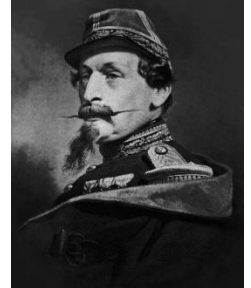


France: from Liberal Empire to the Third Republic

The Reign of Napoleon III

From 1851-1860, Napoleon III was authoritarian by restraining all political dissent, but had widespread support due to protection of property, backing of the pope, and economic programs. After 1860, he became more liberal by creating a free-trade treaty with Britain and by giving moderates more power in government. Yet, he lost control over Italian unification and supported a failed Austrian military expedition against Mexico. The Franco-Prussian War, specifically the Battle of Sedan, wrecked the Second Empire in 1870, after which Paris attempted to take control. Paris surrendered in 1871.



The Paris Commune

After fighting with Germany stopped, the division between the provinces and Paris became sharper. The new National Assembly, elected in February, was dominated by monarchists. The Assembly subsequently gave executive power to Adolphe Thiers. On May 23, the Treaty of Frankfurt, which Thiers negotiated with Prussia, was officially ratified. Many Parisians regarded the monarchist National Assembly sitting at Versailles as a betrayal.

Parisians elected a new municipal government, called the *Paris Commune*, which was formally proclaimed on March 28, 1871; it consisted of both radical and socialists alike. The goal of the Commune was to administer Paris separately from the rest of France. The National Assembly surrounded Paris with an army in April, and on May 8, the army bombarded the city.



On May 21, the army broke through the city's defenses, and during the next seven days, the soldiers killed around 200,000 inhabitants. The Paris Commune soon became a legend throughout Europe. While Marxists regarded the Commune as a genuine proletarian government that the French bourgeoisie had suppressed, it was dominated by petty bourgeois members. The Commune wanted a nation of relatively

independent, radically democratic enclaves, not a worker's state. The suppression of the Commune represented the triumph of the centralized nation-state, as well as the protection of property.

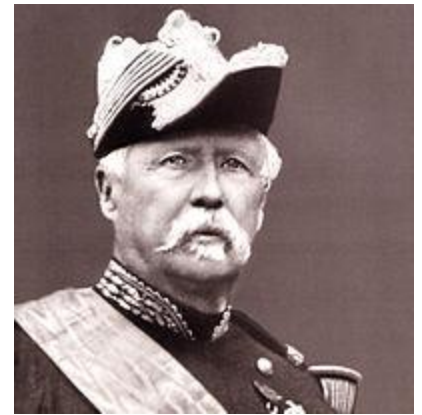
The Third Republic

In France's transformation from a liberal empire to the Third Republic, the National Assembly was forced into a republican form of government. The Assembly faced several difficulties mainly because of its monarchist ambitions. The Assembly was never able to

formally restore the monarchy because of the conflict of who the throne should go to, the Bourbons or the Orleans. This problem realistically could have been avoided because the count of Chambord, the Bourbon claimant, agreed to allow the Orleanist heir to take the throne because Chambord had no children.

Eventually, after much bickering and frustration, the Assembly elected Marshal Patrice MacMahon as president and it was intended for him to prepare France for a monarchist restoration.

In 1875, the Assembly was still unable to find a king, so they decided to regularize the political system. This caused the provision for a Chamber of Deputies to be elected by universal male suffrage, a Senate chosen indirectly, and a president elected by the two legislative houses. After several disagreements with the Assembly, MacMahon resigned as president and the republican minded Assembly now had control of the national government. In the coming years the Third Republic proved to be much stronger than any of the French citizens expected.



The Dreyfus Affair

In 1894, Captain Alfred Dreyfus of the French Army was accused of selling secrets to the Germans. Since Captain Dreyfus was Jewish many anti-Semites instantly thought he was guilty. Along with the anti-Semites were the French Catholic Church and political conservatives. Due to forged documents and corruption Dreyfus was found guilty and spent almost five years on Devil's Island in French Guiana. The affair began to become widespread in France and in 1898 Emile Zola published a newspaper article entitled J'accuse which was



directed at the president of France and the public. Zola was convicted of libel and fled to England to avoid serving a one-year prison sentence. Zola was just one of many liberals, radicals, and socialists, who had begun to demand a new trial for Dreyfus. The affair ended up dividing the nation of France and ushered in a new phase of the Third Republic. The affair put the conservatives on the defensive while weakening them at the same time. Also, the affair showed the political lefts that they had to support republican institutions to achieve its goals.