

Roman Empire 41

Chapter 41: Dealing with Prisoners of Rebellion

As for which expert proposed this, everyone was very tactful and did not ask anything about it. Franz was unwilling to admit that the "piecework system" was his own idea, so everyone thought of him as principled and not greedy.

In that era, the "piecework system" was undoubtedly advanced, and it could release more productivity and avoid laziness and waste.

In that era, in order to crack down on lazy workers, the means taken by capitalists were extremely harsh. The deduction of wages was the lightest one.

More people were beaten up on top of having wages deducted, and, because of this, a few workers died every year.

Especially in the mines, in order to stimulate production, many capitalists would kill someone as a warning to others who were not working hard.

These cruel means were obviously impossible for the government to take. When Carl was worried that the government would lose money by directly managing enterprises, he actually was worried about the large-scale emergence of laziness and waste.

There were also many cases in later generations: after a state-owned enterprise with serious losses became a private enterprise, and half the staff was laid off, the production capacity doubled.

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"What are your plans for the sentencing of prisoners?" Franz asked.

He decisively ignored the nobles and capitalists who took part in the rebellion. Almost all of them had run away, so those who were caught were mostly fools with poor brains.

As for the leader of the rebellion, no trial was needed at all. During the fighting, he was already killed.

Really, all the middle-level or above officers in the rebel army had been killed by Franz in the first place.

Except for those who took the troops and surrendered without a single shot, all rebel leaders above a platoon sergeant were killed.

During the suppression of the rebellion, only three thousand rebels were killed, while the leaders of the rebels who were executed later numbered more than two thousand.

It was what it was. The rebels had no human rights. As long as they were involved, the higher the status, the faster they died. On the other hand, punishment for ordinary people was not too harsh.

Even the "brag party" of Vienna University, which had advocated revolution, was wiped out at that time. The Army took over the campus. All those who'd joined the Revolutionary Party and advocated revolutionary ideas had only one result: death.

These orders were given by Franz, but the one who took the blame was not him. Before the cabinet was even formed, he'd issued orders in the name of the cabinet.

Anyone who was interested in history would find that all the issuers of these orders were the Prime Ministers, and Franz, the crown prince, pretended to know nothing.

These were small issues because at that time the people of Vienna were badly harmed. Everyone hated the revolutionary party, and no one would sympathize with them.

"Your Highness, this rebellion is too extensive. These prisoners must be severely punished as a warning to others and to frighten the people of the whole country!"

Archduke Louis's eyes flashed with anger, as if he had a deep hatred of these people and wished to execute them all.

He was not alone: several other Cabinet members shared this bitter hatred.

Needless to say, Franz knew that they had many relatives among the old nobles, and they must have lost relatives and friends in this rebellion.

If this had been the whole story, it wouldn't have been unbearable for them. The key was that the rebels also ransacked their houses, robbed their property, and killed their loyal servants.

Even the youngest son of Archduke Louis, who was just unluckily one step slower when running for his life, was killed by the rebels. This was the main reason he was so angry.

Before that, he'd also advocated lighter punishments for the rebels, appeasing the people, and stabilizing the domestic situation as soon as possible.

But then, after the pain of losing a child, everything changed. At first, he proposed that all the nobles who participated in the rebellion be executed, which he did not even want to let the prisoners go.

Franz was very clear about the cause and effect of this rebellion, and he was more clear about his class position. Therefore, after arresting the nobles involved in the rebellion, he did not execute them right away but left them to the noble Parliament.

The nobles participated in the rebellion mostly to stimulate their own interests. They had to recover their losses, and the main damage they'd done was burning the bank's documents.

Not only had the local financial institutions in Austria been hit hard, but also the branches of international banks in Vienna. The behind-the-curtain bosses of these financial institutions were also the main force advocating severe punishment for the rebels, including the Vienna Court.

The profits in the financial field were so large; as the local branch of the Hapsburg family, how could they not participate? In fact, the Hapsburg family held shares of many financial institutions in Austria.

It was obviously impossible to recover the loss at that time. For this reason, Franz was eager to form a cabinet. The main purpose was to let the cabinet withstand the pressure and prevent the nobles from taking back the losses.

After all, all these properties were confiscated from the rebels. It was not clear who the original owners were. Except for those pieces of real estate with a clear owner, Franz prepared to turn them over to the State Treasury.

If they were returned to the original owners, Franz could guarantee that all the spoils of war would soon be divided up by the nobles. Franz was not prepared to test the greed of human nature.

Franz thought for a moment and said, "It is necessary to severely punish the insurgents, but most of these prisoners are workers. It is better to let them return to the factory to continue creating value for us.

According to the seriousness of the case, they will be fined. Then, let them go back to the factories to work until they have paid off the fine before they can be free."

This was the lightest punishment he could fight for. No one would have a hard time with money, and the Cabinet could not refuse so many free laborers.

"This is a good way to go. We can't kill all of them. It's better to put them to work!" The Chancellor of the Exchequer took the lead in echoing Franz.

After the Vienna rebellion, too much money would be needed. He would support anything that could increase revenue.

"Well, but what about the diehards there? What if they do damage to the factories?" Archduke Louis said insistently.

"It is simple. We can use the system of "collective punishment": divide them into groups, let the workers supervise and report on each other, and the sentences of reporters can be reduced.

If anyone in a group without a reporter in it is arrested, everyone in the group will be punished and sent to the mine," the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Carl, sneered.

Franz could not help but want to praise him. In fact, if there were not a series of rebellions in Austria, he would be ready to send these prisoners to mine and build railways.

Considering that there might be more prisoners in the future, if these people were not diehards, and they surrendered quickly under his call, they would win the lightest punishment.

"If none of you have a better idea, this is it!" Franz said firmly.

Chapter 42: Military Preparation

"Your Highness, in view of the current domestic situation, I propose that we double the Vienna City Defense Army immediately and form an army of two hundred thousand soldiers to suppress the rebellions across the country!" Prime Minister Felix said in a murderous manner.

On the point of suppressing the rebellion, everyone was in agreement, and no nobles liked the revolutionary party.

"The proposal of the Prime Minister is right. The City Defense Army should be supplemented. The waste that did nothing in the previous rebellion in Vienna will be retired by my order!

It is imperative to build a counter-rebellion army. Lieutenant General Albrecht has performed well in suppressing the Vienna rebellion. I think he will be the right person to take on this task!"

Franz did not hesitate to take advantage. He not only took the opportunity to clean up the waste in the City Defense Army and replace them with his own people, but also to reach out to the army yet to be built.

"Your Highness, it is of great importance that we form a counter-revolutionary army. I am afraid that Lieutenant General Albrecht will be too busy to cover it all, so it is better to let Marshal Radsky and Prince Wentishgreitz come back to preside over the overall situation," Felix replied.

(Note: Marshal Radsky and Prince Wentishgreitz were two of Austria's three great heroes, and both saved Austria once: the former suppressed the Italian rebellion, while the latter suppressed the Prague rebellion and the Vienna rebellion.)

The two were big shots in the Austrian army. If they came back, Albrecht could only stand aside. Prince Wentishgreitz was Felix's brother-in-law, so it was definitely impossible for Franz to let him come back.

However, it was hard to baffle Franz. He answered, "These two are indeed the best candidates. Unfortunately, rebellion has already broken out in Lombardy. If we transfer Marshal Radsky back here, or anywhere else, at this time, who will be responsible for the rebellion?"

In my opinion, it is better that Marshal Radsky is appointed as the governor of Lombardy and Venice, and he will be fully responsible for presiding over the counter-rebellion work in Italy.

Then we will move fifty thousand troops from Austria to reinforce the Italian region and try to suppress the rebellion in the shortest possible time.

And now the Bohemian region (Czech Republic) is also unstable. In the same way, if we transfer Prince Wentishgreitz back here or anywhere else, then who will take responsibility for suppressing the possible rebellion?"

The front line needed them to command and suppress the rebellion: this reasoning was very sound. Since Franz proposed it, no one dared transfer people arbitrarily. Otherwise, if there was a problem with the front line, they would be responsible for it.

Austria was still the Austria of the Hapsburg family. Even Prime Minister Felix, who was very strong, could only make concessions in the face of Franz's insistence.

Political struggles could be very complicated. This concession meant that in the coming years, the Austrian government would revolve around Franz, and the cabinet would be in an auxiliary position.

Seeing that no one objected, Franz said, "Considering the special situation of Hungary, we must also take action.

I propose to use Josip Yelachic as the senior Croatian official and also as a commander of the City Defense Army.

(Note: Josip Yelachic was one of Austria's three great heroes, and his main achievements were stabilizing Croatia and participating in the suppression of the Vienna rebellion and the Hungarian rebellion.)

Julius Jacob von Haynau will be the senior official in the Slovak region and will also serve as the City Defense Army commander to prepare to suppress the Hungarian rebellion."

(Note: Julius Jacob von Haynau was an Austrian Marshal known for his brutal suppression of Italian and Hungarian rebellions, and he was known as the Arad Executioner, Brescia Hyena, and Hapsburg Tiger.)

Franz's plan was very simple: he would use the meritorious statesmen in the history of Austria's suppression of the rebellion in advance, and those idiots who failed would be excluded right out of the gate.

"Your Highness, the rebellion in Hungary has not yet occurred. If we take action like this, I am afraid it will cause great adverse effects!" Felix thought for a moment and said.

He did not expect that while the Vienna government was still negotiating with the Hungarians, the Crown Prince was already preparing to suppress the rebellion, which was completely undermining the negotiation.

However, once the Hungarians really rebelled, these arrangements would become very useful. Croatia and Slovakia were the territories of the Hungarian Kingdom in that era, but the people there leaned toward Austria.

Controlling these two places in advance was very smart for suppressing the Hungarian rebellion. In history, to suppress the Hungarian rebellion, the Croatian province needed forty thousand troops.

Franz shook his head and said, "Prime Minister, do you think it is a good idea to let Hungary go on like this?"

For so many years in the past, the Vienna government made concessions to them. If we continue like that, we might as well let them be independent!"

This was not nonsense. Hungary was then nominally part of the Austrian Empire, but the tax revenue in Hungary had nothing to do with the central government of Vienna. Even between Austria and Hungary, there were tariffs.

However, they still claimed that Austria was oppressing and exploiting Hungary. In Franz's view, this was complete nonsense.

The Vienna government had gained some benefits from Hungary, surely, but they could be considered protection fees because Austria had been responsible for Hungary's security.

Without Austria's protection, Hungary would either be annexed by Russia or by the Ottomans, and the final result could only be terrible.

On the surface, Austria's industry was more developed, while Hungary was mainly developing its agriculture, so it became a market for Austrian goods.

In fact, the law of that era was the law of the jungle. As the weak, it was impossible to ask too much from the strong. Even to the ordinary Hungarian people, the Hapsburg family was the defender of their interests.

At that time, under that system, not only had the capitalists and nobles in Hungary suffered real losses, but they had also always wanted to make trouble.

After the Great Revolution, some commented that the Hungarian Kingdom of more than ten million people actually had only five hundred thousand people of the Hungarian nation.

In fact, it was the five hundred thousand capitalists and nobles who really exploited and oppressed the Hungarians. Franz was going to kill these worms and distribute their land to the Hungarians.

Therefore, at this point, the goal was not to suppress the revolution but to bring revolution to the Kingdom of Hungary and liberate more than ten million ordinary Hungarian people.

There would be bread for them, and milk. In this regard, Franz believed that he was starting a sacred crusade.

"Your Highness, don't say that. Hungary is our granary. They are an indispensable part of the empire; we must not let them be independent!" Felix said seriously.

Franz smiled and said, "Prime Minister, don't be so nervous. I just told the truth that Hungarians want reform, which is all right; however, all of it must be based on the premise of integration with Austria.

They just want to get benefits, but do not intend to pay the price. There is no such thing in the world. Instead of arguing with them every day, it is better to solve the problem all at once!"

Chapter 43: Forced Reforms

Prime Minister Felix was a representative of the hawks in Austria, and he agreed with Franz's views.

The issue between themselves and the Hungarians must be resolved sooner or later, and compromises only could not solve the problem. It hurt less sooner than it would later: simply let Hungary rebel, then use force to solve the problem.

Austria did the same thing in history, but the Vienna government did not finish it completely, and, in the end, showed mercy to the nobles.

In that way, although they won the support of the nobles, they also lost their opportunity to completely solve the Hungarian problem. Franz surely had to learn a lesson from that.

During that period, the Hungarian nation had not yet formed. There were only five hundred thousand people with vested interests, and the remaining more than thirteen million people had no nationality.

It was not until the establishment of the dualistic empire that the Hungarian nation really took shape. During that period, the Hungarian nobles and capitalists did not think that the lower classes shared anything in common with them.

Not to mention the lower classes, a group of illiterates, worked hard every day to survive, so they had no energy or time to care about what a nation was.

Even when Hungary rebelled in 1848 and they held high the banner of nationalism, they themselves did not really know what nationalism was. Most of the so-called Hungarian people did not speak Hungarian at all, let alone know Hungarian culture.

Nationalism was actually exported to them by the French. Their main purpose was to stir up Austria so that France could realize its strategy of dominating Italy.

This approach could be seen in many places. The southern European region had not completed the National Integration, for which the Vienna government had to take direct responsibility. If it was not for their inaction, there would not have been so many messes in later generations.

"Your Highness, the situation in Austria is unstable. If the Hungarians fight against us at this time, the pressure on our military will be too great!" Foreign Secretary Metternich countered.

Franz smiled slightly. He knew that Metternich had always liked to use political means to solve problems, which was a good thing as well as a bad one.

By using political means, Metternich had initiated a period of Austrian glory lasting 30 years, preserved their status as a major power in the European continent, and also accumulated many conflicts that could be solved all at once.

For example: During the Galicia regional revolution in 1846, the Vienna government could have solved the problem all at once. However, the government chose to compromise with the nobles and passed the conflict on.

"I know, but once this opportunity is missed, it will result in a stalemate that will last forever. Now the Vienna government has become Hungary's scapegoat, bearing the anger of the people from the lower classes.

Austria is already old, and we have too many internal conflicts. If they are not completely resolved, the empire will be dragged down sooner or later.

As for the great pressure on the military, we already have a way to solve it. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should communicate with the Russians as soon as possible because we will need the support of the Tsar's government.

If the situation continues to deteriorate, I would rather compromise with the French and the Prussians than compromise with domestic rebels!"

Franz showed his dissatisfaction with Metternich's previous administration as well as his determination to suppress the rebellion.

The answer was similar to the political proposition of Prime Minister Felix. In history, when the domestic situation was more critical because of the loss of Vienna, the Vienna government had decided to give up northern Italy.

However, Marshal Radsky refused to execute the order of the Vienna government and did not withdraw troops from the Italian region, insisting on suppressing the revolution.

The situation now had not yet reached that level, and Austria would pay much less. It was not a big concession to admit that the Kingdom of Sardinia was subject to the French.

At that time, the domestic situation in France was chaotic enough. As the cradle of revolution, the banners of revolution fluttered in many cities in France, and it had no ability to launch a war.

In the Prussian kingdom, the domestic situation was not better than in Austria: the great Revolution of 1848 had not spared them.

If it was not for the bad luck of the two competitors, 1848 would have been the end of the Austrian Empire. At that moment, Austria would collapse at the slightest touch.

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"Your Highness, to address the current situation in Austria, we must carry out an internal reform, and the issue of serfdom is one that cannot be avoided." The Chancellor of the Exchequer broke the silence and crossed the line.

All the people present were nobles, members of vested interest groups whose benefits would be affected by this reform, so many of them did not look very happy.

However, everyone knew that it was no longer possible to delay reform in Austria, so no one opposed it.

Franz knew he himself was the only one who should put forward the reform plan; it would be an incomplete reform if these leaders were required to preside.

"The abolition of serfdom is the tide of history. The biggest problem now is what comes after the abolition of serfdom. What do we do about the living of serfs?

In this situation, the solution is clear to everyone, that is, to allow the serfs to obtain land and protect their basic needs.

But all the land is owned by someone, and there is no surplus land in Austria that can be distributed to them. In fact, the British and the French have experienced this before us.

Either the nobles must redeem their land, or we must forcibly deprive them of their land through revolution, I don't think anyone wants the latter, so we really have only one choice."

Without a doubt, Franz still knew which side he should take, so he simply brought up the problem and waited for the Cabinet members to respond.

The Schwarzenberg family, of which Prime Minister Felix was a member, owned four hundred and seventy thousand hectares of land. Now, not only was serfdom abolished, but also his land was going to be taken. No one could be happy about that.

"Your Highness, it is easy to abolish serfdom, but to deprive the nobles of their land, this is ..."

Franz interrupted Archduke Louis before he finished his words. "I have no intention to forcibly deprive all your lands; the reaction to that would be too strong.

In view of the current situation, I think it can be carried out in two different ways: all the nobles who participated in the rebellion or provided help to the rebels will be deprived of their land, which will be nationalized.

This part of the land will be leased to farmers, and it can also be traded. The ownership of these lands can be purchased in payments.

The nobles who are still loyal to the Emperor cannot be treated so rudely. I suggest that you all redeem your land, but you will not be forced to sell.

However, in return, after the abolition of serfdom, the nobles who refused to give up their land must provide jobs for the serfs, turning them into farmers or workers to avoid social instability.

In order to ensure the stability of the empire, the national land lease income should not exceed five percent of its profit. After the completion of the reform, the nobles must also pay taxes!"

Chapter 44: Reform Bill

It was impossible to distribute land freely to all, so the nobles could never keep a psychological balance.

Too much generosity would arouse hatred, and Franz had heard too many stories of this kind. Such reforms were fairly advanced for their time, and too much was as bad as too little.

With the advancement of industrialization, Austria also needed to turn farmers into workers, and if everyone had land, who would be willing to work in the city?

Unlike in Asia, the land area per capita was very high in Europe, and the income out of such land was enough for its owners to be adequately fed, so the living standard of workers in that era was not as high as that of farmers.

After listening to Franz's reform plan, everyone breathed a sigh of relief: obviously, this plan had taken care of the interests of the nobles.

Even though they would lose some of their benefits, everyone could accept this plan. As for the nobles who had participated in the rebellion, they were not taken into consideration.

"Your Highness, this reform plan generally has no problems, but about limiting the income from land leasing--can we just erase that article? We can let the market decide!" Archduke Louis suggested.

Franz shook his head and said, "No, if there is no restriction, I'm afraid this reform plan will become meaningless. We cannot guarantee that all nobles care about their moral integrity.

If a few greedy fools mess around, our reform will soon fail. The current serf riots are the best negative examples."

Franz did not want to learn about the greed of the nobles. If it were hundreds of years ago, he might give it a try, but at this point, he just wanted to get rid of it.

Considering Austria's special national conditions, he had already made concessions, actually. He'd done his best to take into account the interests of all people, and he had not yet proposed the abolition of noble privileges.

For the sake of social stability, Franz had to take a gradual approach and prioritize resolving the biggest issue in the country.

Prime Minister Felix thought for a moment and said, "About this reform... I think most of the nobles can accept it, and I think I can convince the rest.

If someone stands against the plan insistently, we will not force it. In case of rebellion, they will be responsible for their personal safety and property, for the empire will not protect greedy fools!"

There was nothing strange about Felix's attitude, for his ideas derived from his position: as the prime minister of Austria, Felix must view a problem from the standpoint of the government.

As long as his own interests were undamaged, he had no good impression of the people who hindered the progress of the empire. In contrast, Archduke Louis had not changed his mind.

The former Prime Minister Metternich wore a wry smile. If he had insisted on reform in the first place, it was likely that the situation would be quite different.

On the serfdom reform, the Cabinet reached an agreement. That meant many people would be out of luck: the policies implemented by the Vienna government in the era of Metternich would be completely changed from then on.

Neither Felix nor Franz could tolerate the existence of a group of incompetent bureaucrats, and the Vienna government would soon face a great purge.

Franz had already even thought of the charge against them: corruption and bribery. There were few officials in Austria who were honest and upright. For this reason, more than 90% of the officials in Austria could be put into prison.

Of course, the range of investigation would not be quite so wide. Only those fools who were greedy, incompetent, and stupid would be investigated. As long as the official could efficiently complete his work, then he could be left alone.

Whether their crimes were retroactive depended on the financial situation of the Austrian government: only if the nation faced fiscal difficulties would Franz make trouble for them.

For the sake of national interests, at this time, the cabinet had to find ways to crack down on the nobles in Italy and Hungary.

If the local forces were too strong, they would go against the authority of the central government, which would be dealt with, even without Franz's direct intervention.

The situation in Austria was already very serious: Lombardy and Venice had already rebelled and were, for the time, under suppression.

There was also rioting in the region of Galicia, while the Czech region still wanted to be autonomous, and the Hungarians had built a responsible cabinet, which was equivalent to a rebellion, without even announcing it.

Other places in Austria were not very peaceful, either. The Croats were very confused: originally they had been part of the Hungarian Kingdom, but all of a sudden, the newly built Hungarian nation excluded them from all rights.

There was polarization among the people: some wanted to stay in Hungary, while others wanted to join Austria as an autonomous province.

Fortunately, they were still loyal supporters of the Hapsburg family, which was worth encouraging.

The people in Dalmatia were barely surviving: already they were impoverished, and the nobles and capitalists exploited them harshly; as a result, the hunger riots were getting worse.

The Revolutionary Party had appeared in the Bosnian region; Transylvania and Slovakia were also in varying degrees of chaos. There was almost no peace in Austria.

This special situation in history forced the Austrian government to carry out reforms.

However, Vienna had been occupied then and was not recovered for a long time. The reputation of the Hapsburg family dropped to its lowest point, and they had to suppress the rebellion by relying on the power of the nobles.

This made the reform favor the noble class. At the same time, the government also made concessions to local forces, which planted the seeds of the collapse of the Empire.

The situation was different this time: the rebellion in Vienna was quickly extinguished, and the power of the nobles was also damaged, so the authority of the central government was not hit hard.

The military power under the control of the Austrian government was much stronger than in history. No troops were transferred from any local governments because of the suppression of the Vienna rebellion, which gave Franz confidence in coping with the crisis.

On March 19, 1848, the Vienna government issued the Abolition Act: all farmers automatically obtain free citizenship, and the corresponding rights and obligations.

The controversial issue of serfdom was finally resolved. From then on, Austria would ban all forced labor, with the exception of criminals.

On March 20 of the same year, the Vienna government introduced the Land Redemption Act, which encouraged the nobles to sell their land to the government, but did not make it mandatory.

The government would lease the land to the farmers and allow the farmers to purchase their own leased land in installments. The maximum period for installments would be 40 years. After the payment was finished, land ownership would be transferred to them.

If something happened midway, farmers could apply for a refund unconditionally, but land abandonment was prohibited during this period.

The Vienna government was still dominated by the nobles, and it was impossible for them to overthrow themselves.

Franz was a realist: he would compromise when he needed to. He did not want to confiscate the nobles' land radically, and anyway, it was impossible.

Just by checking how many noble officers there were in the Army and how many noble employees in the government, he would know what to do next.

Chapter 45: Legal Weapon

On March 21, the Vienna government introduced the Land Lease Act, which stipulated that farmers had the right to lease land and that the maximum rent should not exceed 50% of the land revenue.

This was to protect the most basic survival rights of farmers. If there were no restrictions, it would surely not be long before more hunger riots.

On March 22, the government of Vienna issued the Law on the Settlement and Security of Serfs, which required the nobles to provide minimum living security for the released serfs and solve the problem of the employment of farmers.

That was to say, they could not deprive the farmers of their right to live in their existing houses, and they had to lease the land to farmers or hire farmers to ensure employment.

In order to prevent the capitalists and nobles from taking advantage of the instability, on March 23, 1848, the Vienna government issued the Act on Prohibition of Usury.

The act provided that the annual interest rate for loans of any mode in Austria should not exceed 35%; for loans for vulnerable groups such as farmers and workers, the annual interest rate should not exceed 25%.

For any personal loan, interest was calculated based on the actual amount.

After May 1, 1848, any usurious contract was regarded as an invalid contract and had no legal effect; that was to say, it did not need to be repaid. For the usurious contracts that had already been signed, the law only protected the amount of income within the legal limits.

This was a preventive measure. In fact, when the law was enacted, the cabinet members did not think that the nobles would take advantage of the current situation, that it was only the capitalists who would do that kind of thing.

Well, Franz did not debate them on this issue. The great nobles would definitely not do it because such a little profit was not worth ruining their reputations.

But there were also poor people among the nobles. Every year in Europe, some nobles always went bankrupt, and they might not care so much about the glory of the nobles.

Since the law was written to crack down on capitalists, there were many unfavorable provisions for offenders. For example, the intensity of punishment was very serious.

If caught, all the property of the usurer would be confiscated; he would be imprisoned for a minimum of three years, up to a maximum life sentence.

On March 25, the Vienna government introduced the Minimum Wage Act, which was a subsidiary act of the Labor Protection Act and set the minimum wage standard.

Because the economic development of different regions varied, the minimum wage in Vienna was the first to be announced: 4.5 gulden per week for a male worker, 2.5 gulden per week for a female worker, and 45 Klitzs per week for a child worker.

(Note: 1 gulden = 11.6928 grams of silver = 60 Klitzs)

Franz was still very pragmatic and had not worked out a salary beyond the current moment. This salary standard could only meet workers' basic needs, so they still needed to work overtime if they wanted a better life.

As for the most disgusting issue of child labor, it had not been resolved.

It was as it was: this was the reality of that time in Austria. It would be easy to ban the use of child labor in factories, but if they lost their financial resources, these children's livelihoods would be in danger.

However, these acts still had positive effects: slightly improving the treatment of workers and ensuring the survival needs of workers. Of course, this only guaranteed their right to live.

If they wanted a better life, they had to wait for the further development of production. This situation was determined by social reality: if you did not lower labor costs, the products of enterprises would lose their competitiveness.

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It could be said that 1848 was the year of legislation in Austria. Maybe it was because Franz was used to a legal society, so he was very keen on legislation.

In March alone, Franz enacted 15 laws. After he took office, new laws were enacted almost every day.

From the abolition of serfdom to workers' rights, there were specific laws and regulations for everything.

Regardless of their functions, these laws first off fooled the Austrian reformists, so everyone thought that the reforms that were happening must have been earth-shattering.

Franz successfully used legislation to divert the public's attention, as the coverage of the laws was too broad. When the laws were introduced, they met the interests of serfs and workers.

The intensity of opposition between the public and the government was alleviated, and unconsciously, the revolution lost its base. Of course, it only happened in Vienna at first; other regions still needed time to ferment.

These were things to be taken into consideration in the future. Just then, the Austrian government had received a piece of good news that the Berlin revolution had broken out on March 18, and Prussia too had fallen to the tides of revolution.

If you were the only unlucky one, you could not be in a good mood; however, when you knew there was another person suffering the same misfortune, then you could enjoy some peace of mind.

Of course, Franz was always worrying about the Prussian kingdom taking advantage of the rebellions in Austria. But now that the Berlin revolution had broken out, Prussia would be too busy to do anything else.

The good mood didn't last long before the riots in the Czech lands. Needless to say, Franz knew that the big capitalists in the Czech region were all Austrians, and some of them were definitely the power behind the curtain.

Not only did they want to establish a unified Czech Parliament, but also to establish an independent national self-defense army, and to give the Czech language an equal status to German.

Undoubtedly, these kinds of requests to split the country were not negotiable; the Vienna government could not possibly agree to split Austria.

For now, intelligence personnel were listing nobles and capitalists involved in the event, and Franz was ready to crack down on the Czechs.

In that era, the biggest problem for ordinary people was simply to survive, so the riots there had to have been manipulated by someone.

In some history books, they compared the middle and small capitalists to the working class, which Franz had always sniffed at because the needs of the exploiting class and the exploited class could not possibly be the same.

When the Austrian government was promoting the Labor Protection Law, there was no reason for workers to oppose the government fighting for their rights.

According to the information sent back from Prague, the main crowd of demonstrators was students and the middle and small capitalists, while the workers only got involved in the demonstration as a paying gig.

"Prime Minister, with regard to the demonstrations in Prague, what is the cabinet going to do?"

Franz decisively ignored the conditions they put forward. They were impossible to agree to, so there was no need to discuss them.

"We have ordered the Prague government to arrest the mastermind of this conspiracy, and we've ordered Prince Wentishgreitz to prepare to suppress the rebellion!" Felix said aggressively.

At the time, it was impossible for the Vienna government to make concessions. He even didn't bother to fake a good attitude. The Czech lands were different from other regions because there was no revolutionary base there.

In his view, this was simply a counterattack made by some nobles and capitalists who were dissatisfied with the reform of the Vienna government. After all, if a Czech Kingdom was established, the new laws would not apply there.

Chapter 46: Abolition of the Local Tariff

By 1848, the Czech region had become one of the industrial centers of Austria, and with the development of its industry, the wealth of its capitalists also grew greatly.

The reason that the demonstration broke out was that the wealth and political status of the capitalists did not match, and they refused to stay voiceless in politics.

The Austrian government had continuously introduced new bills, which to some extent sacrificed the interests of capitalists and catalyzed the Prague demonstration.

In Franz's view, these people were probably used to the happy days in Metternich's era, and they had forgotten that those who make the rules of the game could change those rules at any time.

Now, it was the time for the Austrian government to change the rules: those who complied would thrive; those who resisted would perish. Anyone who had complaints about the rules would be destroyed.

On the other hand, as a civilized government, the Austrian government couldn't overdo it and necessarily had to temper justice with mercy.

"In view of the current domestic situation, I propose that we abolish local tariffs to defuse the discontent of capitalists!" said the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Carl.

At that time, the local tariffs in Austria only existed between itself and Hungary, for other local tariffs had already been abolished.

In fact, it was not fair to blame the Vienna government for the tariff between Hungary and Austria. Austria had been prepared to abolish tariffs in various parts of the country as early as the last century, but they were opposed by Hungarian nobles and capitalists.

Since Austria's economic development was not balanced, in areas with developed industries, capitalists strongly advocated the abolition of local tariffs; however, in Hungary, where industries were less advanced, capitalists still relied on local protection.

Still, there were some in Hungary who advocated the abolition of local tariffs, such as capitalists in the grain industry.

The Hungarian taxes had nothing to do with the Vienna government: they collected tax for their own use.

Certainly, the Hungarian nobles could take a share of the local tariffs; thus, they were the biggest obstacle to abolition.

The purpose of Carl's proposal was layered: in addition to buying the hearts of some capitalists, it would also serve as a warning to Hungarian nobles.

At that time, the Vienna government still believed that the nobles dominated the Hungarian Kingdom, and the capitalists on the surface were all just puppets.

Franz didn't intend to change the situation. The number of Hungarian nobles was too great, accounting for 4% of the total population, and most Hungarian capitalists had another important identity: nobility.

If they weren't suppressed, all this could cause the nobles in Hungary to become a big headache for Franz.

This concern had been proved right in history: from the era of Austria to that of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, all the governments had struggled with the Hungary issue. If the Hungarian people did not support the Hapsburg family, they would probably have been independent.

"Yes, Austria is a unified country, and the existence of local tariffs is against the trend!"

Clearly, Franz did not mind that the Hungarian rebellion would likely escalate.

The appeals to attend to the interests of Hungarian workers and farmers had actually only come about thanks to the reforms carried out by the Austrian government.

Using one faction to fight another faction, uniting the majority to attack a small group--this was always a good strategy in politics.

Next, he would issue decree after decree to clear obstacles to the capitalists' economic development and shake their determination to rebel.

The abolition of local tariffs only harmed the interests of the big nobles, because the small nobles weren't qualified to profit from it. In this way, the Austrian nobles might even suffer a loss from it, but without tariffs, at least the price of grain from Hungary would be more competitive.

As a result, it would be unlikely that all Hungarians would participate in the rebellion together, and not even all of the nobles would be involved.

"Your Highness, I am afraid that this will not work. The abolition of Hungarian tariffs will have an impact on the Austrian food industry and affect the income of Austrian farmers!" Archduke Louis objected.

Franz suddenly realized that the biggest impact of abolishing the tariff with Hungary was not on the peasants but on the nobles who owned large swaths of land. If a competitor appeared, the price of food would definitely fall.

Franz hesitated a little, not knowing if it was a good time to irritate the domestic nobles. Just after serfdom had been abolished, he was allowing food from Hungary in, which would surely impact food prices. Would it affect their bottom line?

At that moment, Prime Minister Felix helped make the decision.

"Since 1846, the grain price in Austria has been rising continuously, and for the stability of the country, it is necessary for us to limit it to a reasonable range.

In the long run, it is also a good thing for Hungarian food to enter Austria, because the decline in food prices can help us stabilize public morale as soon as possible.

Moreover, after the abolition of tariffs, Austria's industrial and commercial products will be more competitive in Hungary, which will help us heal from the trauma of the economic crisis!"

Franz was at ease after hearing this: the Prime Minister, a major local capitalist, did not mind the decline in food prices, so the bottom line of the others might be much lower.

In history, it seemed that Austria had also abolished the tariff system during this period, but Franz was not sure which year it was exactly.

"The Prime Minister is right. The abolition of tariffs now will allow the Austrian economy to recover as soon as possible, which is very important to us.

Because of the war, our revenue may be greatly reduced this year. If it weren't for the confiscation of rebel property, I'd be afraid that the government would go bankrupt.

The next counter-revolutionary war will require significant cash flow. I am afraid that the money we have now is just a drop in the bucket, so we have to find ways to increase revenue and reduce expenditure.

Now we have so many factories under our control, we must get them to work as soon as possible, and the Hungarian market is essential for us to capture!" Foreign Secretary Metternich said.

Austria was really short of money. Before the March revolution, the Vienna government already had 748 million gulden in national debt, which, now, was equivalent to about 600 million to 650 million. (1 gulden was about 11.6928 grams of silver.)

Rest assured, Franz did not pay back any money; the creditors were gone.

Because of the rebellion, many debts were destroyed, and many creditors became wanted criminals. The rebel army also seized a large number of bonds, which were directly burned by Franz.

There were two kinds of national debt issued by the Austrian government: registered and bearer. The former would not be possibly cashed in by the wanted criminals, while the latter could still be transferred.

It was idealistic to expect that the Hungarian market would restore the Austrian economy.

Franz believed that Hungarian capitalists would not mind doing business with Austria, even during a revolution.

The issue was how to ensure the safety of transportation during the war. And who would buy their goods? No one would buy from them, except for weapons.

Chapter 47: Outbreak of the First Italian-Austrian War

On March 27, 1848, the Vienna government announced the abolition of local tariffs and prohibited the local government from collecting tariffs in any name. For this, the Hungarian representative in Vienna slammed the door in their faces on the spot.

There was nothing strange about that. Although the Hungarians had also proposed to abolish local tariffs in their conditions, their request was actually that Austria unilaterally abolish its own tariffs, not that Hungary should also abandon collecting tariffs from the Austrians.

Otherwise, there was no need for them to argue about this issue at all. As early as the period of the Maria Reform in 1795, the abolition of local tariffs had been proposed, and by 1848 all the local governments had finished that abolition, except Hungary.

Hungary continued the tariffs due to the obstruction of interest groups. The truth of the matter and the public narrative were quite different, which happened a lot in the history of China.

If it weren't for that, it wouldn't have been necessary for the Vienna government to abolish the tariffs with Hungary until after the Hungarian Revolution was suppressed.

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One piece of bad news after another!

Before the problem with the Czechs was resolved, another bit of bad news spread to Vienna: the Kingdom of Sardinia had declared war on Austria!

On the evening of March 23, Charles Albert, the King of Italy, delivered a speech on the palace square declaring war on Austria. Because of the war in Austria, the news didn't reach Vienna until the 27th.

"Have the reinforcements we sent to Marshal Radsky arrived?" Franz asked.

After the suppression of the Vienna rebellion, the Austrian government transferred fifty thousand troops to reinforce Marshal Radsky.

This was originally prepared by Franz for the war with the Kingdom of Sardinia; otherwise, the suppression of the Austrian Italian rebellion would not have required reinforcements.

If there were no reinforcements, the same thing would happen as in history: Marshal Radsky faced the Italians with a small number of troops and defeated them after the arrival of domestic reinforcements.

But the situation this time was different: the Vienna rebellion was suppressed in advance, and the rebellion in other places had not yet broken out, so Austria still had power to invest in the Italian battlefield.

"The day before yesterday, they arrived in the Venice area, and now they should have begun to suppress the rebellion!" Felix said angrily.

A small country like the Sardinian kingdom must be very sure of themselves if they dared to come and challenge Austria at that time.

Franz shook his head. The anti-Austrian storm started by Italians was not just limited to the Sardinian Kingdom: the Pope, the Duchy of Tuscany, and the Kingdom of Naples were all forced to participate in the war by the will of the people.

The embassies of Austria in various Italian regions had already sent the news that they should heighten military alert.

"Send the order to Marshal Radsky: let him figure it out himself, and do what he can do. If he needs reinforcements, let him wait another month!" Franz thought for a while and said.

He did not intend to discuss military issues with the Cabinet. These people were laymen, and their military literacy was surely inferior to his.

The risk of laymen leading the expert was too high. Besides, after the outbreak of the revolution, the telegraph lines in Vienna and Italy were damaged.

Franz did not know the details of the Italian battlefield, so the only thing he could do then was to delegate power and do a good job of logistics to support Marshal Radsky.

Historically, he suppressed the Italian rebellion and defeated the troops of the Italian countries. This time, Austria had a greater advantage, so there was no reason for him to lose.

Since the suppression of the Vienna rebellion, the Austrian government had been expanding its troops to prepare for war. In addition to suppressing the revolution, they were also worried that foreign forces would take advantage of the instability in Austria.

Sometimes, Franz really wanted to send an army to finish all those nobles and capitalists who might rebel and then carry out land reform. In that way, all problems would be solved.

Unfortunately, this was impossible. Even the nobles who participated in the rebellion had to be handed over to the noble Parliament, let alone those who had not yet rebelled.

Until then, there were only 12 rebel nobles executed by the noble Parliament, and the charge turned out to be that they killed other nobles by despicable means in an attempt to muddle through and seize their titles!

Franz was speechless hearing that. It was even the result that Archduke Louis had strived for in the noble Parliament because of the pain of losing his son.

Of course, Franz also did something: all the property of the 28 nobles wiped out was temporarily nationalized, and all the inheritors who had not proven that they had nothing to do with the rebellion were not allowed to inherit their titles.

Unfortunately, this was an unsolvable question: as long as the application for the inheritance of the title could be submitted, there was a motive for committing crimes.

Even if the applicant hadn't taken part in the rebellion, had his relatives and friends? Even if his neighbor or perhaps someone he knew had participated, the applicant could not clear his suspicion.

Franz didn't have any better answer, so he gave the right to decide a person's guilt to the noble Parliament. As long as at least eighty percent of the nobles were sure that a person was not guilty and was the legal first heir, he could inherit the title.

The relationship between the nobles was extremely chaotic. There were a lot of greedy relatives with inheritance claims, and the internal problems were always difficult to settle.

As long as it was proven that there was a problem with the first heir, then the title and fief would go to the second heir.

Because of noble marriage practices, the first heir and the second heir were often not from the same family, and might even be hostile, which made the situation yet more difficult to settle.

Everyone had plenty of relatives and friends, so it was not difficult for them to hinder others from inheriting the title if they themselves wanted it.

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"Your Highness, if all Italy's major states are participating in the war, Marshal Radsky may not have enough troops for it. Do you want us to transfer more reinforcements from other places?" Felix suggested.

"The Italians are not single-mindedly determined. They are catering to public opinion, and they are still bargaining.

As for the Sardinian kingdom, I don't think they'll launch an attack until the revolutionary party agrees to merge with them.

In Italy, we have already deployed forty thousand troops, plus the fifty thousand reinforcements already sent; even if this is not enough to defeat the enemy, it is not a problem to play around with the enemy for a while.

Now, the domestic situation is also unstable. If we continue to transfer troops, in case of rebellion in other areas, we will be overwhelmed.

You can tell Marshal Radsky: don't worry about the gains and losses for one city or one place; as long as he can win in the end, there is no harm now in losing a few places ."

Franz held himself back from the temptation to defeat the Italians quickly and chose to fight steadily.

In history, even though the Vienna government had ordered him to give up Italy, Marshal Radsky, without preparation, was able to persist in fighting off the enemy. There had been no reason to lose, even without reinforcements.

Franz had no idea of the power of the Austrian army, but when he thought about the Italian army's record, he was relieved.

In history, Austria and Italy fought many times, and, except for the one effort commanded by the original Franz personally with the French-Italian coalition forces, Austria had always beaten Italy soundly, even during the extremely decadent Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Chapter 48: Luring the Enemy in Deep

In the Lombardy region, the situation was very unfavorable to Austria: the Italian-Austrian War was definitely not as simple as that recorded in the history books. There were capitalist and noble rebellions within, and enemy forces without.

The reinforcements sent by the Vienna government were suppressing the rebellion in Venice at that time, so there was only one division arriving at the front line. The total number of soldiers available to Marshal Radsky was less than thirty thousand.

The number was twice what it had been in history. Otherwise, the result would have been the same as in history: the Austrian army would be forced to retreat from the Milan area with their tails between their legs.

Taking a closer look at the map on the table and considering the international situation, Marshal Radsky made a surprising decision at the military conference.

"Order the troops to be ready; we will give up Milan on April 1!"

"What? Marshal, are you sure?" Major General Victor asked incredulously.

"Major General Victor, I am very sure of what I am doing!" Marshal Radsky said calmly.

"But Marshal, we have not reached the point where we must retreat. Once the rebellion in Venice is suppressed, our reinforcements will arrive, and it will be no problem for us to block the Kingdom of Sardinia!" Major General Victor said in confusion.

Victor was not alone in his doubt, as many officers present also found this plan difficult to accept: why should they retreat if they could win?

"The answer is quite simple: we can block the attack of the Kingdom of Sardinia, in the case of internal or external troubles, but we have no way to defeat them.

The rebels in the Lombardy region have colluded with the Kingdom of Sardinia, so if we fight them for a long time, the rebellion will continue.

There are also the political and economic aspects. In short, the Vienna government has authorized me to handle the Italian issue unilaterally, so what you need is just to execute my order!" Marshal Radsky explained coldly.

Giving up Lombardy would surely put him under a lot of pressure and even cause a series of ripple effects. Under normal circumstances, no official would be willing to bear this kind of responsibility.

Marshal Radsky dared to do so because of the order from the Vienna government: as long as they achieved the final victory, he need not care about the gains and losses of one city or one place.

In his view, the high-level authority of the Vienna government was also concerned about the dangerous situation in the Italian war zone. If it wasn't solved as soon as possible, then the Papal state, the Principality of Tuscany, and the Kingdom of Naples would all get involved.

Marshal Radsky still had enough troops to deal with the Kingdom of Sardinia and the rebels alone; if all these countries joined the war, however, he would be in danger.

Thus, it was better to give up Lombardy in the first place; the Sardinian kingdom would then occupy these territories, and the other three states in Italy would not enter the war.

And they had only been forced to declare war to appease the public. The main forces of several states had not been dispatched yet; for now, only the volunteers from civil voluntary organizations were at the front.

If the Kingdom of Sardinia were to occupy these areas, the public of the other states would be satisfied. Even if they felt envy, jealousy, or hatred, they would not possibly send troops to help the Kingdom of Sardinia.

Infighting would break out without foreign aggression. The internal contradictions of the Italian countries were also significant; the people only transferred their hatred to Austria out of political needs.

However, this kind of situation would not last long. Anything could be deceived but the belly: people always had to eat.

The economic crisis was still going on, so there were a lot of unemployed people in Italy. If this problem was not solved, the conflicts would continue to erupt.

In addition to the Italians, the attitudes of Britain and France were also a problem.

The French hoped that Lombardy and Venice could be independent states; they did not want Italy to be unified by driving out Austria.

The British wanted a unified Italy that could fight off France and Austria at the same time, but they did not want to see Austria collapse.

Though they wanted to weaken Austria, they wanted to preserve enough of its strength to block the expansion of the Russians.

In this context, once the Sardinian Kingdom took over Lombardy, the two states would definitely merge, and the attitude of the French would change from support to hostility.

British support for the Kingdom of Sardinia would only be verbal. They would be happy for the Kingdom of Sardinia to stop the war as soon as possible, but unfortunately, the Kingdom of Sardinia was bound to public opinion and could only continue to fight.

After shortening the front line, Marshal Radsky had more troops, while the front line of the Kingdom of Sardinia was lengthened.

The newly occupied Lombardy could not provide them with supplies. Instead, the Kingdom of Sardinia mainly relied on domestic products, which was putting significant pressure on their forces and their homeland.

While fighting Austria, they also had to feed the people of Lombardy; otherwise, they would rebel because of their hunger.

Without the substantial support of Britain and France, there were three fewer states participating in the war. The outcome of this war was already clear. The Sardinians' national strength was limited and had no way to compare with Austria.

Marshal Radsky was confident that he would defeat the army of the Kingdom of Sardinia and then recover the Lombardy region by his military strength. He was even confident that he could succeed fighting Sardinia on its home turf.

Strategically, it was not really a retreat, but an effort to lure the enemy in deep.

More than that, Franz's private letter to him asked him to eliminate as many of rebel parties in Italy as possible, which was another reason he'd made this choice.

The words "rebel parties" were not so simple. Marshal Radsky was sure that it referred to the capitalists and nobles in Italy; without their exploitation, where had the rebellion come from?

When Lombardy was merged into the Kingdom of Sardinia, it was estimated that most of the nobles and capitalists would support the Kingdom of Sardinia. However, after the war was over, when the purge started, these people might be identified as members of the rebel parties.

Maybe they would use their family property to buy the approval of the people, and Austrian Italy would soon stabilize. After all, the people of Lombardy were Germans who had entered Italy, so without the obstacles of the upper class, it was much easier to carry out ethnic integration.

There were both advantages and disadvantages, but Marshal Radsky did not need to consider them all. He had already seen the greatest advantage: he could solve the Italian problem once and for all.

In order to win the final victory, both Lombardy and Venice could be given up temporarily. As long as they would be eventually be taken back, he would still be a hero of Austria.

In the quiet conference room, one voice broke the silence. A middle-aged general stood up and said, "Marshal, maybe we can do something more than let the Kingdom of Sardinia occupy Lombardy so easily!"

"Edmund, what is your plan?" Marshal Radsky asked with concern.

"Marshal, since the people of Lombardy are so welcoming the Italians, we might as well help them advertise to make their impression of the Kingdom of Sardinia even better!" Lieutenant General Edmund Leopold Friedrich said with a sneer.

Chapter 49: Division of Land

In Austria in 1848, revolution seemed to have become the trend of the country, and there was no peace anywhere.

On March 28, a rebellion broke out in the Dalmatian region. Fortunately, the local people suppressed the revolution themselves before the Austrian government had to send troops.

Looking at the intelligence in his hand, Franz felt like cursing somebody. The self-defense army formed by the local government had launched the rebellion, and it was the local capitalists and serfs who had helped the government suppress the revolution.

In other words, it was the nobles and nationalists who launched the rebellion, and the capitalists and serfs suppressed them.

The main reason for this rebellion was that the local nobles were dissatisfied with the government's damage to their interests in the reform. With the coaxing of nationalists, they stupidly announced a revolution.

This kind of foolishness was not uncommon at all times and in all countries. Franz had become inured to that.

Every year, there were always some nobles in Austria who declared their independence only because they'd drunk too much wine. After they sobered up, they would immediately cancel their independence and run to the Emperor to plead guilty.

These idiots were lucky to have been born on the European continent. If their efforts had not caused serious consequences, the Emperor usually did not do anything to them.

It was normal for serfs to help suppress the noble rebellions. The Vienna government already announced the abolition of serfdom and gave them personal freedom, but the nobles wanted to continue to enslave them.

Needless to say, the nobility had to be suppressed. It was for freedom.

It happened that these nobles actually armed the serfs under their control to make a revolutionary force, which was also the reason that Franz thought they were fools.

Only to Franz's surprise, the local capitalists stood together with the Vienna government and contributed to the suppression of the rebellion. It happened so fast that it seemed to be premeditated.

Even so, Franz doubted that the nobles and the capitalists would have really agreed to join the revolution together. As a result, when the capitalists saw it was impossible to succeed, they gave away the nobles.

Dalmatia had a low sense of belonging in Austria, as a seemingly dispensable border province. It was economically underdeveloped and did not have strategic value, so it was easy to ignore.

Looking at Franz, who looked confused, Prime Minister Felix spoke up.

"Your Highness, this Dalmatian rebellion was carried out by the noble officials of the local government. In the name of loyalty to the royal family, they were trying to get more benefits.

After their interests were damaged, these bastards actually wanted to unite Trieste to rebel and prepare to build a country alongside the rebellion in Italy.

However, they forgot that the self-defense army in their hands was loyal to the Empire, and this rebellion was doomed to failure from the beginning.

Moreover, their geographical position makes them heavily dependent on the Empire economically, and if they become independent, the local area would decline immediately.

It was inevitable that the capitalists would go their own way to protect their own interests."

Franz nodded thoughtfully. It seemed that the most likely possibility was that the capitalists felt that the rebellion was hopeless and they could not obtain greater benefits, so they simply sold out their partner.

Franz could only think of a few reasons the nobles of Dalmatia would be so stupid: general lack of knowledge, too many ignorant people among them, and loss of reason due to greed.

"Then send people to confiscate the rebels' property, and at the same time reward the heroes who participated in the suppression of the rebellion. Also, immediately implement the abolition of serfdom.

Exempt the meritorious capitalists from this year's tax, take a part of their land, and give it to the serfs who participated in the suppression of the rebellion. Give a pension to the families of the dead and wounded."

(The Act to Abolish Serfdom had taken time to implement, so not all serfs had been liberated yet.)

Franz was setting an example: no matter what their purpose or motive was, anyone who helped the Empire suppress rebellion would be rewarded.

In particular, the awards for serfs needed to be publicized. It would be best to make sure everyone in Austria knew.

At that time, Franz had already decided to distribute the land and encourage workers and peasants to fight against the reactionary nobles and capitalists; that way, no one would follow their rebellious lead.

"Your Highness, this is too much. It is fine to reward the capitalists. But we have already given the serfs freedom, so there is no need to give them land, too!"

Prime Minister Felix, because of his class position, did not want this kind of thing to happen.

If the emperor started using this weapon to bring down the noble class, the monarch's power would be further expanded, and the nobles' political voice would be restricted.

"Prime Minister, this is just a matter of expediency. The rebellion in the Italian region has not yet been annihilated, and some people want to loot the burning house.

A rebellion may break out at any time in Prague, and the Polish in the Galicia region are also ready to make trouble. Meanwhile, the ambitious Hungarians are preparing to further split the country.

Now we need to unite all the forces that can be united and wipe all these rebellion parties out cleanly. It is natural to reward heroes. Why is it too much to contribute a little land for this purpose?"

There was no doubt that Franz was just pretending to be confused. Anyway, as long as the present situation could be used as a shield, the nobles had no reason to oppose the plan.

If no nobles took part in the rebellion, there was nothing Franz could do about them. However, some nobles had rebelled, so as the Prince, he had reason to doubt their loyalty.

In this context, it was reasonable that he supported the serfs who were about to obtain the status of a free citizen.

These people were illiterate, and their concept of judgment was very simple: right or wrong.

Given land of their own, for the next few decades, these people would be Franz's most loyal subjects, and even their descendants would be supporters of the Hapsburg family.

All rulers needed support as a foundation of their authority. At that time, the foundation of the Austrian Empire was the nobility, which wasn't going to change anytime soon. Franz had just added farmers behind the nobles.

These problems were just for politicians to consider. The vast majority of nobles would not think in such a long term way. Even if they were told his reasoning, no one would believe it.

After a moment of hesitation, Prime Minister Felix chose to retreat.

Unlike in history, this prime minister was appointed by Franz, and his advice was not so influential. If anyone thought they could check the monarch's power with officials' power like in history, they had to be daydreaming.

Seeing the Prime Minister's acquiescence, there was no need for Franz to be aggressive. It was enough to achieve the goal. It was not easy for the Prime Minister to take the blame for Franz every day, so Franz showed him respect.

Then the policy of "dividing up the capitalists' land" began, perhaps better called "dividing up the rebels' land." Only the land of rebels would be divided up; others had no need to worry.

Chapter 50: Frankfurt Conference

On March 1, 1848, a conference of various states was held in Heidelberg on the initiative of the liberals in Baden and Württemberg.

A total of 51 people attended the meeting, most of whom were representatives of the South German states, including four Prussians and only one Austrian.

The meeting voted on the "Declaration of the German People" and decided to set up a seven-member committee to prepare for the German Preparatory Parliament (the predecessor to the Frankfurt Conference).

There was no doubt that this conference did not get the permission of Austria before it happened.

No matter what others thought, Franz would not admit the legitimacy of this meeting. He had been busy dealing with domestic problems and could not take these problems into consideration. However, once the internal crisis was under control, it was time for him to intervene in the affairs of the German region.

The situation was different than it had been in history: the Austrian capitalists had been hit hard, and the rest of the people were trembling, fearing that they would be killed by the government. Under these conditions, who dared stand out and take responsibility for dealing with anything at all?

The Frankfurt Conference was coming, but no representatives of Austria had been selected. Instead, a group of wanted criminals were going to attend the meeting.

Franz didn't even know what the capitalists were thinking. From the beginning, this plan was doomed to failure. Without recognition of all neighboring governments, where would their legitimacy come from?

"Prime Minister, what do you think of this conference, or should I say, the mess stirred up by capitalists?" Franz asked.

"Your Highness, I think we can just ignore them since this meeting is technically illegal. We can just deny it!" Prime Minister Felix said calmly.

At that time, Austria still had powerful capital, and among the many German states, Austria had the greatest national strength.

Franz frowned. Obviously, he was not satisfied with that answer. The Austrian government had done the same thing in history, and the consequences had been quite serious. The Parliament passed the proposal of "Little Germany," without considering Austria's opinion.

To Franz, it seemed that the Kingdom of Prussia was surely behind the scenes of this conference; otherwise, Austria would not have been excluded from the beginning.

"Prime Minister, do you really think so? If we don't intervene, I expect that the result of the conference will be the establishment of a small German Empire without any consideration of Austria.

Regardless of whether the meeting is legal or not, its influence on the people is beyond doubt, though perhaps there is no obvious reaction in Austria.

However, in other regions, its influence has begun to spread. Once the public accepts this theory, it will lay a foundation for Prussia to unify those regions in the future," Foreign Secretary Metternich said with a frown.

Metternich was not called the "European Coachman" for nothing. Although he didn't think that the German region could be unified, Metternich, who pursued a balanced Europe, would still oppose anyone who tried to unify Germany.

At that time, the Kingdom of Prussia was already very strong. If Austria continued to create opportunities for them, they would have no problem annexing the northern German region.

This was a very big threat to Austria. In history, Metternich had left the political circle during this period, lost his voice, and become unable to prevent all this from happening.

This time, since he was still the foreign minister of Austria, he had to do something. Disrupting the Frankfurt Conference was the first step.

This was also the purpose for which Franz had put him in the cabinet. Few people in the whole world could compare with his diplomacy, although the "Vienna System" he'd created had collapsed.

"Mr. Metternich, please don't be alarmist here. What are these capitalists? Do you think they can represent public opinion?

No government will admit their legitimacy. This so-called German Parliament does not even have any power outside Frankfurt!" Felix said in response.

"Don't you forget the influence of the capitalists on the public! They can control public opinion in a region through the newspapers in their hands. As far as I know, the Prussian government had a secret contact with them.

Once the conditions of both sides are met, the capitalists will support the Kingdom of Prussia to unify the German region, and then we will surely have a war to fight with the Kingdom of Prussia!" said Metternich, almost growling.

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Looking at the red faces of the two men, who were practically about to fight, Franz quickly scolded, "Shut up, both of you. Today I am here to hear your discussion, not to listen to your quarrel!"

On the surface, Franz was very angry, but in fact he was happy inside. No monarch wanted his men to be monolithic, not to mention that Franz was not the emperor yet.

As the regent, once the cabinet was united, then Franz would perform practically no function. To maintain the balance of power, he could not let the cabinet members come together in agreement.

One was the former Prime Minister who had been in charge of Austria for more than twenty years, and the other was the powerful present Prime Minister.

When two powerful people had different political views, they would inevitably have conflicts.

"Well, to be on the safe side, whether it is a Prussian plot or not, we must destroy this meeting, at least to minimize its influence.

If any of you have any ideas, please share them. Our time is very precious, and any minute we waste here is a crime!"

Franz actually favored Metternich's opinion: the status of the Frankfurt Conference was artificially magnified when the small German Empire was established in later generations.

As for how great the influence of this conference was, probably only those who had experienced it personally would know. Franz didn't want to get involved, so he just destroyed it.

Because of the Customs Union, Austria had limited influence among the capitalists in the German region, far less than the Kingdom of Prussia. It was undoubtedly impossible to reach an agreement in favor of his own side at such a meeting.

"Perhaps we can send people to propose the formation of a North and South German Empire. If we promise the South German states that we won't interfere in their internal affairs, the chance of success is very high!" Finance Minister Carl said tentatively.

"That definitely won't work. We may have a slight chance to persuade the South German states, but we'd never get it through the meeting of capitalist representatives!

Besides, we'd have to pay too high a price to convince them, and in the end, it would still only be a nominal unity," Metternich said, shaking his head.

Franz was tempted a little bit by that thought. If the Federal Empire of South Germany was established, there would be no issue with the Prussians there. Because of religious beliefs, there was actually an obvious gap between the north and the south of Germany.

Even if there was a nominal unity, in fact, each side would still act in their own ways and use economic means to infiltrate and slowly influence the politics of the other.

Unfortunately, it was not the right time yet. At the very least, Franz had to wait for Austria to resolve its internal conflicts; otherwise, he'd have no confidence in his ability to handle this affair.