

Roman Empire 101

Chapter 101: Reclaiming Lombardy

After the Battle of Venice, Marshal Radetzky didn't halt his advance. He allowed his forces only a two-day respite before marching into the Lombardy Region.

The Sardinian Government overestimated their standing in the eyes of the local populace. Having experienced deception, the people of Lombardy held a deep-seated resentment toward the Sardinian Government.

Unfortunately, at this juncture, the illustrious aura around Marshal Badoglio's name shattered. The Battle of Venice had broken the backbone of the Sardinian forces, and with their loss of conviction, the destructive power of the rout was truly horrifying.

At every location they arrived, they brought calamity with them. Even before the government could rally the masses, they had stirred up animosity to the maximum.

There is no harm if there is no comparison. Ordinary people suddenly realized that the days under the rule of the Kingdom of Sardinia were worse than those under the Austrian Government.

At the very least, the decaying Austrian government had established social order. Despite oppression from the government, nobles, and capitalists, the overall stability of social order allowed people to muddle through their lives.

However, after the arrival of the Kingdom of Sardinia, what followed was a continuous series of wars. The exorbitant war taxes were even more severe than under the Austrian government. The oppression from nobles and capitalists persisted, and there was also the added nuisance of marauding soldiers.

On June 1st, a bread riot erupted in Milan. In a bid for survival, the city's workers besieged bakeries, leading to a brutal crackdown by the Sardinian military that resulted in the deaths of hundreds on the spot.

On June 3rd, a peasant uprising flared up in Pavia. The uprising grew to encompass over three thousand individuals at one point, and they even openly displayed banners welcoming the Austrian Army.

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The Sardinian Government had anticipated that a people's war wouldn't really affect Austria, but instead, they found themselves submerged in the turbulent waters of a people's war first.

Obtaining control over Lombardy was too easy for them. Apart from purging a group of republicans, the Sardinian Government had not made significant moves. Now, the consequences were coming to the surface.

After Austria's rule in this region for so many years, how could there not be supporters?

If the Kingdom of Sardinia had remained dominant, the loyalty of these supporters would likely have diminished. But now, when it was clear that Austria held the upper hand, they couldn't hold back any longer.

In addition, there was a large group of opportunistic individuals looking to switch sides. The workers' and peasants' revolutionary movement in Lombardy was also spreading like wildfire. Marshal Badoglio found himself torn between battling the Austrians on one hand and sending forces to quell uprisings on the other.

Before the Kingdom of Sardinia's reinforcements could arrive, the Austrian Army was already at the gates of Milan.

In just a few short days, Marshal Badoglio seemed to have aged twenty years, and at this point, all that remained was regret.

If he had known it would come to this, he wouldn't have been greedy for merit in the first place. Now, he could see that Marshal Radetzky had essentially baited them into abandoning Lombardy.

Unfortunately, they had all been deceived by political propaganda, naively believing that the Austrian Empire was already in decay, and their army was vulnerable to attack.

"Marshal, the enemy is at the gates of Milan. Please, give the order to retreat!" pleaded the anxious Lieutenant General Messer.

"Retreat? Where can we even retreat to?" Marshal Badoglio said with a bitter smile.

Looking at the general in front of him who made him make a wrong decision, Badoglio wished he could just kill him on the spot.

However, those were just his passing thoughts. Now, his spirit was dead. As the supreme commander of this military operation, he had to take responsibility for the failure of this war.

Badoglio couldn't bear the pain of having his reputation be ruined. He would rather die on the battlefield than go back and be court-martialed.

"Of course, we need to return home. Milan can't be held anymore, and most likely, Lombardy won't hold either. The Austrians won't simply let it be. We still have to fight to defend our homeland. At this point, we must preserve our strength as much as possible, or who will defend the Kingdom of Sardinia?" Lieutenant General Messer asserted with certainty.

Badoglio shook his head and said, "It's precisely because we need to preserve our strength as much as possible that we cannot retreat. If we don't engage the main Austrian forces and keep them occupied, do you think the other units can make it back?"

If we run ahead, with the enemy chasing us from behind, do you think we'll have many soldiers left if we make it back to the Kingdom of Sardinia?

Furthermore, for the defense of our homeland, preparations are needed within our own borders, so we must keep the enemy engaged in Milan to buy time for our homeland!"

At this point, he had set aside thoughts of his own life and death. Out of his responsibility as a military leader, he was prepared to fight for a glimmer of hope for the Kingdom of Sardinia.

If we say that the Battle of Venice was a head-on collision between the two sides, then the Lombardy defense will be brutally one-sided, crumbling quickly with the Austrian Army sweeping through like a gust of autumn wind scattering leaves.

Originally, Badoglio believed that with roughly one hundred thousand troops at his disposal and relying on fortified positions, he could delay the enemy for two to three months.

With this much time, the Kingdom of Sardinia had the opportunity to mobilize its entire nation once more. Fighting on home soil with the support of the people, there might even be a chance for a last-ditch effort.

However, it was unfortunate that the Sardinian Army had already lost its fighting spirit. Such a force, no matter how numerous, had become ineffective. Badoglio had no choice but to place his hopes on the defense of Milan.

After all, the Hungarian Republic had successfully defended Budapest against the Austrian Army for over a month, and it still hadn't fallen. There was no reason to believe they couldn't do the same.

Badoglio wanted to defend Milan at all costs, but King Charles Albert would not agree. With all of Sardinia's forces committed to this war, the survival of the entire kingdom was at stake if the entire army was defeated.

In the end, Badoglio made a decision to leave behind ten thousand troops to hold Milan and buy time for the main army's retreat.

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On June 10th, after two days and nights of fierce fighting, the Sardinian Army was ultimately unable to withstand the Austrian onslaught. With the cooperation of the city's residents, Milan once again fell into Austrian hands.

When Milan Fell, Marshal Badoglio committed suicide in the Governor's Palace, preserving his final shred of dignity as a soldier.

On June 12th, the Austrian Army reclaimed Lombardy and turned its military force towards the Kingdom of Sardinia, marking a new phase in the Austro-Sardinian War.

Turin.

The swift failure of the Lombardy defense left the Sardinian Government stunned. They never expected it to collapse so quickly.

After all, in the beginning of the conflict, Marshal Radetzky had held off an attack from nearly 200,000 Sardinian troops with fewer than 100,000 men, relying on defensive positions.

From their perspective, the Sardinian forces in Lombardy still numbered around 120,000 to 130,000, not significantly different from the Austrian forces engaged in the offensive. Even though their combat capabilities might have been somewhat inferior, as the defending side, they believed they could compensate through geographical advantages.

Charles Albert asked anxiously, "Li Qi, how many troops have we withdrawn from the front lines, and can we hold off the enemy's advance?"

Minister of War Li Qi replied with a bitter smile, “Your Majesty, a total of 70,000 troops have been withdrawn, and domestically we have mobilized another 150,000 troops. However, these troops mobilized later have not received formal training, and their combat capabilities may be...”.

Chapter 102: Survival Hangs on A Single Thread: Kingdom of Sardinia

Charles Albert waved his hand and said, “Just teach them how to use guns, it doesn’t matter anymore at this point. The focus now is to boost morale, ignite their patriotism, and make up for the lack of training with courage.

As long as they dare to fight and are willing to sacrifice, even if we have to exchange three of our soldiers or five for one enemy soldier, we can still hold off the Austrians and create favorable conditions for negotiations!”

He held no illusions about their combat capabilities anymore. The regular army of the Kingdom of Sardinia had been beaten black and blue, and now with these hastily assembled cannon fodder units, could they really defy the odds?

If the quality wasn’t up to par, they would make up for it with quantity. There were plenty of people available for homeland defense.

Thanks to the government’s prolonged propaganda efforts, ordinary citizens blamed their hardships on Austria, and now they had a solid support base.

Minister of War Li Qi nervously replied, “Your Majesty, our weapons and equipment are severely lacking. Many soldiers have to share one rifle among two or three, and this is a result of our encouragement for soldiers to bring their own weapons.”

After suffering a defeat, he naturally lacked the confidence to even speak. If it weren’t for Marshal Badoglio sacrificing himself at the last moment and shouldering all the responsibility, the Kingdom of Sardinia might have seen a change in leadership by now.

Even so, the government was under immense pressure. It could be said that the Austrian Army’s arrival at this critical moment has, to some extent, saved the Sardinian Government.

King Charles Albert, a seasoned politician, took the opportunity to shift domestic tensions, using the pretext of defending the homeland. He strategically placed all the destabilizing elements into the military and positioned them at the forefront against Austria.

If the Austrian Army could help him eliminate these elements, Charles Albert probably wouldn’t mind awarding them a big medal.

Of course, this was impossible, and Charles Albert had no intention of being grateful to the Austrians. Unless these elements were eliminated, the Austrian Army was likely to stay for quite some time.

The Kingdom of Sardinia was unfortunately at its weakest now. If they don’t take a piece of the pie now, can Austria still proudly consider itself a major power?

“Let’s mobilize all the people of our country to raise donations. I will personally take the lead and donate all the firearms we have in storage. Whatever we can gather, we’ll make the most of it. If it’s not enough, we’ll make do with some cold weapons for now.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is in talks with Britain and France. It won't be long before we secure enough weapons and equipment," King Charles Albert contemplated and said.

Li Qi's inner turmoil was palpable. He really wanted to ask what King Charles Albert was thinking. What kind of firearms were in his collection? Does he even have any sense of urgency?

The firearms usable within the country had already been requisitioned. The royal collection mostly consisted of antique firearms, with the oldest dating back to the 14th century, a matchlock gun.

While these weapons were suitable for decoration, using them on the battlefield would be nothing short of murder.

As one of the birthplaces of the Renaissance, the Kingdom of Sardinia's nobility pursued historical and cultural heritage. Naturally, the older the weapons in their collections and the more historical stories they held, the better.

During this mobilization, all eligible young aristocrats in the Kingdom of Sardinia were conscripted into the military. They had already brought out whatever firearms they could use.

This was somewhat acceptable because, with even the oldest firearms, as long as they could fire bullets, they could be used for killing, even if they were considered disposable items.

However, the most tragic part was the need to resort to cold weapons. This was probably in preparation for close combat with the Austrian Army. Faced with their unreliable monarch, Li Qi ultimately chose to say, "Your Majesty is wise."

Prime Minister Azeglio couldn't help but say, "Your Majesty, the French have already refused our request to purchase weapons, and they have even started cracking down on smuggling, just like the Swiss next door, banning the flow of weapons and ammunition into our country."

The secret Franco-Austrian Treaty was no longer a secret. However, for the Kingdom of Sardinia, dealing with Austria alone was already a matter of life and death. If France also became their enemy, they wouldn't even have the courage to resist.

The Sardinian Government, from top to bottom, chose to feign ignorance, hoping to use internal conflicts within the French government to escape this crisis.

But now, they can't pretend to be ignorant any longer. The neutral nation of Switzerland imposing an arms embargo was standard procedure for them. However, the French playing the same game was blatant malice.

Remember, before the outbreak of this war, the French Government was encouraging them to join the conflict and promising a lot of weapons assistance. Now, not only has that assistance not materialized, but even regular trade was struggling to proceed smoothly.

There was no way they could promise France the same benefits that Franz offered so straightforwardly.

Austria can cede half of the Kingdom of Sardinia to the French, but that would be an act of generosity on Austria's part. The Sardinian Government would never make such a decision.

In the face of interests, politicians' promises are worth about as much as a fart.

The French have long held ambitions in Italy, but due to the Habsburg Family's constraints, they have been striving for centuries with little success.

Now, the opportunity has presented itself. Politicians need the political prestige that comes with expanding territory, capitalists need access to larger markets, and aristocratic officers need military achievements.

With so many people having vested interests, it was something that the diplomatic efforts of the Kingdom of Sardinia naturally can't stop. If it weren't for internal power struggles, the French Army would have arrived by now.

"Bam!"

Charles Albert slammed the table fiercely and angrily said, "Damn those Frenchmen, they should all go to hell. If I had known this in the Anti-French War, we wouldn't have let them off so easily!"

The king's furious outburst left everyone choosing to pretend they hadn't heard it. What was the situation in the Anti-French War? Was there a need to say more?

"Your Majesty, the British have agreed to mediate in this war. At this moment, the British Foreign Secretary, Mr. Palmerston has set off from London and is on his way to Vienna," Prime Minister Azeglio quickly conveyed the good news.

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When the Kingdom of Sardinia's survival was hanging on a single thread, the internationalist spirit of the Parisian people sparked the June Uprising and saved Sardinia.

The June Uprising in Paris was legendary. After the bourgeoisie government in France successfully seized power, it aligned itself with Austria and Russia.

The Prussian liberals sent a communication to France, inviting the French Government to support the Polish independence movement together. Naturally, this was met with a refusal from the French Government.

After this news came in, to support the Polish Revolution, 150,000 Parisian workers took to the streets on the morning of June 15, 1848, and occupied the Parliament building, demanding that the French Government form an expeditionary force to support the Polish independence movement.

Without a doubt, this internationalist spirit was met with rejection from the French Government, and tensions escalated between the two sides. On June 23, Paris experienced another outbreak of revolution.

With internal instability in France and to avoid the situation from deteriorating further, the French Government had to cancel its plans to send troops to the Kingdom of Sardinia.

Chapter 103: Held Hostage by Interests

Hungary.

As news of Sardinia's defeat spread, more and more Hungarians began to lose confidence in the revolution. Cities like Miskolc, Debrecen, Pécs, Szeged, and others fell one after another.

By mid-June, the Hungarian Republic was left with only one city, Budapest.

Unwilling to accept defeat, the revolutionaries fled to the countryside after losing important cities, attempting to continue the resistance through guerrilla warfare.

It was a pity that the Hungarian populace didn't buy it. In the eyes of ordinary people, the Habsburg monarchy was their protector, while the Hungarian Republic was seen as a government formed by nobles and capitalists to exploit them.

A people's war was not ignited and was suppressed by the masses instead.

It can be said that Franz's successful land reform in Hungary effectively shifted all of Austria's dark history onto the Hungarian Government.

This world never lacked intelligent individuals. The Hungarian nobility, whose power had been greatly diminished after the internal turmoil, quickly changed sides and took action to prove their worth to the Austrian Government. They were preparing to secure advantageous positions in the new social order.

This was the way of survival for the ancient nobility, understanding the need to compromise with reality. The upstarts who hadn't learned this lesson had already been dealt with when Austria suppressed the Hungarian rebellion.

In an old castle outside Arad, a young man was saying angrily, "Father, do we really have to do this? Once the Kingdom of Hungary ceases to exist, we will be left with..."

The elder waved his hand and said with great solemnity, "August, do not let your eyes be blinded by self-interest!

The Kingdom of Hungary no longer exists, and it was doomed from the moment the Hungarian Revolution began. The determination of the Austrian Government to eradicate Hungary will not waver.

While the courage to stand up to a powerful adversary is admirable, it is by no means something we should emulate; this goes against our ancestral teachings.

Since it is unavoidable that Hungary will be annexed, why not seize this opportunity to gain the greatest benefit?

The Austrian Government can use this revolution to annex the Kingdom of Hungary, but they still lack a legitimate basis in international law. This is our chance."

August furrowed his brow and said, "But Father, the Austrian Government has taken our lands. The million hectares of ancestral land that has been passed down to us is now gone. We can never reclaim it!"

The elder shook his head and said, "What do you propose, then? These lands have been distributed among hundreds of thousands of people, and there's no way to reclaim them. Do you want to become sworn enemies with our own subjects on our estates over these lands?

August, you are being too extreme. The most important thing now is not to blame the heavens or seek revenge recklessly but to cut our losses in a timely manner!

Remember, these lands were taken under the guise of redemption, yet we haven't received any redemption funds. At this point, the Austrian Government would be delighted if you made trouble because that way, they wouldn't have to pay a single florin."

The House of Koháry, like many major aristocratic families, placed significant emphasis on estate management. Eliciting the anger and contempt of the public were characteristics of the nouveau riche and prodigals. Genuine ancient aristocrats highly value their reputation.

In Europe, noble wars often erupt, and nobles must rely on the loyalty of their subjects on their estates. If they cannot gain their support, how can major aristocrats maintain their special status?

Money moves hearts, and now that the lands have been distributed, it was fait accompli. The serfs who have received land will certainly not be willing to give it up. If they want to reclaim the land, they would end up on the opposite side of these people.

There was no other way; they must cut their losses at this point. As for seeking revenge against the Austrian Government, that idea is still on the table. They can even create trouble for them secretly. However, they should not take action openly.

Perhaps due to the intermarriage between the major noble families, the Habsburgs can't take drastic measures against them. However, withholding their land redemption payment was still possible, or rather, the land redemption funds.

Redeeming the funds for millions of hectares of land, even with a discount, was still a significant sum, an amount no one can refuse.

Getting that money wouldn't be so simple either. The land redemption funds are managed by the Austrian Government, they won't readily release it.

Even if, for the sake of government reputation, they can't outright default, they'll find ways to turn it into long-term debts.

With this realization, August deflated. It was frustrating to think that while the Austrian Government harmed their interests, they still had to help stabilize the region to cut their own losses.

At least until they get their hands on this enormous land redemption fund, they must side with the Austrian Government and hope for Austria's development, otherwise nobody will repay them.

After a lengthy silence, August reluctantly said, "Alright, I'll push for a public petition to allow the Austrians to legitimately annex Hungary!"

For the sake of the colossal land redemption funds belonging to the House of Koháry, no matter how unwilling he felt deep down, August had to swallow his pride.

Launching a public petition to apply for becoming a direct territory of the House of Habsburg, providing the Austrian Government with an excuse to annex Hungary was their first step in currying favor with Vienna.

Franz was demanding, and while it might be easy to take over Hungary, gaining the acceptance of the local population was difficult. Historically, after the annexation of the Kingdom of Hungary, it was revived not long afterward because the local population did not accept it.

If the local population voluntarily applied to become a direct territory of the House of Habsburg, then there would be no problem. This was public opinion, and no one could find fault with it.

Public opinion is blind, and at this time, it was the nobles' turn to perform. With their leadership and the House of Habsburg's reputation among the common people, orchestrating such a petition campaign was relatively easy.

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Budapest, now a besieged city, seemed to have lost the Austrian Army's interest in launching further attacks, as they hadn't made any advances in a week.

With the Danube River flowing through it, the city had a reliable water source, but other supplies were running scarce. Due to a lack of industrial raw materials, factories had long ceased production.

A large population of unemployed people faced soaring prices, and the city's economy had already collapsed. Those who were still young and able could join the National Guard to at least get a meal, but the elderly, sick, and disabled had lost their sources of income entirely.

The collapse of the discipline within the National Guard was largely because the soldiers had families to support. The meager salaries paid by the impoverished Hungarian Republic Government couldn't feed their families.

To prevent their loved ones from going hungry, they were forced to suppress "counterrevolutionaries" in the hope of seizing enough wealth from the "enemies" to provide for their households.

Chapter 104: Being Framed

By mid-May, Budapest experienced widespread food shortages, and the soaring food prices had emptied the pockets of the people of their last savings.

In order to maintain order, the Republican Government had to start implementing a rationing system for food.

During this period in Budapest, vegetables and fruits became luxury items, and meat products were no longer on the tables of ordinary people, becoming exclusive to the nobility.

The government could only provide the most basic rations: 500 grams of black bread per person per day, along with 300 grams of potatoes and 200 grams of corn.

Even with these meager supplies, there were bureaucrats in the government profiteering by shortchanging the portions.

In some cases, there were even unscrupulous practices like adding tree leaves and sawdust to the black bread, offering discolored potatoes, and multicolored corn. For those with weak digestive systems, consuming such food was a risk to their lives.

It seemed that for government officials in the republic, there were no boundaries when it came to their integrity. Their actions could be considered a shining example of capitalism in the world.

While Budapest faced a severe shortage of food, it was primarily the lower-class citizens who suffered. The ruling class, on the other hand, did not experience any food scarcity, even as the enemy was knocking on their doors. Their banquets continued unabated.

In fact, they went further by exploiting the middle and upper-middle classes through the underground black market. The prices of food had soared to astronomical levels, where a piece of unadulterated black bread would cost as much as its weight in silver coins.

At this time, a regular residential building in Budapest could be acquired for just fifty kilograms of bread. Even a bustling store would at most cost a few hundred kilograms of bread.

Street girls filled the city's corners, and you could easily obtain their services with just a single piece of black bread or potato.

To reduce the consumption of food, starting in June, the revolutionary government began to expel the elderly, the weak, and the sick from the city. Lieutenant General Julius warmly welcomed these refugees and ensured their proper resettlement.

Franz took propaganda seriously, inviting journalists from Austria's major media outlets. They waved their cameras and captured photographs from various angles, all of which were crucial evidence to expose the crimes of the revolutionary party.

Now, without any intervention from the government, as they looked at these war-worn refugees and listened to their painful accounts of the atrocities committed by the Hungarian Republic, the media, driven by a strong sense of justice, competed to condemn the unscrupulous Hungarian revolutionary government.

Even the renowned Hungarian composer Franz Liszt had infiltrated the ranks of journalists during this time. The more he learned, the more deeply he was affected.

Not just him, many literati and intellectuals came rushing in, including some supporters of the revolutionary party. The scenes before their eyes made everyone completely lose faith in the revolutionary party.

The pen of a literati can be mightier than the sword, and with everyone's collective efforts, this Hungarian revolution was being redefined.

Those trapped in Budapest, like Kossuth, were still unaware that their reputation had been ruined. Tens of thousands of people submitted petitions to the Emperor, hoping that he would ensure justice for them.

Franz, of course, went with the flow and accepted the people's petitions, stating clearly that all the rebels would be publicly tried. He invited the victimized citizens to serve as the jury, allowing them to vote on the final sentencing.

Those with discerning eyes could see that this was Austria's way of annihilating the revolutionary party.

This group of victims now wished they could devour the revolutionaries alive, so how could they possibly show any mercy to them?

The ultimate outcome was undoubtedly a beheading spree, all carried out in the name of the people, and even if many were killed, the Austrian Government couldn't be held accountable.

Of course, this was a one-time occurrence, and Austria would inevitably become a country ruled by law in the future, no longer able to act so recklessly.

Before the revolution, Hungary and Austria were managed separately, with many differing laws between the two regions. Hungarian laws were outdated, and Austrian laws had never been implemented locally, which allowed Franz to delegate sentencing authority to the people.

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As they witnessed the revolutionary uprisings being quelled in various regions and their sole ally, the Kingdom of Sardinia, being overwhelmed by Austria single-handedly, the revolutionaries began contemplating their next move.

The sudden halt in the Austrian military's advance on Budapest took the revolutionaries by surprise, leading Kossuth to suspect the presence of internal collaborators.

The House of Habsburg had never lacked supporters in Hungary, and there were also royalist factions within Budapest. Furthermore, nobles and capitalists looking for opportunities to realign themselves were not in short supply.

Once these people mobilize, Budapest would change hands in an instant.

The revolutionary party's foundation was too shallow, and it was divided into different factions. Before 1847, the largest revolutionary group had members no more than three-digits.

After the outbreak of the revolution, the revolutionary ranks expanded a hundredfold, but most of these individuals merely adopted the revolutionary party's identity. In reality, the revolutionary party had no real authority or control over them at all.

The aftermath of rapidly expanding the ranks began to surface. Without a tightly-knit revolutionary organization or a unified political agenda, most people joined the revolutionary party on a whim or due to recommendations from acquaintances which they were too embarrassed to refuse.

Nobody wanted to die, and the revolutionary party was no exception. While the Austrian Army didn't rush to attack, internal divisions within the Hungarian Republic Government were intensifying.

After a series of failures, President Kossuth's prestige had dropped to a critical point. The opposition had become intolerant of him, and even his loyalists began to doubt his abilities.

The rapid expansion of the Hungarian National Guard, which included people from all walks of life, and Kossuth not restraining them properly finally ignited conflicts.

On June 8th, a battalion of the National Revolutionary Army, acting on Kossuth's orders, stormed into Count István's residence. They accused Count István of being a counter-revolutionary and executed dozens of people, including the Count, on the spot. They also looted all valuables and took the young women to their camp for immoral activities.

The situation escalated significantly, and Count István was no ordinary nobleman. He is often regarded as one of Hungary's greatest figures by future generations. Could a person of such stature be killed so casually?

It was important to note that since the establishment of the Hungarian Republic, there have been deep internal conflicts. Kossuth even personally invited Count István to mediate, and now he was executed on charges of counter-revolution?

On June 9th, during the Hungarian Government meeting, the opposition led by Schemir directly challenged the actions taken.

"Mr. Kossuth, I must ask, who authorized you to convict Count István, and on what grounds was a nobleman of such greatness executed? How do you explain the atrocities that occurred at the Count's residence?"

Kossuth's inner turmoil was overwhelming. In the name of all that was just and right, when had he ever issued an order for the execution of Count István?

But the deed had already been done; the National Guard had carried it out under his banner, and the commanding officer responsible for this act had now disappeared without a trace. The truth of the matter seemed irretrievable.

"This matter has nothing to do with me; I have never issued such an order!" Kossuth denied vehemently.

Chapter 105: End of the Rebellion

Howell, a conservative aristocrat, said angrily, "Kossuth, your explanation is not convincing, and similar incidents have occurred more than once. Why haven't you restrained the National Guard you command?"

Count István is your political opponent, and he also opposes Hungarian independence, but we cannot deny his greatness because of this. You should not cruelly kill him due to personal grievances."

Bem immediately retorted, "No, you're playing with fire and talking nonsense! Mr. Kossuth could never be a murderer!"

Schemir sneered, "General Bem, now Mr. Kossuth is the head of the government and the supreme commander of the National Guard. He has repeatedly obstructed the efforts to discipline the army. Shouldn't he provide us with a reasonable explanation for what has happened?"

The National Guard has completely degenerated, its current state a shell of its former self. Incidents of rapes and crimes have become common, and internal management is in utter disarray. Mr. Kossuth, as its highest leader, cannot evade responsibility for this.

As for hindering the Ministry of War from enforcing military discipline, that was simply a power struggle. The revolutionary party doesn't want to see the Ministry of War using this as an opportunity to intervene deeply within the National Guard.

However, now it has become the best excuse to attack them. Regardless of whether Count István's death is related to Kossuth or not, he must be held responsible for it.

Petfi thought for a moment and said, "The most crucial thing right now is to apprehend the perpetrator. That missing company commander is the central figure in this incident, and it would be irresponsible to judge this event without capturing him beforehand!"

As he said this, there was a strong sense of concern in his eyes. There was no way around it; Kossuth's integrity was questionable, and who knows if he really was involved in this matter?

Minister of War Görgei scoffed, "However, at the very moment the crime occurred, the National Guard obstructed the police from apprehending the perpetrator.

Mr. Kossuth must take responsibility for this. Allowing the National Guard to run amok, acting independently of the law, unconstrained by it, is the primary factor behind this tragedy.

Until the truth is uncovered, it is advisable for the parties involved to avoid suspicion. I propose suspending Mr. Kossuth, Mr. Bem, and others from their positions within the National Guard!"

G?rgei had played a clever card by directly accusing the National Guard of releasing the culprit, effectively aiming to bring the National Guard under the command of the Ministry of War.

This move deeply wounded Kossuth's supporters, and they found themselves unable to present a compelling counterargument. They couldn't claim that they were all virtuous and wouldn't obstruct the investigation, could they?

Cornered, Kossuth reluctantly stated, "Very well, I resign!"

It was an unavoidable choice. Opposition within the government had united against him, and even some of his closest allies were choosing silence. He was rapidly becoming isolated.

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In a remarkable twist of history, Kossuth was still forced to step down under immense internal and external pressures, but this time, his fall from power was even more chaotic than it had been historically.

After Schemir and the opposition took power, their first action wasn't to investigate the case but rather to promptly organize a breakout.

Their actions didn't raise suspicions since Budapest was essentially a city under siege. Continuing to defend it meant certain death, and breaking out offered a glimmer of hope.

Outside the city, at the Austrian military headquarters.

"Commander, this is news from inside the city. The enemy is preparing for a breakout. This is their battle plan!" the operations officer whispered.

After receiving the intelligence, General Julius couldn't help but smile. It was astonishing that there had been a change of power within the Hungarian Republic at this very moment, and the surrender faction had now openly taken control of the government.

Betraying one's comrades needed skill. Simply announcing surrender wouldn't work; the desperate revolutionaries had no way of agreeing to that.

However, even if the National Guard was a motley crew, they still had some fighting capability left to defend the city. Launching an offensive would only result in heavy casualties.

Under the pretext of a breakout, they could be sent to their deaths, achieving the same objective.

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On June 12, 1848, the Hungarian National Guard in Budapest launched a breakout operation but was routed by the well-prepared Austrian forces.

Following the failed breakout, the Austrian Army pursued them back into the city. Under the leadership of Schemir, the Hungarian Republic surrendered to the Austrian Army.

Unwilling to accept defeat, the revolutionary forces, commanded by General Bem, stubbornly resisted in the southern part of the city. After two days of resistance, they were ultimately defeated.

As of June 15, the Hungarian rebellion, which had lasted for over two months, came to an end in Budapest.

The war was over, but the aftermath of the conflict was only just beginning. Budapest had suffered devastating blows during this rebellion, with one-third of the city's buildings reduced to ruins and incalculable economic losses.

After reclaiming Budapest, General Julius had no time to celebrate; instead, he found himself facing new challenges.

Looking at the large number of captives in his hands, General Julius was deeply troubled. Massacre was not an option. There were around 150,000 people, including their families. How could he carry out such an atrocity?

Letting them go was also out of the question. For the long-term stability of Hungary, these potential threats had to be eliminated.

"Commander, how about using the pretext of a plague to..." suggested a young military officer who held strong animosity towards the revolution.

Julius shook his head and said, "No, we can't do that. There are too many media outlets watching us closely. Taking the top leaders of the revolution out for public trial has already raised a lot of questions.

If we fabricate a plague, it's likely to get exposed. We can't actually create an epidemic, can we? That's uncontrollable, and if it spreads, we won't be able to contain it in time!"

Governor Josip Jelačić suggested, "Actually, there's no need for complete annihilation. We just need to purge the hardcore elements. The rest can be sentenced to ten or twenty years and put to hard labor for their redemption.

It is said that Vienna handled it that way during their revolt. We can follow suit. As long as these people are not released, the threat they pose will remain under control!"

Lieutenant General Julius hesitated for a moment, then issued the following order: "Execute all officers, government officials, those who have joined the revolutionary party, and intellectuals. Find excuses for those you can't accuse directly and have the courts sentence them to death.

If that's not possible, let the enraged refugees take matters into their own hands and kill them, or make sure they die of illness or commit suicide. The rest should be sentenced to hard labor."

Upon hearing Lieutenant General Julius' orders, the people's faces turned pale. This meant that in the near future, tens of thousands of people would face execution.

However, no one voiced opposition. This was also in line with the intentions of the Austrian Government. Apart from those who cleverly sided with the Austrian Government in time, the rest were considered candidates for elimination.

The leaders of the revolutionary party, including Kossuth, had all been "eliminated" due to their "stubborn resistance" during the war. Even István Széchenyi, the Count involved in the earlier incident, had met his end during the conflict.

In an effort to win hearts and minds, Julius organized a funeral for Count István and presented a narrative that painted him as a leader of the Hungarian monarchists. He was portrayed as someone who had refused to compromise with the revolutionary party and had been cruelly killed by Kossuth.

It's a sad truth that heroes to some can be seen as enemies to others.

Count István Széchenyi was not only a leading figure among the Hungarian monarchists but also a staunch Hungarian nationalist.

He laid the foundations for the establishment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, including promoting the Hungarian language and culture. In the historical context of Hungary's split and subsequent reunification, his efforts were inseparable from the nation's resurgence.

However, his political ideas were in direct contradiction to the Austrian Government's policies. Consequently, not only István Széchenyi but also many other prominent Hungarian figures met their end during this tumultuous period. Their differing visions for Hungary's future made them targets for those in power.

Chapter 106: The Debts of the Big Shot

Vienna.

Prime Minister Felix said with a worried expression, "Your Highness, the Hungarian rebellion has now ended. However, there is a portion of the nobility who did not participate in the rebellion but lost their land during the conflict.

If we follow the previously enacted 'Land Redemption Act,' the Austrian government would be required to pay a total of 2.37 billion shields."

(1 shield = 11.69 grams of silver)

"Why is it so much?" Franz asked in surprise.

You see, after this rebellion, nearly seven tiers of nobility in Hungary have been affected, including those who had already settled for a modest lifestyle and those who were stripped of their titles due to their involvement in the rebellion.

Felix explained, "Your Highness, several major noble families in Hungary did not participate in the rebellion, and nearly half of this redemption payment is meant for them.

In addition, there are some progressive nobles within the country who are willing to give up their land, and they also require us to pay redemption money.

Furthermore, in the Italian Region, there are some nobles loyal to us who have lost their land during the turmoil.

When you add up all these various factors, our preliminary estimate for the land redemption payment is approximately 2.37 billion shields. If more people continue to relinquish their land, this number could increase."

Franz rubbed his forehead. To encourage the nobility to relinquish their land, this redemption payment had been assessed at market value, equivalent to 550 million taels of silver.

This sum of money was clearly not something the Austrian Government can produce in one go, despite the assets they have amassed through confiscations.

Since these non-liquid assets cannot be easily converted into cash in the short term, the Austrian government was financially constrained.

According to the 'Land Redemption Act', the land redemption fees paid by farmers are collected by the government, and the government is responsible for directly compensating the nobles who relinquish their land.

This enormous debt has become the responsibility of the Austrian Government. Franz cannot pay off this massive debt all at once, nor can he default on it, as it would damage the government's credibility.

Franz asked with concern, "How much land redemption fees can we collect annually?"

Prime Minister Felix pondered and replied, "Approximately 180 million shields."

This 180 million shields doesn't come solely from these lands, but also includes a substantial amount of land seized by the government and the lands of extinct noble families.

If it were only these lands, with a redemption fee rate of 30 percent of the output, the maximum would be around 45 million shields.

After calculating, Franz reluctantly realized that farming was not such a good venture. Even if he didn't consider the cost of capital and time, it would still take over ten or twenty years to break even.

The land redemption money collected by the government was likely insufficient to cover the interest costs of the capital.

Franz thought for a moment and said, "Let's do it in installments. Explain to the nobles, let them understand our difficulties. For the enlightened nobles who voluntarily give up their land within the country, pay them half of the redemption money upfront, and the remaining amount can be paid in installments over twenty years.

For the major noble families in Hungary, inform them that the minor infractions during this rebellion will not be pursued by the government, but as a punishment, their land redemption payment will be extended to be paid off over forty years.

For the others with minor issues, just give them a warning and extend their redemption payment period. For those who fully cooperate by voluntarily giving up their land, we can stick to the original plan!"

Franz finally experienced what it feels like to be a big shot who owed money.

After the revolution, the interest groups in Austria have also undergone a reshuffle. These nobles who were forcibly bought out of their land naturally belong to the losers.

The money was in the hands of the Austrian government, while land was in the hands of the farmers. They basically have no choice.

Before this, the Austrian government feared them because every large aristocratic family had a large amount of land, serfs, and a large number of small and medium-sized aristocrats dependent on them and could arm themselves with several thousand or even tens of thousands of troops at any time.

Now, this situation has changed, the serfs have gained their freedom and are no longer under their control, and the middle and small nobles who were dependent on them have suffered heavy losses.

A tiger without teeth only has its fierceness left. The reason why they were not completely eliminated was because Franz was also part of the established interests and was unwilling to disrupt the established norms.

“Yes, Your Highness,” Prime Minister Felix replied.

On the issue of cracking down on local powerful factions, the Austrian government and Franz were on the same page.

The so-called installment payment did not include any interest at all, and was divided into forty years of payment which, in fact, was not even enough for the interest.

Even though it was installment payments, when exactly they would receive the money remained uncertain. As long as the payments were completed within the promised timeframe, it wouldn't be considered a breach of contract.

The specific situation would depend on whether these nobles were wise or not. If they were willing to cooperate with the government's actions, then everything would proceed smoothly, and the Austrian government would repay them as soon as possible.

However, if they continued to resist the government, it was doubtful whether they would ever see that money in their lifetime.

Not everyone was as optimistic. Metternich, with a furrowed brow, hesitated for a while before saying, “Your Highness, so many nobles suddenly losing their land and source of income, it won't be easy for them to transition. If we can't find a way out for them, it might become a social problem in the future.”

This was a practical issue. It's not possible to turn all these nobles into capitalists, and even in business, they might incur losses. Blindly transitioning them won't work; most of them would likely suffer significant financial setbacks.

Don't expect these bankrupt nobles to quietly become workers and work in factories.

A more likely scenario is that after bankruptcy, they might join the revolutionary forces, attempting to disrupt the social order and advocate for a redistribution of wealth.

Minister of Education Count Leo considered and said, “Our education department can hire some nobles as language teachers. The vast majority of them are qualified, but this will require an increase in salary and benefits!”

It was not unusual for the same position to have different salaries and benefits for nobles and non-nobles. This was a common practice on the European continent.

“This is just a drop in the bucket. Nobles without ambitions might accept teaching positions, but the majority of them wouldn't give up their pride to become rural teachers,” Felix shook his head.

Archduke Louis proposed, “How about we establish colonies and let them colonize overseas, so they don't cause trouble domestically?”

During the Metternich era, Austria hadn't ventured into overseas colonialism, not because it lacked the capacity. As one of the top four nations globally, Austria could easily acquire a colony abroad if the government unleashed its potential.

Seeing Britain and France expanding their empires overseas, even smaller nations like the Netherlands and Portugal had colonies. How could the nobility within Austria not envy this prospect?

Chapter 107: The Most Suitable Country to Ally With

When it came to establishing colonies, Franz was also very interested. However, his views differed from others, as it wasn't solely for plundering wealth from overseas.

The House of Habsburg had existed for too long, and an ancient empire implied conservatism and rigidity. Even though the recent rebellion had prompted a reshuffling, the path to advancement remained narrow.

As a beneficiary of the existing system, Franz couldn't choose to start from scratch. Therefore, the solution was to make the cake bigger, which would naturally provide more opportunities.

Expanding within Europe was challenging, and even if successful, it came with significant consequences. Overseas colonization, on the other hand, offered a different scenario. Leveraging Austria's strength to claim a share of the pie presented no real issues.

Almost without spending a significant cost, Austria could acquire colonies many times the size of its homeland. Then, immigrants from the German-speaking regions could gradually develop these colonies. It's worth noting that the primary source of immigrants in Europe at the time came from the German-speaking regions, so there would be no labor shortage.

If the colonial plan succeeded, Austria's internal problems would also be resolved. The second-generation nobility would have a purpose and wouldn't have to stay behind aimlessly.

Not all nobles are wealthy; in reality, this is far from the truth. Just take a look at the church; many missionaries and nuns come from noble backgrounds, and the harsh reason is - poverty.

Impoverished nobles can no longer afford the expenses of marrying off their second sons or providing dowries for their daughters. To preserve what little nobility they have left, they have no choice but to take such measures.

These individuals are not easy to manage; they have received a good education, and many of them are unwilling to accept their assigned fates. The main driving force behind the European colonial movements in the 19th century consisted of individuals like them.

Missionaries who traveled overseas during this period often had an additional identity – that of colonizers.

However, it's still too early to discuss this matter; Franz decided to delay it further.

“This matter, we will discuss it later. The British Foreign Secretary Palmerston has entered Austria and will arrive in Vienna shortly.

Palmerston's visit is likely related to the war with the Kingdom of Sardinia. What do you all think should be our approach towards the Kingdom of Sardinia?”

When the Kingdom of Sardinia was mentioned, everyone was quite upset. Great powers all had their dignity, and any challenge had to be taken seriously.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Metternich spoke up, “Your Highness, we have just received news that on June 23rd, a workers’ uprising erupted in Paris. It is said to be because French workers oppose the government’s support for us and the Russians in suppressing the Polish revolution.

If this situation is true, then at this point, the French government may have to abandon the annexation of the Kingdom of Sardinia with us in order to maintain domestic stability.”

Hearing this news, everyone was stunned. Who could have imagined that the main factor behind the June Revolution in Paris was to support the Polish revolution?

It sounded like a joke, but Franz knew this news was indeed true. In this era, the people of Paris had developed a sense of internationalism.

Of course, their support for the Polish revolution does not necessarily mean they will also support the Italian revolution. The French still had their eyes on the Italian territories.

However, after this uprising, there would likely be turmoil within France once again. They wouldn’t be able to mobilize their forces until their leadership stabilized.

“This is an opportunity. The Russian and Prussian forces are preoccupied with the Danish War and are unlikely to hinder us. The French are dealing with their own problems. As long as we can withstand the pressure from the British, we can annex the Kingdom of Sardinia!” exclaimed Archduke Louis, excitedly.

Austria had not expanded its territory externally for a long time, and everyone was eager for it. Now, the opportunity had come knocking, and the Kingdom of Sardinia seemed to be asking for trouble this time. It was the perfect moment.

Metternich shook his head and said, “It’s not that simple, I’m afraid. If the French join forces with us and we create a *fait accompli*, most other countries might accept it. If we unilaterally annex the Kingdom of Sardinia, even if the Russians don’t oppose us, we won’t gain their support. Prussia is busy with the war against Denmark and probably won’t pay much attention to us.

While we can withstand pressure from the British alone, what happens after we swallow Sardinia? When the French resolve their internal conflicts and the Russo-Prussian conflict subsides, at that time, the English and French might jointly intervene, or even the English, French, Prussian, and Russian powers might demand that we withdraw from Sardinia. What will we do then?”

Clearly, Metternich’s diplomatic judgment was very accurate, effortlessly untangling the relationships among the great powers.

Not intervening now does not mean not intervening in the future, and Austria’s annexation of the Kingdom of Sardinia would not be recognized by the great powers. Once everyone frees up their hands, they can settle the scores. Historically, Austria occupied the Danube River basin during the Crimean War, but didn’t they eventually have to give it up?

Prime Minister Felix nodded and said, “Mr. Metternich is right. Swallowing Sardinia is not difficult; the key is the attitudes of other countries. If we make diplomatic efforts, it won’t be hard

to keep Prussia and Russia neutral, but gaining their support may come at a great cost, perhaps even more than it's worth.

As for the French, we all know their stance. They will never tolerate us annexing Sardinia alone, and once they stabilize domestically, they will certainly join hands with the British to interfere. This timeframe could range from a couple of years to a few months. Do we have the confidence to take over Sardinia and digest it in such a short time?

If we can't achieve that, surrounded by strong enemies with no guerrillas to pillage, Sardinia won't stand a chance."

Pausing for a moment, Finance Minister Karl proposed, "If we can't annex the Kingdom of Sardinia, what about demanding war reparations or ceding some of their territories?"

Metternich, with confidence, said, "That depends on the attitude of the British. Whether it's demanding war reparations or ceding territories, the Kingdom of Sardinia must pay the appropriate price. If they can't compensate for our wartime losses, then this war won't end, and I believe the British will provide us with an answer."

This confidence was rooted in their strength, as there were established protocols among the great powers, and typically, they wouldn't overturn the table.

The British advantage lay in their isolation overseas and their world-spanning navy, which gave them a somewhat aloof position in Europe.

At the same time, this was also their weakness. As an island nation focusing on sea combat, they naturally sacrificed their combat capabilities on land. To implement a strategy of balancing power in Europe, they needed to cooperate with the major European powers.

Among the many great powers in Europe, Austria was currently the most suitable ally for the British, without a doubt. More precisely, in this era, Austria had the foundation to ally with any European power.

They had a certain level of strength to support their allies' actions, but they were constrained by internal issues, lacking the capability to vie for world dominance.

For the three countries—Britain, France, and Russia—each aspiring to world hegemony, as long as Austria didn't unify the German-speaking regions, it was the ideal ally.

Chapter 108: The Fall of Turin

Forming alliances is no easy task, especially considering the numerous conflicts and contradictions among the major European powers. Austria can only ally with one country since once they aligned themselves with one nation, the others would consider them as enemies.

Perhaps Metternich had insight into the essence of this situation early on. After the Napoleonic Wars, Austria actively contracted its sphere of influence and worked to balance the power of various European countries, positioning Austria in a superior position.

From the perspective of that era, these diplomatic measures could be considered successful. However, the only failure was the internal reforms within Austria, which didn't keep pace with the country's growing power.

Without sufficient strength, Austria naturally couldn't continue to sustain the Vienna System. Therefore, Austria had to make a new decision.

“Let's wait and see what cards the British will put on the table. If they continue to support Italian unification, then Sardinia can't remain.

Worst case scenario, we might have to take some losses and help the French manage their piece of territory for now. When their domestic situation stabilizes, we can then sell it to them!” Franz said firmly.

In the matter of Italy, the French could undoubtedly be swayed. They have long been eyeing the Italian region, while Austria's strategic focus was not here at all. There were no core conflicting interests between the two sides.

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In the case of the Kingdom of Sardinia, Charles Albert found himself in a precarious situation, far from what he had anticipated. The era of modern warfare had arrived, and it was no longer solely about numerical superiority.

Even with the unprecedented fervor of the Sardinian troops, with their morale boosted by 200% for fighting on their home soil, it couldn't change the fact that they were essentially an undisciplined mob.

Moreover, the severe shortage of weapons and ammunition left many soldiers armed with outdated equipment from the era of cold weapons. No matter how high their patriotic fervor, it couldn't protect them from the hail of bullets.

“Your Majesty, we must hurry! The enemy is almost at the city gates, and Turin can't hold on much longer!”

Prime Minister Azeglio, displaying unwavering loyalty, immediately urged Charles Albert to flee when the defensive lines collapsed. With no other option, the Kingdom of Sardinia, with its limited territory, was left with little choice but to prepare for the defense of Turin once the frontline forces crumbled.

Charles Albert, in despair, said, “No, I won't go anywhere. I will stand with Turin to the end!”

“Your Majesty, for the future of the Kingdom of Sardinia, you must leave here immediately,” urged the Minister of War, Licht. He had a mournful expression on his face.

In continental Europe, monarchs were significant assets. If Charles Albert, the king, were captured by the Austrian army, it would spell disaster for the Kingdom of Sardinia. This wasn't about manipulating the king's authority but controlling the monarch opened doors to various possibilities, including forcing Charles Albert to sign a series of treaties that would be detrimental to his kingdom or even outright annexing Sardinia.

Other major powers, even if they wanted to intervene, lacked a strong moral ground, which was highly unfavorable for the Kingdom of Sardinia.

Charles Albert roared, “Incompetents, fools, idiots... If it weren’t for you lot, how could we have failed? And now, instead of thinking about how to fight back, you’re thinking of fleeing...”

As time passed, with everyone taking turns to persuade him, Charles Albert eventually left. Of course, whether his departure was related to the Austrian vanguard forces arriving at the gates of Turin was unknown.

When the British Foreign Secretary, Palmerston, arrived in Vienna, news of the Austrian army capturing Turin had already reached them.

Palmerston, even with all his preparations, found himself vexed by the situation in the Kingdom of Sardinia.

Things had not gone according to their plans. According to the British, at this point, Austria should still be locked in a struggle with Sardinia over Lombardy. At most, Austria would have just regained its lost territories.

However, Sardinia’s performance had disappointed them. Perhaps the first time they experienced a nationwide mobilization had drained them of their resources. And the second mobilization they had essentially led their troops to their doom.

Especially those “patriots” and “Italian nationalists” – they had expected these individuals to fight the Austrian army to the bitter end. The ultimate outcome, however, has shown the world that talk is cheap.

The ones who shout the loudest often turn out to be the quickest deserters on the battlefield. Just as the battle began, they vanished into thin air.

Charles Albert had put these people on the front lines as cannon fodder, but he never expected that they would turn around and deliver the positions directly to the Austrians.

This situation left Palmerston in a predicament. Negotiating with the Austrian army before they occupied Sardinia came at a different cost than negotiating with them after they had taken control.

If it weren’t for the instability in France’s internal affairs and Austria losing its ally making it difficult to swallow Sardinia on its own, Palmerston might as well have packed up and left.

These worries didn’t last long as the welcome banquet prepared for him by the Austrian Foreign Ministry began.

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Berlin.

With the diplomatic support of Austria, the liberal bourgeois government’s confidence soared once again. In their view, having the entire German Confederation as a backing, the Russians were not as scary.

Despite the outward support for the Danes from various European nations, in reality, only the Russians will actually take action. The Swedes’ aim was just to ensure that the Kingdom of Denmark wouldn’t be completely wiped out, but had no plans of helping the Danes regain their lost territories.

Especially after witnessing the French people's determination to support the Polish revolution, leading to the June Rebellion, the resolve of the liberal faction to support Polish independence became even stronger.

Frederick William IV could no longer tolerate this situation. Allowing the liberals to have their way would lead to a war between Prussia and Russia. 250,000 Russian troops had already arrived at the Prussian-Russian border.

The patience of the Russian government with the Kingdom of Prussia had reached its limits. Any actions that further provoked the Russians would be unwise.

Before the Crimean War, Russia had a formidable reputation on the European continent and was not in the same league as the Kingdom of Prussia, which had not yet unified Germany.

Under his instructions, the Junker(Prussian) nobility, who opposed the revolution, formed the "Property Defense League." Simultaneously, efforts were intensified to control the military and find various pretexts to purge republicans from the army.

A counter-revolutionary coup was brewing within the Kingdom of Prussia. The bourgeois government, lacking experience in such struggles, seemed oblivious and continued to pursue its idealized plans for unification.

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The negotiations between Britain and Austria had begun. Palmerston was concerned that if the talks dragged on, the Sardinian government might surrender to Austria, jeopardizing their investments in the region.

After the initial pleasantries, Palmerston got straight to the point, saying, "Mr. Metternich, for the sake of world peace, we need the Austrian government to handle its conflicts with the Kingdom of Sardinia carefully."

Metternich chuckled and replied, "Mr. Palmerston, our conflicts with the Kingdom of Sardinia will soon cease to exist. The situation in the Italian region will stabilize very soon, and your country has nothing to worry about."

Chapter 109: Anglo-Austrian Negotiations

Under what circumstances would the conflict between Austria and the Kingdom of Sardinia disappear?

Well, that depends on the specific situation. Palmerston certainly wasn't naive enough to believe that Austria would send its armies to the Kingdom of Sardinia and, in the name of world peace, simply let them off the hook. In reality, for the conflict to disappear, one side would have to fall. It takes two to tango, and if the enemy falls, then the conflict naturally ceases to exist.

There was no doubt that, in this case, it would be the Kingdom of Sardinia that would fall. Palmerston had little faith that the Sardinians could turn the situation around.

Even if the remaining soldiers of Sardinia turned into Spartans, it wouldn't change the outcome of the war.

Palmerston pondered for a moment and said, “Mr. Metternich, for the sake of world peace and stability, the British government suggests that your country should end the Austro-Sardinian War as soon as possible and return to the pre-war status quo.”

The relationship between the British and the Austrians was complex. They opposed Austrian expansion in Italy but also didn't want to antagonize Austria due to their European strategic needs. This was the reason for Palmerston's visit to Vienna. They wanted to try to resolve the disputes between Austria and Sardinia through diplomatic means.

After all, following the Napoleonic Wars, Europe had entered an era of the dual hegemony of Britain and Russia. While the Vienna System led by Austria had isolated the British Empire from the European mainland, it had also restrained Russian expansion.

For the British, isolation was acceptable as long as the balance of power was maintained on the European continent, ensuring that their hegemonic position remained unchallenged. The Vienna System also safeguarded their core interests.

Now that the Vienna System had collapsed and the situation on the European continent was on the brink of a dramatic transformation, containing Russian expansion became the top priority for the British. Austria, as the barrier to Russian westward expansion, was the ally London needed to secure, and they couldn't afford to break apart British-Austrian relationship until it was certainly necessary.

Metternich was well aware of this complex diplomatic strategy employed by the British, and Austria also saw the need to cooperate with the British under these circumstances.

Even though Russia and Austria are allies, it doesn't mean Austria is no longer concerned about curbing Russia's expansionist ambitions. In fact, the Austrian government was one of the least enthusiastic about Russia's outward expansion.

Of course, this does not include Franz.

The Russian westward expansion has practically few options left, as neither the Prussian nor Austrian nations are easy targets. And the Russian government was unlikely to focus its attention on this front.

The northern European region, Sweden in particular, is also a tough nut to crack for the Russians. They won't take on such a challenge. So, in terms of European expansion, the only region left for Russia is the Balkans.

In this era, people generally believed that if Russia entered the Balkans and captured Constantinople, it would be an unstoppable force on its way to the Mediterranean.

However, Franz's assessment was quite the opposite. He believed that Russians, staying in their icy realm, were the real threat. Once they entered the Mediterranean, the British would have to deal with the “Russian Bear” all over again.

Being formidable on land doesn't necessarily translate to naval prowess. Franz wasn't belittling the Russians; they could rely on their vast numbers for land warfare, but when it came to naval power, they were inexperienced.

If the topic was about naval development, even Austria had an advantage over Russia. After all, Venice was once a maritime powerhouse, and there were still plenty of skilled sailors around.

Having a vast expanse of sea doesn't automatically make a navy formidable. Russia may have a large maritime territory, but it's not particularly suited for naval development.

Even today, Russia is still considered a land power rather than a naval one. Building a substantial navy would take decades.

Even as Russia expanded into the Balkans, Austria could have secured a piece of the pie, maybe not the tastiest part, but still a share.

However, Franz's attitude was: "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

As long as it could strengthen Austria's power, he didn't really care about restraining Russia's expansion; whoever wanted to do it could go ahead, as he lacked this kind of internationalist spirit.

If the Russians were led astray and decided to vigorously develop their navy, he didn't mind fully supporting them, allowing them to go further down this self-destructive path.

Franz's attitude, to some extent, also influenced Austria's diplomacy, making them less actively involved in many international affairs than during the Metternich era.

Metternich shook his head and said, "Mr. Palmerston, there are consequences for wrongdoing. If the Kingdom of Sardinia can dare to go against Austria, they must naturally bear the corresponding consequences.

The dignity of the Austrian Empire cannot be profaned, and the wicked Kingdom of Sardinia, by daring to violate the Vienna system and launch a war of aggression, must pay the price for it."

Palmerston breathed a sigh of relief as Austria wasn't adamant about annexing the Kingdom of Sardinia. This meant there was still room for de-escalation, primarily revolving around issues of interest.

Encouraging the Kingdom of Sardinia to start the war and providing them with loans, he also had a share of responsibility in this matter. If the Kingdom of Sardinia were to be defeated, these loans would turn into bad debts, and British bankers wouldn't spare him.

Palmerston thought for a moment and said, "Of course, since the Kingdom of Sardinia initiated this war, they should naturally pay the price for it. For the sake of world peace, the British Empire is prepared to mediate this war, and we hope your country can temporarily halt military actions."

Metternich smiled slightly and said, "Unfortunately, Mr. Palmerston, you have arrived far too late. At this point, the Kingdom of Sardinia has already been occupied by the Austrian military, and King Charles Albert of Sardinia has gone into exile overseas. It may not be long before he arrives in London. If your country can restrain the Sardinian guerrillas from further disruption, we can cease the upcoming military actions."

Have the Austrian forces occupied the entire Kingdom of Sardinia?

If it was merely referring to major cities, then yes, Austria has indeed occupied the major cities of Sardinia. However, if you mean the entire country, Austria has only occupied about half of Sardinia's territory. This didn't stop Metternich from boasting. During this era, military occupation most often referred to major cities, and vast rural areas were often overlooked.

At this stage, Palmerston was already too tired to continue fighting. Sardinia has lost all its bargaining chips, and avoiding significant bloodshed seems impossible.

Palmerston quickly got into character and asked, “Mr. Metternich, to bring an end to this conflict, what are the conditions your government has in mind? We can serve as intermediaries.”

Metternich didn’t respond; instead, he handed over a prepared ceasefire treaty. After scanning its contents, Palmerston's expression changed dramatically. If Austria’s terms were to be followed, it seemed that the Kingdom of Sardinia was not far from becoming history.

“Mr. Metternich, these terms seem rather harsh, don’t you think?” Palmerston said, furrowing his brow.

It’s not just harsh; it’s blatantly and excessively so. These terms essentially place the Kingdom of Sardinia’s politics, military, finances, and territory entirely under Austrian control, with little difference from an outright annexation.

For instance: The appointment of government ministers and officials at or above ministerial rank would require approval from the Austrian government.

Another example: Sardinia would be prohibited from maintaining a military force, allowed only to retain a police force not exceeding ten thousand personnel. Furthermore, half of their financial revenues would be allocated to employing the Austrian military to safeguard their territory.

The right to issue currency in Sardinia would be managed by the Austrian government.

The Kingdom of Sardinia’s taxation rates would be determined by the Austrian government.

Sardinia would be prohibited from manufacturing weapons and equipment, and all weaponry must be imported from Austria.

Sardinia would also delegate its diplomatic authority to the Austrian Foreign Ministry, relinquishing control over its foreign relations with any other countries or regions.

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There are no territorial or monetary compensation demands on this document. However, compared to the listed requirements, it’s likely that the Sardinians would prefer ceding territory or paying reparations rather than becoming a colony of Austria.

Metternich kindly remarked, “This is just a draft for negotiations. Sardinia’s invasion inflicted severe losses on Austria, with Lombardy and Venice almost completely devastated.

It has also resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Austrians and left millions of our citizens homeless. How can such extensive losses be accounted for?

If the Sardinians find our terms unacceptable, there is an alternative. They can compensate us in full for all our losses, and that would suffice.”

Chapter 110: War Compensation

Vienna International Grand Hotel.

Palmerston pleaded, “Mr. Metternich, your demands are too exorbitant; they already exceed the financial capabilities of the Kingdom of Sardinia!”

Metternich, composed and unruffled, replied, “Mr. Palmerston, let’s calculate this carefully. In the recent Austro-Sardinian War, Austria expended 100 million florins on war expenses and suffered

12,000 casualties among its officers and soldiers. If one were to pay 1,000 florins in death compensation, that would amount to 12 million florins.

The civilian death toll reached a staggering 586,000, with 26,000 nobles among the casualties, and the highest rank among them being that of a Marquess. Over a million people have also been left homeless.”

Calculating on the basis of each civilian costing 500 florins in compensation for casualties and each noble casualty amounting to 3,000 florins, the total amounts to 371 million florins. As for the displaced population, even if they were to be conservative; it would still require at least 150 million florins for resettlement costs, right?

In the Lombardy and Venice regions, nearly half of the cities were destroyed in the flames of war, leading to a complete economic collapse. The post-war reconstruction costs will not be less than 300 million florins.

Furthermore, the Sardinian army has been plundering extensively from the civilian population, amassing at least 180 million florins. These funds must also be returned.

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Following the calculations done by the Austrians, Sardinia’s debt might not be settled even into the next century. Without allowing Metternich to finish, Palmerston chimed in:

“Mr. Metternich, we can’t simply calculate the accounts this way. Among the extensive casualties and economic losses, a significant portion can be attributed to the actions of revolutionary factions. The damages caused by the Sardinian army are only a fraction of the overall losses.”

Indeed, these losses resulted from the actions of rebel forces, the Austrian army, and the Sardinian army collectively. However, it appears that Sardinia is expected to shoulder the burden of these losses.

Metternich, with an unwavering expression, stated, “Mr. Palmerston, we have substantial evidence indicating that the uprisings in Lombardy and Venice were masterminded by the Sardinian government.

The losses caused by the rebels naturally require the Kingdom of Sardinia to take responsibility. We are merely requesting compensation of 1.66 billion florins, which, in reality, is already quite modest.”

Palmerston, of course, wasn’t convinced and continued to press Metternich on various points.

For instance, regarding civilian casualties: The Sardinian army didn’t engage in mass killings, so how could they have caused so many civilian deaths in such a short time?

Natural disasters, man-made disasters, and deaths from natural causes can be partially attributed to the Sardinian government, albeit with some effort.

Although the war has led to a displacement of the population, these people are still alive. Is it too ridiculous that they should only be compensated based on the number of deaths?

And demanding compensation and pensions for rebel casualties, isn't that outrageous? They are all criminals; does the Austrian government need to pay compensation to their families?

No, this must be deducted.

For example: the Sardinian army looted the area. They are all in prisoner-of-war camps, and the plundered wealth could be considered your spoils of war, right? At most, we can provide some compensation for losses. Why would there be so much?

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After nearly half a month of negotiations, Palmerston finally reached an agreement with Metternich. Sardinia agreed to pay Austria 338 million florins in war reparations and 62 million florins in prisoner-of-war ransom, ending the war (equivalent to approximately 93.52 million taels of silver).

This was already the limit, as Sardinia had not yet undergone the Cavour reforms, and their fiscal revenue, when converted, amounted to just over 10 million taels of silver.

Faced with this huge indemnity, they certainly couldn't afford it. The existence of the Franco-Austrian Secret Treaty also cut off their possibility of seeking assistance from the French financial sector. Besides borrowing from the British, they had no other choice.

Given John Bull's character, how could he not take advantage of the situation at this time?

It can be said that after borrowing this massive debt, the future of the Kingdom of Sardinia politically and economically would be fully dependent on the British.

As for the opinions of the exiled Sardinian government, they no longer matter. They had no say in the matter and could only accept their fate.

Disobedience can be resolved by replacing the government. The British invested significantly to support an obedient pawn in the Italian region, thereby strengthening their influence in Italy.

Of course, there's another factor at play—the British banking consortium has significant loans tied to this situation. The Sardinian government owes the British a substantial sum of money, and if they don't find a solution, these loans will be lost.

This enormous compensation, instead of representing the absolute limit of what the Kingdom of Sardinia can endure, is more indicative of the threshold to which the British are willing to continue their involvement.

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On July 7, 1848, the Austrian ambassador in London and the exiled Sardinian government in the United Kingdom signed a ceasefire treaty. Interestingly, the content mirrored the negotiations in Vienna, albeit with different wording.

The British banking consortium extended a loan to the Sardinian government, covering Austria's war indemnity of 200 million florins. The remaining amount would be paid off over twenty years with an annual interest rate of 5%.

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The decision to prioritize finances over territory was made by Franz. If France, their pig teammate, weren't dealing with its own issues, they could have joined forces to divide the Kingdom of

Sardinia, with Austria gaining the prosperous regions of Genoa and Turin – a move that would have been worthwhile.

However, with France currently preoccupied, Austria can only do it alone. Unfortunately, Austria doesn't have the appetite to fully absorb the entire Kingdom of Sardinia.

If they can't completely annex Sardinia and only occupy parts of their territory, they'll face prolonged threats of national uprisings, making it difficult to successfully integrate these regions into the nation.

Moreover, within Austria's borders, there are already a significant number of Italian ethnic communities. Franz doesn't want this number to continue increasing, as it doesn't align with his policy of promoting ethnic integration.

Austria, in its concessions regarding the Kingdom of Sardinia, naturally received compensation.

For instance, the British have pledged support for Austria's expansion in the Balkans and have essentially granted Austria entry into overseas colonial expansion.

In contrast to the complex situation in Italy, with British support, Austria's expansion in the Balkans merely requires coordination with the Russians.

Overseas colonial expansion is even simpler; as long as Austria charts a colonial direction that doesn't clash with the core interests of Britain and France, the rest becomes a minor issue.

One has to acknowledge that Palmerston's judgment was quite accurate. Austria's strategic focus had indeed shifted away from the Italian region.

Currently, the dominant factions are the Germanists, led by Prime Minister Felix, advocating for expansion in the German region.

Following closely are the Near Easternists, led by Prince Windischgrätz, Minister of War, advocating for expansion into the Balkans.

Then there are the Colonialists, led by Archduke Louis, advocating for the establishment of overseas colonies.

The impact of the butterfly effect is indeed profound. At this point in history, the Austrian government was predominantly focused on suppressing rebellions, with far fewer aspirations for external expansion.

Behind these strategic moves, there are one or multiple interest groups driving them. On the surface, everyone's reasons seem compelling, but in practice, they all come with a series of challenges.

Franz was in no hurry to declare his position. In politics, many times it was not just about right or wrong; it was more about considering the involved interest groups and the potential ramifications it might bring about.

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Palmerston's current visit wasn't just about the issue in Italy; it also included mediating the Prussian-Danish War. Austria, in this matter, holds significant influence as well.

"Mr. Metternich, I believe that, regarding the Prussian-Danish War, it is necessary for our two nations to engage in more in-depth discussions.

The actions taken by the Kingdom of Prussia in unilaterally initiating the war should be condemned by the international community. As peace-loving nations, it is imperative that we take more proactive measures,” Palmerston stated.

“Of course, Mr. Palmerston. The Austrian government has long expressed its position:

Schleswig and Holstein are traditional German states, and Austria is hoping they will return to the German Confederation.

However, they must return as independent states rather than becoming part of the Kingdom of Prussia,” Metternich cautiously responded.

Palmerston responded sternly, “Mr. Metternich, Schleswig and Holstein have already belonged to the Kingdom of Denmark; this is a historical matter.

The term ‘German region’ is just a geographical designation, not a nation. The German Confederation is merely a league, and it doesn’t possess any sovereignty!”

There’s no doubt that the British were opposed to the unification of the German regions. Once a unified empire emerged in central Europe, it could potentially challenge the hegemonic status of the British Empire.

Palmerston made his position clear: it was to thwart Austria’s potential aspirations for a unified German region.

Metternich, on the other hand, was against the establishment of a Greater Germany. He believed that unifying the German regions was an impossible feat. After testing the waters with the British, he naturally didn’t have an overly reactive response.

“Mr. Palmerston, the issue lies not in how we perceive it but in the public opinion being guided by Prussian influence. Currently, the Austrian government is held hostage by public sentiment. We’ve just experienced a domestic rebellion, and we must consider public sentiment. In this war, we have no choice but to diplomatically support the Prussians,” Metternich explained.

Metternich emphasized the word “diplomatically,” and Palmerston naturally understood the implied message: Austria does not want Prussia to continue growing, and their support was limited to diplomatic measures, with no intention of taking practical action.

While this response might not have been entirely satisfying to him, it was still acceptable. Essentially, in this Prussian-Danish War, Austria seemed prepared to take a back seat.

Having failed in his attempt to involve the Austrian government in jointly pressuring Prussia, Palmerston did not linger in Vienna and instead headed straight for Berlin.