

OLLIE LECTURE

October 6, 2009

“The Nationalist Civil Wars”

We spoke last time about Karl Marx sitting alone in the British Museum researching his revolutionary Das Kapital, first published in 1867 and originally dedicated to Charles Darwin (who refused to accept the honor intended). In this work and his earlier *Communist Manifesto* (1848) Marx was proclaiming and applauding the forthcoming revolution of the working classes. What he didn't seem to understand nor have many of his successors is that an even more powerful revolutionary concept was in the air—one that would shape modern history far more permanently than Marx's “workers of the world unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains.” That revolutionary idea is summed up in this music: “The Marseillaise” (1792), a chorus song by Frenchmen from the port city of Marseille on their way to the battlefields of Europe in defense of their Revolution. It is today the French national anthem and it embodies an idea that has transformed human society almost as much as the Industrial Revolution: the idea of **nationalism**.

Unlike Communism, I can't show you an image of the author of this revolutionary concept. It sprang up in Europe like the blossoms of springtime—a little here and a little there. Some have argued that the very first nation-state was Portugal which (because of its modest size and culturally-uniform population) was able in the fourteenth century to harness the energy of its subjects to pursue common objectives, such as the exploration of the Atlantic islands and the African coast.

Certainly Spain, when it was united under Ferdinand and Isabella in 1467, was able to pursue great enterprises such as the conquest of the Americas on an unheard of scale. Soon the monarchs of France and Great Britain sought to tap the wealth and energies of their subjects in pursuit of goals just as vast and daring.

The nation-state was something new in history. Great powers had existed in the past on a grand scale; *e. g.*, the empire of Ghenghis Khan, Imperial Rome, Asoka's (273-232 B. C.) Magadha domain in India. But here was a new concept: one that claimed that the ruler's power derived not from conquest or divinity, but from the consent of those he or she governed. No one stated that idea more eloquently or more brilliantly than the American, Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), who told the crowd at Gettysburg in 1863 that: "... our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

Ann and I were treated this weekend to an address by Professor Thomas Bender of NYU, the author of the recently published *A Nation among Nations: America's Place in World History*. In it he placed our civil war into the context of the triumph of the concept of nation during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He noted that in his inaugural address Lincoln had repeatedly used the term "Union" to describe the United States. At Gettysburg, Bender noted, that word was eclipsed by "Nation." Prior to our civil war, he noted, reference to the United States was "these"; afterward, "the".

Well, it was catching on. Napoleon I (1769-1821) captured the idea of nation and used it to fill his armies with volunteers whose numbers overwhelmed the professional soldiers of the established monarchies of Europe. In fact, on one day in 1806 the French under Napoleon caught the Prussian army at Jena and literally annihilated it. Napoleon marched into Berlin unopposed.

It could not be said that it was Russian nationalism that ultimately defeated the Emperor's ambitions for world domination since Russian nationalism was only beginning to emerge. But it did account in some manner for the defeat of the French in their invasion of that vast empire in 1812.

Nationalism, spawned by the French, was certainly a factor in their ultimate defeat. In the "Battle of Leipzig" (1813) Germans by the thousands smashed into French troops inspired by a vision of "Deutschland" that would never again be dominated by foreigners from across the Rhine. Many were university students inspired by the writings of Johann Herder (1744-1803), the romantic musings of

Goethe (1749-1832), and even the folk tales of the Grimm brothers. In 1807 students at the University of Berlin heard Professor Johann Fichte (1762-1814) admonish them that Germany needed “the devouring flame of higher patriotism, which embraces the nation as the vesture of the eternal, for which the noble-minded man joyfully sacrifices himself.” They enrolled by their thousands as volunteers in the Prussian army and helped smash Napoleon at the Battle of Leipzig in 1813.

After Napoleon’s final defeat in 1815, the Congress of Vienna attempted to put the nationalist genie back into its bottle. This was especially important to Hapsburg Austria where it was recognized that nationalism was an idea that could eventually destroy it. Thus the Congress created the German Confederation (mentioned last time); restored the Austrians to control of much of northern Italy (Lombardy and Venetia); and delivered over the Poles to Russian control. Even the vast revolutions of 1848 were unable to undo the 1815 agreement, except to divide the Netherlands into Holland and Belgium (with an international guarantee of Belgium’s independence).

Still the nationalist cry persisted, expressed no where so eloquently as in the words of Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) who wrote, “Nationality is the role assigned by God to each people in the work of humanity, the mission and task which it ought to fulfill on earth that the divine purpose may be realized in this world.” We had similar expressions in the “Manifest Destiny” ideal that prompted us into war with Mexico in 1848. The same inspiration drove Simón Bolívar (1783-1830) to attempt to end Spanish colonialism in the Latin America and the Greek Alexander Ypsilanti (1792-1828) to drive the Turks from the Balkans. Still, as late as 1849, Russian troops had helped the Hapsburgs crush a Hungarian national revolt led by Louis Kossuth (1802-1894) in an uprising that caused an Illinois state legislator, Abraham Lincoln, to introduce a resolution of support for the embattled Hungarians.

Nationalism, of course, had played a major role in convincing the French to elect Louis Napoleon Bonaparte the president of their Republic in 1849. He was the great Napoleon’s nephew and drew upon French nationalist ideas to elevate

himself (by plebiscite) to Emperor in 1852. What then was the French empire? Coastal regions of Algeria, Senegal in Africa, some islands in the Caribbean, trading concessions in a place called “Cochin China” or Vietnam. A grander imperial notion was manifest in France’s major participation in the Crimean War and afterward, at the Paris Peace Conference, a hint that the Emperor (with his family ties to Corsica) might be willing to involve himself in Italian affairs. Certainly, the effort in 1858 of an Italian nationalist named Orsini to assassinate the Emperor and his wife would have concentrated his attention on the Italian problem. He agreed privately to meet with Camillo di Cavour (1810-1861), the newly-appointed prime minister of Piedmont/Sardinia. Cavour, the former editor of *Il Risorgimento*, was an Italian nationalist appointed as Piedmont’s prime minister in 1852 and an open enemy of Austrian dominance of the peninsula.

#### Sequence of Events

- July, 1858 – Napoleon meets Camilo di Cavour at a spa (Pombolières) and agrees to join Piedmont in a war against Austria should it “be justified in the eyes of diplomacy and even more in the eyes of public opinion in France and Europe.” The idea was to drive Austria out of Italy and to create four states under the presidency of the Pope (who was being protected by French troops). Cavour agrees and by recruiting Lombardy dissidents into the Piedmontese army prompts Austria into declaring war on Piedmont in April, 1859. France responds by rushing to Piedmont’s defense.
- July, 1859 – After major and costly French victories at Magenta and Solferino, Napoleon agrees to a peace with the Hapsburgs that allows the Austrians to keep Venetia, keeps French troops in the Papal States, and appoints the Pope to be head of an Italian federal union: Piedmont, the Papal States, and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Piedmont is betrayed and Cavour resigns (but returns in 1860).
- May 11, 1860 – Giusuppe Garibaldi (1807-1882), an ardent nationalist and republican, lands an army of 1,000 volunteers in Sicily and in two weeks captures Palermo.

- August 22, 1860- Garibaldi crosses the Straights and captures Naples on September 7. He heads north toward the Papal States.
- Cavour sends Piedmontese troops into the Papal States. They meet Garibaldi's forces south of the city and Garibaldi joins Victor Emmanuel II in riding through Naples as co-founders of the Italian nation. Still, Austria has Venetia and there are French troops in Rome.

On March 3, 1861, Czar Alexander II of Russia issued a decree abolishing serfdom in his empire. More about the details later. Millions were suddenly free persons.

- April, 1861 – Civil War in America which earlier (1853) had obliged Japan to open its doors to western trade.
- July 1864 - The Manchu dynasty in China puts down the Taiping Rebellion, a nationalist uprising that lasted 14 years and may have resulted in the deaths of 20 million (!!!) Chinese.
- 1867 – The last Japanese shogun abdicates and the new emperor, Matsuhito [Meiji] was crowned. Major westernization begins.

What was this unsettling idea (nationhood) that was creating such tumult across the planet? Lincoln had stated it so well in his Gettysburg address: *government of the people, by the people, for the people*. But who exactly were the people? Important different schools of thought emerge here.

One of the most influential writers about nationalism was the Frenchman Ernest Renan (1823-1892) who in his 1882 discourse "*Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*" [*What is a nation?*] stated that it was defined by a people who wished to live together ("having done great things together and wishing to do more.")

Yet there were other less voluntary notions of nationhood. Heinrich von Treitschke (1834-1896) was the renowned author of the multi-volumed History of Germany in the Nineteenth Century (1879). Treitschke identified

the nation with the *Volk*, a mystical and hereditary concept that involved ancient linkage to the land and its culture. Not surprisingly, therefore, he subsequently penned an essay in which he stated, “the Jews are our misfortune.” Here’s a bit of his prose: *The greatness of the State lies precisely in its power of uniting the past with the present and the future; and consequently no individual has the right to regard the State as the servant of his own aims but is bound by the moral duty and physical necessity to subordinate himself to it.*

The idea of nationhood even stirred the Danes, who in 1863 enacted a constitution that would have incorporated the province of Schleswig into the Danish state. An international treaty of 1852 had granted the Danish king jurisdiction over the provinces of Schleswig (mostly German-speaking) and Holstein (mostly Danish), but forbade their incorporation into the Danish state. The Danes ignored that treaty and moved to bring the Schleswig Germans into their domain. The Austrian-dominated and usually dormant German Confederation objected and diplomats hastened to prevent a conflict. Britain’s Disraeli said of the Schleswig-Holstein Question, “I have known only three people who understood it: one is dead, another went mad, and I have completely forgotten its particulars.”

In one of the Confederation states, Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898) had been appointed in 1862 to become prime minister of the Kingdom of Prussia in the depths of a constitutional crisis between the King and the parliament over the question of ministerial responsibility. The king wished to expand the army; parliament refused to endorse the tax increases and the government went ahead and collected the taxes anyway. Bismarck stood stolid in the abuse that was heaped upon him. He was a Junker, a Prussian aristocrat, and like those of his class before him he was dedicated to the service of the House of Hohenzollern, not the idea of German nationalism. However, should those interests coincide, he was prepared (and preparing) to make the most of them. With the revenues he was collecting, Bismarck funded major reforms (modernization) of the Prussian army and intensified Prussian railway construction.

The Schleswig-Holstein question presented Bismarck with the perfect opportunity to synthesize German national feeling with Hohenzollern interests. In January 1864, he convinced the Hapsburgs to join Prussia in decreeing a joint ultimatum to Denmark to rescind its claims on the two provinces within 48 hours, acting in the name of the German Confederation. Denmark foolishly refused (thinking that the British would back them up) and thus both Austria and Prussia declared war on Denmark on February 1, 1864. It was, of course, a romp, and in October 1864 the Danes agreed to surrender their claims to the German Confederation with Austria occupying Holstein and Prussia gaining Schleswig—all in the name of the Confederation, of course. That put the Austrians between two Prussian armies. Bismarck would spend much of the next two years in either persuading the Hapsburgs to allow a division of the Confederation between them (north and south) or to isolate Austria diplomatically so that they would have no allies in a German civil war. Next time, we'll discuss the 1866 outcome of that effort.

Oh, also, in a little noted event. The Queen of Spain, Isabel II (reigned 1846-1867) was overthrown in a military coup as a result (among others) of her conspicuous indiscretions with the American ambassador, Daniel Sickles, a former Union general. For the next three years the nation experienced chaos.