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NAPOLEON AND METTERNICH IN 1813: SOME NEW AND SOME NEGLECTED EVIDENCE

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Abstract—The eight-hour meeting at Dresden between Napoleon and Metternich on 26th June 1813 is a famous moment in modern French and European history. It marked a decisive stage in Austria's tortuous path from ally to enemy of France, and thus played a crucial part in Napoleon's downfall. Yet it still remains unclear exactly what transpired during the interview—the three published accounts, two by Metternich himself and one by Napoleon's secretary Baron Fain, are contradictory and incomplete. There are, however, two further accounts of the Dresden meeting, one unpublished, the other almost completely neglected since its publication in 1933. The first is a revealing letter from Metternich to his wife Eleonore two days after the interview. The second is a narrative of the meeting taken down from Napoleon's own words by his Grand Equerry Caulaincourt just a few hours after it ended. This sheds important new light on some of the key issues discussed. In particular, it clarifies the central question of whether or not Metternich offered concrete peace terms to Napoleon. Finally, the question of how far, if at all, the wider French public supported Napoleon's determination not to conclude a 'dishonourable' peace in 1813 is examined.

I

At 11 a.m. on 26 June 1813, the Austrian foreign minister, Count Klemens Wenzel von Metternich, stepped into Napoleon's study in the Palais Marcolini in Dresden for a stormy, decisive, nine-and-a-half-hour confrontation. By his own account, Metternich emerged convinced that Napoleon had become the prisoner of his own obstinacy and illusions, and that Austria, until then his ally, could no longer make him see reason. From this moment on, Austria's path first to neutrality, and then to full-blown alliance with France's enemies, was clearly marked out, and a critical stage in Napoleon's downfall accomplished. The interview at the Palais Marcolini swiftly became famous. Contemporaries acknowledged its importance, and their verdict has been echoed by historians. For Metternich's biographer, Heinrich von Srbik, writing in 1925, the meeting was 'a world-historical moment'.[1]

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[1] H. Ritter von Srbik, *Metternich, der Staatsmann und der Mensch*, 2 vols (Munich, 1925), i. 160.

This moment, however, has always presented a problem. Only Napoleon and Metternich were in the room; there was no secretary present taking minutes. As a result, historians since have had to rely on the accounts left by both men subsequently, and these are hardly unbiased sources. The fullest version given by Napoleon to date is third hand, from conversations with his foreign minister, Hugues Maret, duc de Bassano, which the latter then passed to the emperor's secretary, Baron Fain, who published it in 1824. On St Helena, Napoleon added some details to this account, which were taken down and later published by one of his companions in exile, the comte de Montholon, in 1847. For his part, half an hour after leaving the interview Metternich wrote a short report to his emperor, Francis I, along with a 'summary précis' of the conversation. Seven years later, he returned to the subject for his memoirs, but the usual distortions of hindsight, added to the fact that he wrote from memory without consulting his original report, make this the least reliable version of events.[2]

There are, however, two further accounts of the Dresden meeting, one unpublished, the other published in the 1930s but almost completely neglected since. The most important of these was written by Armand-Augustin de Caulaincourt, duke of Vicenza, one of Napoleon's closest confidants and his grand equerry before becoming foreign minister in November 1813. Although Caulaincourt left voluminous memoirs, which were eventually published in 1933, these did not include his narrative of Napoleon's interview with Metternich.[3] He wrote this separately, and it remains in his family papers in the Archives Nationales.[4] There are two copies, both in a secretary's hand rather than Caulaincourt's own cramped and difficult handwriting, but there is no reason to doubt its authenticity, since it is internally coherent and tallies with other contemporary writings in Caulaincourt's hand.

The editor of Caulaincourt's memoirs, Jean Hanoteau, found the account while researching in the family archives in the interwar years, but did not include it when he published them, in three substantial volumes, in 1933. Instead, he published it separately, in the same year, in the *Revue d'Histoire Diplomatique*.[5] If he thought this would bring it greater publicity by distinguishing it from the memoirs, he was wrong; the document has been almost entirely forgotten, and

[2] A. J. F., Baron Fain, *Manuscrit de 1813*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1824), 36–44; *Récits de la Captivité de l'Empereur Napoléon à Ste-Hélène, par M le Comte Montholon*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1847), 493–8. The version in Metternich's memoirs is in *Aus Metternichs nachgelassenen Papieren, herausgegeben von Fursten R von Metternich-Winneburg, geordnet und zusammengestellt von A. von Klinckowström*, (8 vols, Vienna, 1880–89), vol. 2, 150–7; Metternich's report to Francis I is published in W. Oncken, *Österreich und Preussen im Befreiungkriege: Urkundliche Aufschlüsse über die politische Geschichte des Jahres 1813*, 2 vols (Berlin, 1876–79), ii. 384–6.

[3] *Mémoires du Général de Caulaincourt, Duc de Vicence, Grand Ecuyer de l'Empereur, introduction et notes de Jean Hanoteau*, 3 vols (Paris, 1933).

[4] A[rchives] N[ationales, Paris,] 95 AP, Fonds Caulaincourt, carton 12, 'Conversation de M de Metternich avec l'Empereur Napoléon, telle que Sa Majesté me l'a racontée', in two copies: pièces 620 and 621.

[5] J. Hanoteau, 'Une nouvelle relation de l'entrevue de Napoléon et de Metternich à Dresde', *Revue d'Histoire Diplomatique* octobre-décembre 1933, 421–40.

to my knowledge has only ever been cited once.[6] This neglect is all the more striking since the document is substantially longer and more detailed than Fain's and Metternich's, and elucidates some key issues that they left unresolved. It deserves to be far better known by historians.

Finally, Metternich himself left one other account of the Dresden meeting, which has remained unused until now, in his family papers now in the National Archives of the Czech Republic: it is reproduced in the Appendix to this article.[7] This is a letter he wrote to his wife, Eleonore, two days after it took place, when he was still in Dresden. Like his report to the Emperor Francis, it is contemporary with the event and thus much freer from the hindsight that informs his memoirs. Above all, the fact that it was addressed to his wife, a highly intelligent woman from whom he had few secrets, increases one's confidence in its veracity. The letter offers no new revelations about the content of the meeting, but it does give fresh insights into Napoleon's state of mind, and into Metternich's own motivation during these crucial months of 1813.

II

Fain's, Metternich's and now Caulaincourt's accounts can only be compared in the context in which the meeting at the Palais Marcolini took place. In June 1813, Napoleon was bloodied but defiantly unbowed. His disastrous Russian campaign of the previous year had destroyed both the largest army he had ever fielded, and the legend of his own invincibility. Shortly afterwards, his reluctant ally Prussia had changed sides. Not only was he now faced with a formidable coalition of Russia, Prussia, Britain and Sweden, but he had been forced back into the territory of his German allies, and the defection of Prussia raised serious questions about their future loyalty.[8]

Despite these setbacks, by the beginning of 1813 Napoleon had raised a fresh army of 200,000 men that significantly outnumbered the Russo-Prussian force of 110,000. His new recruits could not compare with the hardened veterans facing them, and his opponents, particularly the Russians, had reserves of reinforcements who would swiftly redress this balance. Nonetheless, in May 1813 Napoleon had won two clear victories at Lützen and Bautzen, and gained a distinct military and psychological advantage over his enemies.

Napoleon was now faced with a choice that would recur with variations throughout the next year, right up to his defeat and abdication in April 1814. Either he could stake everything on a final military victory that would enable him

[6] In the integral 1951 edition of the *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*: Comte de las Cases, *Le Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*, ed. M. Dunan, 2 vols (Paris, 1951), vol. 2

[7] N[ational] A[rchives] P[rague], Acta Clementina 12/33, sg C 50, ka 5., Metternich to Eleonore von Metternich, 28 June 1813.

[8] The literature on Napoleon's military campaigns is of course enormous, but three important reassessments of those of 1812 to 1814 are D. C. B. Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon: The Battle for Europe, 1807–1814* (London, 2010); M. V. Leggiere, *Napoleon and Berlin: The Franco-Prussian War in North Germany, 1813* (Norman, OK, 2002) and *The Fall of Napoleon: the Allied Invasion of France, 1813–1814* (Cambridge, 2007).

to dictate peace to his enemies, as he had at Pressburg in 1805 and Schönbrunn in 1809, or, exploiting his remaining resources and the war-weariness of his opponents, he could attempt to negotiate a compromise peace. In either eventuality, the attitude of Austria was crucial. For almost twenty years, since the outbreak of the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, she had been France's most inveterate enemy. In 1809, however, after the crushing defeat of Wagram, she had reversed her policy, concluding a French alliance and sealing it with the marriage to Napoleon of Francis I's favourite daughter, the Archduchess Marie-Louise. In March 1811 this union had produced a son, Napoleon Francis Joseph Charles, the king of Rome, giving the Habsburg dynasty a major interest in the continuance of the Bonaparte dynasty on the French throne.

As the foreign minister who had negotiated the marriage, Metternich was the Austrian political figure most identified with the French alliance.[9] In March 1812, he had even signed a new treaty of alliance and cooperation which added to Napoleon's forces an Austrian auxiliary corps of 30,000 men, commanded by Prince Schwarzenberg, ready for France's imminent attack on Russia. Yet when the news of the retreat from Moscow filtered through, Metternich's policy became much more ambiguous. The auxiliary corps was ordered to retreat towards Austria, leaving Poland and the French southern flank uncovered, and Schwarzenberg actually signed a secret armistice with the Russians at Zeycs in January 1813. Above all, that spring Metternich launched a mediation project by which Austria would attempt to broker a compromise peace between France and her enemies to restore peace and equilibrium to Europe. In addition, to give weight to her intervention Austria embarked on a major programme of rearmament. This carried the implied threat that her expanding army would be thrown into the balance against whichever of the warring sides she concluded was being most unreasonable. This gradual move from ally to potential enemy was not calculated to reassure Napoleon.[10]

The Austrian mediation began in earnest in early 1813, with the despatch of emissaries from Vienna to Paris, London and Alexander I's headquarters in the field.[11] It failed to prevent a resumption of hostilities in April and the French victories of the following month. By the end of May, however, both sides were

[9] The standard biography of Metternich is still Srbik, *Metternich,* though a substantial new one by Wolfram Siemann, based on Metternich's recently catalogued papers, is currently in preparation. Other helpful studies are V. Bibl, *Metternich, der Dämon Österreichs* (Leipzig and Vienna, 1936); A. Sked, *Metternich and Austria: an Evaluation* (Basingstoke and London, 2008), and C. Zorgbibe, *Metternich* (Paris, 2009).

[10] The major works on the diplomatic history of this period are: A. Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution Française*, vol. 8: *La Coalition, les Traités de 1815, 1812–1815* (Paris, 1904); H. Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace, 1812–1822* (London, 1957); P. W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848* (Oxford, 1994); T. Lentz, *Nouvelle Histoire du Premier Empire*, vol. 2: *L'Effondrement du Système Napoléonien 1810–1814* (Paris, 2004) and vol. 3: *La France et l'Europe de Napoléon, 1804–1814* (Paris, 2007). E. Kraehe, *Metternich's German Policy*, 2 vols (Princeton, 1963–83) is also important. For Metternich's policy in 1813: Oncken, *Österreich und Preussen,* and F. Luckwaldt, *Österreich und die Anfänge des Befreiungskrieges von 1813* (Berlin, 1898).

[11] Luckwaldt, *Österreich und die Anfänge*, 85–7, 121–52.

temporarily exhausted, and needed a suspension of arms in order to rebuild their forces. This gave Metternich his chance to revive the mediation project, and on 4 June France, Russia and Prussia signed the armistice of Pleiswitz, providing for a truce until 20 July, before which Austria would convene a congress at Prague to broker peace between France and her enemies.

Metternich's 'armed mediation' was deeply controversial at the time, and has remained so since. Almost all the French historiography holds that it was simply a ruse which enabled Austria to change sides in stages while avoiding the impression of betraying Napoleon too flagrantly. For this school, the compromise peace proposals Metternich did put forward after 1812, far from being sincere, veered at different times from being impossibly vague, to far too harsh for Napoleon to accept. In both cases, the aim was not to make a genuine settlement with Napoleon, but to cast him as an incorrigible warmonger, widening the gulf between himself and moderate opinion within France, and paving the way for his overthrow. This interpretation received its classic form in the last volume of Albert Sorel's *L'Europe et la Révolution Française*, which appeared in 1904. The most important recent French study of the Napoleonic empire, Thierry Lentz's *Nouvelle Histoire du Premier Empire*, completed in 2010, echoes Sorel's verdict on Metternich's policy: 'une diplomatie cynique mais ô combien habile'.[12]

Anglo-Saxon and German historians have been more inclined to give Metternich the benefit of the doubt. The most influential recent exponent of this line has been Paul Schroeder. In his major work, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848*, Schroeder argues forthrightly that Austria's peace plan was sincerely meant: 'Austria … wanted peace, an end to war, full stop.' Furthermore, this plan emphatically did not include the overthrow of Napoleon. In analysing Metternich's policy, Schroeder claims,

> the one thing impossible to find is evidence of hostility to Napoleon or a desire to oppose him, much less overthrow him. Napoleon's defeat in Russia, for example, caused Metternich real dismay. The evidence indicates that Metternich saw the best chance for achieving his kind of peace … through close ties between Austria and a Napoleonic France which was still the dominant power in Western Europe.[13]

The gulf between defenders of Napoleon and defenders of Metternich is not likely to be bridged soon, especially since Metternich's diplomacy, always subtle, was so tortuous in these years that it can be interpreted in various, and often opposing, ways. Yet for both schools of thought, the meeting of 26 June 1813 is crucial. For Napoleon's defenders, it shows Metternich at his treacherous worst,

[12] For example: Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution Française*, viii. 84–91, 137–8; Lentz, *Nouvelle Histoire*, ii. 398.

[13] Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics,* 460, 465.

luring the emperor into a congress that was never seriously intended to lead to peace. Instead, they claim, it was simply a means of prolonging the armistice until a rearmed Austria was ready to join the ranks of France's enemies. For Napoleon's detractors, the Dresden meeting marks the moment at which his bellicosity and unwillingness to consider an acceptable peace convinced Metternich that compromise was now impossible and that Austria had no option but to take the field against France.[14]

The two traditional accounts, Fain's and Metternich's, agree on the broad outline of the meeting. Napoleon, they claim, attempted to avoid Austria's mediation, relying instead on a mixture of cajolery and threats to keep her neutral. He lost his temper when Metternich refused to be deflected, accusing him of betraying the Franco-Austrian alliance. In a fury he threw his hat across the room, only to pick it up in some embarrassment a little later. By the end of the interview, however, the emperor had recovered his self-control. The two men parted on reasonably civil terms, and Metternich was able to return to Francis I with Napoleon's agreement to participate in a peace conference at Prague in July.[15]

Yet there are key differences between Fain's and Metternich's recollections. Fain states that Napoleon agreed to the peace congress at the end of the meeting. Metternich, on the other hand, maintains that this was only conceded four days later, just before he stepped into his carriage to leave Dresden. The dramatic phrase with which Metternich remembers ending the meeting: 'Sire, vous êtes perdu!' is not in Fain's account. On matters of substance, Fain asserts that Napoleon twice offered Austria the return of Illyria, which he had taken from her in 1809, as the price of her neutrality, while Metternich makes no reference to this. Fain also claims that Napoleon accused Metternich of having been bribed by England to change sides: 'Ah! Metternich, combien l'Angleterre vous-a-t-elle donné pour vous décider à jouer ce rôle contre moi?' Unsurprisingly, this figures nowhere in Metternich's version.[16]

On one critical issue, however, Fain and Metternich are inconclusive. Did Metternich put concrete proposals to Napoleon for a territorial settlement to end the war? This question is of central importance to the defenders and detractors of both men and, by extension, of the causes they represented. If Metternich did not, then the argument of the traditional French school, that his aim was not peace but to trap Napoleon into negotiations that would divide him from French public opinion, is much strengthened. If he did, then Napoleon's refusal even to discuss these terms in detail, at Dresden and subsequently, reinforces the opposing view of his obstinacy and belligerence. In his own account, Metternich does not mention that he brought territorial proposals to Napoleon, which

[14] Lentz, *Nouvelle Histoire*, ii. 414–16; Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics,* 470–71.

[15] Fain writes merely 'le chapeau de l'Empereur est tombé à terre', Metternich 'mit diesem Ausruf warf er den Hut, welchen er bisher in der Hand gehalten, in die Ecke des Zimmers'. Fain, *Manuscrit*, ii. 42–3; *Aus Metternichs Nachgelassenen Papieren*, ii. 155. For the amicable end to the meeting: Fain, *Manuscrit*, ii. 43–4; *Aus Metternichs Nachgelassenen Papieren*, ii. 156–7.

[16] Fain, *Manuscrit*, ii. 43, 40, 44, 42.

supports the French school's belief in his duplicity. Writing in 1820, however, Metternich had sound reasons for denying that he had seriously sought to negotiate with Napoleon at Dresden. Along with Alexander I and Wellington, he was being hailed as the conqueror of French tyranny, and was not about to produce any evidence that he had sought to compromise with it.

Fain's version is ambiguous. Nowhere does he positively state that Metternich made territorial proposals, but he does record words of Napoleon's that appear to be a reaction to them. Towards the end of the meeting, he writes, Napoleon led Metternich from his study into his adjoining map-room. 'Après un assez long intervalle', he continues,

> la voix de l'Empereur s'élève de nouveau. 'Quoi! Non-seulement l'Illyrie, mais la moitié de l'Italie et le retour du pape à Rome! Et la Pologne, et l'abandon de l'Espagne! et la Hollande, et la Confédération du Rhin, et la Suisse! Voilà donc ce que vous appellez l'esprit de modération qui vous anime!'[17]

The fact that Napoleon's words have survived, but not Metternich's, may be explained by the fact that Maret, who was Fain's source, was listening to the conversation from an antechamber crowded with members of the court.[18] Metternich's voice, presumably speaking in normal tones, could not be heard from the map-room beyond the study, but Napoleon's furious response probably could. Unfortunately, Napoleon's reaction does not permit one to reconstruct exactly what Metternich said to provoke it. If he did urge concessions, Napoleon was quite capable of exaggerating them for effect, flinging them back at Metternich in feigned outrage the better to avoid them. It is also not inconceivable that he was playing to the gallery in the form of the audience beyond his study door. Finally, Maret may have transmitted to Fain an inaccurate version of Napoleon's outburst, either because he misheard it, or because, like his master, he was determined to present any Austrian proposals at this point as unreasonable.

Albert Sorel chose not to explore these possibilities. For him, the conclusion to be drawn from both Fain's and Metternich's accounts is perfectly clear: that at no point during the Dresden interview did Metternich put to Napoleon territorial proposals as a basis for peace. Fain's indirect evidence that he did is dismissed as a simple mistake on the part of Maret.[19] As a result, Sorel's judgement is categoric: 'Metternich resta muet … sur les conditions de paix que l'Autriche proposerait au congrès, qu'elle accepterait, qu'elle imposerait enfin par sa médiation armée.' He repeats the point shortly afterwards; by the end of the meeting,

[17] Fain, *Manuscrit*, ii. 40.

[18] *Aus Metternichs Nachgelassenen Papieren*, ii. 150.

[19] 'Maret a dû écrire à distance, car il y fait des allusions à des conditions de paix qui ne lui ont été notifiées qu'après.' Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution Française*, viii. 144.

'Metternich n'avait pas découvert les conditions de paix de l'Autriche, celles qui la feraient passer aux alliés si Napoléon les refusait.'[20]

Caulaincourt's testimony sheds significant new light on both Fain's and Metternich's accounts. It is particularly compelling for several reasons. Caulaincourt had a privileged status as a favourite member of Napoleon's inner circle, and most recently as his sole companion on his return journey by sledge from Russia to Paris in December 1812.[21] His recollections of the period are solidly reliable; his important and exhaustive memoirs are generally corroborated by the other contemporary sources. Above all, Caulaincourt's account of the Dresden meeting was taken down from Napoleon's own words almost immediately after it ended, whereas the letter Metternich wrote to Francis I just afterwards is much shorter and less detailed, and Fain's version came second hand via Maret, only appearing ten years afterwards.

Caulaincourt sets the scene with his usual precision. As soon as Metternich left the emperor's study, he writes, Napoleon called in the ministre d'Etat comte Daru,[22] and Caulaincourt himself immediately afterwards. If Daru was the first person to receive Napoleon's account of the meeting, Caulaincourt was the second, which makes it all the more likely that it was unvarnished. As Caulaincourt put it:

> Le travail avec le comte Daru fut d'autant plus long que l'Empereur lui parla de la conversation qu'il venait d'avoir avec M de Metternich; il eut par conséquent sa première impression, et elle avait été vive, si j'en juge par ce qui me dit ensuite l'Empereur, car je le trouvai si plein de son sujet, qu'il avait encore je puis dire, toute l'indiscrétion qui échappe à un premier mouvement. Loin d'expliquer les choses uniquement dans l'intérêt de sa politique, il me répéta avec la franchise d'un homme oppressé par les confidences qu'on vient de lui faire, tout ce que M de Metternich lui avait dit, même ce qui était contre les vues politiques et l'opinion qu'il avait intérêt à faire prévaloir. Cette conversation me frappa tellement que je la notai en le quittant, et je crois que ma mémoire m'a assez bien servi pour n'avoir rien omis, et avoir même en grande partie conservé les propres paroles de l'Empereur.[23]

[20] Ibid., 146, 147. Oncken also concluded that Metternich did not mention peace terms: 'Nach Allem, was wir jetzt über die denkwürdige Unterredung wissen, konnen wir … mit aller Bestimmtheit behaupten … dass Metternich ein Friedensprogramm nicht vorgelegt … hat.' *Österreich und Preussen,* ii. 391.

[21] For the journey back from Russia: *Mémoires de Caulaincourt,* ii. 205–347. The recent biography of Caulaincourt, A. d'Arjuzon, *Caulaincourt, le Confident de Napoléon* (Paris, 2012), surprisingly makes very little use of the Fonds Caulaincourt in the Archives Nationales.

[22] On Daru: H de la Barre de Nanteuil, *Le Comte Daru, ou l'Administration Militaire sous la Révolution et l'Empire* (Paris, 1966) and B. Bergerot, *Daru: Intendant Général de la Grande Armée* (Paris, 1991). Neither book makes reference to any conversation of Napoleon with Daru after Metternich's departure, for which Caulaincourt's manuscript is thus the only known source.

[23] AN 95 AP 12, pièce 621, fo. 3.

For the first part of the meeting, in which Napoleon tried to bully Metternich into standing by the Franco-Austrian alliance, Caulaincourt's version follows Fain's. It then moves on to the critical question left unresolved by the other two accounts—whether Metternich actually put concrete peace terms to Napoleon. Here it provides important new evidence. It clearly states that he did so, with some hesitation but in unmistakeable terms. In answer to Napoleon's blunt question: 'Mais quelle paix voulez-vous?', Metternich answered first in general terms, that he desired a more equitable balance of power on the continent guaranteed by all the powers. He then broached specific territorial questions. According to Caulaincourt,

> Il parla du duché de Varsovie, de la convenance, même pour nous, de réédifier la Prusse et de lui donner ce qu'il appelait une frontière. Empêcher les ennemis de parler de l'indépendance de l'Italie et de l'Espagne lui paraissait une question qui méritait toute la reconnaissance de l'Empereur, auquel il fit vaguement sentir la nécessité de renoncer au protectorat de l'Allemagne et de la Suisse etc, ce qui ne lui ôterait, selon lui, qu'un titre sans le priver de l'influence naturelle que devait conserver à la France sa position et sa puissance.[24]

The likelihood that Metternich did indeed say this is increased by comparison with Fain's version. It is probable that Napoleon's outburst, which his courtiers could hear across two rooms, was the response to these proposals. There are still some discrepancies. In Fain's account, Napoleon stormed that Metternich wanted him to abandon Spain, Holland, Illyria, Poland, the Confederation of the Rhine and half of Italy, and to accept the Pope's return to Rome, but Caulaincourt presents the terms as more modest: renunciation of the Duchy of Warsaw and the protectorates of Switzerland and the Confederation of the Rhine, and the restoration of Prussia to great power status.[25] He adds that later on in the interview Metternich spoke of the return of Illyria to Austria and the need for France to relinquish Hamburg. The not inconsiderable difference between the two versions is with regard to Holland, Spain and half of Italy, and this may well be impossible to resolve. Yet weighing the available evidence, Caulaincourt's manuscript seems more plausible; he cites Metternich directly, which Fain does not, and his account was not intended for publication, while Fain's was.

The only other published source on the Dresden meeting, the further details Napoleon dictated to Montholon on St Helena just six weeks before his death, also bears out Caulaincourt. Here, Napoleon added that Metternich actually pointed out on a map the territories France would have to cede to gain peace. They seem to have been less extensive than Fain had claimed, since on this occasion Napoleon only recalled having protested against losing Illyria, half of Italy

[24] Ibid., fos 6–7.
[25] Fain, *Manuscrit*, ii. 40.

and the protection of the Confederation of the Rhine.[26] Thus Montholon's testimony confirms Caulaincourt's statement that Metternich did outline specific peace terms, though without Caulaincourt's precision.

If accepted—and there seems no reason for it not to be—Caulaincourt's evidence lends powerful support to the argument that Metternich's peace policy was indeed sincere. If Metternich did make territorial proposals to Napoleon at Dresden, the French school's charge against him of duplicity becomes much more difficult to sustain. Napoleon may, in Caulaincourt's words, have found these terms 'onéreuses', but at least they were put to him honestly.[27] Rather than merely a smokescreen to gain time for Austria to rearm against France, Metternich's diplomacy emerges as a genuine, if quixotic, attempt to find a viable compromise between Napoleon and his enemies.

A comparison with the territorial settlement Metternich was discussing with Russia and Prussia just before he met Napoleon, and the one contained in the ultimatum he gave six weeks later to Caulaincourt at the Congress of Prague, reinforces this point. The evening before he set off for Dresden, Metternich actually agreed four demands with his Russian and Prussian colleagues, the refusal of which by France would trigger an Austrian declaration of war by 20 July. These were almost identical to the points he put on 26 June: the dissolution of the Duchy of Warsaw, the cession of Danzig and its territory to Prussia and the evacuation of French garrisons in Prussia and Poland, and the return of Illyria to Austria. The independence of the Hanseatic ports, at least of Hamburg, Lübeck and their territories, was also stipulated, as well as eventual French renunciation of her possessions in North Germany in the context of a general peace.[28]

Metternich's Prague ultimatum reflects even more closely the terms he put to Napoleon at Dresden. Again, this demanded the destruction of the Duchy of Warsaw, the transfer of Danzig and her territory to Prussia, the return of Illyria to Austria, the independence of Hamburg and Lübeck, and an eventual French withdrawal from North Germany. Two further conditions were added, which also echoed Metternich's words on 26 June: an end to France's protectorate of the Confederation of the Rhine and an international guarantee of the German princes' independence, and Prussia's restoration to a size approaching that of 1806.[29] The striking similarity between the points set out on all three occasions underlines the consistency of Metternich's policy for a compromise peace, and the terms on which he hoped to achieve it. These proposals may not have satisfied Napoleon, but they were not merely, as Sorel claims, '[des] jeux de fantasmagorie'.[30]

[26] *Récits de la Captivité,* ii. 495.
[27] AN 95 AP 12, pièce 621, fo. 2.
[28] Oncken, *Österreich und Preussen,* ii. 364–5.
[29] AN 95 AP 13, pièce 411; Oncken, *Österreich und Preussen*, ii. 450–1; Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution Française*, viii. 171–72.
[30] Sorel, *L'Europe et la Revolution francaise*, viii, 138.

There was one flaw in Metternich's plans. Even if Napoleon made all the concessions indicated, this would still only gain him, at best, a continental peace, since England remained outside the negotiations. Baron Wessenberg had been sent from Vienna to London in February to gain English support for Austrian mediation, but had swiftly been rebuffed.[31] To obtain a general peace, in addition to the Austrian conditions France could expect tough negotiations on those issues essential to England's maritime interests: the future of colonial possessions outside Europe and, in the Mediterranean, the status of Italy, Spain and Portugal. Napoleon naturally seized on this weakness at Dresden. In Caulaincourt's version, he astutely used the goal of a general peace as an argument against making the continental concessions Metternich proposed. These would, he claimed, deprive him of the weapons he needed to force England to the conference table:

> Vous voulez donc que le résultat de votre alliance et de l'intérêt que mon beau-père vous charge de me témoigner, m'affaiblit plus que ne feraient quatre batailles perdues; est-ce le moyen d'amener l'Angleterre à la paix? … ce ne serait pas en ramenant mes légions la crosse en l'air que j'en imposerais à l'Angleterre … parlons net, M. de Metternich, c'est la paix générale dont vous avez besoin comme moi.[32]

Napoleon certainly had a point. The fact that Metternich could not at this stage deliver a general peace significantly compromised the Austrian mediation, though the responsibility for this lay not with him but with the British government. Yet one suspects that Napoleon was also using the argument that he could not negotiate with Britain from a position of weakness as a convenient excuse to refuse continental concessions. Even some of Napoleon's closest advisers had doubts about this reasoning. It was more likely, they argued, that if France made peace with her continental foes this would marginalize England and make her more amenable in negotiations for a general peace. As Caulaincourt put it to the emperor in July:

> L'honneur français n'a aucun sacrifice à faire … et de ceux qu'on réclame au nom d'un meilleur équilibre politique et de la tranquillité ou prospérité générale, il n'y est point, sire, qui n'offre à votre majesté une utile ou honorable compensation, puisque l'isolement de l'Angleterre qui en sera le résultat forcera cette rivale à la paix.[33]

Raising the spectre of England was one part of Napoleon's strategy to avoid Austrian mediation. The other was a naked appeal to self-interest. Napoleon was convinced that he could secure Austria's neutrality with a territorial bribe, first

[31] Luckwaldt, *Österreich und die Anfänge*, 122–7.
[32] AN 95 AP 12, pièce 621, fo. 8.
[33] AN 95 AP 13, pièce 405, Caulaincourt to Napoleon, Dresden, 26 July 1813.

and foremost Illyria. This point was made by Fain and Montholon, and has been echoed by Paul Schroeder, but the extent of Napoleon's obsession with the issue is only fully revealed in Caulaincourt's manuscript.[34] The emperor could not conceive that behind Metternich's talk of forging a peace based on equity and equilibrium lay anything more than a desire to exploit France's recent reverses for territorial gain. When Metternich spoke of the need for a more equal balance of power in Europe, backed by international guarantees of the independence of states, he got only the dismissive reply: 'Ces mots sont vagues'.[35]

In contrast, Napoleon returned repeatedly to the idea that Austria could be bought off with Illyria, both in his conversation with Metternich and afterwards with Caulaincourt. He claimed later that Metternich had indeed asked for the return of Illyria, but among the many territorial issues that were discussed it is revealing that he concentrated so disproportionately on this one. Three times with Caulaincourt he reverted to the subject:

> En tout, [Metternich] n'a rien fondé, et je dois au moins lui savoir gré d'avoir été franc, si le fond de tout cela n'est pas, comme je persiste à le croire, dans la possession de l'Illyrie … Le fond de tout cela me parait toujours l'Illyrie. Voilà ce que veut mon beau-père et ce que Metternich lui a sans doute promis en venant ici … Au fait, [Metternich] veut l'Illyrie, il croit le moment favorable.[36]

Napoleon's fixation on Illyria raises wider issues than the return of one former Austrian province. It emphasizes his deeply cynical and material view of international relations. He genuinely seems to have thought that territorial gain—or in this case regain—was all that Austria cared about. In fact, Austria broke with him because Francis I and Metternich decided that the much wider interests of Europe required French withdrawal from Germany and Poland, and the rebuilding of Prussia. Similarly, Napoleon's contemptuous dismissal of Metternich's desire for a new treaty system guaranteeing the rights of all the European states—'Ces mots sont vagues'—is highly revealing. Within six years Metternich was to justify his words; the Congress system was an attempt to put at least some of these ideas into practice.[37] For Napoleon, in contrast, the only foundations of diplomacy were power and force; the concept of independent states negotiating freely with one another within a framework of international law had little meaning for him. As a result, he grossly miscalculated the chances of Austria staying neutral or fighting him, and paved the way for his own downfall.

[34] Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics*, 470.
[35] AN 95 AP 12, pièce 621, fo. 6.
[36] Ibid., fos 11, 13, 17.
[37] For this aspect of the Congress system: Kissinger, *A World Restored*, and P. W. Schroeder, *Metternich's Diplomacy at its Zenith, 1820–1823* (Austin, TX, 1962).

III

If Napoleon thought that Austria had its price, he also thought that Metternich had his. He made this explicit in an aside to Caulaincourt. Recalling that during the meeting Metternich had spoken of a durable and honourable peace that would be satisfying for all, he commented acidly: 'C'est-à-dire lucrative pour l'Autriche et pour lui, car voilà ce que M. de Metternich appelle honorable.'[38] This perception led Napoleon to make his greatest blunder of the Dresden interview. Fain, Montholon and Caulaincourt all claim that, in a moment of anger towards the end of the meeting, he accused Metternich of having accepted a bribe from England to turn Austria against France. According to Caulaincourt, this was a variation on his theme that he was being asked to make disproportionate sacrifices before England had even agreed to negotiate. Napoleon also knew that just a few days earlier England had signed new treaties of alliance with Russia and Prussia at Reichenbach, and, not without reason, suspected Austria of being about to do the same. As a result, he again lost his temper:

> Vous ne comptez pour rien ce que l'Angleterre a acquis, cependant il faudra beaucoup lui rendre, et on ne demandera qu'à moi … Elle vient de signer deux traités à Reichenbach avec la Russie et la Prusse, n'en a't'elle fait qu'en ébauche un troisième? … Vous devez en savoir quelque chose, M de Metternich, combien vous-a-t-elle donné pour cela?[39]

Caulaincourt's version of this famous incident has one particularly interesting feature. It sets down not only Napoleon's outburst, but also his comments on it immediately afterwards, which none of the other sources do. It reveals Napoleon as uncomfortably aware that he had offered Metternich an unpardonable insult, but trying to convince himself that the latter had not taken it as such. 'Soit que j'eusse été trop loin', he recalled,

> soit que M de Metternich se vit démasqué, ou qu'il fut trop choqué pour répondre, il se tut. Je le battais de l'oeil. Il resta impassible'. L'empereur fit la réflexion [Caulaincourt adds] que *M de Metternich n'étant pas à sa première affaire d'argent, il était probable que son reproche l'avait peu choqué*.[40]

Shortly afterwards Napoleon returned to the subject, clearly trying to shrug off his words by pretending they had been meant as a joke. As Caulaincourt recalled:

> Quand j'ai demandé en plaisantant à Metternich', me dit-il, 'combien l'Angleterre lui donnait pour que l'Autriche changeât d'alliance, il

[38] AN 95 AP 12, pièce 621, fo. 6.
[39] Ibid., fo. 10.
[40] Ibid.

> n'a pas eu l'air de faire attention à ma question. Au reste je pourrai l'acheter, et même plus cher que ne font les Anglais, mais ces moyens sont indignes de moi, puis il se méfierait des conséquences.[41]

Only on St Helena, just six weeks before his death, was Napoleon finally able to admit that his angry jibe had permanently damaged his relationship with Metternich. With considerable dramatic licence, he told Montholon that by the end of the Dresden meeting he had actually persuaded Metternich to drop his wider territorial demands in exchange for the return of Illyria and some unspecified further concessions to Austria. This smacks too much of wish-fulfilment to be taken seriously, and contradicts not only Caulaincourt's and Fain's accounts, but also the consistency of Metternich's diplomatic aims both before and after Dresden. Then, Napoleon claimed, just as he had won Metternich back to his side, his ill-judged sally about the English bribe had compromised everything. 'Je croyais l'avoir ramené à ma cause', he recalled, 'et je me laissai aller à lui dire: "Je vous ai donné 20 millions, en voulez-vous 20 autres? Je vous les donnerai. Mais combien l'Angleterre vous offrait-elle donc?" La foudre n'a pas d'effet plus prompt. La pâleur mortelle de M de Metternich me prouva l'énormité de ma faute. Je venais de m'en faire un ennemi irréconciliable.'[42]

Napoleon's explanation of why he had uttered the fateful words is also revealing. He ascribed this to his emotional and combative reactions when questions of French national honour were at stake. He nonetheless admitted the enormity of his error, and recognized, far too late, the flaws in his negotiating style:

> Ces fautes appartiennent à ma nature impressionable, il y a chez moi de certaines cordes qui vibrent avec la violence de la foudre quand par malheur ells sont heurtées dans leur susceptibilité d'honneur ou de patriotisme; c'est comme ma sortie à cet ambassadeur anglais qui osa me rappeler la bataille d'Azincourt. A Dresde, c'est différent, je suis impardonnable. Mes passions nobles ne sont pas mon excuse, c'est un mauvais sentiment qui m'a fait dire à M de Metternich: combien les Anglais vous donnaient-ils donc? C'était l'humilier par plaisir, et il ne faut jamais humilier l'homme qu'on veut gagner.[43]

Of all the accounts of the Dresden interview, Metternich's is the only one not to mention the incident. This is natural, since if he had, he would have had to explain why, as a man of honour, he had not left the room immediately. The fact that he did not implies not that the charge was justified, but rather that the moment was so critical that he was prepared even to swallow this shocking

[41] Ibid., fo. 17.
[42] *Récits de la captivité*, ii. 497.
[43] Ibid., 497–98.

insult. Thus on balance it is probable that Napoleon did accuse Metternich of having been bribed by England, and that this had serious consequences. It did not make Metternich abandon his quest for a compromise peace—his role at the Congress of Prague is evidence of that—but it added personal offence to the central issue of Napoleon's territorial intransigence, and undermined Metternich's confidence in his mission. If he did indeed declaim 'Sire, vous êtes perdu!' at the end of the meeting, one can see why.

If Napoleon attacked Metternich personally at Dresden, he did not spare his country either. One can understand his fury at what he saw as Austria's betrayal, but the barrage of accusations he levelled at her went beyond this. It revealed a suspicion and hostility that powerfully echoed the Austrophobia of the old regime. This was a venerable tradition that dated back to the Franco-Habsburg wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which France had seen as an existential struggle to frustrate Austrian plans for a 'universal monarchy', and one requiring constant vigilance.[44] In French eyes, if Austrian ambitions were limitless, her methods were also insidious, involving diplomatic intrigue and, above all, marriage policy to extend her influence. Hence the famous phrase: *Alii bella gerant; tu, felix Austria, nube.*

The reversal of alliances of 1756, sealed fourteen years later by the marriage of the Archduchess Maria Antonia, the future Marie Antoinette, to the Dauphin Louis Auguste, the future Louis XVI, ended this rivalry, though deep reservoirs of distrust remained on both sides, particularly in France. The wars of the Revolution had seen the collapse of the 1756 alliance, the execution of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, and the renewal of armed conflict between France and Austria. It was Napoleon who had ended this, after the crushing victory of Wagram in 1809, by reviving the 1756 alliance. His marriage in 1810 to the Archduchess Maria Louisa, who became the Empress Marie Louise, echoed that of Louis XVI to Marie Antoinette, though Napoleon produced an heir with far more efficiency than his predecessor.

It may seem bizarre that Napoleon, having identified his dynasty's future with Austria, should in the spring of 1813 attack his own policy. The threat of Habsburg defection, however, reawakened in him the Austrophobia common to his generation. Its standard obsession with deep-laid Austrian plans to dominate Europe figured prominently in the broadside he unleashed at Metternich:

> vous vous plaignez que je domine, et vous prétendez de fait vous mettre à ma place, puisque vous voulez vous mêler des affaires de

[44] For two classic statements of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century French Austrophobia: J.-L. Favier, *Doutes et questions sur le Traité de Versailles du 1 mai 1756 entre le Roi et avec, l'Impératrice-Reine de Hongrie* (Paris, 1789 edition), and J. L. Soulavie, *Mémoires historiques et politiques du règne de Louis XVI*, 6 vols (Paris, 1801), i. 280–1, and ii. 160–1. For modern scholarship on the subject: T. C. W. Blanning, *Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars* (London, 1986), 40–5, 96–123; T. E. Kaiser, 'Who's afraid of Marie Antoinette: diplomacy, austrophobia and the queen', *Fr Hist* (2000), 241–71; idem, 'La fin du renversement des alliances: la France, l'Autriche et la déclaration de guerre du 20 avril 1792', *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française* (2008), 77–98 and G. Savage, 'Favier's heirs: the French Revolution and the *Secret du Roi', Hist J* 41 (1998), 225–8.

> tout le monde … est-ce le rang de la France que vous voulez? Je dois le croire, car vous demandez déjà pour chacun, comme si vous étiez le dispensateur des prétensions des souverains. Depuis quand la politique a-t-elle cette allure? En Italie, en Allemagne, en Suisse, vous voulez tout changer et au fond reconquérir sous différents prétextes, sous d'autres dénominations tout ce que vous avez perdu … vous croyez le moment opportun pour ressaisir l'Illyrie et l'Italie, car tout est à votre convenance, et vos espérances comme vos prétentions ne sont pas seulement dans celles que vous avez aujourd'hui, le temps et les circonstances les régleront, car voilà vos vieux auxiliaires …[45]

If Austria and France went to war again, this left Marie Louise, the Habsburg archduchess now Empress of the French, in a painfully exposed position. Napoleon ruthlessly exploited the fate of Marie Antoinette and her son, immolated in a previous Franco-Austrian conflict, to paint an apocalyptic picture of the possible consequences if his father-in-law changed sides. Such an action, he had recently warned a previous Austrian envoy, Count Bubna, would be disastrous for both countries:

> Nous allons bouleverser le monde et l'ordre des choses qui est établi. L'existence des monarchies deviendra un problème. La meilleure des femmes en sera la victime; elle sera malheureuse. La France sera livrée aux Jacobins. L'enfant dans les veines duquel le sang autrichien coule, que deviendra-t-il? … Ce qui me tient le plus au coeur, c'est le sort du Roi de Rome; je ne veux pas rendre le sang autrichien odieux à la France![46]

The emotional blackmail here is obvious: Napoleon well knew that Marie Louise was Francis I's favourite daughter. In effect, he was threatening to sacrifice his wife and son if Austria took up arms against him. As he put it to Bubna: 'L'honneur avant tout! puis la femme, puis l'enfant, puis la dynastie.'[47] This could be dismissed as mere rhetoric, but events were to prove otherwise. Marie Louise did not suffer the fate of Marie Antoinette, but within a year she had ceased to be Empress of the French, and her son's prospects of succeeding his father as emperor had been destroyed. This was not accompanied, as Napoleon had threatened, by a repetition of the French Revolution, but the Bonaparte dynasty—in the direct line—had been permanently dethroned.

This was an extraordinary response to an ally's effort to broker a compromise between France and her enemies. Whether or not the Austrian peace proposals were sincere, and on balance the evidence is that they were, it is remarkable that Napoleon never engaged seriously with them, even if only to demonstrate

[45] AN 95 AP 12, pièce 621, fos 9–10.
[46] Cited in Oncken, *Österreich und Preussen*, ii. 650–1.
[47] Ibid., 650.

their hollowness to public opinion. The question of why he chose this ultimately disastrous path remains. The answer he himself gave was *l'honneur*. This might more accurately be described as a furious determination to cling on to an empire that by 1813 had become unsustainable. Yet the question remains as to why, even after the disasters of Russia, he bound his honour so closely to this uncompromising refusal, as he put it to Bubna, to cede even one village of the French Empire.[48]

Caulaincourt's account, among other sources, offers evidence that the deepest reason for this lay in domestic rather than foreign affairs. Time and again in 1813 Napoleon expressed his conviction that if he signed a 'dishonourable' peace, his exasperated people would turn on him and drive him from the throne. As he put it in April to Metternich's colleague Prince Schwarzenberg: 'En publiant une paix de cette nature, on n'entendrait à la vérité au premier moment que des cris de joie, mais bientôt après on blâmerait hautement le gouvernement, je perdrais l'estime et en meme temps la confiance de mes peoples, car le Français a l'imagination vive, il aime la gloire, l'exaltation, il est fibreux.'[49] This basic insecurity was dramatically increased by the retreat from Moscow. In his discussion of the Dresden interview with Caulaincourt, Napoleon insisted that 'depuis ses revers de Russie, il avait besoin de *se remonter dans l'opinion*', and, a little later, that 'toute concession le perdrait'.[50]

Were Napoleon's fears justified? The answer can only be sought in what we know of the state of French public opinion after the Russian disaster. Public opinion is a notoriously difficult concept to define and measure, particularly in a regime such as the First Empire where freedom of expression was so tightly controlled. Censorship ensured that real political debate was absent from those standard barometers of opinion, newspapers and books. However, there is substantial material from other sources, above all the daily reports prepared for the emperor by the ministre de la police and by the préfet de police for Paris.[51] Napoleon complemented this by a more informal network of informers of his own. As Thierry Lentz puts it: 'Le chef de l'état voulait être informé de tout et pouvoir agir sur tout.'[52]

The problem with this material is that it is, by its nature, particular rather than general, presenting snapshots of specific incidents deemed to pose a threat to public order rather than a more general trend. In reading it, one sometimes has difficulty perceiving the general picture amid the mass of *faits divers*. Yet certain impressions and incidents recur so often in late 1812 and early 1813 that they must form part of a broader pattern. They can also be corroborated by the

[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid., 622.
[50] AN 95 AP 12, pièce 621, fos 16, 18.
[51] Fouché's bulletins as minister of police to Napoleon have been published by E. d'Hauterive and J. Grassion, *La Police secrète du premier empire: Bulletins quotidiens adressés par Fouché à l'Empereur, 1804–1810*, 5 vols (Paris, 1908–64); those of his successor Savary by M. Gotteri, *La Police secrète du premier empire: Bulletins quotidiens adressés par Savary à l'Empereur, 1810–1814*, 7 vols (Paris, 1997–2004).
[52] Lentz, *Nouvelle histoire*, iii. 315.

monthly reports of the prefects to the ministre de l'intérieur.[53] It is clear that the twenty-ninth bulletin of the *Grande Armée* of 3 December 1812, which first announced the catastrophe of the retreat from Moscow, caused consternation at all levels of society when it was published in Paris thirteen days later. This resulted in some displays of open opposition to the regime; in both Paris and the provinces the posting of seditious placards became a growing problem. More widespread, and typical of such an authoritarian state, were rumours that the twenty-ninth bulletin, shocking as it was, had still not fully admitted the extent of the army's casualties.[54] The result was an atmosphere of alarm and apprehension which, if not a precursor to revolt, presented the authorities with a worrying long-term problem.

Over the next months, this fear and discontent crystallized into a desire for peace that was widely attested at the time and was subsequently echoed in the memoir literature. In June 1813 the préfet of the Haut-Rhin, la Vieuville, reported to the minister of the interior that 'les voeux sont unanimes pour la paix'. His counterpart in Marseille, Thibaudeau, underlined the point at the end of the year: 'Il n'y a que la paix qui puisse améliorer les choses.'[55] This picture is confirmed retrospectively in a range of subsequent memoirs of the time, from those of military men like General Thiébault to the préfet de police in Paris, Baron Pasquier, himself.[56] It is all the more likely to be accurate since, unlike posting seditious placards, expressing a desire for peace was a relatively safe way of manifesting disagreement with Napoleon's policy in 1813 while still outwardly professing loyalty to his regime. One can only speculate what deeper discontents were concealed behind the general hopes for an end to the fighting reported by the police and the civil service. The conclusion drawn by Mme de Boigne in her memoirs, if impressionistic, is striking:

> À mesure que le théâtre de la guerre se rapprochait, il était plus difficile de cacher la vérité sur l'inutilité des efforts gigantesques faits par Napoléon … Franchement, il était détesté; chacun voyait en lui l'obstacle à son repos, et le repos était devenu le premier besoin de tous.[57]

At the grass-roots level, opposition to conscription was the most basic form of expressing hostility to the continuing war, and refusing personal involvement in it. From the first *levée en masse* of 1793, conscription had been a fact of French life. The best estimate is that between the regularization of conscription by the Jourdan Law of 1798 and the end of 1813 just over two million Frenchmen

[53] N. Petiteau, *Les Français et l'empire, 1799–1815* (Paris, 2008), 216.
[54] Ibid., 212–14.
[55] Ibid., 218–19.
[56] *Mémoires du général baron Thiébault*, vol. 5 (Paris, 1895), 1; *Histoire de mon temps. Mémoires du chancelier Pasquier*, vol. 6 (Paris, 1894), 90.
[57] *Mémoires de la comtesse de Boigne*, vol. 1 (*Mercure de France* edn, Paris, 1999), 306–7.

were recruited into the army.[58] To a remarkable degree French society appeared to have accepted this annual tribute of young men aged between twenty and twenty-five. However, the demands Napoleon made in the first months of 1813 to make good his losses in Russia and put a new army of 300,000 men into the field were draconian even by his standards. Both previous and future classes of eligible young men were ransacked, in ways that, in theory at least, were illegal. The height requirement for conscripts was ignored, and men of up to thirty-eight were drafted into the reserve.[59]

The most obvious evidence of refusal of conscription comes in the statistics for draft evasion and desertion. Louis Bergeron calculates that by 1813 these had come down over the past thirteen years from 27 per cent to 10 per cent, testimony to the efficiency of Napoleon's administrative and repressive apparatus.[60] However, by the end of 1813 the figure had risen again, with one-sixth of conscripts avoiding service.[61] There were also two major anti-conscription revolts that year, in the departments of the Vaucluse and the Nord.[62]

In gathering and assessing these indices of public opinion, what is difficult to find is any solid evidence to support Napoleon's claim that there was a wave of bellicose 'Jacobin' patriotism waiting to break over him the moment he signed a 'dishonourable' peace. The evidence in fact points in precisely the opposite direction; the vast majority of French people, from Parisian *salonnières* to young conscripts to many of his own ministers, were desperate for the war to end, and if he had signed a peace on almost any terms his regime would probably have emerged strengthened.

Why Napoleon persisted until the end in the illusion that a diplomatic compromise would fatally undermine his domestic position is ultimately unknowable. Its effect was that he never properly tested the one chance he was offered after 1812 to secure the Bonaparte dynasty in France and a stable peace in Europe.

The last source for the Dresden meeting so far discovered is a letter written by Metternich to his wife Eleonore two days afterwards, on 28 June. It is in the National Archives of the Czech Republic, and up until now has remained unpublished.[63] It contains no new revelations about what was discussed during the interview, but it does shed new light on Napoleon's behaviour during it, and on Metternich's own reaction to this. Naturally, in this intimate letter Metternich let his guard down much more than in his report to his emperor, and the result is a vivid description of his feelings as a key player in a great historical moment.

[58] A Forrest, *Conscripts and Deserters: the Army and French Society during the Revolution and Empire* (Oxford, 1989), 20.

[59] Ibid., 36.

[60] L. Bergeron, *L'Épisode napoléonien. Aspects intérieurs, 1799–1815* (Paris, 1972), 144.

[61] J. Lovie and A. Palluel-Guillard, *L'Épisode napoléonien. Aspects extérieurs, 1799–1815* (Paris, 1971), 141.

[62] Petiteau, *Les Français et l'empire*, 194, 217.

[63] NAP, Acta Clementina, 12/33 sg C 50, ka 5, Metternich to Eleonore von Metternich, 28 June 1813.

Metternich here portrays Napoleon as significantly less in control of himself than he appears in the other accounts. In the course of the nine-and-a-half-hour confrontation, he told Eleonore, the emperor threw his hat not just once, but 'four times … into the corner of the room, swearing like the Devil'. Metternich's commentary on this is cool and ironic: 'Aussi souvent que je l'ai vu furieux j'ai placé mon chapeau sur une chaise comme prise de possession.' The account also underlines Napoleon's volatility: 'Après le fureur il est redevenu tout doux et il a fini par me déclarer dans *la neuvième* heure que j'étais un des hommes au monde qu'il aimait le mieux, et que si demain nous nous ferions la guerre il ne m'aimerait pas moins.'[64] Napoleon's terrible temper is a historical fact. Metternich's letter offers further evidence that on this crucial occasion it seriously compromised his diplomacy.

Metternich also let slip aspects of his own character in the letter, particularly his extraordinary vanity. His delight at playing a central role at such a decisive juncture, the fruit of months of tortuous negotiations, was palpable: 'Quand je vois que je fais tourner l'Europe autour d'un point que moi seul j'ai fixé il y a des mois et dans un temps où tous ceux auxquels j'ai parlé de mes idées les ont traitées de folies insignes ou de plates chimères!'[65] The implication is clear: he himself, not Napoleon, was now the dominant figure in Europe, and the contrast he drew between the emperor's storming and his own 'impeturbable calm' underlined this reversal of fortune.

Metternich recounted the impact of his arrival in Dresden with equal egocentricity. 'Vous ne vous faites pas d'idée de l'effet que produit ma présence ici sur le public de Dresde,' he told Eleonore. 'Il y a continuellement foule sous mes fénêtres de gens qui veulent voir quelle mine je fais.' However, even in the midst of this self-congratulation there is a reminder of his essential goal, peace, and of how desperately it was needed. 'Des inconnus m'ont accosté dans la rue', he continues, 'pour savoir de moi-même si je croyais à la possibilité de la paix.'[66] This comment also illustrates the extreme informality of early nineteenth-century diplomacy; it is difficult to imagine such lack of security at a modern G8 summit.

Metternich's description to Eleonore of his walks around Dresden also underlines a more appealing quality of his character than vanity. This was a basic humanity, and a view of war and its effects very different from that of Napoleon. 'On ne se fait pas d'idée de l'état de misère et d'horreur qui règne ici,' he wrote. 'Les dernières batailles ont coûté plus de 80,000 morts et blessés aux Français. Toutes les maisons un peu susceptibles de servir à cette fin ont été changées en hôpitaux; il y a peut-être encore à l'heure qu'il est 25,000 blessés et malades dans Dresde et les environs les plus proches.' The contrast between the remaining beauties of Dresden, and the terrible human suffering it was now witnessing, reinforced Metternich's distaste for Napoleon's bellicosity and imperialism. He

[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.

made the point almost poetically to Eleonore: 'Toutes les allées … sont couvertes de batteries; les plus belles roses sont en attendant dans le jardin Japon. J'y suis entré hier un moment et j'aurais volontiers pleuré sur ces bouleversements continuels que l'on nomme l'histoire des empires.'[67]

This may not be further direct evidence of the sincerity of Metternich's peace initiative, but it does confirm it indirectly. The nearest Metternich comes to defining his political goal here is a phrase invoking divine aid for his mission: 'le Bon Dieu … m'a fait tout vaincre et il me protégera jusqu'au bout de mon énorme entreprise.'[68] Given his distress at the 'misery and horror' he encountered in Dresden, it seems unlikely that this enterprise was simply to bring Austria into the war on the side of the allies, thus prolonging the conflict and all its agonies.

Metternich's letter to his wife reveals new detail on the atmosphere of the Dresden meeting. Caulaincourt's account, however, sheds significant extra light on its actual content. Above all, its revelation that Metternich did set out concrete peace terms to Napoleon on 26 June provides significant, yet neglected, evidence that the Austrian mediation was sincerely meant and not merely a treacherous ruse. Its length and detail also flesh out the shorter versions of Fain, Montholon and Metternich. Finally, the manuscript offers a penetrating glimpse of Napoleon at a critical point in his career, not only in the interview itself, but also in his comments on it afterwards. It reveals his shrewdness, his perception and his tremendous force of character, but also his deepest flaws.

APPENDIX

Metternich to Eleonore von Metternich, 28 June 1813

Dresde ce 28 juin 1813

La date de cette lettre vous prouve, ma bonne amie, que mon séjour ici s'est prolongé au-delà de ce que j'avais prévu. Je suis arrivé ici 25 dans le courant de la soirée. J'ai vu l'Empereur le 26 à *11 heures* du matin; cette entrevue a finie à *8h1/2* du soir. J'ai battu par conséquent pendant 9 heures et demie le terrain avec lui. Je ne sais ce que donnerais pour avoir un témoin à mon audience. L'Empereur a jeté 4 fois son chapeau dans le coin de la chambre en jurant comme le diable. Aussi souvent que je l'ai vu furieux j'ai placé mon chapeau sur une chaise comme prise de possession. Après la fureur il est redevenu tout doux et il a fini par me déclarer dans *la neuvième* heure que j'étais un des hommes au monde qu'il aimait le mieux, et que si demain nous nous ferions la guerre il ne m'aimerait pas moins.

Il serait difficile de croire à des scènes comme celles que j'ai eues; le Bon Dieu qui m'a doué d'un calme impéturbable m'a fait tout vaincre et il me protégera

[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.

jusqu'au bout de mon énorme entreprise. Je commence un peu à croire à mon étoile comme Napoléon à la sienne. Quand je vois que je fais tourner l'Europe autour d'un point que moi seul j'ai fixé il y a des mois et dans un temps où tous ceus auxquels j'ai parlé de mes idées les ont traitées de folies insignes ou de plates chimères!

Vous ne vous faites pas d'idée de l'effet que produit ma présence ici sur le public de Dresde. Il y a continuellement foule sous mes fénetres de gens qui veulent voir quelle mine je fais. Des inconnus m'ont accosté dans la rue pour savoir de moi-meme si je croyais à la possibilité de la paix. On ne se fait pas d'idée de l'état de misère et d'horreur qui règne ici. Les dernières batailles ont couté plus de 80,000 morts et blessés aux Français. Toutes les maisons un peu susceptibles de servir à cette fin ont été changées en hopitaux; il y a peut-etre encore à l'heure qu'il est 25,000 blessés et malades dans Dresde et les environs les plus proches. Le pauvre pont est malade comme ceux qui le passent; il est tout couvert de palisades et rempli de canons. Toutes les allées entre le Meissen et le [illegible word] sont couvertes de batteries; les plus belles roses du monde sont en attendant dans le jardin Japon. J'y suis entré hier un moment et j'aurais volontiers pleuré sur ces bouleversements continuels que l'on nomme l'histoire des empires. Pour compléter le tableau je vous envoie un billet de spectacle d'hier au jardin Marcolini où l'Empereur a fait arranger un théatre dans l'orangerie. Là je me suis cru à St Cloud; toutes les mêmes figures; la même cour; les mêmes individus. Mlle Georges (qui par parenthèse vise à l'embonpoint de feu Mlle Contat) est ici et va débuter jeudi dans *Phèdre*. Je ne la verrai plus parce que je partirai demain pour Gitschin où les négociations vont s'ouvrir sur le champ, et je vous quitte pour aller avoir une nouvelle séance avec l'Empereur qui me menera peut-etre jusqu'à 3 heures du matin.

Je vous embrasse ma bonne amie et vous enverrai de Gitschin de bien jolies petites toiles que je vous ai achetées. Je bénirai le ciel quand je vous retrouverai. Le ciel seul sait *quand!* Mais il ne dépendra pas de moi que ce ne soit bientôt.

National Archives, Prague, Acta Clementina 12/33 sg C 50, ka 5.