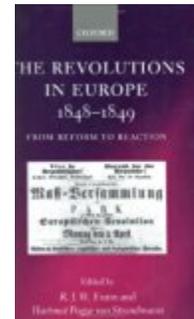


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

R.J.W. Evans, Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann, eds. *The Revolutions in Europe 1848-1849. From Reform to Reaction*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. xiii + 250 pp. \$60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-820840-2.

Reviewed by Paul-Marie T. Arpaia (Baruch College)
Published on H-W-Civ (February, 2001)



In 1998, a group of former and present members of the Faculty of Modern History at Oxford University gave a series of lectures to commemorate the sesquicentenary of the Revolutions of 1848. The lectures, published in the present volume, offer the reader a panorama of the areas that directly experienced revolutions (France, Italy, Germany, and Austria) as well as several countries on the periphery (Great Britain, Russia and the United States). Essays by the editors on the nature of the Revolutions of 1848 and on the decades leading up to the Revolutions, together with an essay on the meaning of the revolutions to subsequent generations, serve as foreword and epilogue.

Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann's introductory essay "1848-1849: A European Revolution?" rejects the myth that events in France caused revolutionary activity elsewhere in Europe or served as a model for the revolutions in Italy, Germany, or Austria. If the revolutions of 1848 were autochthonous in nature and their outcomes varied from country to country, all of the revolutions shared common aspects. Revolutionaries throughout Europe attacked the *ancien regime*, demanded broader political participation in government, and focused attention on the social question. Although nationalism played a lesser role in some countries, it was pronounced in central and southern Europe—even though it wound up becoming a more divisive than cohesive force. Pogge von Strandmann insists that despite the defeat of the revolutions, in the long term, they had important domestic and international consequences.

In his essay, "Liberalism, Nationalism, and the Coming of the Revolution," R.J.W. Evans offers an overview of European history from 1789 and 1848. He argues that during this period liberalism and nationalism could not

become an effective revolutionary force on the continent. Both movements impacted the economic sphere, leading some to embrace the free market and others, a state-controlled market. While liberalism was encouraged by the Revolution of 1830 in France, socio-economic developments proved to be more important factors. The migration of agricultural workers to urban areas and the industrial transformation of urban areas, coupled with the spread of radical thought, created the matrix in which the Revolutions of 1848 would become radicalized. Echoing Pogge von Strandmann, Evans concludes that the revolutions impacted later developments in France, Italy, Germany, Austria and the successor countries of the Habsburg Empire. The Revolutions of 1848 acted as a catalyst to social, political and cultural developments that had begun with the Revolution of 1789 and would play out over the next century.

The major thrust of Geoffrey Ellis's contribution, "The Revolution of 1848-1849 in France," is that the revolution failed to show signs of class struggle. The success of the revolution was owing to the leadership of the liberal and republican bourgeoisie, the unwillingness of the financial, commercial and industrial bourgeoisie to rally to the Orleanist regime, and most importantly, the Parisian National Guard's abandonment of Louis-Philippe. The creation of the *ateliers nationaux*, the National Assembly's decision to abolish them and the violence that followed their suppression was not motivated by class interests, either. The workshops offered menial labor and low wages, serving primarily as insurance for the middle classes against the radicalization of the urban poor. They hardly matched Louis Blanc's conception of *ateliers sociaux* and were suppressed by the National Assembly when it became convinced that they did not make

good economic sense.

The resulting violence of the June Days also lacked a class basis, as evidenced by the social background of the revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries. The problem with this argument is that, although it underscores flaws in Karl Marx's analyses, it does not consider other Marxian interpretations or suggest an alternative motivation for what happened. By resorting to the spontaneity of the revolt as an explanatory factor, Ellis implies that there was a whole lot of false consciousness in 1848 and 1849. His interpretation does make an important contribution by suggesting a growing split between traditional and capitalist sectors of the middle classes. He also argues convincingly that the revolution of 1848 had a lasting impact on France.

The greatest strength of Denis Mack Smith's "The Revolutions of 1848-1849 in Italy" can be found in his discussion of the diplomatic and military side to 1848-49. His analysis of the military struggle between Austria and the various Italian states demonstrates clearly the problems facing Italian unification. In 1848-49, Italian leaders could not overcome military setbacks, tensions between democratic and moderate leaders, and the rivalries among the Italian states. Viewed from this standpoint, the revolutions provided valuable lessons to the political leaders who would finally unite Italy. Unfortunately, the prominence Mack Smith gives to diplomatic history is not balanced with an analysis of two interconnected developments: the insurrections against local leaders and the creation of the Roman Republic. One may also find fault with his use of tired clichés. For instance, he marvels that *mafiosi* "paradoxically" set things in motion in the "socially backward" Sicily. What is missing is any effort to test the recollections and characterizations of the Englishmen and Italians on whom he bases these characterizations. (This criticism can be applied to the essay as a whole. The only recent publication cited in the bibliography is Roland Sarti's excellent biography of Mazzini.) Mack Smith also fails to recognize that the constitution adopted in Sicily was not the old constitution, but one that was significantly modified. How and why it was modified might have provided insight into at least one aspect of the revolution. A similar gloss can be found in Mack Smith's consideration of the revolutions further north. There is hardly any consideration of the significance of the Roman Republic for Italy or Europe. And, while he states that the presence of "urban guerrillas" in Milan made the revolt "one of the most extraordinary episodes" of the 1848 revolutions, he fails to compare this revolt with popular insurrections elsewhere in Europe, or

at least, in Tuscany, Brescia and Genoa.

As the title suggests, Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann argues in "The German Revolutions of 1848-1850 and the *Sonderweg* of Mecklenburg," that events in the German states did not constitute a single revolutionary movement. He sees the German revolutions as spontaneous, uncoordinated and multidimensional events that belie Marx and Engels's reading of the Revolutions of 1848-49. Shifting alliances among landowners, peasants, rural laborers, artisans and urban workers do not support a class-based interpretation. The first phase of the revolution began among the peasantry in 1847. Artisans limited their action to passing resolutions and signing petitions. The revolutionary impulse in the second phase came from property owners among the middle classes, who, despite their fears of revolution, used the unrest among the lower classes as an opportunity to advance their demands for political reform. These demands included calls for national constitutional reform and national unification as well as issues of local concern. Pogge von Strandmann insists that there was no "all-German" revolution in 1848-49, and he focuses on Mecklenburg-Schwerin and Mecklenburg-Strelitz to make his point. His thorough analysis demonstrates the singularity of events in the two grand duchies, as well as their connection to developments elsewhere in Germany and Europe.

In his study, "1848-1849 in the Habsburg Monarchy," R.J.W. Evans argues that the revolution in the Habsburg Empire was unlike any other because it jeopardized the future of this Great Power. Despite the apparent weakness of the monarchy in the beginning, the crown emerged more resilient than ever, and the revolution proved that the monarchy was the bond that united the lands of the Habsburgs. Evans provides an excellent twelve-part synopsis of events in Austria, Hungary, Lombardy, the Veneto, Bohemia, Galicia, the South Slav areas and Frankfurt. In his analysis of the revolutions, Evans argues that the army was not the key to the survival of the monarchy. There was really no serious challenge to Habsburg rule in 1848 and 1849 with the exception of Lombardy-Venetia and Hungary. Moreover, the army caused problems in the long run by retaining the Italian lands against their will and by damaging the relationship between the crown and the Magyar leadership. Instead, the key to the Habsburg's success was to be found on the international front. The failure of the *grossdeutsch* solution at Frankfurt ensured the viability of the monarchy as both a German and non-German institution. Britain was supportive of the Habsburgs, and Russia actively helped quash revolutionary movements.

Evans dismisses the question of whether the revolution was liberal or national. He maintains that it was both liberal and national in the sense that liberal legislation was seen as a means of asserting a national identity. Yet, the true significance of the revolution was to engage the masses and women in nationalist conflicts, creating “popular nationalism” in Central Europe. Evans also sees the revolutions as a success since they provided key elements for later reforms including the abolition of serfdom, the creation of the *Reichsrat*, and the *Ausgleich*.

This collection of essays has the merit of considering the impact of the revolutions of 1848 on several countries on the periphery. Constraints of space limit a fuller discussion of the excellent essays on Britain, Russia and the United States of America. In “Britain’s Reaction to the Revolutions,” Leslie Mitchell demonstrates that the revolutions confirmed for Englishmen their distinctiveness in Europe and resulted in the vilification of the Irish and foreigners as threats to British institutions and a British way of life. In “A Pyrrhic Victory: The Russian Empire in 1848,” David Saunders argues that Nicholas I’s attempt to exploit the revolutions of 1848-49 must be viewed as a failure. Russia did not gain diplomatically from its costly intervention in the Danubian principalities and Hungary, while Nicholas I abandoned his tendency to reform out of fear of revolutionary contagion from the west. His authoritarian stance had drastic results isolating Russia from the leftward trends elsewhere in Europe. Nicholas alienated the educated classes from the state. He reversed policy initiatives that would have emancipated the serfs, and his government mishandled ethnic concerns in the southwestern part of the Empire. In the third essay, “The United States and the Revolutions of 1848,” Timothy M.

Roberts and Daniel W. Howe demonstrate how Americans used different aspects of the revolutions to further their own political and social agendas. The authors discuss how the revolutions changed America by creating temporary and permanent immigrants who, among other things, impacted the antislavery movement and the development of the left in America. It is this reviewer’s hope that this essay presages a book-length analysis of the American reaction to the revolutions of 1848. The final essay, “1848 in European Collective Memory,” by Robert Gildea concludes the series of studies. Although his analysis of the myth of 1848 is admittedly “sketchy,” he goes a long way in demonstrating the multiplicity of interpretations of events. It is a thought-proving essay that also warrants further elaboration.

Despite the length of this review, I believe it necessary to prevail on readers to draw attention to the book’s merits. The scope of the book lends itself to a comparative approach to the revolutionary movements. The analysis of the revolutions’ impact on Britain, Russia and the US raises the question of how the revolutions impacted other countries elsewhere in Europe and the Americas. The studies are, for the most part, up-to-date in their analysis of the topic, and the authors provide useful bibliographical annotations. This work would be an excellent choice for an upper-division or graduate-level course on the Revolutions of 1848 or Europe in the nineteenth century.

Copyright (c) 2001 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-w-civ>

Citation: Paul-Marie T. Arpaia. Review of Evans, R.J.W.; Strandmann, Hartmut Pogge von, eds., *The Revolutions in Europe 1848-1849. From Reform to Reaction*. H-W-Civ, H-Net Reviews. February, 2001.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=4882>

Copyright © 2001 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.