NAPOLEON III AND THE PARIS COMMUNE

I. Purpose and overview of lecture

A. Description and analysis of the Second Empire in France
B. Attempt to understand the appeal of Napoleon III
C. Examine yet another form that "liberalism" and nationalism took in the mid-years
D. A look at the Paris Commune of 1871
   1. A major event in the history of socialism, usually slighted in most textbook accounts
E. Finish up the final chapters of the story of the national unification of Italy and Germany

II. The collapse of the Second Republic

A. A previous lecture examined the failure of the "social republic," with a climax in the June Day
B. Following it there was a conservative assembly, deeply divided among itself
C. A key issue became the election of a president
   1. Conservative anti-socialists saw it as important to further their goals of repressing the left
D. The new constitution gave the president considerable power
   1. He was to be elected by universal manhood suffrage, with the implication that he could represent the people directly
E. Results of Dec. 1848 election
   1. Napoleon: 5.4 million
   2. Cavaignac: 1.5 million
   3. Ledru-Rollin: 370, 000 (the only "social" candidate, really)
   4. Lamartine 18,000 (the hero of the first “romantic” days)
F. There was, and has been, much speculation about what these statistics really meant
   1. They were surprising, in that Louis Napoleon had up to this time been a nobody, with no real visibility in French politics
   2. Did they mean that France yearned once again for order,
as it had in the time of the first Napoleon?

3. Or, was it simply that Napoleon benefited tremendously from "name recognition" among the newly enfranchised peasants?
   a) It was certainly both of these to an important degree
   b) It also gave many pause about what "democracy" could mean
   c) The "people" would not necessarily vote for the left, as many had assumed, or push for socialism, redistribution of property, etc.

G. Napoleon then went on, in stages, to declare himself Emperor, much as his uncle had done
   1. Again, there is considerable evidence that he retained popularity in so doing

III. The New Emperor

A. The sources of Napoleon's popularity
   1. The Napoleonic legend had grown in the romantic 1830s and 1840s
   2. In 1840 Napoleon's remains were brought back, interred in Les Invalides
   3. Many Frenchmen looked back in longing to this great period of French gloire
   4. But Louis Napoleon himself clearly had something to do with this popularity
      a) He was not quite the buffoon that his enemies made him out to be
      b) Although up to this time he had been a kind of misfit and failure
      c) He had been involved in various unsuccessful coups in France and Italy
      d) He had been sentenced to life imprisonment, but escaped in 1846
   5. His associations had been mostly with the left, or at least with the Saint-Simonians
   6. He had a program that in fact "fit" into the 1850s, one that spoke to those disillusioned or frightened by the 1840s, and the revolution of 1848
7. More to the point, he was able to combine leftist and rightist appeals
   a) He presented himself as "modern," progressive, favoring industrial growth
   b) This spoke especially to the bourgeoisie, the business interests
   c) Yet he was also an advocate of order, authority
   d) He could speak effectively to the peasants, yet also persuade many workers that he was concerned about their plight
   e) Also cutting across political lines, he presented himself as a strong nationalist, someone who would bring France back to a more prominent role

8. For these reasons, some historians have seen him as a precursor to 20th century fascism, to Mussolini and Hitler

9. Marxists have in particular emphasized how, in spite of his language in favor of the workers, he in fact most clearly served the interests of the bourgeoisie
   a) And this again parallels, according to the Marxists, what Mussolini and Hitler did

IV. The Nature of the Second Empire

   A. The political institutions ruled over by Napoleon III also resembled in certain ways the regimes of 20th century fascists
   B. The parliament became a powerless facade
      1. Real power was in the executive
      2. Plebiscites were held rather than elections to representative institutions
         a) Thus, "direct democracy"
      3. "Napoleonic idea": parliaments are inefficient, quarrelsome and corrupt
   C. Much attention was devoted to massive, visible projects
      1. Railroad building, public monuments, urban renewal
         a) Best known of these: rebuilding of Paris under Baron Haussmann
   D. New, more sophisticated attention was devoted to the control of public opinion
1. The press was controlled, news manufactured, etc.

2. Perhaps more important: rigorous supervision through the prefects and the police in each département
   a) They effectively "organized" support for elections
   b) They also dealt, sometimes ruthlessly, with opponents of the regime

E. A free, basically capitalist economy, but nevertheless considerable emphasis on state regulation and direction of industrial development
   1. There were vaguely Saint-Simonian elements in these economic notions
   2. But it was also a time of unprecedented industrial development, in France as in most of Europe

F. Aggressive foreign policy, breaking away from previous patterns
   1. Here, too, the parallels with later fascism are obvious
   2. and in both cases led to disaster

G. Napoleon's breaking with previous traditions, his efforts to support "modern" trends (such as support for Italian unification), finally added up to a disaster for France
   1. His critics have emphasized that in encouraging "modern" nationalism he was at the same time violating central principles of French foreign policy
      a) Most important one, since seventeenth century: keep central Europe divided and weak
      b) But Napoleon connived with Bismarck, did not effectively oppose his efforts to build a strong nation in central Europe
   2. This might be termed a very fundamental break with European traditions, one with incalculable ramifications

H. He experienced a number of embarrassments
   1. Mention has been made of how he got cold feet in Italy, when coming to Cavour's aid, but then acquiescing in peace with Austria
   2. He also got involved in fiasco in Mexico
      a) Effort to establish a French puppet regime there
      b) Much opposed by the Mexican nationalists—Cinco
V. The Franco-Prussian War

A. This war was, however, his greatest blunder, and the cause of his downfall, a shattering disaster for France

B. Background: There was a growing fear, after Bismarck's victory over Austria, that the next war would be between Prussia and France

C. Bismarck played skillfully on the fears of the southern German states that Napoleon III would try to dominate them as had his uncle
   1. Southern Germany was an area of considerable French influence, but it had become more and more German-national in feeling
   2. Thus, while these states disliked Prussia, they feared France more than Prussia

D. At the same time, Napoleon was losing much of his earlier wide support in France
   1. He hoped, or at least some of his advisers hoped, that a successful war would restore confidence in his regime

E. Once again, Bismarck played his cards masterfully
   1. The issue that provided the pretext for war was the question of the succession to the Spanish Throne
      a) Revolutionaries there invited a Hohenzollern to be their king
      b) This was much against French interests
   2. In fact, Bismarck publicly refused three times to condone it
   3. Yet at the same time he secretly encouraged the Spanish to ask again
   4. Through a complex set of diplomatic maneuvering, Bismarck was able to doctor a telegram in order to make it seem that his own king had been insulted and the French snubbed
   5. And that induced Napoleon into a fatal blunder: he declared war in July 1870

F. Like the Austrian war, this one was short and a brilliant victory for Prussia
1. France had no allies
2. The southern German states rallied to Bismarck, as he had calculated they would
3. Humiliating final defeat at the Battle of Sedan in Sept., when Napoleon III himself was captured

G. The German Empire is declared in the Hall of Mirrors, etc.
   1. Tremendous symbolism in this: Germany had a "sun king," but perhaps more, the "superior" Germans had won a social-darwinistic struggle
   2. They were widely seen as the voice of the future, the future dominant state and people on the Continent

VI. The Paris Commune and the formation of the Third Republic

A. Shortly after Napoleon's surrender a republic was proclaimed in Paris

B. For several months efforts were made to rally the country in the manner of the 1790s
   1. Gambetta made a dramatic escape from Paris in a hot-air balloon, to try to rally the country, but finally to no avail

C. The peace terms imposed on France were harsh
   1. Loss of Alsace-Lorraine, large indemnity

D. Conditions in Paris become increasingly desperate by the winter of 1870-71
   1. The city had been long under Prussian siege
   2. Elections called in order to ratify the peace settlement returned an extremely conservative assembly
   3. And soon Paris and the National Assembly, led by Adolphe Thiers, were edging toward a kind of civil war

E. National Assembly met in Versailles, while Paris began to organize its own institutions of rule
   1. Obvious parallels with the situation in the 1790s

F. Thiers finally agreed to the Prussian terms
   1. But the Parisians refused to go along, and were arming themselves for yet another onslaught
   2. But the implications of this arming of the people went much beyond the issue of the war with Prussia
   3. There were as well revolutionary socialist implications
a) Revolutionaries a dizzying variety tried to gain control of the Parisian masses
b) As conditions become ever more desperate, more extreme leaders came to the fore
c) Such was especially the case after Thiers once again put Paris to the siege
d) Parisians came to know desperate hardships
   (1) They turned to eating their pets, rats, wallpaper
   (2) They turned as well to the animals of the famous zoo in Paris: One could order filet of crocodile, hippo almadine, zebra à la mode de Caen
e) Yet there was another aspect to developments by the spring of 1871: It has been called a "festival of the oppressed"
f) The common people took over the districts formerly monopolized by the wealthy elite of the Second Empire
g) Elaborate parades and festivals were arranged
h) symphonies, theater, (especially) funerals of those who fell in the battle with Thiers's troops
i) *Paris libre*, "Free Paris" of the common people, a "socialist" Paris, blossomed, if only briefly
j) Efforts were made to organize the city according to socialist principles, very loosely defined
   (1) Rent control, free education, free cultural activities, etc.
k) But it was only a kind of dream-land, as its participants mostly sensed, soon to become a nightmare

4. The end came in May, with desperate, murderous conflict
a) Some 20-60,000 were killed, many more left France for exile or were imprisoned

5. Much of the center of Paris was on fire by the end of the Commune
a) Famous last battles in Père Lachaise Cemetery,
between the tombstones
b) The *Mur des fedérés* (a back wall in the cemetery) became a kind of sacred place for socialists thereafter
c) Famous socialists and communists were buried there in following decades

6. The Paris Commune would horrify France and the world
a) It represented an especially frightening turn for the property-owning bourgeoisie
   (1) They were more than ever afraid of what the future held, more inclined to repressive measures

7. Marx gained his first real notoriety in defending the communards
a) But the Paris Commune of 1871 also became a great symbol for later socialists and communists
b) Lenin was greatly elated when his regime had lasted one more day than the Paris Commune