

Quadrant II – Transcript and Related Materials

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Unit: II: Unification of Italy: Count Cavour, Garibaldi

Module Name: Unification of Italy: Count Cavour, Garibaldi

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Notes

Unification of Italy: Count Cavour, Garibaldi

Role of Count Cavour

Count Cavour was the chief architect of modern Italy. Unlike Joseph Mazzini, he was a practical positive man. In 1849 Cavour became a member of Piedmontese Parliament. In 1850 he became a minister and in 1852 he was appointed the Prime Minister. His life-ambition was to free Italy from foreign influence and control and give the Italian people a parliamentary government on liberal English pattern.

Sardinia-Piedmont a Model State

Cavour clearly realized that in the task of liberating and unifying Italy, the state of Sardinia-Piedmont was to take lead as it enjoyed a unique position in Italy. It was the only state ruled by an Italian dynasty. To realize this objective he introduced several reforms which transformed the backward kingdom into a modern state. He encouraged trade and commerce, built railways, introduced modern postal system and banking, patronised shipping, curbed the power of the church and reorganized the army on modern lines.

Cavour As A Diplomat

The outbreak of the Crimean war (1854-56) gave an opportunity to Cavour to internationalise the issue of Italian unification. He joined the war on behalf of England and France against Russia and found a place at the Paris peace conference in 1856, where he was able to draw the attention and support of the French king Napoleon III

for the Italian cause. It was not until an attempt was made to murder Napoleon III by an Italian patriot, that he asked for a secret meeting with Cavour. Napoleon III met Cavour secretly at Plombiers in 1858 and signed the Compact of Plombiers. In return for French help in expelling Austria from northern and central Italy, she would get Nice and Savoy from Piedmont. The next step was to provoke Austria into a war. Cavour piled up troops on the border with Lombardy and refused to demobilise at Austria's ultimatum. Losing patience, Austria declared war, so appearing the aggressor.

Austro- Sardinian War 1859

France duly stepped in to stop the invasion of Piedmont and by June 1859, Victor Emmanuel II and Napoleon III had won two major battles of Magenta and Solferino, thereby liberating most of Lombardy. When it appeared that Venetia could be easily overrun and the Austrian rule in Italy terminated, Napoleon III suddenly halted in the full tide of success, without consulting his ally, personally met the Austrian Emperor Francis Joseph at Villafranca and signed an armistice with him in July 1859. Cavour's anger was terrible, he resigned his post and even contemplated suicide thinking of how his country had been cheated of complete success. During the Austro-Sardinian war, the people living in central Italian duchies of Parma, Modena and Tuscany rose in revolt, overthrew their rulers so also papal authority in Romagna. They desired that their state be merged in the kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont. In the meantime, by the treaty of Zurich, the French Emperor hoped to receive Nice and Savoy from Piedmont. He therefore inserted a clause that the above four states could decide their future through plebiscites. The results of the plebiscites in 1860 were in favour of joining the kingdom of Sardinia. Victor Emmanuel II now ruled a bigger kingdom from the Alps to papal states except Venetia which was retained with Austria. Nice and Savoy were given to France.

The Exploits of Giuseppe Garibaldi

During the next few years the Italian struggle for freedom centred on the exploits of Garibaldi, one of the most romantic figures in the making of Italy. He was a great sailor who met during his voyages many an Italian exiles and patriots whose love for their country made deep impression on his sensitive mind. He joined the "Young Italy" movement led by Mazzini. He spent his life in south America where he collected large number of followers who were prepared to die for him. Called the Redshirts, they followed him to Italy in 1848 to share the thrills of their master's exploits. Garibaldi met Cavour in 1856 and announced his loyalty to the House of Savoy. When Piedmont waged war with Austria in 1859 Garibaldi participated in and covered himself with glory for his daring exploits. In May 1860, Garibaldi embarked with his troops at Genoa comprising one thousand Redshirts to help Sicilians in their struggle to overthrow the hated Bourbon ruler - a expedition secretly financed by the king and Prime Minister Cavour. He conquered the island of Sicily within two months in the name of king Victor Emmanuel II. He then crossed over to the mainland and overran the whole of Naples whose king fled and Garibaldi entered the capital amidst joyful welcome by the people. In the meantime, with the tacit consent of Napoleon III, Victor Emmanuel II led a Sardinian army across the Papal States, excepting Rome and conquered them. The Pope strongly protested but was helpless.

First National Parliament

On February 18, 1861, the first national Parliament representing the north as well as south, except Venetia which still remained under Austria and Rome which was under the Pope, met at Turin. Victor Emmanuel II was officially styled “by the grace of God and the will of the nation king of Italy”. The Constitution of Sardinia, granted by Charles Albert in March 1848, became the fundamental law of the new kingdom of Italy. After Victor Emmanuel arrived in Naples, Garibaldi was left with no choice other than surrendering to his authority. Refusing all honours this great patriot left for his home, the island of Caprera, off the coast of Sardinia, with a few hundred francs of borrowed money and a bag of seed corn. After expressing hope that Rome and Venice would ultimately unite with the rest of Italy, Cavour died in 1861, at the age of fifty, only three months after the establishment of the new kingdom.

Annexation of Venetia

At the outbreak of the Austro-Prussian war in 1866, king Victor Emmanuel proposed military alliance with Austria in exchange for the return of Venetia. The Austrian Emperor turned down the offer. It was about this time that Bismarck sought an alliance with Italy in his war with Austria. He promised to procure for her Venetia from Austria if he won the war. All Italy had to do was attack Austria from the south. Although Italian troops were badly beaten, Prussia won the war and forced defeated Austria to cede Venetia to Italy.

Annexation of Rome

In 1866 Napoleon had withdrawn the French garrison from Rome; and once Venetia was safely acquired, this tempted Garibaldi into raising volunteers for another attack on the city. The French returned quickly and soon ended Garibaldi’s initial run of successes. Finally, in 1870 when the Franco-Prussian war broke out, Napoleon III in his need for troops had again to withdraw the French garrison from Rome and this time for good.

The appeal of king Victor Emmanuel II to the Pope to respect people’s desire for merger of his state with the rest of Italy went in vain. Italian troops marched into Rome and occupied it. A plebiscite was held in Rome, in which the people overwhelmingly voted in favour of a merger with the rest of Italy. On 2nd June 1871, Rome became the capital of Italy after king Victor Emmanuel II entered it with all grandeur. The Italian Unification was thus complete.