paris virtually doubled; in Marseilles it increased by 67% whilst Lyons saw an increase of 62%. Furthermore, the influx of migrants led to severe overcrowding and this, combined with inadequate provisions of facilities in the working class suburbs, led to general dissatisfaction. If we look at the revolutionary current of the time, it is clear that workers saw this ever-growing movement as a way to protest against their own grievances. Ernest Gellner believes that an ‘age of transition to industrialism was bound...also to be an age of nationalism.’ Workers of different nationalities would have all been living in close proximity, often causing conflicts between various nationalities with some believing they were superior to others, or perhaps blaming a particular nationality for the hardships of the time. Therefore we see a link between the original aims of the nationalist movements adopted by those who were spurred on by other reasons for revolution in 1848.

Lauren Hughes

Nationalism as a cause of the 1848 Revolution
Revolutions Issue

Tied in with the issue of industrialisation was the creation in France of National Workshops. The immediate trigger of France’s February revolution was François Guizot banning the mass reform banquet, sparking many popular protests which multiplied as other groups joined in. For alienated workers this provided the inspiration and opportunity to resort to violence for their own means. This gives weight to the fact that many, especially the lower classes in society, used the protests of nationalist movements to advance their own aims. To restrain these protests the new Provisional Government quickly proclaimed ‘the right to work’ and ‘the organisation of work’ on 25th February, with the National Workshops established the following day. This satisfied the grievances of many socialists, such as Louis Blanc, who before the revolution had called for stricter government regulations on industry and believed it was the government’s responsibility to ensure the employment of its people. By the middle of June enrolment had reached 118,000, approximately half the working population of Paris. However far more enrolled than were expected so projects were never able to provide for more than 10,000 individuals, meaning many were still out of work, leading to additional resentment. Furthermore, Conservative members of the government wanted to abolish the workshops due to the high expenditure, so they were eventually closed down. This led to further resentment as the workshops were a symbol of the revolution; getting rid of them was perceived as reverting to the old ways. In this respect, nationalism was only significant in that those movements inspired more protest, since this protest was more to do with the problem of work and the poor decisions made by the current government within France.

Overall, clearly nationalism did play a key role in the mind-set of many revolutionaries during the 1840s, be it the ‘revolutionary tradition’ from the Napoleonic Era, or the more immediate nationalistic concerns. Although this nationalist sentiment was significant, it wouldn’t have led to such widespread revolutions if it wasn’t for other problems during the 1840s. Regarding the peasant situation, with the abolition of feudalism incomplete in the east, and the new state of the peasantry in the west, living conditions in the countryside compelled peasants to rebel across Europe. Similarly, there were problems with industrialisation throughout Europe, again mainly regarding living conditions and the economic situation. However, although both of these areas were significant in creating large scale grievances, the momentum for revolution wouldn’t have been strong enough without the more long term protests created by nationalist movements. Therefore, the revolution needed both the nationalist causes among the upper classes, and the short term triggers among the lower classes to develop into the strong pan-European phenomenon that it did. Whilst nationalist movements alone wouldn’t have been able to create such a widespread wave of revolutions, it is also true that without the inspiration created by such movements, both the peasants and workers themselves wouldn’t have been able to seize this opportunity to rebel in such a way. Nationalism therefore was significant in creating strong momentum for revolution,
yet if it had been the only issue, it wouldn’t have been significant enough to cause
the revolutions that occurred in 1848 as the majority of peasants and workers, who
made up a significant proportion of the population, largely wouldn’t have been
involved.

Notes

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