

The Failure of a Revolution

France, Germany and The Netherlands in 1848: A Comparative Analysis



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Spring 2008
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Image on front page:
Horace Vernet – *Barricade
at Rue Soufflot, Paris 1848.*

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Chapter 1. Introduction

*“The tricolor republic now bears only one color,
the color of the defeated, the color of blood.”¹*

Karl Marx after the June Days uprising
(*Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, 29 June 1848)

As I am writing this opening paragraph, it is 160 years ago to the day that the French National Guard ended a bloody uprising among the Parisian workers. Sometimes labeled a ‘class war’², the so-called ‘June Days’ uprising posited the urban working class against the Provisional Government of the French Second Republic. It shall become clear in the following chapters that this clash between the revolutionary regime and the masses which had been vital in its victory four months prior, ultimately represented the failure of that revolution, a revolution which made an end to the French monarchy, instated universal male suffrage for a short time and set off a wave of revolutions across the continent.

Chronologically halfway between the French Revolution of 1789 and the Russian Revolution of 1917, the European Revolutions of 1848-1849³ are not usually included among the ranks of Great Revolutions. In the last chapter of his *The European Revolutions*, Jonathan Sperber suggests a fruitful comparison between those two crucial episodes in world history on the one hand, and the 1848 revolutions on the other. To make that comparison, he argues, is to ask “why were the initial victories of 1848 revolution so short-lived?”⁴ The usual answer historians offer, Sperber notes, is that the 1848 revolutionaries, compared to their Jacobin predecessors and their Bolshevik successors, lacked energy, drive and ruthlessness.

Sperber, however, discards this argument as too easy. “A closer look at the revolutions suggests that differences in the situations of 1789 and 1848 are nowhere near so great as the different outcomes they are supposed to explain.”⁵ Instead, therefore, Sperber writes that the reason 1848 was not 1789, was precisely because it was sixty years later. The French Revolution was brandished into the collective European memory:

¹ Marx, Karl; Fernbach, David ed. *The Revolutions of 1848*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973. 129.

² De Remusat, C. *Mémoires de ma vie*, vol. I, Paris, 1962 and Marx, K. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (Marx-Engels Selected Works, vol. 1), Moscow, 1962; both quoted in Price, Roger ed. *Documents on the French Revolution of 1848*. London: MacMillan, 1996. 21.

³ The series of revolutions that started with the February Revolution in Paris and from there spread across Europe has been almost interchangeably labeled revolutions of ‘1848’, of ‘1848-1849’ or of ‘1848-1851’. For the sake of clarity, I will in this paper generally use the denominator ‘revolutions of 1848’, although I by no means intend to exclude the related and very significant events that took place after December 31st, 1848.

⁴ Sperber, Jonathan. *The European revolutions, 1848-1851*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. 245.

⁵ *Ibid*, 246.

“All political elements in 1848 had learned the lessons of 1789. Conservatives were acutely aware of the danger of being too passive, of allowing revolutionaries to dominate events, above all of losing control of the armed forces. No monarch was willing to repeat the fate of Louis XIV. (...) Moderates of 1848 had noted all too well how militant measures taken by their predecessors had paved the way for the Jacobins to come to power. Consequently, they were reluctant to repeat them, seeking compromises with monarchical authority. (...) The success of the Jacobins in mobilizing the masses of the capital city to overthrow or intimidate moderate governments and parliaments convinced 1848 leftists they could do the same.”⁶

Although the memory of 1789 should be borne in mind, the problem with such a comparison is not only the chronological correlation, but definite differences in the socio-economic make-up of the population as well as fundamental nationalist differences, especially with the case of Russia in 1917.

The comparison I would like to make in this paper, therefore, is a different one. The revolutions of 1848 differed from those of 1789 and 1917 in that the former essentially consisted of decidedly related yet geographically and politically separate cases. Some scholars have attempted to argue that 1848-1849 was a single European revolution⁷, but as one of them, Axel Körner, noted in his 2000 book *1848: A European Revolution?*:

“The revolutions were seen at the time as a European event, the overthrow of a European order through a European revolution, a European ‘springtime of the peoples’. However as the year progressed, and events across countries became less uniform and less recognizable for foreign sympathizers, the revolutions came to be seen more and more as separate entities.”⁸

Indeed, while the initial occurrence of the revolutions in nearly all the states of central Europe can be directly related to the February Revolution in Paris, we will see that their successive reversal occurred on a national scale rather than an international one.

Of course, in the nineteenth century political landscape it is difficult to discern clearly delimited nation-states. The Restoration had left the Italian peninsula divided, much of it either incorporated into the Habsburg Empire or, like Tuscany and Naples, under its direct influence.⁹ The Habsburg Empire, in its turn, was a collection of many different nationalities, which effectively created a fundamentally different revolutionary momentum¹⁰. The German

⁶ Ibid, 247-248.

⁷ Evans, Robert and Hartmut Pogge Von Strandmann, *The Revolutions in Europe, 1848-1849: From Reform to Reaction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; Körner, Axel ed, *1848, a European Revolution? International Ideas and National Memories of 1848*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000.

⁸ Körner, *1848, a European Revolution?*, 5.

⁹ Smith, Denis M. “The Revolutions of 1848-1849 in Italy” in Evans, *Revolutions in Europe*, 55-56.

¹⁰ Evans, Robert. “1848-1849 in the Habsburg Monarchy” in Evans, *Revolutions in Europe*, 183.

people under the German Confederation and the economic unions of the *Zollverein* and other such tax unions, had become increasingly integrated, but were officially still divided into over thirty larger and smaller states. Nevertheless, important changes in the political and nationalist layout in 1848 temporarily gave Germany a more united character. Only few states, most notably France but the Netherlands¹¹ as well, were integrated national states.

As the following chapter will show, the selection of viable case studies for this research, therefore, is relatively straightforward. Despite the larger number of possible cases demonstrating revolutionary failure, only two of those were sufficiently homogeneous and self-determining to make for a constructive comparison. Given the effective Prussian dominance and the unifying intentions of the German people, the case of Germany will prove to have exhibited most of the same factors that caused the failure of the revolution in politically centralized France. Furthermore, contrasting these two cases of revolutionary failure with another case of successful revolutionary reform, I selected the Netherlands as a third case study. The inclusion of this third case is intended to control the relevance of factors common between France and Germany.

I believe that the comparative approach taken in this paper will present a new insight into the dynamics and causes of failure for the 1848 revolutions. Nevertheless, much of it will be based on the vast body of previously published research, most of which takes a wider view of the events of 1848. The aforementioned question posed by Sperber¹² can be viewed as an initial blueprint for a central research question; in the remainder of this introductory chapter I will add some important specifications based on the body of research available on the subject of the 1848 revolutions.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to make explicit the assumption underlying Sperber's remark. We cannot start to investigate the causes for the failure of the 1848 revolutions before briefly addressing the question: did the 1848 revolutions fail? Although some historians have suggested a more nuanced assessment of the accomplishments of 1848, a general consensus exists among scholars that at least in the short run, 1848 failed to fulfill its revolutionary promise. Sperber, one of the experts on the issue, points out that one of three common views of 1848 among historians "directs attention to the failure of the revolutions of that year,"¹³ while Michael Broers speaks of "short, sharp and usually failed revolutions."¹⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, too, notes that nowhere in Europe the revolutions had won,

¹¹ Charles Tilly points out that after the Belgian Revolution in 1830 led to the independence of Belgium, the Kingdom of the Netherlands experienced no notable nationalist upheaval. Tilly, Charles. *European Revolutions, 1492-1992*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993. 74-75. Jonathan Sperber does mention that aspirations by the inhabitants of the province of Limburg to secede from Holland and join the united German state seemingly about to be created "led to a few nervous moments", but never truly turned into a substantial movement. Sperber, *European Revolutions*, 241.

¹² See note #1

¹³ Sperber, *European Revolutions*, 2.

with the exception of France.¹⁵ Roger Price, specialist on the subject of the Second French Republic, does not precisely label the February Revolution a failure, but points out that the republic was under the control of the conservative monarchists before the end of the year and that what followed was a period of repression and restrictions of freedom¹⁶, quite the opposite of the revolutionaries' ambitions. And finally in his synoptic account of the past two centuries, R. R. Palmer confirms that

“The Revolution of 1848 failed not only in Germany, but also in Hungary, in Italy and in France. (...) Everywhere the cry had been for the freedom of nations, to unify national groups or rid them of foreign rule; but nowhere was national liberty more advanced in 1850 than it had been two years before.”¹⁷

I shall not here divulge further into the details of the conservative, counterrevolutionary victory in Germany or the conservative, monarchist retransformation that occurred in the Second French Republic, as that will be done in some detail in Chapter 3. Furthermore, in order to determine revolutionary failure in one case and success in another can only be done using a demonstrable benchmark, which I shall outline in Chapter 2.

Accepting then the assumption of revolutionary failure for the moment, there is of course a much larger academic debate considering the underlying question of ‘why’. While not as profusely documented as the causes of the initial occurrence of the 1848 revolutions, the factors determining the negative outcome of these revolutions have been given significant attention by a number of historians. Analysis of the revolutions and their failure started with contemporary observers, such as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who on the one hand expressed their disappointment with the failure of the socio-democratic revolution in Paris and Berlin and on the other took the inaction of the Frankfurt Parliament to confirm their thesis that the revolution would have to take the form of an all-encompassing class war.¹⁸ Numerous historians, too, including for instance Sperber, Hobsbawm, Evans, Körner and Price mentioned above, have recounted the revolutions of 1848 since and have consequently added possible factors to the existing debate on their failure.

Before I present a short overview of causal factors which have been raised previously, it is important to stipulate the dual character of a revolution. Using a division most notably introduced by Charles Tilly¹⁹, we can distinguish between a revolutionary situation and a revolutionary outcome. Tilly’s highly stylized definition is perhaps too encompassing,

¹⁴ Broers, Michael. *Europe after Napoleon: Revolution, Reaction and Romanticism, 1814-1848*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996. 106.

¹⁵ Hobsbawm, Eric. *The Age of Revolution: 1789-1848*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1962. 149

¹⁶ Price, Roger. *The Revolutions of 1848*. London: MacMillan, 1988. 89.

¹⁷ Palmer, R.R. *A History of the Modern World: Since 1815*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1950. 495.

¹⁸ Marx, *Revolutions of 1848*.

¹⁹ Tilly, *European Revolutions*, 10-16.

and in the following chapter I will propose some important modifications wherein a revolutionary outcome is no longer necessarily determined by a forceful transfer of power, just as a revolutionary situation need not involve widespread violence. The value of Tilly's work, however, lies in demonstrating the division between revolutionary situations and outcomes – which allows us to define revolutionary failure – and maintaining the clear link between a revolutionary situation and a subsequent revolutionary outcome. When this link will be up for in-depth assessment further on, it will become apparent that despite the theoretical division, revolutionary outcome is for a large part dependent on the dynamic of the revolutionary situation.

Causes cited for the occurrence of a revolutionary situation have varied from long-term socio-economic trends to wartime tax-deficits and from political repression to immediate triggering events. Often it is long-term grievances, exacerbated by those short-term events which create the potent mix for revolutionary demands and immediate action that sets off a revolution.²⁰ Tilly asks the question why the many revolutionary situations have such varied outcomes and particularly why so few revolutionary situations have revolutionary outcomes. To answer that question, he writes, we should look closely at the interaction between the nature of the revolutionary and incumbent factions, the split in the populace and, importantly “the revolutionary process itself.”²¹ Once the revolutionary process has been set in motion, it is mainly internal factors that affect its dynamic determine its path and subsequently the nature of its outcome. Skocpol, too, argues that

“to explain social revolutions, one must find problematic, first, the emergence (not “making”) of a revolutionary situation within an old regime. Then, one must be able to identify the objectively conditioned and complex intermeshing of the various actions of the diversely situated groups – an intermeshing that shapes the revolutionary process and gives rise to the new regime.”²²

Arguably, some of the initial causes may indirectly influence the dynamics of the revolutionary process. Nevertheless, a revolution should be investigated as a process determined by the interactions of the parties involved and their sources of power (through e.g. popular support or military force), but at the same time certainly not immune to external pressure, military or otherwise.

Geoffrey Bruun's *Revolution and Reaction 1848-1852* opens with a brief overview of the forces at work in what he, too, calls “the Revolution that failed,”²³ listing several factors

²⁰ Goldstone Jack. *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World*. Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991; Hobsbawm, *Age of Revolution*.

²¹ Tilly, *European Revolutions*, 15-16.

²² Skocpol, Theda. *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979. 18.

²³ Bruun, Geoffrey. *Revolution and Reaction, 1848-1852: A Mid-Century Watershed*. Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand Company, Inc, 1958. 9.

that contributed to that failure. The blind idealism of the revolutionary leaders based in their political inexperience is obviously a possible risk factor in any new regime, but Bruun's argument does not convince that this directly affected the revolution's failure. Another, more fundamental reason why the movement faltered, Bruun argues were the internal contradictions among the reformers and revolutionaries. Disputes and quarrels divided the party of movement when it was most essential to unite against the forces of reaction that gathered against them.²⁴ There were three basic sources of disagreement or strife within the revolutionary movement:

“Radical *socialist* reformers sought justice for the ‘disinherited’ classes, the peasants and factory workers, while more moderate *political* reformers were concerned with protecting and increasing the influence of the middle classes, the bourgeoisie and the professional groups. The radicals in general favored a *republican* form of government while many moderates were prepared to accept *constitutional* monarchy as a satisfactory substitute. (...) Many of the revolutionaries, especially in the Germanies and Italy, wanted to transform their homeland into a strong and united country, but their aims contradicted the nationalist aspirations of minority groups.”²⁵

Whatever the nature of the divisions, we shall see in the following chapters how they led to political indecision or open strife, subsequently weakening the revolutionary regimes to the counteraction by the conservatives.

Jonathan Sperber's *European Revolutions, 1848-1851*, also contributes to the understanding of these internal divisions which culminated in the June Days. In Germany, too, he argues similar divisions played a vital role in determining the outcome of the constitutional reform – even if a violent confrontation was mostly avoided. *European Revolutions* is perhaps the most notable book to develop an understanding of the forces of revolution which were at work in 1848, and reasserts the previously listed factors of economic and industrial development and its impact on demography, as well as emerging political dissatisfaction based on liberal ideology. In addition to the division between radicals and moderates along the ideological axis, Sperber confirms the importance of nationalist tensions, in particular regarding the German case²⁶. Divisions between those favoring the inclusion of Habsburg territories in the new German state (*Grossdeutschland*) and those willing to settle for a smaller state dominated by Prussia (*Kleindeutschland*) caused indecision among the members of the Frankfurt Assembly. Although such nationalist issues did not play the same role in all three cases, we shall see that it contributed to the internal

²⁴ Ibid, 10.

²⁵ Ibid, 10-11.

²⁶ Sperber, *European Revolutions* 90-95, 126-137; See also Breuille, John. John Breuille, “The German Question and 1848.” *History Today* 48 (May 1998): 13-20.

division of the revolutionary movement which played a vital role in the failure of the 1848 revolutions in France as well as Germany.

Next to the internal division of the revolutionaries, another important factor is their means to maintain power, whether through political support or, ultimately, military force. In his account of the Habsburg reaction to the liberal revolutions in Lombardy and Venetia²⁷, Alan Sked argues that the role of Field Marshall Radetsky and the army loyal to him – rather than to the state or any conflicting party – for a great deal determined the success of the counterrevolution in the cisalpine Austria. Although, like I indicated above, this research does not include the cases of Italy or Austria, Sked does give an indication as to the potential importance of the military forces. Charles Tilly has also noted the changing control over the military, as well as the mobilization of popular support, the most important means of coercive and normative power, as crucial in the dynamic of a revolution.²⁸ Furthermore, Jonathan Sperber concludes that

“In the end the mid-century revolutions were defeated by soldiers loyal to the monarchical authority of the tsar, the Austrian emperor, the king of Prussia, the king of the Two Sicilies, and the soon to be emperor Louis Napoleon Bonaparte.”²⁹

The control over coercive means as the primary source of power, therefore, will prove to have been one of the determining factors for the success or failure of the 1848 revolutions.

Another possible factor or condition - one which is difficult to measure but is repeatedly named as important in understanding the grievances, preconditions and sentiments of 1848 – is the legacy of the French Revolution of 1789³⁰. Denis Mack Smith, specialist on mid-nineteenth century Italy, mentions the political settlement of 1815 as a constant source of discontent across the Italian peninsula.³¹ More generally, of course, the French revolution of 1789 (and again in 1830) left a large number of potential revolutionaries disappointed with its accomplishments. The most important negative memory of the French Revolution, however, was that of the Grand Terror and the subsequent usurpation of power, the corruption of the revolutionary cause. First the Jacobins and afterward the Napoleonists gave the revolution a bad name in the eyes of many idealists and as a result, Broers argues³², the revolutions of 1848 were perhaps greeted with lesser euphoria than their predecessors. Similarly in the surrounding countries – including the Netherlands and the

²⁷ Sked, Alan. *The Survival of the Habsburg Empire: Radetzky, the Imperial Army and the Class War, 1848*. London: Longman, 1979.

²⁸ Tilly, *European Revolutions*, 49-50.

²⁹ Sperber, *European Revolutions*, 249.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 244-248.

³¹ Smith, “Revolutions of 1848-1849”

³² Broers, *Europe after Napoleon*, 118.

German states – the memory of French dominance remained fresh, which certainly affected their reaction to the news of the February Revolution, if not in the same way.

As we can see, the existing historiography puts forward a significant number of possible explanations to the central research question of this thesis. Why, and how, did the revolutions of 1848 in Germany and France fail to generate sustained change in the relevant state institutions? Which of the suggested factors, internal division or coherence, the weak basis of power, the external pressure from other countries, determined the eventual failure of these revolutionary movements? How does the Dutch case prove or disprove the importance of those factors, as it represents a contrasting revolutionary success? It is these questions that I intend to review and answer in this paper.

In the following chapter I shall briefly address methodological issues such as the definition of key concepts and the selection of case studies. Building the analysis around three instances of a certain revolutionary nature – I will elaborate on the specific definition of revolutionary further on in this piece – this paper will take a comparative approach. Based on the existing historiography, therefore, I shall draw up four hypotheses which are to be tested in the course of this research on the basis of a three-way comparison between France, Germany and the Netherlands. Through presenting a detailed assessment of the events of 1848 in three specific cases, I intend to go beyond understanding the events *an sich*, in order to first explain the failure of the revolutions in 1848, and from there to point to possibilities for developing a more general theory of the forces that determine the failure of revolutionary change. The explanation will remain primarily applicable to the revolutions of 1848, but may suggest further research to investigate its adaptability to other failed revolutionary events.

The structure of the analysis, too, will be explained in more detail at the end of Chapter 2. In essence, Chapter 3 represents an overview of the crucial events from the February Revolution in France 1848 and the constitutional reform in the Netherlands, through the corruption of the French Second Republic and the dismantling of the Frankfurt Parliament. As those events underline the crucial moments that led to the failure of the revolutions, Chapter 4 takes a more analytical view of which factors were significant to that failure and why. Looking at the internal dynamic of the revolutionary and incumbent parties, the basis of their respective strength and the possibility of external influence, I will draw the explaining relations based on the findings of Chapter 4. The concluding chapter 5, finally, will structurally answer the research questions posed above and summarize the reasons why the 1848 revolutions failed. The closing remarks, then, will suggest a general theory on the failure of a revolutionary process to create a sustained revolutionary outcome, with the possibility of transcending the case of 1848 and investigating revolutionary failure elsewhere.

Chapter 2. The Comparative Method

As has already been indicated in the introduction, this thesis will be based on a comparison of revolutionary failure in Germany and France with relatively successful reform in the Netherlands, which took place without a significant violent clash between two factions of the population, but was instigated under the mounting pressure of the European revolution nonetheless. Although such reform would not fall under some definitions of revolutions³³, its sudden and fundamental nature in coincidence with the general revolutionary atmosphere in Europe definitely gives the Dutch case a revolutionary character³⁴. Further on in this chapter, I will present an adapted definition of a revolution, which allows for this case and others to be considered revolutionary. Before proceeding to address specific issues such as the definition of key concepts, or the delimitation of case studies, however, I would like to concentrate on the question of why the comparative approach is ideally suited for this investigation.

Comparative history is not new. Historical comparisons can be traced back at least as far back as Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, and have been a welcome tool since to such social theorists as Max Weber, Alexis de Tocqueville and more recently Barrington Moore, jr. and Theda Skocpol. At least part of its appeal, the latter argues, "comes from the general usefulness of looking at historical trajectories in order to study social change."³⁵ Comparative history is ideally suited for investigating societal dynamics in order to form a better understanding of epochal transformations of cultures or societal structures. It has therefore been a popular approach to the study of macro-social topics such as the rise and fall of empires, economic 'modernization' or pivotal events such as revolutions.

Of course not all investigations of social change make use of such an explicit comparison of distinct cases. The question therefore arises: What motivates the use of comparisons as opposed to a detailed investigation into a specific single historical case? The answer is provided by Barrington Moore, jr. in the introduction to *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*:

"In the effort to understand the history of a specific country a comparative perspective can lead to asking very useful and sometimes new questions. [...] Comparisons can serve as a rough negative check on accepted historical explanations. And a comparative approach may lead to

³³ Such as Charles Tilly's definition which is based on a rift in the populace, rivaling claims and an eventually forceful transfer of power. See note #17.

³⁴ Recent scholars have also given more attention to the revolutionary character of the Dutch constitutional reform. See for instance Stuurman, S. "1848: Revolutionary Reform in the Netherlands." *European History Quarterly* 21 (1991): 445-480.

³⁵ Skocpol, Theda and Margaret Somers. "The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22.2 (April 1980). 174.

new historical generalizations. In practice these features constitute a single intellectual process and make such a study more than a disparate collection of interesting cases”³⁶

Indeed, the purpose of comparison is twofold. First of all, by structuring the cases into a comparison, we are able to form a better understanding the effect of general historical trends on specific events. Secondly, the comparative method allows us to go beyond a mere account of historical events and to determine whether certain causal factors can be pinpointed across cases, so as to draw up an explanatory theory for a general historical phenomenon. To give an example, Theda Skocpol’s *States and Social Revolutions* is a well structured account of the major revolutions in France, Russia and China, which focuses on a selected number of important aspects of social life. More than that, however, by structuring her analysis around these key facets of society, Skocpol is able to draw conclusions as to the general causes of all three revolutions – a theory which could then be tested by applying it to another case in point. She argues, therefore, that “comparative historical analysis is the most appropriate way to develop explanations of revolutions that are at once historically grounded and generalizable beyond unique cases,”³⁷ which is exactly what this paper intends to do.

Units of Historical Study

Before we can proceed to the actual analysis, it is important to determine exactly what is being investigated. The chronological span of this paper is relatively straightforward, as it deals with the failure of the revolutionary events that initially took place in 1848. The next section will focus on defining the nature of such revolutionary events as well as the definition of the analyzed result, revolutionary failure. Chronologically, we shall see that this failure came about in Germany by mid-1849 and in France ultimately in 1852 – although the crucial events that determined this failure had taken place by December 1848. In the contrasting case of the Netherlands, the confirmation of the revolutionary success of 1848 was enacted in early November of that year³⁸, despite minor conservative challenges as late as 1853.

Another essential issue in the study of macro-social history is determining the scope and limitations of the macro-social units being investigated. Skocpol underlines that “we can make sense of social-revolutionary transformations only if we take the state seriously as a macro-structure.”³⁹ In the centralized political structure of nineteenth century France and the Netherlands, it is obvious that revolutionary change can be enacted only through the

³⁶ Moore, Jr, Barrington. *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973. xiii-xiv.

³⁷ Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 5-6.

³⁸ Sas, N. C. F. van and H. te Velde, ed. *De Eeuw van de Grondwet: Grondwet en Politiek in Nederland, 1798-1917*. Deventer: Kluwer, 1998. 137.

³⁹ Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 29.

transformation of exactly those centralized institutions. In the case of Germany, however, as we shall see the state structure had two distinct levels, and therefore the attempted revolutions aimed at transforming two different levels as well.

In favor of regarding Germany a single case, despite its complex political structure, we can follow the argument presented by Deborah Cohen and Maura O'Connor, who emphasize that "comparisons drawn are most often between nations, although other units of comparison are possible, sometimes even desirable."⁴⁰ The question of a single German nationality was of course an issue of great contention during the 1848 conflict, but only very few at the time would have denied a considerable degree of cultural, political and economical coherence between the German states. The problematic of resolving this issue lay particularly with the delimitation of the German nation and consequent conflict over territorial control, rather than the primary question of the existence of a common German culture.⁴¹

On a number of criteria, the German case shows considerable comparability to the cases of France or the Netherlands. Despite the inclusion of several linguistic minorities – as had been the case in the Netherlands before 1830 and in France before Napoleon, the vast majority of the inhabitants of the German states spoke the same language.⁴² Due to the establishment of the Zollverein (Customs Union), a large part of Germany was economically integrated and interconnected by railways – more so in fact than in France or the Netherlands, which for example also made communication within and between the German states much faster than in France at the time⁴³. The three cases furthermore all existed under the terms of the Restoration of 1815 and shared, to some degree, the traumatic legacy of the French Revolution. The year 1830, too, was one of considerable popular upheaval in all three cases, which subsequently shared a conservative fear of future uprisings and the ominous prospect of a European Revolution.⁴⁴

Given the chronological coincidence of the 1848 revolutions, France, Germany and to a lesser extent the Netherlands shared the same socio-economic trends which resulted from the increasing industrialization of their economies. In the middle of the nineteenth century, France and increasingly also the economically integrated German states became industrial nations and as a result, class differences – which so profoundly influenced the contemporary social theorist Karl Marx – became more pronounced, as did regional inequality. These trends were less clearly visible in the Netherlands, which did not develop as an industrial nation until later and never at the same level. Nevertheless, many of the socio-economic

⁴⁰ Cohen, Deborah and Maura O'Connor eds. *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective*. New York/London: Routledge, 2004. xi.

⁴¹ Breuilley, "German Question," 14.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Cameron, Rondo and Larry Neal. *A Concise Economic History of the World*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. 239.

⁴⁴ Palmer, *History of the Modern World*, 475.

tensions – based in the shortage of food supplies after the meager 1845-1847 harvests and in a lack of political power for the lower classes – were felt in the Netherlands as well as in France or Germany.

Politically, finally, the Netherlands and France shared many characteristics with most of the individual German states. The settlement of 1815 had restored much the absolute power of the monarch in France and Prussia, and given much of the same power to the Dutch king and the petty princes of Central Europe through charter-like constitutions. Despite their apparent independence, however, the numerous smaller states and principalities were politically dominated by the two largest states, the Kingdom of Prussia and the Austrian Empire. Since the events of 1848 had Austria preoccupied with national uprisings in Bohemia, Hungary and Northern Italy, Prussia dominated politics in the smaller German states during the course of 1848 and 1849,⁴⁵ a factor which further enhances the comparability of Germany with the cases of France and the Netherlands.

The nature of the revolutionary conflict and the subsequent reforms make the nation-state not only the most applicable as a unit of analysis, but relevant to the study itself. In order to encompass the full impact of the revolutionary reforms, enacted in France and intended in Prussia but most importantly, intended for a unified Germany, the hypothetical German state is the best available analytical unit for this comparison. The section on the German revolutions in the following chapter will show that grievances throughout all of Germany were for a large part the same, and the intended reform – at its high point represented by the constitution drafted by the Frankfurt Assembly – would have made this hypothetical unit a reality. The interaction between liberal constitutional reform and nationalist desires, argues Jonathan Sperber, is crucial to understand the dynamics of the 1848 revolutions⁴⁶. As shall become clear throughout this thesis, the same interaction is vital also to explain their eventual failure.

The study of revolutions

Comparative historians have readily investigated the so-called Great Revolutions (in France, Russian, China and arguably England) for their particular social impact and clear-cut transfer of power. One of the first examples of a comparative study of revolutions, Crane Brinton's 1938 *Anatomy of Revolution*⁴⁷, describes the revolutionary process as a cycle: the revolution moves away from the old order to a moderately liberal regime, which is overtaken by radicals, eventually losing popular support and subsequently subject to a moderate or even conservative reaction. This cycle, however, has proven specifically applicable to the Great Revolutions but may not provide a good typology of many other revolutions such as the ones

⁴⁵ Sheehan, James. *German History, 1770-1866*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989. 42.

⁴⁶ Sperber, *European Revolutions*.

⁴⁷ Brinton, Crane. *The Anatomy of Revolution*. revised ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1965.

of 1848. There are, however, two important points to take from Brinton's model. First of all, he recognizes the potential rift between radical and more moderately liberal revolutionaries; the relation between the two groups is often precarious and can either serve to propel the revolution further or break it up from the inside instead. The second aspect that will prove relevant to our subject is that of a conservative reaction. In a revolutionary situation there are (at least) two contending parties, and while the weakness of the revolutionary faction has often been cited as a potential cause for their failure, the determination and force of the conservative reaction should similarly be investigated.

As has been said in the introduction, the work of Charles Tilly, has contributed greatly to the understanding of the dynamic of revolutions. His *European Revolutions, 1492-1992* uses a precariously structured and perhaps too widely applicable definition of the concept revolution.⁴⁸ According to this definition, a revolution has two components: a 'revolutionary situation' and a 'revolutionary outcome'. A revolutionary *situation* entails "multiple sovereignty: two or more blocs make effective, incompatible claims to control of the state, or to be the state."⁴⁹ This multiple sovereignty generally takes the following course: a contender or coalition of contenders advances competing claims to control of the state, these claims are supported by a significant segment of the citizenry and finally the *ancien régime* is unwilling or incapable of suppressing the alternative coalition. As is the case in Brinton's anatomy, and as we shall observe also in the events of 1848, Tilly states that larger revolutions generally consist of not one but a series of consecutive revolutionary situations. Important to add is that the nature of a revolution requires that the contending claims to control of the state no longer treat the state as an actor which will continue its role in the intended new situation⁵⁰. This last addition will prove important in order to distinguish between the cases of France and Germany on the one hand, and the Netherlands on the other.

After the revolutionary situation has arisen, a revolution is not complete until a revolutionary *outcome* has occurred. A revolutionary outcome occurs "with transfer of state power from those who held it before the start of multiple sovereignty to a new coalition"⁵¹ Characteristics of such a transfer of power include defections of members of the original polity, acquisition of armed forces and other means of coercion by the revolutionary coalition and similarly control of the state apparatus by members of the revolutionary coalition.

There is, however, a fundamental problem with Tilly's definition, which essentially treats a revolution as built around a 'transfer of power'. His use of this concept is at the same

⁴⁸ Some aspects were introduced in Tilly, Charles, *Coercion, Capital and State Formation, AD 990-1992*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993. The definition was further elaborated in Tilly, *European Revolutions*, 10-20.

⁴⁹ Tilly, *European Revolutions*, 10.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 14.

⁵¹ *Ibid*.

time too encompassing and excludes some cases of a revolution⁵². By including such events as military coups and fratricide among princes, which carry no further implications for the state institutions or for social structures, his definition has become too wide. Skocpol instead characterizes social revolutions as “rapid, basic transformations of a society’s state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below.”⁵³ The transfer of power is thus not the key aspect of a revolution; instead the primary characteristic is a structural transformation of the state. For example, in the case of the Netherlands in 1848, the king remained head-of-state, but the constitutional reform transformed the nature of the parliament and its electoral basis, under the pressure of potential revolts like the ones occurring elsewhere in Europe, thereby forming part of the European revolutions of 1848. The transformation of the state institutions, Skocpol argues, should be paired with a consequential transformation of that state’s social structure⁵⁴. With the exception of her introductory chapter Skocpol herself, however, treats revolutions in the first instance as crises of states, resolved by mutations in the character of these states – and only pays minor attention to the social implications of those mutations. Therefore, while the larger social consequences of the revolutions of 1848 provides an interesting subject for investigation, for the sake of structure and limitations of space, we shall here focus mainly on the transformation of state structures to determine the character of the revolutions.

Another problematic characteristic that is too often included in the definition of a revolution is the occurrence of violence⁵⁵. While indeed the contending claims put forward sometimes result in an open violent struggle, making this a necessary condition excludes numerous cases of revolutionary change from the equation. Imagine the following hypothetical situation. A senior general, enjoying the unconditional loyalty of his troops, decides to become the champion of the people. He marches on the capital, intends to lay siege to the royal palace and under this pressure, the king abdicates in favor of an elected government. Although no blood has been shed, this situation clearly involves a split between rivaling factions and a fundamental transformation of the state institutions.

A revolution clearly needs not involve a violent clash and although the nature of the rivaling faction’s claim may differ greatly from the example given here, the reality of its contention is enough to create a revolutionary situation. Similarly, the fundamental rearrangement of state institutions may be wrested from the establishment by force, but its occurrence top-down under the potential yet tangible threat of such force would not change

⁵² Imagine, for instance, a situation where general upheaval forces the abdication of the monarch in favor of an elected head-of-state. If the monarch were to subsequently be elected president, arguably no power has been transferred, thereby falling outside Tilly’s definition of a revolution.

⁵³ Skocpol, Theda. *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979. 4.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Emsley, Clive. *Introduction to the Study of Revolutions and Some Interpretations of 1848*. Milton Keynes: The Open University Press, 1976. 8-9.

its revolutionary nature either. The example painted above discredits the inclusion of violence into the definition of a revolution. Jack Goldstone underlines that while that may be a characteristic of the Russian and Chinese revolutions of the twentieth century, it is hardly applicable to most state crises in the early modern he would qualify as revolutions⁵⁶. Tilly, too, argues that contention for control over armed forces and popular mobilization in support of a revolutionary coalition are characteristics of the revolutionary process⁵⁷, but the revolutionary transformation in his definition can also occur peacefully under the threat of use of force. Violence, therefore, should be considered a potential and even empirical characteristic of a revolutionary situation, but not a necessary condition.

The definition of a revolution thus should include the following aspects. A sense of duality in which a revolutionary situation is followed by a revolutionary outcome remains essential to understand its dynamics. A revolutionary situation, then, is defined as a situation in which contending claims are put forward by one (or more) revolutionary faction challenging the existing state institutions. The revolutionary faction requires some significant popular support,⁵⁸ transforming it into a “movement for radical social change”⁵⁹. This opposition between several contending factions may, but does not need to, come to a violent conflict as the possibility of such a popular revolt sometimes holds enough influence to determine the outcome of such a situation. A revolutionary outcome, we see in Skocpol’s definition, involves a rapid transformation of a society’s state (and often class) structures.

The occurrence of a revolutionary outcome, then, defines the revolution’s success or failure. Skocpol identifies successful structural change as a basic defining feature of revolutions.⁶⁰ Indeed, if the revolutionary claim is immediately crushed by the authorities, we can hardly speak of an actual revolution. In the case of the 1848 revolutions, however, I argue that considering the initial occurrence of fundamental transformations – regardless of the subsequent reversal of almost all of those changes – or in some cases of the existence of a longer period during which neither claim could reestablish an accepted status quo, we can speak of revolutions, irrespective of their success or failure.

Like I indicated above, the dual character of a revolution remains important for the definition of revolutionary failure. In its basic form, revolutionary failure can be defined as the absence of a revolutionary outcome after a revolutionary situation. However, one important condition must be added to this definition. Given Skocpol’s emphasis on fundamental structural change, the definition of a revolution needs to include an aspect of durability. I want to therefore include the condition that not only must a revolutionary situation produce a

⁵⁶ Goldstone, *Revolution and Rebellion*, 8.

⁵⁷ Tilly, *European Revolutions*, 49-50.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 10.

⁵⁹ Emsley, *Introduction to the Study of Revolutions*, 9.

⁶⁰ Skocpol, *Social Revolutions*, 5.

revolutionary outcome, but this outcome must be *sustained*. A sustained outcome is of course equally difficult to delimitate and to merely introduce a necessary time span would undoubtedly exclude several cases. Nevertheless, as a rule of thumb we could say that when a revolutionary outcome goes unchallenged by another faction of the populace, most likely a version the former incumbent party, we can speak of a sustained revolutionary outcome. Instead, if the outcome is challenged within such a relatively small time span, this should be considered as a continuation of the initial revolutionary situation (regardless of whether the challenge happens at the behest of the incumbent party or a second revolutionary faction). Revolutionary failure therefore is defined as *the absence of a sustained revolutionary outcome after the occurrence of a revolutionary situation*.

Outline

In its basic form, comparative history concerns itself with similarities and differences; in explaining a given phenomenon it asks “which conditions, or factors, were broadly shared, and which were distinctive - a variant of J.S. Mill's classic formulation of the methods of agreement and difference.”⁶¹ In terms of the logic behind the method, comparative historians studying macro-social developments proceed according to those two basic analytic designs, which are laid out by Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers in “The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry”⁶².

On the one hand, macro-social analysts can try to establish, according to the basic principles of Mill's method of agreement, that several cases having in common the phenomenon to be explained also have in common the hypothesized causal factors, although the cases vary in other ways that might have seemed causally relevant. On the other hand, following the method of difference, macro-social analysts can contrast cases in which the phenomenon to be explained and the hypothesized causes are present to other (“negative”) cases in which the phenomenon and the causes are both absent, although they are as similar as possible to the “positive” cases in other respects. Taken alone, Skocpol and Somers argue, this second approach hold more power for establishing valid causal associations, which is why sometimes, if the historical incidence of cases allows the researcher to do so, it may be beneficial “to combine the two methods by using at once several positive cases along with suitable negative cases as contrasts.”⁶³

This current investigation into the failure of revolutions, particularly those of 1848 in France and Germany, uses this method favored by Skocpol and Somers. The analysis of the failure of the 1848 revolutions will combine two of the four types of comparative analysis

⁶¹ Cohen and O'Connor, *Comparison and History*, xi.

⁶² Skocpol and Somers, “Uses of Comparative History”

⁶³ *Ibid*, 183.

outlined by Tilly in his *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*⁶⁴. The aim is essentially to determine the common factors in the cases of France and Germany, which share the outcome of revolutionary failure ('universalizing' comparison). Subsequently contrasting these cases with the Netherlands, where the revolutionary transformation of the state institutions was established and consolidated. Making use of the method of difference, or a 'variation-finding' comparison, the Dutch case will help to determine whether the observed causal factors in the first two cases are indeed significant for the observed result.

A common criticism has been that historians using the comparative method by looking too much for general tendencies lose too many important details. In addition, Moore warns that "too strong a devotion to theory always carries the danger that one may overemphasize the facts that fit a theory beyond their importance in the history of individual countries."⁶⁵ As I am aware of this potential problem – which is also obviously linked to restrictions of space, I have decided to restrict this research to a selection of only three cases – where there are of course many more within the same wave of revolutions of 1848 which are worth incorporating into this study into the failure of revolutions. I hope therefore to be able to adhere to the propriety of historical research by giving a detailed account of all three, which will prove to be readily comparable – without omitting vital factors and without of course being perfectly identical.

As the comparative method in historical analysis is set in between two distinct theoretical approaches – qualitative versus quantitative analysis – criticism may often be raised from either side. The above claim that comparative analysis loses valuable detail is valid, but can obviously be fired with much more force against quantitative analysis, which through codifying the entirety of society runs the risk of losing an insight into that society as a dynamic unity. The reverse argument is made equally easily, by saying that qualitative scientists run the risk of getting lost in petty detail, thereby losing the ability to create a coherent understanding or explanatory theory of the phenomenon or event he studies.

Such skepticism is lodged also against comparative historical analysis and the 'small-*N* problem'. Social scientists – like comparative historians engaged in the study of social change and the generation of explanatory models – may argue that the combination of many factors assumed to be causally relevant with evidence from only a small number of comparable cases leads to too much case-specificity and therefore too little theoretical relevance. Dietrich Rueschemeyer⁶⁶ concedes that indeed, the small number of historical cases available is an obstacle to a historian's ability to come close to the 'ideal of a

⁶⁴ Tilly, Charles. *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1984.

⁶⁵ Moore, *Social Origins*, xiii.

⁶⁶ Rueschemeyer, Dietrich. "Can One Or a Few Cases Yield Theoretical Gains?" in Mahoney, James and Dietrich Rueschemeyer. *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 305-336.

universally applicable social theory'. They argue, however, that although falling short of devising a universal social theory, comparative historical work generates a sense of insight and understanding, causal explanations and partially generalized propositions which can subsequently be tested on other available cases. As such, comparative historical analysis produces generalizable explanations within a broader historical context.

Such is also the intention of this research. In the subsequent chapters of this paper, I shall first provide a qualitative account of the events in France, Germany and the Netherlands in Chapter 3. In particular the focus will lie on those events that represent the turning points in the revolutionary process, from the initial success of the revolutionary claims to the moments where internal division within the revolutionary faction surfaced, to the reactionary challenge posed by the conservative monarchist faction.

Based on the existing literature on the subject, in Chapter 4 I will test the relevance of the causal factors suggested in the first chapter. Comparing the failure of the revolutionary movement in France and Germany with the successful reform in the Netherlands, I will answer the question of which factors contributed to the failure of the 1848 revolutions. Did the internal division of the revolutionary faction, which surfaced as the conflict between socialists and liberals during the June Days in France, and fragmented the Frankfurt Parliament in Germany, indeed leave the revolutionary regimes in a position vulnerable to a conservative reaction? How important was the continued control of Frederick William of Prussia over his military for the success of the counterrevolution in Germany? Did the knowledge that Prussia, unable to ward off revolution at home, would not act as a rescuer in the case of a revolution in the Netherlands influence William II's decision to accept far going constitutional reform? Chapter 4 will address the importance of four factors in the three cases: 1) the internal division of the revolutionary movement; 2) the internal division of the conservative faction; 3) the control of the conservative faction over the two important sources of power: coercive means and popular support and 4) the intervention by a foreign power, which in 1849 did prove crucial, for instance, for the suppression of the Hungarian revolution and the Roman Republic.

Chapter 3. The Events of the Revolution

The central question of this paper is why the revolutions of 1848 failed in France and Germany, but in order to answer that question we should first investigate *how* the revolutions failed. Looking at the events of 1848-1849 as steps in the process from a revolutionary situation to a revolutionary outcome, we can observe how and where the causal factors manifest themselves and determine the outcome of the revolution. This chapter first describes the emergence of the revolutionary situation in France, Germany and the Netherlands before proceeding to answer the question which events were crucial in determining the failure of the February Revolution in France and the March Revolution in Germany. Investigation of these pivotal moments will create an insight in the nature of the forces at work in the revolutionary process, contrasting them also with the case of revolutionary success in the Netherlands. On the basis of this investigation, then, Chapter 4 will outline which factors caused the failure of the 1848 revolutions.

Spring 1848: Revolution

While with the popular uprisings of the preceding decades the memory of the French Revolution was still fresh, many in the first half of the nineteenth century were expecting a general European-wide revolution. This general sentiment had manifested itself in local revolts, which occurred in the Mediterranean in the 1820s and more widespread in the 1830s, but none were so interconnected as the events of 1848.⁶⁷ Therefore, while I briefly lay out the revolutionary events early on in 1848 structured per country, it will be important to keep in mind the constant interaction between the various revolutions, particularly in this early stage.

The causes for the Spring revolutions have been widely chronicled and hotly debated elsewhere, and it is not the intention of this paper to contribute a challenging position to that discussion. For the general understanding of the forces at large in the 1840s, however, I should provide at least a short overview of the generally accepted causes. Most historians of nineteenth century Europe, including Roger Price in *The Revolutions of 1848*⁶⁸ and Robert Goldstein in “Comparing the European Revolutions of 1848 and 1989” point to three dimensions, although the order of importance changes per author. Firstly, the impact of the Industrial Revolution on the continent created long-term socio-economic grievances among the working class (because of, for instance, increased unemployment and low wages), a long-term factor which was aggravated by the poor harvests of the mid-1840s. Second is a

⁶⁷ Breuille, John. “1848: Connected or Comparable Revolutions?” in Körner, *1848: A European Revolution?*

⁶⁸ Price, *Revolutions of 1848*, 17-33.

socio-political factor, based on middle-class dissatisfaction with the limited freedom of the press and the absence of opportunities for political participation. Finally, the problem of political fragmentation (in the case of Germany) or multinational imperialism (in the case of the Habsburg Empire) created further grievances among the politically engaged bourgeoisie. Further factors sometimes mentioned are grievances among rural peasants over property rights⁶⁹ (particularly in Germany), or dynastic rivalry in the July Monarchy between Orléanists and Legitimists.⁷⁰

For these circumstances to turn into a revolution, Price writes, “triggering incidents were necessary although once one government had fallen, the widespread lack of confidence already evident within governing circles was likely to take its toll.”⁷¹ From the revolts in Paris in February 1848 onwards, the revolutionary wave of 1848-1849 was a sequence of interacting events and realignments. Some historians have dated the beginning of the 1848 European revolution to January riots in Palermo. Although in a way this is correct, most historians agree that no connection can be laid between these events and the subsequent February Revolution in Paris, whereas the latter is commonly accepted as the starting point and the catalyst for revolutions that followed in capital cities like Berlin, Vienna and Munich. Due the centralized nature of France’s political institutions, events in Paris almost immediately took on national significance, but at the same time because of the absence of a significant revolutionary movement in the provinces, the local institutions remained largely intact.⁷² Furthermore, the February Revolution summoned up ghosts from the past and focused all eyes on the developments in France. For this reason, Geoffrey Ellis refers to Paris as “the capital city of European politics, the center of hopes of the party of movement.”⁷³ Conservatives looked on warily, fearing the advance of the revolutionary armies, while radical liberals followed the example of the Parisians and enacted their own revolution, first in bordering Baden and Württemberg, then on eastward.

Palmer underlines existing expectations of an imminent revolution and points out, using a phrase by Alexis de Tocqueville, that in fact, ‘the July Monarchy in France was a platform of boards built over a volcano’⁷⁴. The moderately liberal Louis-Philippe was opposed from the beginning on one side by the Legitimists who contested his right to the throne and increasingly on the other by Republicans and Socialists who became dissatisfied with his social policies and the elitist base of his power. Further aggravation was caused by the limited freedom of the press and especially the lack of political input for the bourgeoisie, who

⁶⁹ Ellis, Geoffrey. “The Revolution of 1848-1849 in France” in Evans, *Revolutions in Europe*, 27.

⁷⁰ Palmer, *History of the Modern World*.

⁷¹ Price, *Revolutions of 1848*, 18.

⁷² Price, Roger. *Revolution and Reaction: 1848 and the Second French Republic*. London: Croom Helm, 1975. 13.

⁷³ Ellis, “The Revolution of 1848-1849 in France,” 28.

⁷⁴ Palmer, *History of the Modern World*, 476.

wanted France to follow the British example of 1832 in expanding the suffrage. Political alienation became more concrete when harvests in 1846 and 1847 led to an economic depression.

A conflict over the organization of a public banquet on February 22nd led to the raising of barricades overnight and confrontation with the National Guard. Escalation of these riots resulted in the resignation of the sitting cabinet on the 23rd and the abdication of Louis-Philippe on February 24th. Two days later, the liberal opposition came together to organize a provisional government, called the Second Republic. The successes of the early Second Republic have been profusely chronicled⁷⁵. Its primary accomplishment was the establishment of universal male suffrage, by which in April a Constituent Assembly was elected. Furthermore the Second Republic enacted the abolition of slavery, proposed by Victor Schoelcher on April 27, 1848. The February Revolution also established commission at the Luxembourg Palace, under the presidency of Louis Blanc, with the objective of advising the Provisional Government on solving the social problem.⁷⁶ The Revolution established the principle of the "right to work"⁷⁷ (*droit au travail*), and under the urging of the socialist Blanc the Provisional Government decided to establish "National Workshops"⁷⁸ for the unemployed, which became a symbol of hope for workers.

The news that Louis Philippe had been driven from his throne by an enraged mob thoroughly frightened the rulers of Central Europe, and "nowhere were they more numerous than in Germany, nowhere were they more anxious to appease the Revolution."⁷⁹ The unrest, along with the news, started in the southern German states and from there spread in all directions, ending only with concessions which, "according to the character of the prince or the vigor and pugnacity of the opposition, varying from a liberalization to a democratization of the regime."⁸⁰ While in France the Revolution not only started but was largely confined to Paris and a few other cities⁸¹, in Germany the Revolution took place first in the towns and cities but soon spread to the countryside. Hamerow argues in favor the latter's importance, stating that "the crumbling governments of the Restoration, badly shaken by disorders in the town, collapsed completely in the face of an insurrection in the country."⁸²

Reports of peasant insurrections in the provinces and riots in the major German cities caused most monarchs to hastily make concessions to the liberals. In Baden the grand duke

⁷⁵ See for instance Ellis, "The Revolution of 1848-1849 in France"; Price, Roger. *The Second French Republic: A Social History*. London: Batsford, 1972.

⁷⁶ Price, *Revolution and Reaction*, 23.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Palmer, *History of the Modern World*, 477.

⁷⁹ Hamerow, Theodor S. *Restoration, Revolution, Reaction: Economics and Politics in Germany, 1815-1871*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958. 98.

⁸⁰ Sigmann, Jean. *Eighteen-Fortyeight: The Romantic and Democratic Revolutions in Europe*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1973. 251.

⁸¹ Price, *Revolutions of 1848*, 54.

⁸² Hamerow, *Restoration, Revolution, Reaction*, 107.

appointed a liberal as his new prime minister and similarly in Württemberg and Darmstadt conservatives were replaced by liberals in the cabinets.

As Germany was economically, politically and militarily dominated by the states of Prussia and Austria, the Revolution could not be complete without victory in Berlin and Vienna. The March days in Vienna led to the forced resignations of count Metternich, which in conjunction with the widespread nationalist revolutions in the Habsburg domains effectively neutralized Austria's dominance over Germany for the time being. The revolution spread quickly through the German states and halfway March Prussia, too, was the locus of serious urban and rural disorder. Frederick William IV, faced with numerous petitions for reform and alarmed by the collapse of Metternich's regime, decided to make concessions. A further escalation of the unrest after a bloody confrontation with the military ensured that these concessions would have to go as far as the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. With the dominant forces in Berlin and Vienna compromised by internal problems, the regimes of smaller German states had no hope of withstanding the demands of revolutionaries.

Aside from the socio-economic grievances and liberal political demands which had characterized the February Revolution in Paris, the German revolutions championed a long-existing issue, that of German national unification. *Grossdeutschland* or greater Germany proved to be one of the most contentious issues during the 1848 Revolution. In Heidelberg, in the state of Baden, on March 5, 1848, a group of German liberals began to make plans for an election to a German national assembly. Under pressure from the revolutionaries and the newly established liberal governments, the German states agreed to hold elections to an Assembly for all of Germany. Frederick William, too, had to promise that Prussia would be merged forthwith into a greater Germany. On May 18, the National Assembly gathered in Frankfurt to decide on the matter of German unification and to draw up a liberal constitution.

In the week of March 7, inspired by the events in Paris, Amsterdam and The Hague were both witness to popular disturbances.⁸³ Although the situation was largely contained, it caused "an undefined but nevertheless very real anxiety."⁸⁴ Nevertheless, Ido de Haan notes that the revolutionary clashes in the Netherlands are generally discussed from a leveling viewpoint, due to the small scale and subdued character of the disturbances.⁸⁵ Although the case of the Netherlands is often given minimal attention in general works on the European revolutions of 1848-1849, its constitutional reforms certainly deserves to be titled revolutionary.

⁸³ Stuurman, "1848: Revolutionary Reform," 455.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 464.

⁸⁵ Haan, Ido de. *Het Beginsel van Leven en Wasdom: De Constitutie van de Nederlandse Politiek in de Negentiende Eeuw*. Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2003. 51.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands had been established in 1815 after the end of the Napoleonic wars, placing the house of Orange at the head of a conservative constitutional monarchy. The loss of a considerable part of the country's territory in 1830 by the independence of Belgium had made King William II increasingly protective of his power. Furthermore, William II remained wary of any revolutionary activity in France, remembering how in 1795 the Revolutionary Army had ousted grandfather, Stadtholder William V.

The news of the fall of the July Monarchy reached the Netherlands on February 27th and rekindled the fear that revolutionary armies would again wash over Europe. Tentative plans were drawn up for military action with the backing of Prussian armies and relations with Belgium were improved so that it would function as a buffer against French military progress. News of the revolutionary uprisings in Germany, however, affected both the King's determination to maintain power and the position of the liberal opposition – arguably the potential leaders of a revolutionary faction.

The liberal opposition, of which J.R. Thorbecke became the implicit leader, made a first substantial attempt at constitutional reforms in 1844. Building on a liberal tradition⁸⁶, Thorbecke and eight other liberal members of the Dutch Parliament submitted a series of bills, which failed to pass as the conservative majority in the Parliament made sure the proposal was discarded without being discussed or voted on.⁸⁷ This conservative reaction confirmed Thorbecke's belief that the Dutch political institutions needed a shock in order to achieve the desired transformation.⁸⁸ Although Sap notes that "most liberals – even Thorbecke – were still wedded to a monarchical executive," given Thorbecke's comments on the stagnation of the political development in 1843 and the need for an external shock, it is likely that they, too, were becoming sympathetic to the prospect of revolutionary change.

The necessary shock was provided by the upheaval in 1848 in the surrounding countries and particularly the example set by Germany where governments granted extensive concessions to the liberal opposition.⁸⁹ On March 9, under pressure of the threat of revolution, a total of 27 previously postponed bills were passed, but like J.C. Boogman indicates, it "soon became clear that given the political circumstances a more radical revision was necessary."⁹⁰ Two days later, Thorbecke announced that "it seems impossible that this is

⁸⁶ Stuurman, Siep. *Wacht Op Onze Daden: Het Liberalisme en de Vernieuwing van de Nederlandse Staat*. Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1992. 115. Stuurman argues that the main points of the 1844 proposal had been formulated as early as 1830.

⁸⁷ Drentje, Jan. *Het Vrijste Volk Der Wereld: Thorbecke, Nederland en Europa*. Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, 1998. 90.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸⁹ Boogman, J.C. *Rondom 1848: De politieke ontwikkeling van Nederland 1840-1858*. Bussum: Unieboek, 1978. 51.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

it”⁹¹. The liberals therefore decided to submit a much more extensive bill, reminiscent of the attempt in 1844, on March 12.

The reaction of King William II on March 13 surprised contemporaries and has continued to puzzle historians. Under the apparent pressure of the doomsday scenarios taking place in the surrounding countries and influenced surely also by the counsel of his personal advisors, De Kempenaer and Van Bevervoorde, he announced to the Second Chamber that given the circumstances he was prepared to make considerable concessions.⁹² In cooperation with parliament and its popular mandate, he was prepared to enact a fundamental revision of the constitution. The king, who in the years before had often demonstrated his conservative standpoints, declared to have turned from conservative to liberal in the span of 24 hours.

The consequential constitutional reform constituted a ‘bloodless coup’, to use a phrase by John Sap⁹³. A committee for the revision of the constitution, headed by Thorbecke, was appointed by the King; the body of text of the constitution was compiled within a week, mostly by Thorbecke himself. The constitution introduced ministerial responsibility and created royal immunity; the final responsibility for policy thereby no longer rested with the King, but with his cabinet of ministers. The new constitution also restructured the election process for the Estates General, so that the Second Chamber (Lower House) was now directly elected and therefore had a much more powerful popular mandate. Additionally, the Second Chamber gained the right to amend and interpolate legislation. Furthermore, citizens acquired fundamental rights to freedom of religion, opinion and the press.⁹⁴ In essence the constitution drawn up by Thorbecke in 1848 remains intact in the Netherlands today, with important amendments facilitating universal suffrage taking place only in the twentieth century.

Confrontation

Historians largely agree that the Revolution of the Spring of 1848 quickly washed over the many conservative monarchies of Europe⁹⁵. Although nowhere except in France the monarch was actually toppled, liberal reforms were enacted or promised everywhere, as were various forms of social legislation. But the Revolution of 1848, writes R.R. Palmer, “though it shook the whole Continent, lacked basic driving strength. It failed almost as rapidly as it succeeded.”⁹⁶ A similar observation is made by Roger Price, who argues that “with the

⁹¹ Quoted in Boogman, *Rondom 1848*, 51.

⁹² Boogman, *Rondom 1848*, 51.

⁹³ Sap, John W. *The Netherlands Constitution: 1848-1998, Historical Reflections*. Utrecht: Lemma, 2000. ix.

⁹⁴ Drentje, *Vrijste Volk Der Wereld*, 102-103.

⁹⁵ See Palmer, *History of the Modern World*; Sperber, *European Revolutions*; Price, *Revolutions of 1848*.

⁹⁶ Palmer, *History of the Modern World*, 476.

benefit of hindsight it is easy to see that a conservative reaction against revolutionary change was inevitable.⁹⁷

June is generally considered as the major turning point, not only in France but in most states across Europe. Theodor Hamerow, labeling June the 'Thermidor'⁹⁸ of the 1848 revolutions, points out that the June Days uprising in Paris vanquished the dreams of the February revolution, and that in Bohemia, Naples and Venetia, too, June turned out to be a crucial moment in the process of revolution.⁹⁹ Although in both France and Germany the forces of division and reaction, which would lead to the eventual failure of the revolutions, were in motion shortly after the initial 'springtime of the peoples', the final eradication of the revolutionary regimes and reforms took considerably longer. In Germany the middle class liberals were able to remain in power for almost a year until the ambitious Frankfurt Parliament dissolved without any notable result, and the princes of Central Europe were returned to power by the Prussian armies of the conservative reaction.¹⁰⁰ The French Second Republic remained intact at least in name even until Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état* in 1852, but it was already clear to contemporary observers that Bonaparte represented not the revolutionary Frenchman, but the conservative.¹⁰¹

Tensions between right-wing, liberal Orléanists, and left-wing, Radical Republicans and Socialists came to a head in June of 1848, during the so-called June Days Uprising. The irony of the universal suffrage revealed the distinction between Paris, locus of the revolution and inspiration for the radical revolutionaries, and the predominantly conservative provinces. The socialist movement, champions of the expansion of suffrage and proposed social legislation, had little support outside the major cities, and therefore became a source of only minor influence in the Second Republic.

The euphoria that set in after the revolution in February was short-lived among the workers in Paris. Promised a right to work, they found almost no employment in the private sector since the depression had severely hurt or bankrupted businesses.¹⁰² The National Workshops were established under Emile Thomas to provide jobs, but only menial tasks were available and those were insufficient to keep all the unemployed and hungry applicants busy; no suitable work was available for artisans and craftsmen. The marginal influence of the socialists in the Provisional Government could not protect the project of the National Workshops. Although at one point provided it had provided work to over 100,000 individuals, because of its high costs the project was terminated by the Provisional Government.

⁹⁷ Price, *Revolutions of 1848*, 85.

⁹⁸ Hamerow, *Restoration, Revolution, Reaction*, 117.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 117-118.

¹⁰¹ Price, *Documents*, 169-170.

¹⁰² Castelli, Helen. "June Days" *Encyclopedia of Revolutions of 1848*. Ed. John Chastain. Oktober 2004. Ohio University. May 2008. <<http://www.ohiou.edu/~Chastain/ip/junedays.htm>>

Demonstration against the dissolution of the National Workshops, writes Roger Price, “escalated rapidly on 22 and 23 June. The Executive Commission regarded the insurrection as another street mob, and ordered Cavaignac to send troops to protect the government buildings.”¹⁰³ As the inexperienced National Guard turned against the rioters, the four days which followed were filled with bloody clashes on the barricades and hard-handed suppression by the Provisional Government in what Palmer argues reflected a “class war”¹⁰⁴. Outnumbered and badly armed, the working class rioters were eventually routed by the forces of the Provisional Government headed by the conservative Cavaignac and Lamartine.

In theory, Jean Sigmann argues, “universal suffrage had put an end to the revolution in April”, while in practice the June Days had represented the last Parisian reaction against this electoral reversal of their February successes.¹⁰⁵ In gratitude for the June victory, writes Price, “the Assembly retained Cavaignac as the head of the government. But gratitude rapidly faded as the conservative reaction in the country gathered pace.”¹⁰⁶ The June insurrection was succeeded by a long period of growing repression, as most social and liberal reforms that the February Revolution had committed to were postponed or withdrawn. To give two examples, in September a law extended the working day to twelve hours, while in November the *droit au travail* was not included in the new Constitution.¹⁰⁷

When in December presidential elections were held, a surprising candidate was elected by popular mandate. With the liberal left divided into several candidacies and lower-class disillusioned with the sitting members of the Provisional Government, Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte (son of Napoleon Bonaparte’s brother Louis) won the election with almost 75% of the votes, marking an important defeat of the Republican and Socialist camp. The most important candidate of the bourgeoisie, General Cavaignac, was tainted by his role as the suppressor of the workers protests. Alexis de Tocqueville observed that “the anarchists find him too concerned about preserving law and order, and the supporters of law and order consider him too well disposed toward the anarchists.”¹⁰⁸ Most important, however, was Bonaparte’s massive support in the provinces – where the vast majority of the French population still lived. The election of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte effectively put an end to the aspirations of the liberal republicans. “*Démocrate-socialiste* groups were increasingly forced underground”¹⁰⁹ as the freedoms of the press and the right of assembly were restricted as clubs and newspapers were closed¹¹⁰. The reality of the failure of the revolution became even

¹⁰³ Price, *Revolution and Reaction*, 165.

¹⁰⁴ Palmer, *History of the Modern World*, 479.

¹⁰⁵ Sigmann, *Eighteen-Fortyeight*, 227.

¹⁰⁶ Price, *Documents*, 21.

¹⁰⁷ Sigmann, *Eighteen-Fortyeight*, 228.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Price, *Documents*, 115.

¹⁰⁹ Price, *Revolutions of 1848*, 65.

¹¹⁰ Price, *Documents*, 21.

clearer in 1852 when Louis Napoleon dismantled the Assembly and pronounced himself Emperor Napoleon III.¹¹¹

While in the smaller German states revolutionary regimes seemed to be moderately successful largely due to the Prussian and Austrian inability to intervene, the delegates in the Frankfurt Assembly were engaged in what became a long and complicated debate over the future of Germany. By late 1848, the Prussian aristocrats including Otto von Bismarck and generals had regained power in Berlin. They had not been defeated permanently during the incidents of March, they had only retreated temporarily. General von Wrangel led the troops who recaptured Berlin for the old powers, and King Frederick William IV immediately rejoined the old forces. In November, the king dissolved the new Prussian parliament and put forth a constitution of his own which was based upon the work of the assembly, yet maintaining the ultimate authority of the king. When, as Theodor Hamerow accounts, “on March 28, 1849, the great debate came to an end, as the Frankfurt Parliament announced to the world the promulgation of a new constitution for Germany,”¹¹² Frederick William denied its legitimacy over the princes of the small German states. Offered the imperial crown of a unified Germany by the Frankfurt Assembly, he declined the offer, stating that he did not want to accept a crown from revolutionaries.

Jonathan Sperber argues that it was mainly “the king’s own extreme conservative political convictions strengthened by the counsels of his unofficial advisors, the equally conservative court camarilla, that brought the decision”.¹¹³ After this refusal most moderate forces in the party of movement (pro-Prussian constitutional monarchists) returned home disappointed and the movement took on increasingly radical republican overtones. By mid-May, demonstrations had turned in to conflicts on the street, including the building of barricades, seizure of arsenals and street-fighting. The locus of the revolution had shifted from capital cities to provincial town and the countryside.

The deciding blow to the 1848 revolution in Germany was given by direct intervention by Prussian troops in the smaller states – quite like they had done to the Dutch Patriot revolution in the 1780s¹¹⁴. Important too was the French decision not to back revolutionary regimes militarily, particularly in Baden and Italy¹¹⁵. Part of the reason for this refusal was the collective memory of the 1789 French Revolution and the costly, eventually fatal Napoleonic Wars. Additionally, as the Provisional Government became increasingly dominated by catholic monarchists, Louis-Napoleon decided against support for the Roman Republic, and instead backed the siege on Rome in order to restore the papal seat. A Republic now largely

¹¹¹ Ibid, 90.

¹¹² Hamerow, *Restoration, Revolution, Reaction*, 136.

¹¹³ Sperber, *European Revolutions*, 229.

¹¹⁴ Schama, Simon. *Patriots and Liberators*. London: Collins, 1977. 129-132.

¹¹⁵ Sperber, *European Revolutions*, 234.

only in name, the conservative monarchist majority of the Assembly did not support revolutionary intervention and a final Liberal attempt to have the anti-revolutionary intervention in Rome denounced as 'unconstitutional'¹¹⁶ failed. The Republican armies would not again spread the revolution across Europe.

Having faded to insignificance after the Prussian refusal of their draft constitution, the Frankfurt Assembly dissembled without any significant results. Friedrich Engels remarked in 1852 that "the fate of the revolution was decided in Vienna and Berlin; the key issues of life were dealt with in both those capitals without taking the slightest notice of the Frankfurt Assembly."¹¹⁷ The victory of the conservative counter-movement, Sperber argues, was sealed by repression of liberals.¹¹⁸ Compared with a clear reluctance on the part of the initial revolutionaries, this confirms the argument that part of the reason for failure of the German revolution lies in their inability to consolidate power. Allowed to hold power while the conservative forces were engaged elsewhere, their inherent military weakness eventually became their failure.

With the radical change in their King's outlook and the quick appointment of a new cabinet, the revolutionary reform seemed to proceed successfully for the Dutch liberals. Thorbecke, as the head of the committee for constitutional reform, had finished his draft in mid-April¹¹⁹ and it was submitted to Parliament on June 20¹²⁰. As in Germany, however, the liberal cause was subject to several substantial attempts on behalf of the conservatives to reverse the tide, both during 1848 and in the years after. Unlike in Germany, however, the reformed constitution and the new political structure proved strong enough to withstand these challenges.

With the formation under way, William II had solicited the counsel of Count Schimmelpenninck, a staunch conservative and avid opponent of Thorbecke.¹²¹ Despite the objections of Justice Minister Dirk Donker Curtius, Schimmelpenninck was initially successful in making sure that Thorbecke was left outside the new cabinet and was appointed Prime Minister in his stead. The six-member cabinet now consisted of only two liberals (Donker Curtius and Luzac), three conservatives (Schimmelpenninck, Nepveu and Rijk) and the Catholic minister Lightenvelt¹²². In this context, Schimmelpenninck made a final attempt to counter the constitutional draft after its publication on April 11, hoping to isolate the liberals in

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 235. Sperber writes how the French constitution included a clause stating that the republic would never use its armed forces "against the liberty of any people", on the basis of which the leftists in the Assembly demanded Louis-Napoleon's impeachment, which was voted down by the monarchist majority.

¹¹⁷ Engels, Friedrich. *Revolution and Counter-Revolution or: Germany in 1848*. London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co, 1896. 79.

¹¹⁸ Sperber, *European Revolutions*, 236.

¹¹⁹ Sas and Te Velde, *Eeuw van de Grondwet*, 115.

¹²⁰ Stuurman, "1848: Revolutionary Reform," 459.

¹²¹ Stuurman, *Wacht Op Onze Daden*, 151.

¹²² Ibid, 152.

the cabinet.¹²³ His subsequent inability to do so, however, illustrates the internal division of the Dutch conservatives. Schimmelpenninck first lost the support of Lightenvelt, who was traditionally a conservative but under the pressure of massive Catholic support for a constitution which granted the right to freedom of religion decided to support the proposed reform. The influence of the King, finally, was crucial in securing a majority for Thorbecke's draft: his personal pressure caused War Minister Rijk to join in support of the proposal.¹²⁴ Faced with a liberal majority, Schimmelpenninck resigned from his position as Prime Minister, declaring that "the cause was lost"¹²⁵.

After a period of public review and large-scale petitioning, the revised constitution was confirmed in early November as the exponent of a liberal triumph.¹²⁶ The constitutional reform, Van Sas argues, was on the one hand the long awaited realization of aspirations which had been in existence for decades¹²⁷ and was exceptionally modern only in comparison to its predecessor.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, Stuurman argues, the year 1848 in the political history of the Netherlands marks the definitive end of the *ancien régime*.¹²⁹

The lingering conservative opposition to the new political structure resulted in a final confrontation in 1853¹³⁰, enabled partly by the succession of King William III, who had been opposed to his father's liberal concessions. In November 1849, after a formation again faced with substantial opposition¹³¹, Thorbecke was appointed Prime Minister of a liberal cabinet which consolidated much of the implications of the new political structure. His term was characterized, however, by a constant struggle between Thorbecke and William III¹³², which came to a head in the April Movement of 1853. The establishment of religious freedom in 1848 had been a cause of grievance among Protestant notables, and resentment of political Catholicism had increased with the Bonapartist victory in France. Public opinion expressed its disapproval of the liberal cabinet's devoted support for the Catholics in petitions and conservative pamphlets, even widespread agitation against the Catholic minority.¹³³ Receptive to the extensive criticism of Thorbecke's politics, William III forced the resignation of his Prime Minister and three others, effectively calming the agitated public.¹³⁴

¹²³ Boogman, *Rondom 1848*, 56-57.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 57.

¹²⁵ Quoted in Stuurman, *Wacht Op Onze Daden*, 153.

¹²⁶ Sas and Te Velde, *Eeuw van de Grondwet*, 137.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*. In fact, Stuurman "1848: Revolutionary Reform," 449 confirms this argument, noting that the in the general European upheaval of 1830, a potential liberal revolution had only been avoided due to a "patriotic backlash" to the secession of Belgium.

¹²⁸ Sas and Te Velde, *Eeuw van de Grondwet*, 140.

¹²⁹ Stuurman, *Wacht Op Onze Daden*, 170.

¹³⁰ Sas and Te Velde, *Eeuw van de Grondwet*, 463.

¹³¹ Boogman, *Rondom 1848*, 88-89.

¹³² *Ibid*, 95.

¹³³ *Ibid*, 127-128

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 131-132.

Although it led to a change in leadership, however, this last conservative stand did not challenge the constitutional reforms of 1848. Despite his personal defeat, Thorbecke's reforms proved successful, as a decade of conservative cabinets after 1853 did not reverse the new political structures.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Sas and Te Velde, *Eeuw van de Grondwet*, 463.

Chapter 4. Why the Revolutions failed

“So we have become republicans again,” wrote the radical poet Beranger after the February Revolution of 1848. “Perhaps it has been a little too soon and a little too fast... I should have preferred a more cautious procedure, but we have chosen neither the hour nor marshaled the forces, nor determined the route of the march.”¹³⁶

The first section of Chapter 3 has given an overview of the events which first propelled the revolutionary wave of 1848-1849 across continental Europe. We have seen how the momentum of the 1848 revolutions caused the passing of liberal reforms not only in those countries – such as France and Germany – where popular violence forced them, but also in the case of the Netherlands, where the threat of the potential outbreak of revolutionary violence proved strong enough to deliver a revolutionary outcome as well. The second part of Chapter 3 then went on to delineate the drastic turn events took after June of 1848, and how the revolution in France and Germany – as well as in most other countries in Europe – was stopped in its tracks and subsequently reversed. “By the end of 1848 the bourgeoisie of Europe was in retreat before the forces of a revived conservatism. (...) Lamartine was now only a mediocre poet without political influence and Robert Blum had died before a firing squad.”¹³⁷

In France, the Second Republic lost its shine during the June Days uprising and was slowly corrupted until Louis Napoleon declared the Second Empire in 1852. In Germany, promises of constitutional and nationalist reforms proved to be empty as the Frankfurt Assembly failed in its attempt to create a liberal unified Germany. Only in the Netherlands did the liberals manage to consolidate constitutional reform. As I have indicated above, the central research question for this thesis was “why did the revolutions of 1848 in France and Germany fail?” It shall be the purpose of this fourth chapter to systematically answer that question, by pinpointing the crucial causes for their respective failures and by comparing the cases of France and Germany with the revolutionary success in the Netherlands.

The introductory chapter of this paper has already given an indication of the extent of the academic debate on the revolutions of 1848-1849. Scholars of the 1848 revolutions generally observe the events in one of three possible contexts.¹³⁸ Historians on the one hand often focus only on the initial revolutionary successes, or alternatively look at 1848 as one step in a teleological process towards the acquisition of democracy and, in Germany and Italy, national unity. The most significant approach here, however, is a third, more ad hoc look at the revolutionary events and the causes of their subsequent failure.

¹³⁶ Dautry, Jean. *1848 et la Deuxième République*. Paris: Editions Sociales, 1977. 80.

¹³⁷ Hamerow, *Restoration, Revolution, Reaction*, 173.

¹³⁸ Sperber, *European Revolutions*, 1-4.

In this debate, many bigger and smaller causes, conditions and influences have been suggested, some of which are naturally more convincing than others. In order to be able to impose a clear structure on the comparison between the French and German cases, I believe it is important to determine which factors really determined the absence of a sustained revolutionary outcome. The four major causal factors which are cited in the existing literature – internal division or coherence of the parties involved, control of the sources of power and external intervention – were presented in Chapter 1. The structuring of these arguments shall be done along the various steps in the dynamic process of revolution – from challenge through consolidation to reaction, as it has been laid out in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

The causes for the arising of a revolutionary situation will often be found in the interaction of long- and short term social, political or economic grievances, and the occurrence of such a situation, Skocpol argues, should be investigated from “a structural perspective on sociocultural reality”¹³⁹. As a result, the majority of the literature on revolutions focuses on the causes for the manifestation of a revolution as opposed to the internal dynamics of the revolutionary process, taking those steps for granted. As I have noted in the introduction, however, Tilly has underlined that an investigation of revolutionary failure, however, should rather focus on the phase in the revolutionary process after the occurrence of a revolutionary situation, and scrutinize the link between the revolutionary dynamic and the subsequent failure to enact a sustained revolutionary outcome.

Of course, some of the factors affecting the revolutionary process are closely related to long-term trends. For instance, the apparent divisions among the liberals reflect the way different grievances which initially coincided to offset the revolutionary challenge against a common enemy, thereafter becomes a fundamental weakness for the revolutionary faction. In other ways, too, long-term factors may directly affect the revolutionary process. However, I have constructed the hypotheses of this research on the premise that a revolution should be regarded as a dynamic process, and with the intention of opening up that box and pinpointing the factors which determine its outcome, success or failure. In order to improve the systematic comparability, the emphasis therefore lies on the observation of the internal forces of the revolutionary process, and secondarily to determine how and why the specific circumstances – both long and short term - of each case affected those common factors.

Although revolutions are sometimes investigated in the context of single pivotal events, a successful revolution contains a number of consecutive stages and factors, the absence or weakness of which may directly cause the failure of the revolution. In the adapted version of Tilly’s dual model, containing a revolutionary situation and a revolutionary outcome, there are a number of factors we can point to which are crucial for the success of

¹³⁹ Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 18.

that revolution. The blueprint of revolutions¹⁴⁰ calls first for a challenging proposition regarding a state's institutional structure, a challenge which in order to succeed in transforming the institutions needs to pose a substantial threat to the status quo. This threat can either be defined through the mobilized support of a significant fragment of the population or alternatively control over certain coercive means. Power should thus be defined not only as the control over coercive institutions such as police or military, but particularly also includes legitimizing institutions or legislative or executive power. Like we can see in the case of the Netherlands, the threat of popular dissatisfaction or the possibility of a mass uprising (real or imagined) can also lead to structural transformation of state institutions. Similarly, continued control over coercive power by the incumbent faction better facilitates a conservative reaction against the contentious claims.

During a revolutionary situation, in which the existing equilibrium of control is brought out of balance, a positive result can be acquired only through consolidation of the transformed institutions. It is for this reason that so many revolutionary regimes (for example, the Reign of Terror of 1793-1794 under Robespierre or the deportations under Lenin and later Stalin after the Russian Revolution) in the past have relied on excessive violence in their attempt to consolidate the new structure. Next to consolidation of the status quo, another crucial factor is that of internal union or division. A revolutionary coalition which poses a challenging claim will obviously prove to be less than formidable when rift internally by conflicting goals and interests, as we have seen was the case for the French revolutionaries in 1848. The continued internal union of both the revolutionary as well as the incumbent faction, especially under the pressure of the insecure future in a revolutionary situation, is vital to the success or failure of that revolution.

Four factors can then be discerned from this model. With respect to consolidation of the new status quo, we should pay close attention to the *means for reaffirmation*, and the willingness or ability to use them. Coercive means at the disposal of the new regime, such as the control over the military apparatus, are perhaps the most obvious example of state power, but normative power based on popular support or propaganda should equally be examined. The matter of internal union plays a vital role in the success of each party involved, regardless of their position in the pre-revolutionary equilibrium. The *internal stability of the revolutionary faction* – particularly if this faction consists of a coalition of oppositional groups – directly affects its ability to challenge the existing status quo and to subsequently reestablish the state institutions. Similarly, *the internal union of the incumbent party* of course is directly related to the initial emergence of a revolutionary challenge, but so long as the 'ancien regime' remains a factor of importance, its internal union directly determines its ability to counterweigh the revolutionary faction.

¹⁴⁰ See Chapter 2.2. "What is a Revolution?"

Finally, in a Europe with closely intermarried royal houses and the memory of the Allied victories at Leipzig in 1813 and Waterloo in 1815, the possibility of *external intervention* was a very real one. Chapter 3 shows that no external intervention determined the outcome of the revolution in the cases of France and the Netherlands, and that in the latter case the absence of such an intervention was perhaps vital to its success. The outcome of the German case, given that it consisted of several closely interrelated revolutions, was determined in part by the absence of Austrian control, and the subsequent interventions by the Prussian hegemon. I shall therefore briefly look at why no such intervention took place in France and the Netherlands but did happen in Germany, and especially focus on how the absence of an expected intervention had an influence on the balance between the revolutionary and incumbent factions.

Like I argued in the previous chapter, the downturn of the 1848 revolution started as the optimistic spring turned into a challenging summer. The major point of reference to assess are the June Days uprising in Paris and similarly the consolidation period of the German revolutionary regimes on the one hand; and the dismantling of the Frankfurt Parliament's after the failure of its constitutional proposal, and the election of Louis Napoleon to the French presidency on the other. To be able to determine the causes of the failure of the 1848, therefore, we should survey the changes in the four factors suggested above, leading up and during the 'June' confrontations and ultimately towards the final dismantling of the revolutionary accomplishments.

Internal Coherence of the Revolutionary Faction

The February Revolution, which successfully toppled the Bourgeois July Monarchy, was built for a large part on a coalition between the politically engaged middle class, organized in numerous clubs, and the working class, whose discontent was channeled by the leadership of the bourgeois. This alliance, according to Charles Crouch in the 'Myth of the Demo-Soc Coalition'¹⁴¹ was based on the concepts of neighborhood association as well as the ideological coincidence of a shared opponent. The Demo-Soc alliance arose in the last years of the July Monarchy and was, together with the political agitation by the Parisian Clubs¹⁴², the main force of movement in the French Revolution of 1848.

Eric Hobsbawm notes, however, that after the revolution had taken place, a "break of the middle class liberals with the extreme left was to occur."¹⁴³ In *Revolution and Mass Democracy*, Peter Amann confirms that at least part of the reason for failure of the French

¹⁴¹ Crouch, Charles. "The Myth of the Demo-Soc Coalition: France in 1848." in Boardman, Kay and Christine Kinealy, ed. *1848: the Year the World Turned?* Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007. 36.

¹⁴² Amann, Peter. *Revolution and Mass Democracy: The Paris Club Movement in 1848*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975.

¹⁴³ Hobsbawm, *Age of Revolution*, 154.

Revolution can be found in the fragile unity of the party of movement. Focusing on the Paris clubs, Amann points to a 'mirage of unity' and argues that while in the early months of 1848 the popular societies had shown that they could cooperate in a common endeavor, but after the Republic granted universal manhood suffrage, the clubs failed to come to an agreement on "how unity might be most effectively achieved."¹⁴⁴

As the Provisional Government started to slowly ignore the ideals of the few socialist representatives on issues of funding for social legislation or social mobility, the revolutionary alliance became strained and finally broke over the government's decision to cease funding for the *Ateliers Nationaux*, which had been intended to provide to everyone the right to work. The resulting June Days uprising represented the violent clash between the conflicting interests of on the one hand the Parisian workers and the socialists, whose force had made the February Revolution possible; and on the other hand the middle class bourgeoisie and the liberal/democrats, who through existing political networks had given leadership to that popular uprising. The socialists felt the closing of the National Workshops as a clear sign of their dismissal; the subsequent bloodshed enacted by the Provisional Government to crush the workers' demands further exacerbated the existing conflict and decisively split the revolutionary coalition. "The June insurrection fatally weakened the Republic by separating the moderate republicans – the only republicans most of France could accept in power – from the workers, who alone at this time might have provided mass support for republican institutions."¹⁴⁵

The development of a similar, if more complicated, division can be witnessed in the case of the Germanies. In Germany, in addition to the three broad political currents (socialist, liberal and conservative) which are observed by John Breuilly in an article on the comparability of the European revolutions, a further complication arose¹⁴⁶. Where the French revolutionaries were already bitterly divided into socialists and liberal, not only were the German revolutionaries consistent of different social classes and divided by varying ideologies, they were split over nationalist issues as well. Perhaps characteristic of the German case, this fragmentation – while not necessarily based on regional divides – is best seen in the operations of the Frankfurt Assembly. Conceded by the princes of the German states and erected with the twofold goal of enacting liberal constitutional reform and creating a unified German nation-state, its historical results and the colored commentaries of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in their *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*¹⁴⁷ paint the picture of a thoroughly fragmented and subsequently deadlocked Assembly, unable to impact the strength needed.

¹⁴⁴ Amann, *Revolution and Mass Democracy*, 111.

¹⁴⁵ Price, *Documents*, 20.

¹⁴⁶ Breuilly, "1848: Connected or Comparable Revolutions?"

¹⁴⁷ Marx, *Revolutions of 1848*.

Failure, confirms Hamerow, was inherent in the circumstances which led to the domination of the national assembly by the propertied bourgeoisie. In one state after another, liberalism employed a variety of electoral devices¹⁴⁸ to exclude the masses from the polls. Chosen in a manner predisposing it in favor of the enlightened bourgeoisie, the Frankfurt Parliament could not reflect the multiplicity of interests of the German people.¹⁴⁹ John Breuille downplays the significance of the ideological cleavage in the Frankfurt Assembly, arguing that the main source for division was the question of German nationalism.¹⁵⁰ Regardless of the nature of the division, however, its result was an indecisive legislative body, which allowed the conservatives to regroup before the conceded reforms were consolidated.

In Germany, too, a split appeared within the revolutionary faction equivalent of that within the French Demo-Soc coalition. The German revolution did not know a proletarian insurrection comparable to the Parisian June Days uprising. However, when the March ministries suppressed the spring uprising, they had – like the French Provisional Government would in June – deprived themselves of a valuable asset, one which had propelled them into power in the first place. “Although they could not ignore the danger of a new proletarian rebellion, by acting against it with unrelenting thoroughness, they destroyed the insurrectionary élan of the masses once and for all.”¹⁵¹ By means of strong economical, social and political statements of emancipation (strikes, local and regional proletarian organizations, local riots¹⁵²) the workers proved to the democratic movement that they were no longer a marginal phenomenon, and that their interests should not be ignored as they were in France.¹⁵³ In June 1848, a mob stormed the Berlin arsenal, confirming the growing fear of the middle-classes of the radicals¹⁵⁴. Even if its spell was not immediately broken, in terms of popular support, the middle class stood isolated.¹⁵⁵

While it is clear that both in France and in the case of Germany the party of movement became increasingly divided after their initial success along one or several cleavages, it is important for comparison to briefly look at the Dutch case as well. Siep Stuurman, in one of few publications which, in a comparative context, investigates the revolutionary character of the 1848 constitutional reform, argues that the cleavages dividing the French leading revolutionaries were more complicated than the Dutch.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, based on a survey of petitions submitted in reaction to the proposed reform, he argues that

¹⁴⁸ Hamerow, *Restoration, Revolution, Reaction*, 122.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 122-124.

¹⁵⁰ Breuille, “The German Question and 1848.”

¹⁵¹ Hamerow, *Restoration, Revolution, Reaction*, 117.

¹⁵² See Tilly, Charles. *The Rebellious Century, 1830-1930*. London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1975.

¹⁵³ Schmidt, Walter. “Versuch eines historisch-typologischen Vergleichs” in Timmermann, Heiner. *1848 Revolution in Europa: Verlauf, Politische Programme, Folgen und Wirkungen*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1999. 104.

¹⁵⁴ Sheehan, *History of Germany*, 59.

¹⁵⁵ Hamerow, *Restoration, Revolution, Reaction*, 118.

¹⁵⁶ Stuurman, “1848: Revolutionary Reform,” 467.

while Dutch society was typically divided along regional as well as religious lines, “the Catholic south was massively pro-Liberal during these crucial months” and that Conservative opposition nation-wide was relatively weak.¹⁵⁷ According to Sap, the most notable difference between the ‘Dutch revolution of 1848’ and most other revolutions in 1848 was that it was purely one of competing ideologies, constitutional liberalism opposing conservative monarchism, rather than of violent class conflict, and that the issue of nationalism in the form of a movement for regional self-determination was only moderately influential.¹⁵⁸

I can observe at least two potential reasons for the strong cohesion in the Dutch ‘revolutionary’ faction. First of all, the Dutch economy during the middle of the nineteenth century had not been so rapidly industrializing as had France and Germany¹⁵⁹, especially since most of its early industrial potential had been in Belgium, which seceded in 1830.¹⁶⁰ As such, the revolution was not carried by the angry industrial working class like it had been in Paris and Berlin, and a subsequent estrangement between liberals and socialists could not occur. Secondly and consequently, Stuurman argues, more radical issues such as universal manhood suffrage were outside the scope of the Liberal ambitions at present, which gave the Liberal faction a general acceptability.¹⁶¹

Internal Coherence of the Incumbent Faction

While the Demo-Soc coalition faltered, the conservative monarchist faction – weak in the French capital but with massive support in the provinces – was able to reassert itself. Ironically, it was the ideological naiveté of the revolutionaries which provided this opportunity; by insisting on the introduction of universal suffrage, they opened the way for the rural conservatives to regain power through legitimate channels. Prior to the February Revolution, little homogeneity can be discerned among the conservative groups. Mostly royalists, due to the rapid succession of dynasties they were divided into Orléanists, Legitimists and even Bonapartists.

Faced with a republic however, writes William Fortescue, “a broad-based Party of Order emerged in 1848”¹⁶². This coalition of Legitimists, Orléanists, conservatives and moderate republicans was committed to classic values such as order, private property rights, the Catholic Church and the family. In the presidential elections, perhaps the best benchmark for the level of internal cohesion, only one candidate with a conservative monarchist appeal came forward in the person of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte. Although the ‘Réunion de la Rue

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 462.

¹⁵⁸ Sap, *The Netherlands Constitution*, x.

¹⁵⁹ Zanden, J.L. van and Arthur van Riel. *Nederland 1780-1914: Staat, Instituties en Economische Ontwikkeling*. Amsterdam: Balans, 2000. 166.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 153.

¹⁶¹ Stuurman, “1848: Revolutionary Reform,” 461.

¹⁶² Fortescue, William. *France and 1848: The End of Monarchy*. London: Routledge, 2005. 157.

de Poitiers, a gathering of conservatives presided by Alphonse Thiers – once Prime Minister under Louis-Philippe - did not officially support his candidacy, they chose not to propose an alternative.¹⁶³ Most Legitimist newspapers eventually also backed Bonaparte's candidacy.¹⁶⁴

For Germany, notes Hamerow, developments in Prussia determined the outcome of the Revolution. Since its creation in the Restoration, the German Confederation had been dominated by its two largest members, Austria and Prussia, either side creating a check on the other's influence. With the Habsburg Empire faced with a liberal challenge in its capital and nationalist revolutions in Hungary, Lombardy and elsewhere, its attention was directed away from Germany. This enabled Prussia to pursue an independent policy in Germany, and during about twelve months, argues Hamerow, Frederick William IV was "in a position to determine the fate of Central Europe".¹⁶⁵ The absence of Austrian competition on the German chessboard clearly strengthened the position of the Hohenzollerns. Having regained the control over the army, its attention could be focused entirely on internal affairs. Where the German conservatives had previously been turned half on each other, a feat played upon by the smaller German states in order to improve their bargaining position, now their force was able to freely determine the fate of the German revolution. Well aware of this, Frederick William's concessions to allow constitutional reform and an all-German Assembly had been a bid for time to recollect his strength. Allowed to reinforce his control in Prussia by the indecision and impotence of the Frankfurt Assembly, early in 1849 the Prussian king could refuse to endorse the Assembly's constitutional draft without risking a repetition of the March revolution of 1848.

In the case of the Netherlands, Stuurman argues, the behavior of the king was a crucial factor during the entire crisis and for the internal union of the conservative faction. "His unexpected conversion to a course of reform created a void in the conservative camp. Their long-standing commitment to the crown made it extremely hard for them to contemplate action against the king. Without the support of the king the conservatives felt themselves isolated. Their obstruction never turned into outright resistance to all reform and their politics therefore lacked the firm resolve of those of their adversaries."¹⁶⁶ We see, then that while in France and Germany the conservative faction stood solidly against a divided revolutionary coalition, in the Netherlands "what united all sorts of Liberals was a common enemy"¹⁶⁷ and the conservative faction fell apart into monarchists, staunch conservatives and pro-reform Catholics.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, 143-144.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 144.

¹⁶⁵ Hamerow, *Restoration, Revolution, Reaction*, 173-174.

¹⁶⁶ Stuurman, "1848: Revolutionary Reform," 464-465.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 453.

Control over Sources of Power

In the introductory chapter to a book on Political Terror in Communist Systems, Alexander Dallin has argued that especially in a developing or restructuring polity, coercive power can be a determining factor. “In the period immediately following the seizure of power, [...] a revolutionary regime tends to rely heavily on coercion to consolidate its power.”¹⁶⁸

The bloody yet effective suppression of the June Days uprising by the National Guard under command of General Cavaignac shows that the coercive means in the Second Republic were firmly in the hands of the Provisional Government. Indeed, Price writes that while the military failure in February made the Second Republic possible, the military success in June further determined events.¹⁶⁹ He adds, however, that although the Provisional Government had the coercive means firmly in hand, because of it “the radical republicans were clearly defeated, [...] and the loyalty of the Mobile Guard and the regular army [...] went far to determine the conservative direction of the republic. The concession of universal suffrage essentially forced the liberals and republicans to hand-over control of the coercive means to their conservative elect.

The conservative reaction, however, was based on sources of power other than coercion and rather than presenting a reactionary challenge managed to transform the Republic from within. Many radicals had assumed that the election of a Constituent Assembly by universal male suffrage would ensure a majority committed to social reform. However, although radical candidates attracted considerable support amongst the relatively politicized¹⁷⁰ urban lower-middle and working classes, in the countryside – in which most electors lived – the conservative electoral campaign was better organized across the nation and possessed greater appeal in the provinces, resulting in to strong monarchist support among peasants.¹⁷¹ Roger Price confirms that “the republicans in power had failed to make a positive appeal to the rural population who numerically dominated the electorate. The social question for them had meant the problems of urban rather than rural poverty.” This failure to consolidate their position through the acquisition of popular support, he argues “lost them the Republic.”¹⁷²

Confirming the importance of normative power, particularly in a period where a newly instated revolutionary regime wants to legitimize its rule, Geoffrey Ellis¹⁷³ underlines another cleavage in French society. As I briefly mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, the February revolution took place at the hands of the Parisian working and middle classes,

¹⁶⁸ Dallin, Alexander and George W. Breslauer. *Political Terror in Communist Systems*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1970. 5.

¹⁶⁹ Price, *Revolution and Reaction*, 166.

¹⁷⁰ Amann, *Revolution and Mass Democracy*.

¹⁷¹ Price, *Revolutions of 1848*, 54.

¹⁷² Price, *Revolution and Reaction*, 35

¹⁷³ Ellis, “The Revolution of 1848-1849 in France,” 27-54.

while the comparative calm of the provinces eventually undermined its success. The revolution for the largest and most decisive part took place in Paris, the French capital which Sperber even refers to as ‘the capital city of European politics, the center of the hopes of the party of movement’¹⁷⁴. The irony of the French Revolution of 1848, Ellis states, is that provincial France, too, would be directly involved in the course of events during 1848, but its main influence was to be felt chiefly on the side of the reaction:

“The essential conservatism of provincial France, especially in defense of existing property rights, the foundation of the wider public perception of ‘law and order’, and even of the ‘moral order’ of society, was to prove much more than a match for the reforming visions of the socialists and radicals who had gained a brief hold on power in the Provisional Government during the early weeks of the Second Republic. In the end, it was this same provincial conservatism (...) that was to give Louis Napoleon Bonaparte his massive popular mandate in the presidential elections of December 1848. The official census had revealed, after all, that just over three-quarters (75.6 per cent) of the French population still lived in communes of less than 2,000 inhabitants.”¹⁷⁵

The Provisional Government further lost popular support because of the bloody repression of the June Days insurrection. “Both the Executive Commission and the Parisian National Guard became discredited as political forces.”¹⁷⁶ Thus, when the leading republican Cavaignac ran for president in December, the electorate chose the unconnected Louis Napoleon over the tainted politicians of the Provisional Government.

The German case followed a different path from the French in this respect, yet the result turned out similar. Roger Price’s analysis of the development of the counter-revolution in the seminal volume *Europe in 1848* edited by Dieter Dowe¹⁷⁷ outlines how the conservative faction was able to retain much of its control over the coercive means. Price outlines the weaknesses and divisions among the revolutionaries, the centrality of moral and social order among the conservative counter-revolutionaries, their military response, and methods of political repression. For the revolutionaries, remembering the violent escalation of the Reign of Terror, “persuasion was to be preferred to coercion.”¹⁷⁸ Additionally, remaining at the head of the state, king Frederick William IV continued to control the Prussian army stationed outside Berlin.

James Sheehan even maintains that already during the March Revolution, the Prussian soldiers “had, in fact, almost succeeded in crushing the revolt when the king

¹⁷⁴ Sperber, *European Revolutions*, 114.

¹⁷⁵ Ellis, “The Revolution of 1848-1849 in France,” 28-29.

¹⁷⁶ Price, *Revolution and Reaction*, 166.

¹⁷⁷ Dowe, Dieter et al. eds. *Europe 1848: Revolution und Reform*. Bonn: Dietz, 1998.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 42.

decided to end the bloodshed, horrified and depressed by the street fighting.”¹⁷⁹ Initially unwilling to reinstall his power through a forceful coup, the army’s withdrawal continued until in October Frederick William was informed of the conservative victory in Austria, enhancing his to reinstall his authority. By mid-November, the Prussian army controlled Berlin again and subsequently consolidated the conservative victory by proclaiming martial law, disbanding political clubs and forbidding demonstrations.¹⁸⁰

Conversely, the Frankfurt Assembly, since it was based only on the consent of the individual princes, had no standing army¹⁸¹ and no control over taxation, thus no resources to build one.¹⁸² Its fundamental lack of a means to enforce its decisions ultimately allowed the Prussian conservative faction to retake power and subsequently to intervene in the smaller states to end revolutionary regimes there. In May 1849 the Prussian army put an end to the last remnants of the revolution through an intervention in the Bavarian Palatinate and finally in Baden.¹⁸³

In the Dutch case, the fundamental cause for the non-violent revolution was without doubt to be found in the occurrence of revolutions in the adjacent countries. As a result, writes Stuurman, “both Conservatives and Liberals lived in fear of a popular upheaval, but the Liberals could employ this mood of insecurity for their own ends whereas the Conservatives could not.”¹⁸⁴ In the cases of Germany and France, however, this same mood of insecurity was not necessarily beneficial to the revolutionary faction. Instead in France, the memory of the 1793-1794 Reigns Of Terror instilled a popular fear of a repetition of the Jacobin Terror and gave the conservatives a strong source of normative support.

Of particular importance, also, is the role of the press. Not only do the publications give historians a direct insight into the ideological battle being waged, the liberal and conservative periodicals at the time had a significant impact on the public’s support for the warring parties. Comparing the cases of the Netherland and France, Stuurman argues that “in both countries the government became isolated because the major newspapers turned against it.”¹⁸⁵ In the Netherlands, he writes, the influence of public opinion as expressed in the press, through pamphleteering and most clearly in the nation-wide petitioning campaign, increased dramatically within the span of months. Already in the months leading up to the February Revolution did the liberal press observe the growing tension and gave warning to the Dutch king after the revolt in Naples in the first week of February.

¹⁷⁹ Sheehan, *History of Germany*, 43.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 59.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, 55.

¹⁸² Hamerow, *Restoration, Revolution, Reaction*.

¹⁸³ Sheehan, *History of Germany*, 62.

¹⁸⁴ Stuurman, “1848: Revolutionary Reform,” 465.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 466.

The factor of coercive means, finally, is actually of little relevance to the Dutch case, since its revolution was enacted through the existing state-institutions. King William II realized that the use of power through the military or police forces would have had a reverse effect, provoking further opposition and perhaps escalating the ideological conflict into a revolution like the one in Paris, exactly what William intended to avoid.

External Intervention

Although the subject of external intervention in the cases of France, Germany and the Netherlands can be dealt with in a rather brief fashion, its inclusion is warranted based on two things. First of all, most studies of revolutions tend to ignore or downplay the external factor. Externalities do not easily fit into a holistic approach to case studies and as a result the influence of one revolution on the other is not always given due attention. Skocpol warns, however, that states always exist in a determinant geo-political environment¹⁸⁶ and the influence of this context is most pronounced through an external intervention which may determine the outcome of a revolutionary situation.

The second reason for including this factor is the very nature of the 1848 revolutions. International connections are vital to the understanding of the revolutionary dynamic of 1848-1849, argues Breuilly¹⁸⁷. Especially in the early stages of the revolutionary wave, revolutionaries took their inspiration from their foreign counterparts, while the conservative regimes, particularly in Germany, were wary of a repetition of the first French Revolution in which the Republican armies spread the revolutionary spirit across the continent. The factor external intervention can thus also contribute to the successful conclusion of a revolutionary process, as it provides for an external source of power for the revolutionary party.

In the period leading up to the 1848 revolutionary wave, France was expected by many radicals to once again assume its position as promoter of the revolution across Europe, and many maintained that expectation through 1849¹⁸⁸. Reality showed, however, that the liberal Provisional Government did not intend to retrace the steps of the First French Republic. By June 1849, only a few revolutionary regimes remained in power, particularly in Hungary, Rome and Baden. As the conservative forces of respectively Russia and Austria, the Pope and Prussia prepared to make an end to these revolutionary governments, Sperber argues the only hope for the mid-century revolutionary movement was “intervention by a militarily powerful force,” namely the army of the French Republic. However,

“President Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, his conservative government ministers, and the monarchist majority in the newly elected French legislatures were far from having any

¹⁸⁶ Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 30.

¹⁸⁷ Breuilly, “1848: Connected or Comparable Revolutions?” 32-36.

¹⁸⁸ Sperber, *European Revolutions*, 234.

sympathies for their fellow republicans elsewhere in Europe. Just the opposite, the president was under heavy pressure from [catholic] French conservatives to intervene in Italy, not in support of the Roman Republic, but to restore the rule of the Pope.”¹⁸⁹

If we consider Germany as a single revolution, dominated by events in Prussia, then arguably Germany, like France, did not experience any significant external interference. In fact, the absence of Austrian interference was important for the course of the German revolutions. Traditionally the dominant state within the German Confederation,¹⁹⁰ Austria was for the time being too engrossed in her own affairs to exert her “customary influence on Germany”¹⁹¹. Consequently, events in Prussia largely determined the revolutionary process in Germany in 1848-1849 and as such the conservative reaction in Prussia immediately affected the revolutionary regimes in the smaller German states as well.

The apparent Prussian hegemony in German affairs during the course of 1848-1849, and the inherent weakness of the Frankfurt liberals became obvious during a conflict with Denmark over the inclusion of Schleswig-Holstein in the new German State. Having first secured German control over the area through military force, Frederick William subsequently withdrew his troops, signing a unilateral treaty with the Danes, despite protests from the Frankfurt Parliament¹⁹². Furthermore, although as Chapter 3 shows the revolution in Berlin succumbed to the conservative reaction, the revolutionary regimes in smaller states such as Baden and the Bavarian Palatinate were able to withstand the conservative pressure in their territory. As such, the ‘external’ intervention by Prussian troops – which Sperber argues took place only after the French non-intervention in Rome had made clear that the armies of the Republic would not act on the behalf of the revolutionary regimes¹⁹³ – exacted the final blow to the revolutionary ambitions in the German states.

Finally the Netherlands, like France, remained free from external interventions. As it was in the German case, though, the looming threat of a French revolutionary invasion was a very real concern. In fact, J.C. Boogman argues that the fear of a French invasion caused the Dutch king to rescind his nationalist intentions to reunite the Netherlands with Belgium, instead opting for cooperation against the French threat.¹⁹⁴ More importantly, however, the absence of a conservative intervention from the traditional ally Prussia was crucial for the success of the revolutionary reform. In 1787, a single campaign by the Prussian army had put an end to an extended revolutionary situation which saw the Patriot Movement control

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ Sheehan, *History of Germany*, 42.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁹³ Sperber, *European Revolutions*, 235.

¹⁹⁴ Boogman, *Rondom 1848*, 50-51.

most of the North and East of the Netherlands.¹⁹⁵ In 1848, King William II prepared for a similar strategy against popular uprisings, but his envoys had to return home fruitless when the March Revolution broke out in Berlin.¹⁹⁶ Without foreign support, William eventually felt compelled to accept the revolutionary reforms.

Although I shall draw full-fledged conclusions from this analysis in the following chapter, a few concluding remarks are in order. Like I have argued in this and previous chapters, in order to explain its success or failure this paper approaches a revolution as a dynamic process, in which the outcome is determined by several internal factors. A schematic overview of those factors and their respective influences is given in the table on page 47. The cases of France and Germany have demonstrated how the revolutionary parties in 1848 were construed on the basis of at first forceful, but soon thereafter fragile and divided coalitions between different interests. By repressing the working-class uprisings which had fueled the initial revolution, the coalition weakened itself; the middle-class liberals became isolated from their popular support base and were left vulnerable to the inevitable conservative reaction.¹⁹⁷

The contrasting case of the Netherlands confirms the significance of this factor. Its lesser industrial development resulted in a different demographic make-up, with a smaller proportion of urban laborers and a broader middle class. The liberal faction therefore was not based on a fragile coalition, but rather on the demands of the bourgeoisie which enjoyed widespread popular support. Instead, the incumbent conservative faction suffered from internal division. This combination of internal coherence on the part of the revolutionaries and division on the side of the conservatives determined the success of the Dutch revolutionary reform of 1848.

With regards to the control of the main sources of power, there is a significant difference between the French and the German case. In Germany, the conservative monarchists – and most importantly the Prussian king Frederick William IV – were forced to grant liberal and nationalist concessions, but they did manage to maintain control over the armed forces. As the revolutionary party left itself vulnerable due to internal division and the inability to consolidate new state institutions, the conservative reaction caused the failure of the 1848 revolution in Germany. In France, the revolutionaries were initially more successful in enforcing their institutional reform, proclaiming the Second Republic and announcing elections by universal male suffrage. However, as in France, too, internal strife among the revolutionaries discredited the revolutionary regime, popular support for the conservative faction ironically caused the failure of the revolution. Conservative monarchism, in the form of

¹⁹⁵ Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*, 100-119.

¹⁹⁶ Boogman, *Rondom 1848*, 51.

¹⁹⁷ Price, *Revolutions of 1848*, 85.

Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, was able to reclaim power and slowly but surely corrupted the accomplishments of the February Revolution, until he made an official end to the Republic (by then only a Republic in name) in 1852.

Finally, in a revolutionary wave which affected most states of continental Europe, the possibility of an external intervention in order to counter the revolutionary advances were very limited. As such, the failure of the revolutions in France and Germany was not the result of external interference, but purely of the internal forces of the revolutionary process.

Table 1. Summary

	France	Germany	Netherlands
<i>Internal Coherence of the Revolutionary Faction</i>	After the socialists had been politically sidelined, the crack-down on the June Days uprising created a final rift between the liberal Provisional Government and the mass of workers. -	German revolutionaries were divided not only along a social cleavage, but even more so over the German question, most clearly illustrated by the Frankfurt Assembly's inability to act -	Less industrialized than France or Germany, the support of the working class of lesser importance to the successful revolution, as is evident from the lack of popular mobilization +
<i>Internal Coherence of the Incumbent Faction</i>	Each hoping to use him as a pawn for their own interests, the various royalist factions united their support behind Louis Napoleon Bonaparte +	With Austria occupied elsewhere, the conservative interests were championed by the Prussian king, who subsequently led the counterrevolution +	As the king turned liberal overnight, the conservative faction struggled to redefine itself. They were further divided over the issue of religious freedom -
<i>(Revolutionary) Control over Sources of Power</i>	Most of the armed forces were firmly under control of the Provisional Government, but the popular election of a monarchist majority gave control back to the conservative faction -	The Frankfurt Assembly had no control over any coercive means and was therefore dependent on Prussia military prowess, controlled by Frederick William IV -	While the influence of coercive means was marginal, the nation-wide petitions show that the liberal revolutionaries enjoyed most of the popular support +
<i>External Intervention</i>	Unlike in 1813-1815, the French revolutionary armies did not spread abroad, thus also not sparking another allied intervention -	When a French intervention on behalf of the revolutionary regimes stayed out, Prussia was free to end the revolutions in the smaller German states +	As with the March Revolution in Berlin the likelihood of external intervention faded, William II felt forced to grant concessions -
Revolutionary Failure?	Yes	Yes	No

Chapter 5. Conclusion: A Theory of Failed Revolutions?

Based on the existing literature on the subject of the 1848 revolutions, the first chapter formulated the central question of this thesis. In this concluding chapter I would like to briefly recapitulate how the analysis above has provided an answer to these questions. The historiographical introduction further suggested a number of possible factors which should be included in the investigation to the causes of the failure of the revolution in France, Germany and the Netherlands respectively.

The analysis has been built upon a redefined formulation of the concept of revolution. Combining aspects from classic definitions of revolution as they have been used by Theda Skocpol and Charles Tilly, this paper has investigated the internal dynamics of the revolutionary process, in which a revolutionary situation develops toward a revolutionary outcome. During the course of the European revolutions of 1848-1849, revolutionary situations arose in states across the continent, with moderate liberals and radical republicans joining forces to challenge - in various ways - the existing political structure.

Contemporary observers and modern historians alike, agree however that despite varying initial successes, in the majority of the cases no sustained structural transformation of the state institutions took place. The Second French Republic was heralded as the new pinnacle of liberalism and democracy,¹⁹⁸ endorsing social reforms to alleviate poverty and granting universal male suffrage. Its basis of power soon proved inherently weak, however, and as the June Days uprising bloodily underlined the conflicting interests of radical and moderate members of the revolutionary coalition, conservative monarchism was enabled to regain political influence through the election of Louis Napoleon. Three years of conservative repression ensured the reversal of the February Revolution's accomplishments, until Bonaparte himself finally gave the Second Republic its *coup de grâce*.

As we have seen, the revolutionary situation in Germany took a somewhat different form. Due to its political fragmentation, there were not one but many revolutionary centers and re. The downfall, however, of all but a few of those revolutions came from Prussia. The army, loyal to King Frederick William IV bided its time and retook Berlin to restore conservative power, subsequently rendering the King's forced promises of reform void. Aware of the Frankfurt Assembly's dependence on Prussian coercive power, Frederick William withdrew his support and proceeded to exert the military superiority of the counterrevolution over revolutionary regimes whose initial luster had already begun to wane.

Of the three cases under scrutiny, only the Netherlands saw a lasting transformation of its institutional structure. Under the pressure of a looming revolution, the Dutch constitution

¹⁹⁸ Price, *Documents*, 43-48

was thoroughly reformed, leaving most of the burden of political responsibility with the elected representation rather than with the king. Several attempts were made to counter this constitutional reform, most notably after the self-confessed liberal William II was succeeded by his conservative son William III. Despite the fact that this improved the coherence of the conservative faction, the support for the liberals had sufficiently consolidated the revolutionary reform so that in the Dutch case we observe a successful revolution.

Most of the factors that have been incorporated in the analysis have of course been drawn from existing literature on the subject. The importance of the internal coherence of the revolutionary movement was notably put forward by Bruun, and has also been incorporated in the argument by Price on the transformation of the Second French Republic. I would argue, however, that in a revolutionary situation which posits two (or more) conflicting factions against each other, any comprehensive argument on the outcome of that conflict should observe the strength and coherence of each side separately. As we have seen, especially in the case of Germany the internal stability of the conservative party was as important to the conservative restoration as was the division among the revolutionaries. I have therefore based the first segment of the model on the conjunction of the relative strength or weakness of each party in the revolutionary conflict with their respective hold over possible sources of power, military and political.

While I have concentrated throughout much of this paper on the internal dynamics of the revolutionary process, much of the historiography agrees that in an ever increasingly interrelated Europe, the reality of externalities cannot be ignored. The lessons of the French Revolution had taught that a military operation by a revolutionary regime could help similar revolutions succeed abroad, while at the same time a conservative intervention was capable of reversing a revolutionary outcome despite its internal consolidation. I have therefore separately included the potential factor of external intervention into the internal process which determines the revolutionary outcome in the causal model for failure.

In short, then, based on the analysis in Chapter 4, I would formulate the explanation of the failure of the revolutionary movements in Germany and France in 1848 as follows. After its initial successes, the revolutionary movements proved weak and internally divided, and were therefore vulnerable to the reaction of the conservatives, whose sources of power had not sufficiently been eliminated or overtaken during the revolution. The absence of external intervention on the behalf of the revolutionary movement rid them of an external source of power, while the intervention of the conservative armies in the small German states helped make an end to the revolutionary challenge there. As such, the factors of internal coherence and control over the sources of power correlate to determine the dynamics of the revolutionary process, while the option of external intervention forms a separate and - if

present and on the behalf of the pre-revolutionary status quo - a sufficient cause for the failure of a revolutionary situation to extend into a structural transformation.

Having conclusively determined the causal dynamics in the failure of the French and German revolutions of 1848, I want to finish by suggesting the further application of this explanation to other cases of revolutionary failure. The question mark in the title of this chapter implies the possibility of transferring the explanatory model of this thesis to a general theory of revolutionary failure. Although the analysis has been built on three cases only and is therefore vulnerable to case-specificity, it has been argued by the likes of Moore and Skocpol that a comparative approach may lead to new historical generalizations.¹⁹⁹

Few revolutionary situations lead to revolutionary outcomes,²⁰⁰ as a result the body of available cases of revolutionary failure is sufficiently large to facilitate the generalization of this theory. The revolutionary wave of 1848-1851 was certainly not confined to the three cases investigated here; due to the parallel chronology, the revolutions in the other European states are well suited to test our model. Outside the period of 1848-1851, numerous other unsuccessful revolutionary situations posit further options for analysis of the causes of revolutionary failure.²⁰¹ In order to underline these suggestions for further application, I will very briefly discuss two cases in the context of this paper's explanatory model: the Roman Republic in 1849 and the Dutch Patriot Movement in the 1780s.

The revolution in Rome in November of 1848 is sometimes seen as part of an Italian movement towards unification and although this was certainly an ultimate goal of its leaders²⁰² – most notably Giuseppe Mazzini - it was not yet paramount on the people's mind.²⁰³ Set off by the assassination of the Pope's prime minister, a mass of demonstrators led by the city's democratic clubs as well as much of the civic guard demanded the appointment of a new council of ministers.²⁰⁴ Upon this show of force, Pius IX fled into exile in Naples. A constituent assembly was elected by universal male suffrage and the elected deputies voted the end of Papal rule and in its stead proclaimed the Roman Republic.

As the Roman Republic was consolidating its rule amidst a number of other Italian states which were experiencing revolutionary threats, its external stability was still in question; internally, however, the revolutionary situation had swiftly resulted in a revolutionary outcome which was supported by the majority of the population and was able to

¹⁹⁹ Skocpol, *Social Revolutions*, 78.

²⁰⁰ Tilly, *European Revolutions*, 15.

²⁰¹ Tilly, *European Revolutions* gives a comprehensive overview of five centuries of revolutionary situations in Europe

²⁰² Sperber, *European Revolutions*, 222.

²⁰³ Emiliana P. Noether, "Roman Republic" *Encyclopedia of Revolutions of 1848*. Ed. James Chastain. October 2005. Ohio University. June 2008. <<http://www.ohiou.edu/~Chastain/rz/romanrep.htm>>

²⁰⁴ Sperber, *European Revolutions*, 223.

withstand the pope's attempts to retake the city by force. As I indicated above,²⁰⁵ however, when Louis-Napoleon decided, under pressure of his Catholic constituency, to deploy the French army in support of the pope, the resistance of the Roman Republic was swiftly broken and papal rule restored.

Some sixty years prior, the Dutch Republic experienced a revolutionary situation ahead of the outbreak of the French Revolution. Toward the end of the 18th Century, the Republic had lost a considerable part of its previous luster and wealth. The so-called Patriots, mostly based in the urban bourgeoisie, became increasingly dissatisfied with this observed economic decline and particularly with the political incompetence of Stadtholder William V, which came to a head after the Fourth Anglo-Dutch war in 1780. The Patriots argued for the revival of ancient principles as laid down in the Union of Utrecht (1579) and for the dissolution of hereditary offices, thus directly rebelling against the House of Orange. Between 1780 and 1787, the country became loosely divided between Patriots, who controlled a number of land-locked cities, and Orangists, who maintained control in the coastal cities of Holland and Zeeland.

Despite its name, the Dutch Patriot Movement was as much determined by local demands for a restructuring of city government and the reinstatement of ancient local privileges as it was by national politics.²⁰⁶ As a result of this regional fragmentation, the Patriot Movement never gained the necessary momentum to enact national changes, despite theoretical attempts to redefine their political goals – most notably the *Leyden Draft* (1785) which preempted much of the democratic ideals of the French Revolution.²⁰⁷ Another reason the Patriot movement did not quite manage to push for national reforms was that both sides in the conflict controlled a considerable source of military power. As the country's military leader, the Stadtholder maintained control of most of the army, but traditionally the Dutch cities kept their own local militia ('*schutters*') which formed the basis of the Patriot Movement's support²⁰⁸. Finally, the enduring division of the Dutch Republic between the Patriot and Orangist camps was swiftly ended by a military invasion by Prussia on behalf of William V²⁰⁹ in 1787.²¹⁰

On the basis of this brief analysis of the cases of the Patriot Movement and the Roman Republic, we can draw the following conclusions. The case of the Roman Republic, we can observe, does not comply with the model of internal division and weak sources of

²⁰⁵ See Chapter 4.4 "External Intervention", page 43

²⁰⁶ Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*, 79.

²⁰⁷ Prak, Maarten. "Citizen Radicalism and Democracy in the Dutch Republic: The Patriot Movement of the 1780s," *Theory and Society* 20.1 (February 1991): 89.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 78.

²⁰⁹ William V was married to princess Wilhelmina of Prussia, niece of King Frederick II of Prussia and the daughter of the Duke of Brunswick, the commander of the Prussian army.

²¹⁰ Palmer, R.R. *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959. 338-340.

power we constructed above. The Roman revolutionaries were much more coherent than their French and German counterparts and swiftly managed to gain control over the city’s military resources as well. Pope Pius IX was unable to reverse the revolutionary challenge himself and only with the external military help of Louis-Napoleon was the Roman Republic overthrown and papal rule restored. Despite the observed differences – for a schematic overview, see the table on page 52 – this explanation is compatible with our model which argues that a revolution’s failure can be caused both by a conjunction of internal factors or by an external intervention on the behalf of the pre-revolutionary structure.

As was the case in Rome, the failure of the Patriot Movement can ultimately be attributed to an external invasion, similarly confirming our explanatory model. Observing the revolutionary accomplishments before this intervention in 1787, however, we can see that especially its national ambitions for structural transformation of the state institutions were far from successful. Of course this is partly conjecture, but further investigation of the case might prove that the regional division of the Patriots and the near-equal split of the sources of power was the reason this revolutionary situation endured for so long and failed to result in a revolutionary outcome.

Table 2. Application to other cases

	FR	GE	NL	Roman Republic	Patriot Movement
<i>Internal Coherence of the Revolutionary Faction</i>	-	-	+	+	-
<i>Internal Coherence of the Incumbent Faction</i>	+	+	-	+	+
<i>(Revolutionary) Control over Sources of Power</i>	-	-	+	+	±
<i>External Intervention</i>	-	+	-	+	+
Revolutionary Failure?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

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