

Roman Empire 61

Chapter 61: Hungary

The Vienna government quashed the Prague Uprising and the Galician Uprising one after another. When news of this reached Hungary, the opposition, led by Kossuth, could no longer sit idly by.

From the present circumstances, it became evident that the Vienna government had no intentions of compromising with the revolutionary party. Their response was unyielding, primarily exemplified by the brutal suppression in Galicia, which sent a chill down the spines of many.

Ludwig von Benedek, the one tasked with suppressing the Galician Uprising, allowed the local population to seek revenge against the nobles and capitalists without intervention. The majority of the 20,000-plus casualties were a result of the people's own actions.

The Vienna government couldn't possibly execute such a large number of individuals all at once; Franz had his own image to protect. To ensure lasting peace in Austrian-controlled Poland, resorting to the people's vengeance became the only viable choice.

A local militia was assembled, leveraging their conflicts with exploitative factions to purge these abusive counter-revolutionaries.

Across the country, except for the ongoing war in the Italian region, nearly all uprisings had been brutally suppressed, leaving Hungary on the brink of fighting alone.

If we go back in time by a month, Hungary's cabinet government had not yet been established, and there was still a possibility of compromise. Even before the declaration of independence on April 14th, there was an opportunity to reconsider.

However, the Vienna government consistently refused to recognize the legitimacy of Hungary's cabinet, issuing repeated orders for the dissolution of their unlawful government.

Kossuth had always advocated for Hungary's separation from Austria and the establishment of an independent Hungarian Republic. Unfortunately, this ideology had limited appeal in the Hungarian market.

The majority of the nobility were concerned about the security issues that would arise after independence. After all, Hungary's union with Austria was not only due to the Habsburg family's marriage alliances but also their need for Austria's protection.

Compared to the Russians and the Ottomans, they preferred to align themselves with Austria. However, in recent years, the central government in Vienna had weakened and gradually lost its authority. Through a series of trials, they discovered that a crying baby gets milk.

In order to break free from Austria's constraints and gain greater benefits, the capitalists embraced the nationalism that had spread from France. The opposition forces in Austria, led by Kossuth, began to grow stronger.

However, this didn't mean that Hungary had the strength to achieve independence from Austria, and many still harbored doubts about armed revolution.

A young man hurriedly exclaimed, "Mr. Kossuth, something terrible has happened. The Vienna government has dispatched legal lecturers to enter Hungary, and it seems they are coming for us!"

Upon hearing this news, Kossuth's face turned pale. What could be the purpose of Austria sending legal lecturers? Was it merely to educate the Hungarian people about the law?

If Franz were here, he would say—yes, the purpose of dispatching legal lecturers is truly just to educate the people about the law.

Of course, declaring the establishment of the Hungarian cabinet as illegitimate was also inevitable. However, this can be considered a side issue. The main objective was to divide the Kingdom of Hungary.

Different social classes have different interests and demands. The series of laws enacted by the Vienna government were essentially aimed at buying off the common people.

There was no way around it. It's not that Franz didn't want to bribe the elite class; it's just that it's easier to bribe a few than the majority. The problem was that their demands were too high, and the government simply couldn't afford it.

In March, the Hungarian delegation, led by Kossuth, presented demands to the Vienna government for the establishment of an independent Hungarian government and the abolition of the feudal system.

Both sides engaged in a difficult round of negotiations, and Franz was indeed open-minded. He did not reject the idea of reforms and even advocated for more thorough changes.

However, they encountered a group of idealists and spokespersons for the bourgeois interest groups, making it clear that both sides were unlikely to reach an agreement.

If the Vienna government dared to accept their conditions, it would be Austria's turn to experience revolution.

Equality does not mean privilege. Franz could grant equal status to all ethnic groups, but he would never allow the Hungarian nation to dominate over others.

This brings us to the national situation of the Kingdom of Hungary. The country had a total population of over 13 million people, with more than 500,000 nobles, making them practically ubiquitous.

Hungarian capitalists had another layer of identity – nobility. Therefore, the relationship between Hungarian capitalists and nobles was highly complex. This less than 2% of the population held over 95% of the wealth in society.

During this period, the Hungarian nation, in reality, referred to these 500,000 nobles and capitalists. They held numerous privileges and constituted the true exploiting class in the country.

To a certain extent, Austria was not a true autocratic empire, but rather an alliance of the aristocracy. The central government's control over the regions relied on the will of the nobility.

The current outbreak of Hungarian nationalism was primarily driven by the middle and lower nobility as well as the capitalists. They merged the concept of the nation with their own interests, adorning their pursuit of self-interest with a veil of nationalism during their struggle for power.

This was also evident in the Hungarian government led by Kossuth. On one hand, they advocated for reform, but on the other hand, they rejected the implementation of the reform bills proposed by the Vienna government.

Even the consensus to abolish serfdom, which had been reached by all parties, was not carried out in Hungary. The nobles concealed the Vienna government's legislation on the abolition of serfdom.

Well, this responsibility cannot solely be attributed to Kossuth. After all, he, like a puppet leader, was a product of compromise rather than someone who attained power through strength.

This became apparent during the Hungarian elections on April 12, 1848. Despite proclaiming the intention to hold open elections for all, the reality was that the presidential election in Hungary remained confined to Budapest.

In Budapest, only 16,200 people had the right to vote. If we consider the understanding of "Hungarian nationality" at that time, it could be seen as a partial realization of universal suffrage within the city.

In the end, a total of 5,176 votes were cast, and Kossuth emerged as the winner with 1,639 votes. However, the officially announced results were certainly not those numbers.

From these figures, it was evident that Franz's butterfly effect had indeed taken effect, as there were more people choosing to observe from a distance than in historical instances.

"Nagy, immediately have them expelled from our land. Hungary does not welcome their presence!" Kossuth's expression grew somber as he spoke.

As the president who emerged through compromise, Kossuth faced widespread skepticism among the people of the Kingdom of Hungary. In the eyes of many, the Hungarian Republic was seen as nothing more than a farce, a notion reinforced by the general apathy observed during the elections.

Kossuth's anger was justified by the circumstances. Although the Hungarian Republic had been established, Ferdinand I still maintained his role as the King of Hungary.

Without a king, the nobility would cease to exist. Driven by their own vested interests, the Hungarian nobles staunchly opposed the abolition of the monarchy. Forced by the prevailing circumstances, Kossuth had no choice but to make concessions. As the president, he found himself in a subordinate position to the king, greatly compromising his authority and diminishing his power.

Chapter 62: Building a Nation

Kossuth could deploy individuals to obstruct the overt representatives of Austria, but when it came to those who secretly sided with Austria, they were rendered powerless.

The Hungarian revolution was not achieved through bloodshed, which meant that a significant number of people in the country still held pro-Viennese inclinations. Kossuth had contemplated conducting purges, but it proved impractical. (The casualties of a few individuals were disregarded.)

Internal dynamics within the Kingdom of Hungary were intricate and interdependent, making the nascent Hungarian regime fragile and susceptible to external pressures.

Upon receiving news of the expulsion of Austrian representatives from Hungary, Vienna understood that the countdown to war had commenced. The Austrian government could not simply permit Hungary's independence without a fight.

Prime Minister, how are the preparations for the supplies going?"

Entering the era of modern warfare, battles were fought with logistics. Now that Austria had to juggle the Italian front as well, Franz's greatest concern was the logistical support.

"Your Highness, the campaign to suppress the Hungarian rebellion has yet to begin. Currently, our priority lies in meeting the demands of the Italian front. If we mobilize more than two hundred thousand troops, we won't be able to guarantee the logistical supply," Felix pondered before speaking.

It wasn't that Austria couldn't produce this batch of strategic supplies. As one of the major powers, the Vienna government had no shortage of such resources. The crucial issue was the inability to ensure timely delivery of the supplies to the forces in need.

The first major challenge was transportation. Supporting armies of hundreds of thousands and addressing post-war refugee relief required the transportation of vast quantities of supplies.

Since its establishment, the new cabinet had been working towards this goal. After suppressing the Vienna rebellion, Austria transitioned into a wartime economy, with all government departments devoted to the war effort.

"We can't wait any longer. The Hungarians have rejected our goodwill, and now all eyes are on us. Military action can be postponed, but the political offensive cannot be delayed. Do you have any suggestions?" Franz spoke sternly.

Being seasoned politicians, everyone understood the concept of a chain reaction. If the Vienna government turned a blind eye to Hungary's declaration of independence, wouldn't other ambitious individuals rush to follow suit?

No, wait. It seemed that at this point, the ambitions of others in different regions had already crumbled. If it weren't for Franz's deliberate indulgence, the Hungarians wouldn't have achieved independence so smoothly.

In history, Hungarian independence was established under the circumstances of the complete collapse of Austrian-ruled Italy, the occupation of Vienna by revolutionary factions, and the outbreak of internal strife in Austria, leaving them too preoccupied to deal with Hungary.

At that time, everyone believed that Austria was in dire straits, so they made up their minds and joined the revolution.

Even in their rebellion, they didn't forget to report to the emperor, explaining the reasons behind their uprising and leaving themselves an escape route.

Currently, the conflict in the Italian theater continues, the rebellions in Austrian territories have been suppressed, and the Vienna government still holds significant power.

Capitalists and nobles are not desperados; they all have families and businesses. Under normal circumstances, they wouldn't willingly jump into a situation that could lead to their demise. However, the Hungarian revolution still succeeded.

On the surface, it may seem that the rise of Hungarian nationalism was successful due to the efforts of Kossuth and others.

In reality, intelligent people know that this is highly unusual. The reaction of the Vienna government was too slow. If they had deployed their troops earlier to suppress the rebellion, the Hungarian Republic would never have had the opportunity to establish itself.

Austria had a standing army of 350,000 soldiers, and the Vienna government mobilized an additional 200,000 reserves and expanded the city defense forces by 30,000. Only 100,000 soldiers were deployed to the Italian front.

Austria had deployed 40,000 troops in Galicia, 50,000 in Bohemia, and 20,000 in Slovenia.

Within the borders of the Kingdom of Hungary, there were still 120,000 Austrian troops scattered across Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, Transylvania, and other regions.

Even though a portion of the army had been influenced by Hungarian nationalism, the vast majority of people remained loyal to the emperor. If the rebellion had been suppressed immediately, the situation would be completely different now.

"Your Highness, I believe it is crucial to declare the Hungarian government illegal without delay and convert Croatia, Transylvania, and Slovakia into direct imperial provinces," said the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Metternich, with a determined tone.

Even a plasterer can be a killer. Splitting up the Kingdom of Hungary was something he had always wanted to do but never dared. Now, the opportunity has presented itself.

The audacity of the Hungarian people to rebel left no room for debate. It was necessary to dismantle the kingdom! Missing this rare opportunity would make it extremely difficult to come by again.

The Austro-Hungarian Empire was a multi-ethnic state, and the Kingdom of Hungary was no exception. The desire for Hungarian independence did not imply that the Croats, Romanians, or Slovaks wanted to follow suit.

"Mr. Metternich's words were indeed correct. However, as we proceed with the dismantling of the Kingdom of Hungary, we can now announce the 'Equal Nationality Act,' which we are currently drafting, to the public ahead of schedule."

"The Hungarians have been promoting nationalism, haven't they? We can utilize that by categorizing the serfs and commoners in the Hungarian region as part of the Austrian ethnicity, effectively uprooting their aspirations," proposed Karl, the Minister of Finance.

Franz's eyes brightened as he contemplated the Minister of Finance's suggestion. It was undoubtedly an artificial creation of a new ethnicity, a means to separate the Hungarian nobility from the commoners.

A glimpse into history books reveals that the concept of ethnicity is a human-made division based on cultural, linguistic, historical, geographical, and economic factors.

If we were to discuss bloodline, it would be a fallacy. In the course of human history, almost all ethnic groups have been mixed due to the changes and transitions over time. The distinction becomes indistinct and tangled.

Certainly, the nobility would never admit that their bloodline is the same as that of the commoners, just like the current "Austrian ethnicity" refuses to acknowledge the serfs as their own.

Due to the lack of cultural awareness during this era, most serfs in Southern Europe did not possess a distinct ethnicity, or rather, no one had informed them of their belonging to a particular ethnicity.

To Franz, this presented an opportunity, a chance to unify Austria as a whole.

"Mr. Karl, I fail to see the positive significance of such an endeavor. Austria already consists of numerous ethnicities, and adding one more will only complicate our rule further!" Archduke Louis frowned and voiced his concerns.

He had discerned the underlying implications of Karl's words—creating an Austrian ethnicity would be artificial. The true objective was to merge all of Austria's ethnicities together.

However, that was not what Archduke Louis desired. If all of Austria's ethnic groups were amalgamated, it would inevitably extend to the Germanic people as well. This would result in a division between Austria and Germany, a calamity for staunch advocates of Greater Germanism.

Chapter 63: Shift of Strategic Focus

Franz hesitated to make a hasty declaration. His aim was to unite all the ethnic groups in Austria, but accomplishing such a feat was not as straightforward as it seemed. Except for the commoners in the lower class who had little awareness of the concept of nationalism, the vast majority of people would likely struggle to accept it wholeheartedly.

If genuine approval from all individuals could not be attained and they merely established a superficial Austrian ethnicity, the final outcome would potentially be extremely awkward.

The roots of nationalism can be traced back to 18th-century Europe, where the bourgeoisie initiated a movement to challenge religious authority and feudalism.

It was through the impetus of nationalism that the victories of the bourgeois class revolution from 1789 to 1871 and the subsequent establishment of the nation-state system were achieved.

In the conservative realm of Southeastern Europe, the emergence of nationalism owes much to the ideological influence exerted by major powers.

Take, for instance, Hungarian nationalism, which found its roots in the ideas propagated by the French. It is only now taking its initial steps, with the true formation of the future Hungarian nation awaiting the assimilation of the common people.

During the mid-19th century, the Russian imperial government, driven by its ambitions for aggressive warfare, sparked the flames of "Pan-Slavism." This fervor of nationalism spread throughout the Balkan region, eventually becoming the pivotal trigger for the outbreak of the world war.

"Mr. Karl, if we were to establish an Austrian ethnicity, what would happen to the existing ethnic groups? Should we withdraw from the German-speaking region and establish a separate Austrian empire?" Prime Minister Felix inquired, his brows furrowed with concern.

A heavy silence descended upon the room as his question hung in the air, dampening the atmosphere.

"Back in 1806, when the Holy Roman Empire collapsed, Austria had already asserted its independence from the German-speaking region. Can we now attempt to revive

the Holy Roman Empire?" Karl countered, his response echoing with a touch of skepticism.

"Unifying the German-speaking region is an unattainable goal. Austria can maintain its independence separate from the German-speaking region, but we must not relinquish our German heritage. It is a matter of principle," Metternich expressed with seasoned wisdom.

"Attempting to substitute one ethnicity for the diverse ethnic groups present within Austria is evidently impractical. Even we ourselves would not endorse such an approach. However, it is feasible to de-emphasize the concept of ethnicity and instead emphasize Austria as a nation," he added, his words carrying a sense of thoughtful deliberation.

Franz's brow furrowed, confirming that indeed everyone present held opposing views. It was an era where the perils of a multiethnic nation had not yet been fully realized. For an extended period, governments across various countries had employed ethnic tensions as a cover-up for underlying class conflicts.

Now, at this critical juncture, Franz found himself compelled to speak up. The burden on Finance Minister Karl was becoming overwhelming, and if Franz didn't offer his support soon, the very essence of Austrian national identity risked dissipating into thin air.

"We can approach this issue from separate angles. All the ethnic groups in Austria collectively form the Austrian Empire, and the Austrian nation can encompass all Austrians. Constructing a widely accepted national identity that gradually replaces the current multitude of ethnic groups within Austria would significantly reduce internal ethnic tensions. At the very least, it would help prevent events like the recent Hungarian rebellion."

"Your Highness, even without nationalism, ambitious individuals can still find other banners to rally behind. They will never be short of excuses. In doing so, we would forfeit our leadership in the German-speaking region. Is it truly worth it?" Archduke Louis asked with a hint of dilemma.

His words were already quite courteous, for if he were to express it differently, he might have used harsh terms like "fool," "coward," or "traitor."

The core foundation of Austria rests upon the Germanic people, and this situation is unlikely to change until ethnic integration is accomplished. If the abandonment of the Germanic identity were to occur, it would signify forsaking the very basis of their governance.

"No, Archduke Louis! Who said we are going to abandon our leadership in the German-speaking region?" Franz questioned in response.

Without waiting for a response, Franz continued, "No, Archduke Louis! Let me clarify: the German-speaking region, despite its fragmented state, holds a vital strategic position at the core of

Europe. Whoever controls this region effectively wields power over the entire continent. However, it is regrettable that we currently lack the strength to unite the German-speaking region, and the other European nations are unwilling to accept such unification.”

Within this context, the leadership of Austria, as a Germanic confederation, holds more of a symbolic significance. Internally, they are confronted with the challenges posed by the Prussians, while simultaneously encountering external pressures from other nations.

And their gains are merely superficial, only in appearance. In reality, has Austria truly derived any benefits from its affiliation with the Germanic region?

From an investment perspective, the resources invested by Austria in the Germanic region over the years have consistently yielded net losses, while the Prussians, on the other hand, have enjoyed significant benefits.

Given this situation, why don't they consider temporarily abandoning investment in the Germanic region and redirecting their focus to other areas with higher investment returns?

“As for the Germanic region, it is enough for us to preserve Austria's influence. Maintaining the balance in the Germanic region is not solely our affair; it is a task that should be shared with our allies to keep everyone occupied.”

Indeed, Franz was considering shifting Austria's strategic focus. If they continued to stubbornly confront the Germanic region, they would face the constraints of Prussia internally and the watchful eyes of the French externally. What good would that do?

Despite having many subordinate allies in the Germanic region, Austria shouldn't assume that they would have unwavering support if Franz were to openly express ambitions for German unification. Such a revelation would lead to a dramatic reversal of the situation, with the world turning against them.

One can refer to his ancestor, Emperor Maximilian, as a specific example. When he revealed his ambitions to unify the Germanic region, it ultimately ended in tragedy with the combined efforts of the French and domestic princes.

The Habsburg family during that era was truly formidable, with an empire on which the sun never set. They achieved remarkable feats, such as the incorporation of the flourishing Spanish Kingdom, as well as the occupation of large parts of Italy. Additionally, their domains extended to the territories of the Netherlands and Belgium.

As for whether Austria would be expelled from the German-speaking region due to promoting Austrian nationalism, Franz was not worried in the slightest.

The German princes were no fools. With Austria and Prussia mutually keeping each other in check, their respective fortunes would prosper. If one power were to dominate, it would spell both their doom.

After years of mergers and reorganizations, everyone understood the importance of maintaining a delicate balance. The northern German states gravitated towards Prussia, while the southern German principalities leaned towards Austria.

The implicit meaning behind Franz's words was clear to everyone. It meant abandoning the long-standing policy of continental balance. After all, the "Metternich System" had already collapsed. If they were to rebuild, the price Austria would have to pay would be immense.

Your Highness, are you planning to shift Austria's strategic focus to the Italian region?" Metternich asked with concern.

"No, Austria's strategic focus will remain within our own borders for now. As for the Italian region, we'll deal with the Kingdom of Sardinia as a warning to others," Franz replied, shaking his head.

After hearing Franz's response, everyone breathed a sigh of relief. It was widely acknowledged that the Italian region was not an easy territory to meddle with, considering the intricate involvement of both England and France.

Just focusing on targeting the Kingdom of Sardinia would solve the problem. After all, it was Sardinia's own doing, and it would be unreasonable to expect Austria not to retaliate, right?

Chapter 64: Stuck on a Tiger's Back

Milan City.

Marshal Badoer has been feeling increasingly frustrated as of late. Ever since the announcement of the annexation of Lombardy by the Kingdom of Sardinia on April 7th, a wave of democratic activists has emerged, taking to the streets in protest.

There's no denying that when it comes to national affairs, Marshal Badoer has no authority to speak, let alone these insignificant commoners. Naturally, troops were dispatched to disperse them.

Fortunately, the Austrian military had already quelled a wave of resistance, taking care of the most formidable adversaries. Those associated with the interim government were either persuaded through bribery or subjected to various forms of confinement. As for the rest of the dissenting voices, they merely excelled in the art of empty rhetoric.

"Your Excellency, another group of people has gathered outside, petitioning for your intervention to reclaim Venice!" the aide whispered.

This wasn't the first time such petitions had surfaced. There were demands for independence, calls for autonomy, pleas for increased food provisions, and the list went on...

Regardless of whether Badoer had the final say or not, the people of Lombardy seemed to have designated him as their go-to person. Whenever there was an issue, they sought an audience with the Marshal.

Being a hero wasn't an easy task. In order to maintain his illustrious image, Badoer had to put on an appearance of humility and willingness to listen to advice.

Apart from those demanding independence, whom he had sent troops to disperse, he would receive representatives from other petitioning groups. During these meetings, he would explain his challenges while also trying to address their concerns.

For instance, the most frequently used justification he relied on was that soldiers should not interfere in politics.

Repeating this statement over time, Badoer himself had started to believe in its truthfulness. Lately, he refrained from getting involved in the affairs of Lombardy unless approached by local government officials seeking his guidance.

"Allow them to send representatives in," Badoer said, his brow furrowing.

There was no way to avoid it this time. Sending troops to the Venetian region was not just a political issue but also a military matter. With the command of the Sardinian Kingdom's frontline forces under his control, Badoer was the right person to approach.

Soon, two young-looking individuals, resembling students, were brought in. Badoer's brow furrowed even deeper. Dealing with teenagers and their adolescent ideals was always a headache.

"Respected Marshal, I am Rim, and this is Thomson. It's a pleasure to meet you!"

As he observed the enthusiastic young men, Badoer replied politely, "I'm also pleased to meet you both. May I have a look at the petition first?"

"Oh, of course!" Rim replied promptly.

Taking the petition, Badoer swiftly scanned through its contents. It was a passionate letter, filled with fervent appeals, and it was accompanied by numerous signatures densely packed at the end. He couldn't help but feel deeply moved by it all.

"I have received the petition, and I will promptly deliver it to the King. However, I cannot disclose the timing of the attack on Venice as it is a military secret. We are currently preparing for the military offensive, taking into account the lessons learned from our past experiences when inadequate preparations resulted in hunger for all. This time, we are ensuring longer pre-war preparations to avoid being forced to halt the military operations due to food shortages again. The Austrian forces have a total strength of around five to six hundred thousand troops, and once the war with Venice begins, they will undoubtedly send reinforcements. Currently, my available forces are insufficient. Domestic reinforcements are on their way, and the newly recruited troops in Lombardy are still undergoing training. All of this requires time. However, rest assured that victory will ultimately be ours. Please trust that we will emerge triumphant."

Upon hearing Badoer's explanation, the two young men nodded continuously. They were both novices in military affairs, and in this era without the internet, they were not well-informed about the domestic situation in Austria.

Based on their normal thinking, Austria must be incredibly powerful. If Marshal Badoer, who could defeat Austria, was considered the foremost military commander of the time, then his words must be correct.

"Victory will surely be ours, Your Excellency. We all have faith in you. You are by no means the weakling they claim you to be. They are simply envious of your talent!" Thompson blurted out in a panic.

Badoer suddenly felt a rush of frustration. Could they please refrain from being so direct? Such straightforwardness would leave him friendless.

Attack Venice? Isn't that nonsense? Do they really think Austria is a pushover?

At present, Marshal Badoer commanded an army of 150,000 soldiers on paper, outnumbering the Austrians by nearly a third. Yet, beneath the impressive numbers lurked a concern. Among these 150,000 troops, a staggering 70,000 were hastily recruited from the local populace.

The Italians had long been regarded with suspicion by the Viennese government, leading the Austrian military to refrain from establishing a reserve force in the region. Consequently, the soldiers currently enlisted by Badoer were mostly individuals who had recently abandoned their farming tools or left their urban occupations behind.

Even at the lower echelons, there was a noticeable shortage of military officers. Unlike their German-speaking counterparts, the Italian region, particularly the heavily commercialized Lombardy, lacked a strong tradition of military expertise among the local nobility. Their once-renowned martial prowess had dwindled over time.

It could be said that this hastily reorganized force was primarily intended to fill the ranks. However, they were far from fully equipped, lacking even a sufficient number of rifles. Their main role was to handle logistical tasks and maintain some semblance of local security, although their capabilities in these areas were limited.

Sending them onto the battlefield would be akin to offering themselves as easy targets to the enemy. The true backbone of this war still rested with the Kingdom of Sardinia's army.

Admittedly, the notion of an 80,000-strong Sardinian army pitted against a 100,000-strong Austrian force seemed implausible. Perhaps this power imbalance was one of the reasons behind the decision to halt their offensive.

However, such details remained unbeknownst to the general public, who were simply fixated on the arithmetic of total military strength. They were unaware that the Austrian forces in the Italian region numbered only 100,000, and their ranks had been diminished by several thousand due to their involvement in quelling the revolution.

Amidst the collaboration of the Venetian populace, could the mighty force of 150,000 soldiers from the Kingdom of Sardinia not vanquish the mere 90,000-strong Austrian army?

Marshal Badoer, although burdened with responsibilities, still had some respite. The influential figures of Lombardy, who had recently pledged their allegiance to the Kingdom of Sardinia, dared not instigate unrest. Present before him were delegates of the learned kind, predominantly students, whom he could easily sway in his favor for the time being.

King Charles, on the other hand, was facing a different situation. The Kingdom of Sardinia was rife with various internal factions, and the war served as a convenient distraction to shift the domestic tensions. However, things had spiraled out of control, and now radical nationalists were constantly urging him to launch an offensive against Venice.

This was a mess of his own making. In an attempt to alleviate political pressure within his own realm, King Charles had extensively publicized the supposed victories of the Sardinian army in Lombardy, leading many to underestimate the strength of Austria.

Public opinion was a volatile force, prone to madness. King Charles-Albert had forgotten the age-old adage of "too much of a good thing." Or perhaps he knew it but was helpless against the overwhelming influence of public sentiment.

Currently, nationalism was soaring in the Italian region, with Sardinia being the hotbed of fervent nationalist sentiment. Stirred by the imagined triumph over the Austrian army, nationalism surged once again.

At this juncture, nationalism and patriotism had reached the point of recklessness. There were constant reminders that the Venetian region still languished under Austrian rule.

Ever since the annexation of Lombardy by the Kingdom of Sardinia, the entire population had been jubilant about the further unification of Italy. And now, the Austrian control over the Venetian region was becoming an unbearable thorn in their side.

The Kingdom of Sardinia found itself in a predicament with no easy way out.

Chapter 65: No More Money If They Don't Start Fighting Soon

Late at night.

In a small alley in the city of Turin, three middle-aged men gathered in a grocery store, engaging in a hushed conversation.

The eldest among them asked, "Amor, how are things going?"

"The plan is proceeding remarkably well. The patriotism among the people is running high. Even without our guidance, I believe they would have taken to the streets in protest on their own!" Amor replied with a smile.

"We must not be careless. The more critical the situation, the more cautious we need to be."

"Did you manage to avoid drawing attention from others?" the elder man asked with concern.

"Don't worry, Carmelo! My current identity is that of a patriotic small merchant from Venice. Everything I do now aligns perfectly with that identity. On the surface, it appears that as long as the Kingdom of Sardinia occupies Venice, I will receive generous rewards. In such a situation, it is necessary for me to show hostility towards Austria without raising any suspicions," Amor explained.

There is no shortage of capitalists who, driven by their own interests, advocate for the attack on Venice. Amor, at most, is just showing a slightly more proactive attitude, which is not a big deal in the grand scheme of things.

"Good, that's reassuring. As professionals in our line of work, the utmost importance lies in being cautious and completing our assigned tasks. We must never become greedy."

Cesilio, at what stage is your mission?" Inquired the middle-aged man known by the codename Camero.

"It hasn't been going smoothly. I'm just an insignificant figure, unnoticed by the major newspapers. They have no shortage of articles, and for now, my writings can only appear in the tabloids," Cesilio replied helplessly.

He was just a literary enthusiast, and his written articles could be considered good, but they hadn't reached the level of earth-shattering impact. In the culturally rich region of Italy, he lacked a distinct advantage.

Fortunately, the article he was about to publish was perfectly in line with the current situation, employing various means to disparage the Austrians and extol the bravery of the Sardinian army.

Recently, such articles have been appearing frequently, but Cesarino's articles were more explicit and their content more radical, perfectly catering to the tastes of the "chuunibyou" youth.

"Don't worry, we'll take it slow. The nationalism in the Kingdom of Sardinia has exceeded our expectations. Even if we didn't orchestrate it, public opinion would still push the government to send troops to Venice. We're just accelerating the timing."

"Now that the momentum has been generated, it doesn't matter whether we guided it or not. It's time to change our propaganda approach. Let's highlight the brutal rule of Austria. You can freely fabricate the content, as long as it tarnishes Austria to the extreme. If you can't come up with anything, dig up the dark history of the Sardinian Kingdom's nobility and capitalists, reframe it, and attribute it all to Austria." Camero nodded in agreement.

As Camero thought about it, he couldn't help but chuckle. He had certainly set a record himself. As a spy, he was actively tarnishing his own homeland. It was unlikely that anyone would believe it if the truth were to come out.

Even his two local associates, who were unaware that they were serving the Austrian government, believed that they were part of a secret intelligence organization from the United Kingdom, as Camero had always told them.

Now, by instigating the Kingdom of Sardinia to attack Venice, it was all in line with the strategic interests of the British Empire, aiming to establish a unified Italy.

Under the influence of money and spiritual encouragement, neither of them felt that their actions were wrong. They firmly believed that everything they did was in pursuit of Italy's unification.

Unfortunately, these were the orders given by their superiors. To prompt the Kingdom of Sardinia to swiftly attack Venice, they needed to stoke the flames of national sentiment and exert pressure on the Sardinian government.

There were many individuals involved in carrying out this mission, most of whom disguised themselves as members of British or French intelligence organizations. Some even boldly infiltrated radical groups without raising suspicion.

During this era, there were no identity registration systems or efficient communication methods available. It was easy to fabricate a false identity from the Italian region, as there was no way to verify it effectively.

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Moreover, with the surge of nationalism in the Kingdom of Sardinia, as long as one assumed the role of a patriot, their actions were considered politically correct. Even if their true identity was discovered, the Sardinian government would hesitate to apprehend them easily.

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With someone setting the tone, the nationalist fervor among the supporters of the Kingdom of Sardinia grew even stronger. Faced with the pressure of public opinion, King Charles-Albert could no longer hold on.

It should be noted that after the outbreak of the February Revolution in France, the revolutionary spirit in the Kingdom of Sardinia began to surge. Had it not been for his shrewd move to declare war on Austria and shift the focus of conflict, the question of whether he could retain his throne would remain uncertain.

In reality, Charles-Albert did not have any intention of defeating Austria. His initial plan was merely to engage in a limited conflict, gain some advantages to appease domestic demands, and call it a day.

Having already occupied Lombardy, he had exceeded expectations in fulfilling his mission. Continuing the offensive into the Venetian region posed too great a risk, and the chances of military success were not high.

"Where are our allied forces, Azelio?" Charles-Albert inquired with concern.

Prime Minister Azelio's expression darkened as he realized that all the benefits had been devoured by the Kingdom of Sardinia alone. Could he still rely on other nations for assistance?

Moreover, the Italian states are heavily influenced by Austria, and now everyone is compelled by public opinion to participate in this war, which they were originally unwilling to do. With no motivating incentives, it's only natural that there will be a lot of dragging their feet and procrastination.

"The 5,000 volunteers from Tuscany are already on their way and are expected to arrive in Lombardy by the end of the month. The Papal States' 7,000 troops have reached the Adda River. As for the 40,000 reinforcements from Naples, it is anticipated that only a portion of them will be able to arrive by May." Azelio replied with a troubled expression.

"Urge them to hasten their pace, and continue to demand an increase in the number of reinforcements from other countries. In May, we must launch an attack on the Venetian region!" King Charles pondered for a moment before speaking with determination.

This was his last line of defense. The pressure of public opinion was becoming unbearable. At this moment, King Charles regretted his early announcement of the annexation of Lombardy. If he had kept the division of Lombardy as a bargaining chip, he could have used it to keep Tuscany in check.

However, that thought quickly vanished. In an era where public sentiment demanded unification, engaging in territorial division would be politically fatal.

"Your Majesty, now is not the time for a decisive battle with the Austrians. We should at least wait for the escalation of the Austrian civil war and the arrival of the 40,000 troops from Naples before launching an attack. That would be the optimal time to strike!" advised Minister of War, Li Qi.

The Austrian government has not yet begun suppressing the Hungarian rebellion. At this moment, launching an attack on Venice would only further provoke the Viennese government. It is possible that the main Austrian forces might then redirect their aggression towards the Italian region.

Charles-Albert reluctantly explained, "Indeed, from a military perspective, that is the case. However, politically, we can no longer afford to delay. Additionally, there are financial concerns as the expenses of occupying Lombardy have far exceeded our expectations."

Author's Note: Do not make fun of the name. The Minister of the Army of the Kingdom of Sardinia is indeed translated as Li Qi, and it is not a name I made up.

Chapter 66: Easy to Get on the Ship, Hard to Get Off

The lack of financial resources presented an awkward dilemma. Situated in the northwestern part of Italy, the Kingdom of Sardinia boasted a reputation as one of the most prosperous realms in the country.

However, this reality failed to alter the inherent nature of Sardinia as an impoverished kingdom. With a territory spanning a mere 70,000 square kilometers and a population of only five to six million, the region lacked substantial resources, while its fledgling industrial sector was just beginning to take shape.

Nevertheless, their spirits remained undeterred despite their financial hardships. They had been persistently striving for the unification of Italy, and it was precisely due to their ambitious aspirations that the Kingdom of Sardinia found itself even poorer.

To achieve the goal of Italian unification, they relied heavily on their military might. Consequently, the Kingdom of Sardinia bore the burden of significantly higher military expenditures, leading to a perpetual state of fiscal deficit.

It was not until 1852 that the legendary Prime Minister, Gavardo, made his appearance. He initiated reforms in the fiscal and taxation systems, leading to an increase in national revenue. Additionally, he focused on bolstering infrastructure by investing in railways, ports, and promoting industrial and commercial development. These series of measures enabled the Kingdom of Sardinia to overcome its financial crisis.

Prime Minister Azelio, with a worried expression, concurred, "Your Majesty speaks the truth. We are indeed in dire financial straits. This war has caught us off guard, and our preparations were insufficient.

"The occupation of Lombardy has indeed depleted a substantial amount of our financial and material resources, far surpassing our initial budget. Up to this point, we have already spent over 28 million lire.

(1 lire = 4.5 grams of silver)

"Due to the war, we cannot rely on tax revenues from Lombardy this year, and we will continue to experience net expenditures in the second half of the year.

"Furthermore, the French have abruptly terminated their previously promised weapon assistance. Now we are forced to allocate funds from our limited war budget to purchase weapons and equipment, which will require an additional expenditure of at least 17 million lire.

“When we combine these two factors, our war funds have already accounted for nearly 45% of our budget. We are also maintaining an army of nearly 200,000 soldiers, which costs us at least 1 million lire per day. If we continue like this, at most, we will be bankrupt in two months.”

(TN: To those who are confused with the quotation marks, it has to do with the rule of ‘Multiple paragraphs of dialogue’ which is the case here. In previous chapters I didn’t know this so I just combined them into one big paragraph but when I searched about it, this rule actually existed so there you go. <https://style.mla.org/speech-paragraphs-quotation-marks>)

Upon hearing the Prime Minister's explanation, Minister of the Army Li Qi's initial reaction was disbelief. He immediately questioned, "Your Excellency, how could we have spent so much money? According to our plans, these one hundred million lire should have been enough to sustain our operations for half a year!"

"Li Qi, are you accusing me of embezzlement?" Prime Minister Azelio responded angrily.

Embezzlement? How many officials in this era are not involved in corruption? But it's better not to expose this well-known secret, or else everyone's reputation will be tarnished.

Li Qi quickly explained, "No, Your Excellency, I didn't mean to question your intentions. I'm just curious about these expenses!"

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Upon hearing Li Qi's response, Azelio's expression eased slightly, and he calmly explained, "Let me give you a rough estimate to show you where all this money has been spent.

“In Lombardy, bribing the members of the Liberal Party cost us 8.65 million lire, resolving the food shortage issue cost 10.5365 million lire, providing relief for war refugees cost 3.657 million lire, establishing administrative institutions cost 3.8623 million lire...

“Due to the constant revolutions in Europe, the prices of weapons and equipment in the international market have increased by 37%. Your army department also had representatives participating in the process, so there's no need to ask me, right?

“According to our initial plans, we didn't anticipate recruiting an additional 70,000 troops in Lombardy, but with the increased numbers, naturally, the expenses have gone up!"

Upon hearing the Prime Minister's explanation, Li Qi had nothing more to say. There was no choice. After all, their army lacked confidence in fighting against the Austrians. In order to increase their chances of success, they resorted to the simplest solution - expanding the army.

Before the Industrial Revolution, agrarian societies had limited mobilization capabilities and were unable to achieve widespread participation in warfare.

Indeed, the Kingdom of Sardinia mobilized over a hundred thousand people internally, reaching the limits of their mobilization capacity. At this point, the people of Lombardy showed great enthusiasm for joining the military, and it wouldn't make sense to turn away capable soldiers.

However, at this stage, Li Qi couldn't afford to consider such factors. As the Minister of the Army, he had to prioritize the interests of the military and minimize the risk of failure as much as possible.

"Your Excellency, the British are supportive of this war. Can't we request a loan from the British?"

Prime Minister Azelio frowned and said with a bitter smile, "Obtaining a loan from the British is not easy. We paid a significant price for a loan of 3 million pounds. Now that the war has already begun, if we were to request another loan from them, the conditions would likely be more complicated than before."

(1 pound \approx 25 lire)

There's no way around it. This is almost a foolproof tactic used by the British. They entice people by offering a loan upfront, getting them on board. But as the saying goes, "Easy to get on the ship, hard to get off." Once you're in the midst of it, you have no choice but to let them take the lead.

"Well, what about the French? Weren't they the ones who wanted us to drive the Austrians out of Italy? Don't they have any intentions to help us now?" Li Qi persisted, unwilling to give up.

Charles-Albert sneered and said, "Hmph! The French are a bunch of untrustworthy bastards. They've even reneged on their promise of providing us with weapons and equipment. Do you really think we can still rely on them?"

The others didn't pursue the topic further. Initially, there was indeed assistance from the French, but once they learned of Sardinia's annexation of Lombardy, the whole matter fell through.

According to the French demands, the independence of Lombardy was a prerequisite, which was something they couldn't accept.

Independence may be easy, but reunification is difficult. If the current opportunity is missed, will the Kingdom of Sardinia still have a chance to annex Lombardy?

After calculating for a moment, Li Qi said, "Your Majesty, based on the current situation, Venice is being guarded by the Austrian renowned general, Radetzky, who is a cunning old fox. After suffering a defeat, he will not fall for the same trick again. If the Austrian army simply stays within the city walls and avoids a decisive battle with us, it will be impossible for us to end the war within two months. Even if we capture Venice, the war will continue if the Austrians are unwilling to negotiate a peace. Therefore, we still need to find a solution for the war funds."

He is laying out the cards and indicating that in order to end the war, it is not solely their decision. Unless the forces of the Kingdom of Sardinia can march all the way to Vienna and force the Austrian government to surrender, it is simply impossible.

This is clearly an unattainable goal. Everyone involved is a rational politician, and even if they have confidence in the military of the Kingdom of Sardinia, nobody believes that reaching such an extent is feasible.

Given this situation, if they want to win the war, the government must find a way to raise military funds. Otherwise, if they lose the war due to lack of funds, it will not be the responsibility of the Ministry of War.

Prime Minister Azelio sighed and said, "Well, Minister Li Qi, we will find a way to solve the military funding issue, but you must ensure victory. We cannot afford to lose this war."

"Prime Minister, rest assured. Marshal Badoer is leading this war, and he has already defeated the Austrians once. Dealing with a group of defeated enemies is not a problem!" Li Qi quickly reassured.

After a moment of silence, Charles-Albert suddenly asked, "Prime Minister, how do you plan to address the funding gap?"

Chapter 67: Power Play

Prime Minister Azeglio's heart sank as he realized his mistake. He had acted too hastily without first seeking the King's opinion, which had caused the discontent of Charles Albert to arise. Politics can be quite delicate, as demonstrated in the case of the Kingdom of Sardinia, which operates under a constitutional monarchy. In this particular situation, when the Prime Minister made decisions without first consulting the King, it risked evoking the dissatisfaction of Charles Albert. Had he not reacted, it wouldn't have taken long for him to be sidelined and his authority undermined. Clearly, Charles Albert was no political novice like Louis XVI. He possessed a political acumen of at least 90 points and wasted no time in exerting his influence and challenging the Prime Minister's decisions. After carefully considering everything, Prime Minister Azeglio spoke with genuine trepidation, "Your Majesty, at present, we have only two options to address the financial issue. We can either impose a war tax or seek a loan from international financial institutions." Charles Albert glared at him fiercely, silently cursing in his heart, "Sly old fox." The words of Prime Minister Azeglio were only halfway spoken, "impose a war tax" — but towards whom would it be imposed? There must be a specific target or scope, right? The Kingdom of Sardinia has long imposed taxes on its old territories. Is the current tax imposition specifically targeting Lombardy, or is it being implemented nationwide? This is indeed a task that will offend people. The common people are already impoverished, and simply squeezing them will yield meager results. Therefore, the only option left is to reach out to the capitalists and nobles for assistance. Despite appearances of patriotism and their enthusiastic donations, one should not overlook the fact that the nobles and capitalists of the Kingdom of Sardinia may not be as willing to part with their money when the time comes. The reality might prove to be quite different than expected. The scandal of fraudulent donations exists even in this highly advanced era of the 21st century, let alone in the current circumstances. Putting on a show is something anyone can do. They are capable of doing much more, even donating a mere ten thousand lire while making profits of twenty or thirty thousand lire in return. Such cases are all too common. Fraudulent donations still exist in the era of highly developed internet in the 21st century. Is it any different in this era? Anyone can put on a show, right? They can do even more than that. It's common to see people donate 10,000 lire and then make two or three times that amount in return. Borrowing from international financial institutions? Who would be willing to lend money to the Kingdom of Sardinia now? Apart from the British, which other countries would be willing to lend them money? International loans are always high risk, high return, and without government involvement, who can guarantee repayment? If the Kingdom of Sardinia is defeated, who will they turn to for the money? Borrowing from the British would

undoubtedly come with unfavorable terms and conditions, including signing numerous treaties that may compromise national interests. This kind of deal, which leaves a lasting stain, is something no one wants to engage in. "Oh, since the Prime Minister already has a clear understanding, let's implement it as soon as possible!" Without hesitation, Charles Albert decisively confirmed the decision. Constitutional monarchy is essentially about the king delegating power, isn't it? And now he has done just that. In short, this matter no longer had anything to do with the king; it was now entirely the responsibility of the cabinet. Prime Minister Azeglio does show some awareness in taking the blame for their leader. However, he knows he shouldn't shoulder the blame alone. Azeglio is not foolish, so naturally, he would try to drag others down with him. "Yes, Your Majesty! I will return and convene a government meeting to discuss this matter and implement it as soon as possible!" Satisfied, Charles Albert nodded. The prime minister took the responsibility upon himself, whether it would ultimately be shouldered by him alone or by the officials below was no longer important. As long as it didn't make things difficult for him as the king, that would make him a loyal subject. "Indeed, the issue of military expenditure is the responsibility of the cabinet, but we cannot delay the military operation to attack Venice. The Ministry of War must expedite war preparations!" Charles Albert added. "Yes, Your Majesty!" replied Minister of War Li Qi promptly.

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The king understood the intention behind his words. Regardless of the challenges they may face, the campaign to attack Venice must be initiated. This was the politically correct course of action. As for how to proceed with the attack, that remained uncertain. They could either concentrate their forces for a full-scale assault or send small units for probing attacks. The important thing was to showcase the determination of the Kingdom of Sardinia to the outside world. Li Qi was content. He had successfully secured additional time for the frontline troops. A preliminary probing attack, lasting around ten to fifteen days, wouldn't pose a problem, would it? Considering the overall preparation time, they could effectively postpone the decisive battle to June. By then, the training of new recruits would be mostly completed as well. ... As the Kingdom of Sardinia made preparations, Austria was not idle either. After Marshal Radetzky retreated to the Venetian region, the first thing they did was suppress the local rebellion. After the execution of a group of key figures, the Vienna government acquired over 70,000 individuals as free laborers. For the sake of the Venetian region, these individuals were promptly taken in by the Austrian government. Due to the war, the Vienna government didn't have the time to carefully assess these individuals, so they were all hastily incorporated into the road construction corps, working diligently to ensure the logistical supply for the Austrian army. After all the turmoil, the situation in the Venetian region has finally stabilized. However, the cost of this stability is that the economy has almost come to a standstill. However, considering that this place is about to turn into a battlefield, such concerns become inconsequential. During times of war, can we really expect economic development? "Your Excellency, Sir Rothschild requests an audience!" the aide whispered. Marshal Radetzky smiled slightly and said, "Let him come in!" ... Rothschild extended a noble salute to Radetzky and spoke respectfully, "Respected Marshal, Rothschild is honored to have the opportunity to meet you!" According to convention, it would be customary to address him by his title of nobility. However, compared to his noble title, Radetzky prefers to be addressed as Marshal. Rothschild naturally chose to address him according to his preference. "I am honored as well. Mr. Rothschild, may I ask what brings you here to see me today?" Marshal Radetzky asked with a smile. Rothschild replied, "Your Excellency, today I am here representing the Venice Business Association. As you are aware, this uprising has implicated..." Before he could finish his words, Marshal Radetzky forcefully interrupted, "Mr.

Rothschild, the insurgents will not receive any forgiveness. If you are here to plead on their behalf, there's no need to continue. As for the captured leaders, most of them have already been executed. For those who haven't been captured, if they surrender themselves, they may be treated leniently." Feeling the imposing aura of Radetzky, Rothschild's forehead broke into a cold sweat. It was only April, and the weather in Venice wasn't particularly hot. He couldn't help but feel relieved that he had always been against violent revolution and had not participated in this rebellion. Otherwise, his head would have been added to the pillars in Venice by now. The Vienna government had been ruthless towards the rebels this time. Even those with powerful connections were of no use. Once they were caught, they were immediately executed without any time for them to maneuver. Rothschild stammered, "No, Marshal. Why would I plead for these rebels?" Marshal Radetzky laughed and said, "Oh, don't be nervous, take your time. As long as you have no association with the rebels, everything is fine. Your father, old Rothschild, is still a friend of mine. Is there anything I can assist you with?" After this initial surprise, Rothschild started to regret getting involved in this muddy situation. As a nobleman and a part-time capitalist, his primary identity remained that of a nobleman.

Chapter 68: Zero Risk, High Returns

At this point, he cannot be allowed to back down. With a determined expression, Rothschild spoke, "Your Excellency, there are many innocent civilians who were involuntarily dragged into the rebellion and have now been arrested. They all have families to support. I wonder when they can be released?" Marshal Radetzky chuckled and said, "That's indeed a concern, but rest assured. We are in the process of screening and evaluating the situation, but it will take some time. As for the welfare of their families, we have a solution. The Venetian municipal government has already started distributing rations, and everyone will receive a portion of food. They won't go hungry!" To determine who are the real rebels and who were coerced into joining them is not something that can be accomplished overnight. The enemy is about to launch an attack, and at such a critical moment, stability takes precedence. Marshal Radetzky is not willing to take risks, and Emperor Franz is even less inclined to take chances. That's why the Vienna government chose to evacuate the people immediately. Anyway, most of these people are workers, so even if there are mistakes, it doesn't matter much. The government can simply compensate them with a salary and then arrange for their placement in state-owned factories, which should be enough to appease their grievances. With a little guidance, their hatred can be redirected towards the rebel factions. After all, if it weren't for these groups dragging them into this mess, none of this would have happened in the first place. The government is indeed righteous. Even if there are mistakes, they still provide salaries, don't they? Plus, they also offer employment opportunities. Compared to being under the mercy of capitalists, working in state-owned factories is much better. Without a point of comparison, there's no harm done. People are practical, especially ordinary folks who worry about their basic needs every day. They will naturally choose to align themselves with whoever provides a better life. This has been confirmed. The serfs who initially ignited the revolution in the Venetian region have now become loyal supporters of the Habsburg family, haven't they? Is it because of the serfs' defection that Marshal Radetzky was able to easily suppress the Venetian rebels? As long as they assist the government army in quelling the rebellion, they can be rewarded with land distribution. Who would refuse such an offer? The revolutionary party boasts about lofty ideals, but when it comes to concrete measures, they have never truly considered the interests of the lower-class people. Whether it's independence or republicanism, it doesn't help fill their bellies. Under Franz's strong insistence, the Austrian army rigorously carried out the policy of suppressing the rebel party and distributing

land. In addition to land distribution, the government also thoughtfully allocated the farming tools and food confiscated from the rebellious nobility. The rural areas in the Venetian region have now stabilized, and the remaining nobility who managed to escape are also being cautious, fearing any association with the rebel party. With the forced emancipation of the serfs, these newly liberated farmers are closely watching the nobility, hoping that they too would join the rebellion, leading to the redistribution of their lands. That's also why the noble class, after witnessing the ruthless actions of the Austrian government, refrains from emerging. They have been thoroughly frightened. Unfortunately, the Austrian-controlled Italian region has always been unstable and has not been well-regarded within the Austrian Empire. The political situation there is heavily suppressed, and they have little say in matters of governance. Under the leadership of Marshal Radetzky, there was a ruthless crackdown in Venice, and blood nearly flowed like a river. Surprisingly, the Vienna government showed no reaction, considering it a lesson taught to the Venetians with bayonets, making it clear who is in charge. In just over a month, nearly seven layers of nobility in the Venetian region were stripped of their titles, and nearly eight layers of capitalists had their homes raided. Many of these individuals either fled or met their demise. For the remaining capitalists, this is an extremely rare opportunity. With so many competitors out of the picture, it would be foolish not to seize the market. Regardless of who rules over Venice, they will always require the capitalists to pay taxes. As long as they don't rebel, their position is generally secure. The Austrian government's ruthlessness in this operation was a result of certain individuals taking things too far. They believed they were powerful enough, thinking that providing funds and weapons to the revolutionary party was no big deal.

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Well, actually, these things can still be done as long as one is careful and cautious enough not to get caught by the Austrian government. It's just that these individuals were too arrogant. The blame lies with them for being too audacious. What's the point of emulating the French and getting involved in social movements as if they're afraid of not being connected to the revolutionary party? Now that the Austrian government is cracking down, they have gathered enough evidence to prosecute them, with a whole stack of incriminating documents. Those who survive are the smart ones. Seeing the connection between the Rothschild family and the Radetzky family, the capitalists, eager to resume production and seize the market, are now nominating Rothschild as their representative to negotiate. Upon hearing Marshal Radetzky's words, Rothschild realized that trouble was brewing. However, he still persevered and continued to strive for a solution. "Your Excellency, since the outbreak of the rebellion in the Venetian region, the local economy has suffered severe damage. If we cannot resume production quickly, it is feared that this year's tax revenue will be affected!" Marshal Radetzky looked at him and smiled, then calmly said, "Rothschild, isn't that obvious? Due to the effects of the war, the local economy has suffered a devastating blow. I have already reported to the Vienna government, requesting the exemption of this year's taxes. Do you think that by releasing the people, you can guarantee that tax revenue in the Venice region will not decrease this year?" Rothschild hesitated in his response and said, "No!" He didn't dare to make that promise. If the tax revenue in the Venetian region this year reaches one-fifth of previous years, it would be considered a blessing from God. What about the remaining deficit? We can't expect them to pay to make up for it, right? "They are not like the Thirteen Factories¹, engaging in the business of tax farming!" Marshal Radetzky persuaded, "I understand your purpose. We are about to engage in war with the Kingdom of Sardinia, and in order to ensure stability in the Venetian region, these individuals cannot return until the investigation is completed. "I understand your desire to expand production

and seize the market. There's no need to rush. Once we defeat the Kingdom of Sardinia, your gains will be even greater. "Since the capitalists in the Lombardy region have sided with the Kingdom of Sardinia, as the defeated party, they no longer have the right to exist. I believe you can fill the void they have left behind!" This is a clear implication that as long as Austria wins the war, the main commercial circles in Northern Italy will be dominated by Venice. Rothschild, struggling to control his emotions, said, "Your Excellency, what price do we need to pay for this?" "It's simple. All you have to do is create a provocation in the Kingdom of Sardinia, prompting them to launch an attack on Venice ahead of time," calmly replied Marshal Radetzky. Rothschild's joy was evident as this presented a low-cost, high-return, and risk-free investment opportunity. Even if they failed, they would only have to spend a small amount on propaganda expenses. But if they succeeded, everyone's industries could double or even multiply several times over.

Chapter 69: Pragmatist

In this era, the main industries in the Italian region were concentrated in the northern region. Due to factors such as politics and geographical location, they were divided into the 'Turin-Genoa' industrial zone and the 'Milan-Venice' industrial zone.

Undoubtedly, the industrial revolution in the Italian region has just begun. It is still dominated by traditional handicrafts, but many mechanical tools have been added.

The capitalists in the Venice region and the capitalists in the Kingdom of Sardinia have both cooperation and competition. Many capitalists have industries in both places, and the relationship between the two sides is not so easy to sort out.

After the conditions proposed by Marshal Radetzky spread in the Venice region, the capitalists responded one after another. As for who he supported in his heart, it is difficult to say.

It doesn't matter. In any case, this is a conspiracy. Even the capitalists who are most hostile to Austria need the Kingdom of Sardinia to send troops to Venice as soon as possible.

Every day the war continues, it will bring them immeasurable losses, including the local capitalists in the Kingdom of Sardinia. National mobilization also hinders their ability to make money.

Turin has become more lively. The capitalists in the Venice region have joined the public opinion offensive, as if it has become the last straw that overwhelms the camel. Seeing the dark crowd of demonstrators, Charles Albert had to order the army to launch an attack in advance.

For this reason, he also sent out the last 40,000 troops that could be mobilized domestically. The army of the Kingdom of Sardinia alone reached 190,000. If the strength of its allies is added, their total strength is theoretically close to 250,000.

The reason why it is said to be theoretically is because in addition to the army of the Kingdom of Sardinia, the armies of several other states are still idle.

Especially the Neapolitan army, which is farthest away, stopped in the Papal States due to a large number of soldiers suffering from heatstroke. Only God knows why they suffered heatstroke in spring.

In short, the 40,000 troops promised by Naples will not be able to make it to this war. However, for the early unification of the Italian region, they still sent hundreds of warriors to the battlefield.

No matter how absurd this reason is, at least one thing can be certain: the Neapolitan army will not come.

Franz did not think this was the credit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Just look at the origin of Ferdinand II, the current King of Naples.

He is the son of Francis I, King of the Two Sicilies, and Clementina, daughter of Leopold II, Holy Roman Emperor. (The Kingdom of Sicily and Naples united to form the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, with Naples in a dominant position).

In simple terms, he is a junior member of the Habsburg family established in the Italian region. Although Austria's international prestige has declined, it is not enough to make them rebel.

Just look at the map and you will know that Naples is separated by the Papal States. Even if they can drive Austria out of Italy, they will not gain any substantial benefits.

Any Italian state has the ambition to unify the Italian region. At this time, it is not a good choice to support the enemy. Even if Austria occupies Venice and Lombardy, it is more in their interest than the Kingdom of Sardinia occupying these areas.

History has changed. Because Austria's military strength in the Venice region is stronger, the Kingdom of Sardinia has now begun to deploy the "Heavenly Demon Disintegration Technique". This has now become a battle of national destiny.

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By May, the reserve forces mobilized by Austria had been honed for more than a month and had begun to show their combat effectiveness. Franz quietly increased his troops in Hungary, and the war was imminent.

Vienna.

Franz once again lamented that Nicholas I was a good comrade. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that 300,000 Russian troops were ready to go and could help Austria and Prussia suppress the revolution at any time.

The strong support of the Tsarist government has had a very strong impact in Europe. Both the revolutionaries in Austria and Prussia have suffered a heavy blow.

The newly independent Hungarian regime has become precarious. Kossuth, the head of the Hungarian Republic, is already sleepless at night, fearing that the Russians will stab them in the back.

Metternich said triumphantly: "Your Highness, the French have changed their minds. They have terminated all assistance to the Kingdom of Sardinia. Now we are discussing the division of the Kingdom of Sardinia's territory."

Franz was overjoyed and thought to himself: "Sure enough, Metternich is better suited for diplomacy. Being a prime minister is completely mismatched for his expertise!"

Being able to deceive the French, the Italian battlefield will have no surprises. Without the help of the French, the army of the Kingdom of Sardinia is weak.

In just over a month, the army of the Kingdom of Sardinia quickly expanded from 20-30,000 to nearly 200,000. Anyone with a bit of military knowledge knows that such an army is unreliable.

Of course, if the soldiers of the Kingdom of Sardinia are fearless or obediently follow their superiors' orders like German soldiers, then there is no problem.

Indeed, the Kingdom of Sardinia has likely been swayed by radical public sentiment within the country, believing that once these soldiers reach the battlefield, they will be as formidable as when they chant slogans.

Franz made a decisive decision, saying, "Hmm, let's quickly sign a treaty with the French government. They change governments almost as quickly as women change clothes. Let's not complicate matters further!"

"Your Highness, if we rush to sign a treaty, it will be to our disadvantage. The French have bigger appetites than we imagined," Metternich cautioned.

"It doesn't matter. Whether the treaty we sign with the French can be upheld or not depends on whether the French can withstand the pressure from the British.

"Based on the current situation, the French government is constantly trying to please the British. As long as the London government takes a tougher stance, the French are likely to make compromises.

"If they choose to back down on their own, then it's their own fault. We can even condemn them for being untrustworthy," Franz said indifferently.

Not only this interim government, but several subsequent French governments have also been cozying up to the British and living off their support. It is unrealistic to expect them to confront the British head-on, at least within the next five years.

"Your Highness, if the French retreat, then we will likely find ourselves isolated. In the current situation, it is not suitable for us to annex the Kingdom of Sardinia!" cautioned Archduke Louis.

"Unfortunately, it's such a missed opportunity. It's not as easy as having the Kingdom of Sardinia willingly come to us. We've let a great chance slip away," sighed Prime Minister Felix.

Dominating Italy is not just a dream for the French but also for Austria. However, it remains nothing more than a dream. The European powers will not allow them to have their way.

"There's nothing we can do about it. Who can blame us for not being strong enough? If we really try to swallow the Kingdom of Sardinia whole, we might just choke to death!" Franz said helplessly.

Chapter 70: Preparations Complete

The Austrian Empire is like a weak and ailing old person, indulging in excessive eating and drinking, and could pass away at any time. Franz's concessions to the French are also based on this.

Following the principle of seizing the opportunity, in case the French government takes a tough stance, Austria can still tear off a piece of flesh from the Kingdom of Sardinia.

The amount is not important. What is important is to prove to the outside world in politics that the Austrian Empire is still a powerful country with great strength, deterring the restless Prussians.

As for whether the French will take advantage of this, Franz is very indifferent. What does it have to do with him?

If the French become stronger, it is the British and Russians who should worry about it. Will the French be foolish enough to attack Austria?

Don't be ridiculous. After experiencing Napoleon's baptism, the vigilance of European countries against France is at an S-level.

Before breaking free from diplomatic isolation, any military action taken by the French could potentially invite joint suppression from other countries.

Metternich calmly said: "If the French are intimidated, then there is no need for us to destroy the Kingdom of Sardinia. Keeping them as a buffer between Austria and France is also a good choice.

"The most troublesome are the British. Despite the London government's commitment to mediate the Austro-Sardinian war, their involvement presents complications.

"However, our embassy in London sent a message that a British consortium is secretly negotiating a loan with the Kingdom of Sardinia.

"In addition, some time ago, the Kingdom of Sardinia had already borrowed 3 million pounds from the British. We have reason to believe that the British are on the side of the enemy in this war."

As for territorial expansion, Metternich has never shown much interest. This conservative statesman believes that Austria is already large enough, and the internal ethnic conflicts pose enough challenges. Therefore, he opposes further expansion.

Based on this policy, Austria has hardly engaged in territorial expansion over the past few decades.

Franz may not see eye to eye with Metternich's political views, but he holds a different opinion when it comes to his diplomatic skills.

Metternich is undoubtedly considered one of the greatest diplomats of the 19th century. He earned titles such as "Prime Minister of Europe" and the "Metternich era," which are the highest accolades bestowed upon him by the outside world.

The collapse of the Vienna System was not solely a result of diplomatic failures; rather, it was largely due to Austria's weakened power and its inability to withstand the impact of revolutionary movements.

It is true that Metternich had already stepped down during this period of history, and as a result, the British unleashed a flurry of smoke bombs, successfully misleading the Vienna government. If it weren't for the steadfastness of Marshal Radetzky, Lombardy and Venice would likely have been lost in 1848.

Felix confidently said: "There is no need to worry too much. Even if the British support the Kingdom of Sardinia, they cannot personally enter the field without the support of European powers."

This is not arrogance, but a judgment based on the international situation and the strength of various parties.

In history, the Vienna government spared the Kingdom of Sardinia not only due to the intervention of Britain and France but also because they were concerned about the French annexing Sardinian territories and expanding their power.

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“Well, it’s good to prepare for these things in advance. The most important thing is the outcome of this war. If we can easily defeat the enemy, then we will naturally have the upper hand!”

Franz poured cold water on the confident Prime Minister, reminding him that the war was not yet over, and displaying such arrogance at this stage was not a wise move.

It’s understandable that Felix feels that way. After all, Austria is considered one of the European powers, while the Kingdom of Sardinia is relatively insignificant in comparison. The significant disparity in their strengths makes it normal to look down upon them.

After a moment's pause, Metternich proposed again, "Your Highness, the Russians have already promised to help us suppress the rebellion. Should we consider letting them deploy their troops to quickly quell the Hungarian uprising?"

Observing the intrigued expressions of the others, Franz shook his head.

"No! This is Austria's domestic affair. If we let the Russians help us suppress the rebellion, we will have to rely on them in diplomatic matters in the future. The hardest debt to repay in the world is the debt of gratitude.

“The hardest thing to repay in the world is a favor owed to someone. The situation in Hungary is still within our capacity to handle, and there is no need to involve the Russians. However, we can create an illusion that the Russians are mobilizing to intervene in Hungary, to shake the determination of the rebellious factions.”

You're right, appearances and actual outcomes are two different concepts. If the Russians actually send troops to help Austria suppress the Hungarian rebellion, how would future history books record it?

‘Inviting foreign troops to suppress the revolution? Wouldn’t that make them representatives of the reactionaries? Would it not tarnish the illustrious image of Franz?’

It’s just putting on a show, to scare the Hungarians and force them to divide their troops to defend themselves. It’s not a big deal.

As the victor, Franz can write the narrative however he pleases. If there is a falling out with Russia in the future, he could even twist the truth and claim that under the leadership of the great Emperor Franz, the nefarious plots of the Russians in the Hungarian region were thwarted.

While it may not be easy to find fault on the surface, Europe has its share of regional conflicts. Russia, too, only integrated into European society after the anti-French wars.

If one were to delve into the dark history of the Russians and claim their sinister intentions towards Hungary, Franz could have almost believed it himself if he didn't know the truth.

"Your Highness, we have received news from the frontlines in Venice that the Kingdom of Sardinia is being cautious and not launching any hasty attacks. Our plan of luring them deeper into our territory may fail. Marshal Radetzky urges us to deploy our forces quickly to suppress the Hungarian rebellion, preferably gaining an advantage on the battlefield to force Sardinia into a risky confrontation." The Minister of War suddenly spoke up.

Franz, feeling exasperated, rubbed his forehead. Historical records could be misleading. While it was true that the Italian army had displayed limited combat capabilities, Franz understood that it didn't necessarily mean they were easy to deal with. The present-day Kingdom of Sardinia was not to be underestimated.

General Badoer, often regarded as a mediocre marshal, is known for his cautious approach, preferring to adopt a defensive stance and endure greater losses rather than risk engaging in a decisive battle with the Austrian army in the Venetian region.

The pocket formation painstakingly arranged by Marshal Radetzky did not attract the enemy's main force. If we were to fight now, it might be possible to defeat the enemy, but it would be impossible to inflict heavy losses or annihilate the enemy army.

Originally, Franz had planned to suppress the Hungarian rebellion after defeating the Kingdom of Sardinia, but now it is obviously impossible. He could only start with the Hungarians and force the Kingdom of Sardinia to send troops to fight decisively.

Many people understand the principle of 'when the lips are gone, the teeth will be cold.' If Austria suppresses the internal rebellion, then the Kingdom of Sardinia will have no chance of winning.

"Speed up the preparations. Once everything is ready, we will immediately deploy troops to suppress the Hungarian rebellion. How much more time do you need, Prime Minister?" Franz asked with a hint of doubt.

"Your Highness, the strategic supplies are nearly prepared, and the deployment of the military is mostly complete, except for a few newly established central provinces that require some time for integration. The earliest we can launch the offensive would be next Saturday, which is May 5th," Felix said after a moment of consideration.