31 The French Revolution and the Empire of Napoleon

> The effect of liberty upon individuals is that they may do as they please; we ought to see what it will please them to do before we risk congratulations.
>
> —*Edmund Burke*

1715–1774	Reign of Louis XV
1774–1792	Reign of Louis XVI
1789–1791	First phase of the Revolution: Constitutional monarchy
1792–1794	Second phase of the Revolution: Jacobin Terror
1795–1799	Third phase of the Revolution: Thermidorean Reaction
1800–1814	The Revolution terminated: Napoleonic Empire
1815	The Vienna Settlement

THE WATERSHED OF MODERN political history is the upheaval called the French Revolution that struck France and then all of Europe in the last years of the eighteenth century. More than what had happened in the American colonies a few years earlier, the unrest in France challenged every tradition and shook every pillar of the establishment. During its unpredictable and violent course evolved the ideas of popular democracy, social equality, and personal liberty, which the Revolution originally stood for but later betrayed. What started as a French aristocratic rebellion against royal taxes became the milepost from which all modern political and social developments in the Western world are measured.

The Background of the Crisis

Just as the American Revolution had been, the 1789 Revolution in France was triggered by a dispute over finances and taxation between monarch and subjects. But the tax question could have been remedied if the deeper problems of the royal government in Paris had not been so intense and so complex.

Since the death of the Sun King, Louis XIV, in 1715, the quality and the morale of French officialdom had declined. Louis's immediate successor was

his great-grandson (he had outlived both his son and grandsons), Louis XV, a young boy. For many years during his youth, actual power had been exercised by a group of nobles who used the opportunity to loosen the controls put on them by the Sun King's monopoly of power. Intent mainly on personal luxuries, they abused their powers and their newly regained freedom. Corruption and bribery began to appear in the courts and in administrative offices where it was previously not tolerated. The middle-class professional officials who had been the heart and soul of Louis XIV's bureaucracy were passed over or ignored in favor of the aristocrats who monopolized the highest offices by right of birth.

How did this deterioration come about? By nature, Louis XV was not suited to the demands of absolutist government. He was intelligent but cynical and preferred play to work. When he did take action, he delegated power to sycophants and careerists and refused to involve himself if he could avoid it.

But the tax-revenue problems could not be put off indefinitely. During the mid-eighteenth century, France engaged in a series of costly and losing wars against Britain overseas and against Austria and then Prussia on the Continent (War of the Austrian Succession, 1740–1747; Seven Years' War, 1756–1763). Taxes had to be increased, but from whose pockets? The urban middle classes and the peasantry were already paying a disproportionate amount, while the state church (the greatest single property owner in France) and the nobles were paying next to nothing, claiming ancient exemptions granted by medieval kings. By the time of Louis XV's death in 1774, the government was already on the verge of bankruptcy, unable to pay its military forces on time and forced to go to several moneylenders (notably, the Rothschild family) to meet current accounts.

Louis XV was succeeded by his weak-minded and indecisive grandson Louis XVI (ruling 1774–1792). A sympathetic and decent person, Louis was in no way qualified to lead an unstable country that was rapidly approaching a financial crisis. Specifically, he could not be expected to limit the vast expenditures that were wasted on the maintenance and frivolities of the royal court at Versailles (such as the amusements of Louis's queen, Marie Antoinette). Nor would he take an effective stand against the rising political pretensions of the nobility. This latter group, acting through their regional assemblies, the *parlements* (pahrl-MOHNT), claimed to be the true defenders of French liberties. In practice, this claim translated into a determined resistance to paying their share of taxes.

This was the situation in 1778 when the royal government decided to enter the American rebellion on the side of the colonials, to weaken Britain and perhaps to reclaim what it had lost in the Seven Years' War earlier (that is, Canada and the Mississippi Valley). The expenses of this effort were very high for France. And by now, much of the entire budget had to be funded by borrowed money at rates of interest that rose higher and higher because of the suspicion that the government would declare bankruptcy and refuse to honor its outstanding debts. Half of the revenues had to be paid out just to meet the interest due on current accounts. No one knew when or whether the principal could be repaid.

Faced with the refusal—once more—of the nobles and the clergy to pay even a token sum, the king reluctantly agreed to the election of an assemblage that had been forgotten for 175 years: the **Estates General**, or a parliament representing all segments of the society of all France. No Estates had been convoked since 1614, because after that time, first Richelieu and then Louis XIV had embarked on absolutist royal government.

Constitutional Monarchy

According to tradition, their own colleagues would elect the members of the Estates General. There were three "estates," or orders of society: the **First Estate** was made up of the clergy, the **Second Estate** consisted of the nobility, and the **Third Estate** included everyone else. Rich or poor, rural or urban, educated or illiterate, all people who were neither in the church nor of the nobility were in the Third Estate. Tradition further held that each estate voted as a bloc, so that only three votes would be cast on any issue. Because the two "privileged" estates could always form a majority against the commoners, they were assured of retaining their privileges if they stayed together.

Calling of the Estates

The first two estates made up only about 3 percent of the total population of France, but the nobles and clergy dominated every aspect of public life except commerce and manufacturing. They were the exclusive holders of political power above the local level. They were the king's powerful servants and concession holders, and they had every social privilege imaginable. They lived a life apart from the great majority, with their own customs and their own entertainments. They looked on the commoners with contempt and sometimes fear. They held a very large share of the property in France—about 40 percent of the real estate and an even higher share of income-producing enterprises and offices of all sorts.

Some of the representatives of the First and Second Estates were liberal-minded individuals who sympathized with the demands for reform. Their leadership and assistance were crucially important to the success of the Revolution's first phase.

Mainly lawyers and minor officials represented the Third Estate, the commoners. A very few delegates were peasants, but there were virtually no representatives from the masses of artisans, employees, and illiterate laborers. The Third Estate's major complaints were the legal and

social inequalities in the kingdom and their own lack of political representation. The Estate's guiding principles and its political philosophy were taken straight from the liberal Enlightenment. In the spring of 1789, the elected Estates General convened just outside Paris at Versailles, the site of the royal palace and government. Immediately, a dispute arose over voting. The Third Estate demanded "one man, one vote," which would have given it the majority when joined with known sympathizers from the other estates. The other two orders refused, and the king was called on to decide. After attempting a vain show of force, Louis XVI caved in to the demands of the commoners. Some renegades from the privileged then joined with the Third Estate to declare themselves the National Constituent Assembly. On June 20, 1789, they resolved not to disperse until they had given the country a constitution. In effect, this was the French Revolution, for if this self-appointed assembly were allowed to stand, the old order of absolutist monarchy would end.

The National Assembly and Its Constitution

What the Assembly wanted was a moderate constitutional monarchy like England's, but the king's hope to reestablish control and the refusal of most of the nobility and clergy to go along with the Assembly's project made a confrontation unavoidable. The confrontation came in the summer of 1789, beginning with the storming of the Bastille (the royal prison in Paris). For the next several months, the Parisian mob, whipped up by radicals from all over the country, played a major role in the course of political events, the first time in modern history that the urban underclass asserted such direct influence. The moderates and conservatives who dominated the Assembly were forced to listen to and heed the demands of the poor, who staged a series of bread riots and wild demonstrations around the Assembly's meeting place.

On August 4, 1789, the nobles who had joined the Assembly made a voluntary renunciation of their feudal rights, effectively ending serfdom and the nobility's legal privileges in France forever. A little later, the Assembly adopted the **Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen**, which went much farther than the almost-simultaneous first ten amendments—the Bill of Rights—of the American Constitution. The *Civil Constitution of the Clergy*, meaning the Catholic clergy in France, followed this democratic manifesto. It allowed the state to confiscate the church's property and made the priests into (unwilling) agents of the emerging new government—paid by it and therefore controlled by it. This radical act was a misreading of the country's temper, because most French were still obedient Catholics and rallied to the support of the church's continued independence. The pope in Rome condemned the Civil Constitution, and resistance against it began the counterrevolution.

Musée de la Ville de Paris, Musée Carnavalet, Paris, France, Giraudon/The Bridgeman Art Library, London

FEMALE PATRIOTS, 1790. A club of women discusses the latest decrees of the revolutionary government, while a collection plate is set up for the relief of those families who have suffered in the cause.

By the end of 1791, the new constitution had been completed. It provided for powers to be shared between king and parliament along the English lines, but with even stronger powers for the parliament. A national election for this new Legislative Assembly was ordained and carried through.

Jacobin Terror

The conservative monarchic governments of Europe, led by Austria and Prussia, were closely watching what was happening, and they were determined to restore Louis XVI to his rightful powers with armed force. The counterrevolutionary war began in the summer of 1792. Combined with the misguided attempt of Queen Marie Antoinette and Louis to flee the country, the war changed the internal atmosphere of the country all at once. Until 1792, the moderates, who wished to retain the monarchy and to avoid any challenge to the rule of property, had been in control. Now the radical element called the **Jacobins** (their original headquarters was in the Parisian convent of the Jacobin order of nuns) took over the Legislative Assembly. The moderates were soon driven into silence or exiled.

What did the new masters of France want? The Jacobins were determined to extend the Revolution, to guarantee the eradication of aristocratic privileges and royal absolutism, and to put the common man in the driver's seat. They dissolved the Legislative Assembly and called a

National Convention, elected by universal male suffrage, into being. In Paris, a self-appointed Jacobin Commune established itself as the legal authority. By early 1793, the war emergency encouraged the Jacobins to institute a *Reign of Terror* against all enemies within the country. This was history's first mass purge of people on account of their social origins or suspected beliefs. Over the next year or so, between 25,000 and 40,000 victims were guillotined, and many tens of thousands more were imprisoned or exiled by the extraordinary Courts of the People, which were everywhere.

Among the early victims of the Terror was the king. Held as a prisoner since his foiled attempt to escape France, he was given a mock trial for treason and beheaded in January 1793. Marie Antoinette followed him to the guillotine in October. The killing of the king and queen was an enormous shock to the many Europeans who believed in liberal ideals and had seen the first stage of the Revolution as their implementation. From 1793 on, the educated classes of Europe were sharply divided between friends and enemies of the Revolution, with more and more tending toward the latter camp as the atrocities of the Terror were recognized. What had started in 1789 as a high-principled campaign for justice, liberty, and progress had degenerated into a bloodbath.

After September 1792, France was no longer a monarchy but a republic. The *National Convention's Committee of Public Safety* exercised executive power with dictatorial authority. **Maximilien Robespierre** was its leading member and the theoretician of the Revolution. (For more about Robespierre, see the Law and Government box.)

The years 1793–1794 were the height of the Revolution. The Jacobins produced many novel ideas and techniques of power that would be imitated in revolutions to come over the next two centuries. They insisted on the following three points:

- That all men were legally, socially, and politically equal—*Egalité* (eh-GAH-lih-tay)
- That they were free in mind and body—*Liberté* (LEE-bayr-tay)
- That they were, or should be, brothers—*Fraternité* (frah-TAYR-nih-tay)

They elevated reason and patriotism to entirely new heights, making these faculties into virtues that were supposed to supplant the old ones of religion and subservience. They recognized no neutrality, nor would they tolerate neutrals. Those who did not support the People's Revolution were necessarily its enemies and would be treated accordingly. These were novel and shocking thoughts to the conservative forces inside and outside France. It seemed to them that the Jacobins' systematic rejection of traditional authority must lead to chaos rather than freedom.

Believing the royal professional military to be a dubious ally, the Jacobins also started the **levée en masse** (leh-VAY ahn MAHS; conscript army) to defend the Revolution. With the aid of many recruits from the former royal forces (such as Napoleon Bonaparte), they developed and used that army so effectively that the French were on the offensive from 1794 onward against the conservative coalition. And they completed the wholesale confiscation and distribution of royal, noble, and clerical land to the peasants, thereby eliminating one of the major causes of complaints in pre-1789 France. The nobility and the church had lost their economic bases. They would never get them back.

Reaction and Consolidation

The machinery of terror was quickly dismantled after the execution of Robespierre, as the pervasive fear had become too great for most French, even radicals, to live with. The period of 1794–1795 is termed the *Thermidorean Reaction* against the excesses of the Reign of Terror. The name comes from Thermidor, the new name for August, the month after which Robespierre fell. In place of the Jacobin-led poor who had greatly influenced government policy until now, the middle classes and the

Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

THE EXECUTION OF KING LOUIS XVI. It was not the original intention of the Revolutionary Assembly to do away with the Bourbon monarchy. However, the rise to power of the radical Jacobins and the attempted escape by the royal family doomed both the king and Queen Marie Antoinette.

wealthy came again to the fore. They chose several of their own to form a new executive, called the **Directory**, and by sharp restriction of the franchise created a much more conservative-minded assembly, derived largely from the propertied classes.

The five directors were soon maneuvering for power and squabbling among themselves. Meanwhile, the economic condition of the urban poor grew desperate, and the ongoing war created a severe inflation and a new class of wealthy profiteers. The peasantry sought in vain for legal recognition of its newly seized lands, while neither the clergy nor its secularist detractors were satisfied with the relationship between state and church. These various discontents could be contained only so long as the revolution was winning on the battlefield and the prospect for final victory looked good.

The Bonapartist Era Opens

From 1794 to 1798, French armies seemed irresistible (see Map 31.1). A young and well-connected general named Napoleon Bonaparte distinguished himself in the campaigns that forced the Austrians and Prussians to make a losing peace with France. In 1798, however, Russia joined the anti-French coalition, and Britain remained an enemy that would not give in. Napoleon persuaded the Directors to send him with a large army to Egypt to cut off the British commercial route to the East and thus induce this "nation of shopkeepers" to make peace. The ill-thought-out Egyptian campaign of 1798–1799 turned into a disaster, but Napoleon saved his reputation by returning home in time and letting his subordinates take the eventual blame. His ambitious wife, Josephine, and his friends had told

MAP 31.1 The French Republic and Its Satellites, Hostile States, and Neutrals in 1799

The Wheel of the Law, 7th-8th century (stone), Siamese School/National Museum, Bangkok, Thailand/Photo © Luca Tettoni/The Bridgeman Art Library International.

LAW AND GOVERNMENT

Maximilien Robespierre (1758–1794)

The most dreaded name in all of France during the Reign of Terror of 1793–1794 was that of the leader of the Committee of Public Safety, Maximilien Robespierre. A small figure with a high-pitched voice, he had come to the forefront during the National Assembly in 1790–1791 as an advocate of a republican democracy. His power base was the Society of Jacobins in Paris.

Robespierre was the driving force behind the steady radicalization of the Legislative Assembly in 1792 and its successor, the Convention. He engineered the declaration of the republic in August 1792 and justified the horrific massacre of imprisoned nobles and clerics in September as a necessary step for preparing France to defend its Revolution. Attacked by his enemies in the Convention as a would-be dictator, he defied them to find any stain on his patriotism and his selflessness in the revolutionary cause.

His election to the Committee of Public Safety in July 1793 meant a sharp turn toward even more shocking measures. In the fall, he led the Convention into pronouncing the Republic of Virtue, an attempt to supplant Christianity and all religion in France. Patriotism would henceforth be measured by devotion to reason and the people rather than to God and king. The names of the days and the months were changed to rid them of all overtones of gods and saints, and the counting of the years began anew, with the declaration of the republic in 1792 being Year One. Churches were renamed Temples of Reason, and the Catholic clergy was subjected to both ridicule and bloody persecution. Much of this change went far beyond what Robespierre had intended, but he was powerless to stop the frenzy that he had helped set loose among the *sans-culottes* (urban working class) and the provincial Jacobins.

Musée de la Ville de Paris, Musée Carnavalet, Paris, France, Giraudon/The Bridgeman Art Library, London

ROBESPIERRE. An anonymous eighteenth-century portrait of the man whom some considered the pure and selfless servant of the little people and others viewed as the personification of evil.

Robespierre found it necessary to eliminate even his coworkers in the committee and the Convention for being lukewarm supporters of the Revolution. He believed he was destined to cleanse the ranks of all who would falter on the road to perfection. In June 1794, he pushed the notorious Law of 22 Prairial through an intimidated Convention (Prairial was the name of the month in the revolutionary calendar). This allowed kangaroo courts all over France to issue the supreme penalty with or without substantive evidence of hostility to the government. In that summer, thousands of innocents were guillotined, either because they were anonymously denounced or simply because they were members of a "hostile" class such as the nobles. Robespierre justified these actions in a speech, saying that because the Terror was but an inflexible application of justice, it was a virtue and must be applauded.

In July 1794, the increasingly isolated Robespierre rose in the Convention to denounce the backsliders and the hesitant. In the past, such speeches had foretold another series of arrests by the People's Courts. This time, by prearrangement, the Convention shouted him down and arrested him. On the following day, July 28, he was guillotined amid sighs of relief and curses.

>> Analyze and Interpret

Can you think of the counterpart of Robespierre in a more recent revolution? What case can be made for the application of terror against the internal enemies of a radical political movement? What case against it?

You can read Robespierre's "Address to the National Convention" online.

THE LEVÉE EN MASSE. In 1792, the National Convention created a new, massive army composed of volunteers from all classes, and later of conscripts. Here, citizens enthusiastically sign up while receiving cash payments for their enrollment.

him that the time was ripe to brush aside the unpopular government and take command in France. In November 1799, he acted on their advice.

Finding little resistance in defense of the by-now vastly unpopular Directors, Bonaparte and his army accomplices pulled off the *coup d'état* of 18 Brumaire. It made Napoleon **First Consul** of France, handing supreme civil and military power into his ambitious hands. A new era was about to begin, led by a thirty-year-old Corsican who had risen dramatically since entering the revolutionary army six years previously as a young lieutenant.

Confident of his talent and his vast energy, Napoleon as First Consul (1799–1804) pretended to obey a new constitution that was concocted by his agents in the tame legislature he allowed to stand. He suppressed all political opposition and solidified his already-high standing with the public by carrying out a series of acts, collectively called the **Napoleonic Settlement**. It embraced the following:

- Establishing a *concordat* (CON-cohr-dah) with the papacy in 1801. This agreement pacified the French clergy and the peasants by declaring that Catholicism was the semiofficial religion, but it also made the Catholic Church and its clergy a part of the state apparatus and put them under strict controls.
- Creating administrative and judicial systems that have lasted in France until the present day. Napoleon created a highly centralized network that went far to integrate and standardize the formerly diverse provincial governments and connect the regions more tightly with the capital.
- Granting legal title to the peasants for the lands they had seized earlier in the revolution.
- Giving the country new uniform civil and criminal codes of law (the **Civil Code of 1804**).
- Putting the new single national currency and the government's finances in good order.
- Establishing social peace by allowing the exiles to return if they agreed to support the new France.
- Crushing Royalist plots to return the bourbons, and also crushing the radical Jacobian remnants.

French Dominion Over Europe

In 1804, Napoleon felt the time was ripe to do what everyone had long expected: He crowned himself monarch of France. His intention was to found a Bonaparte dynasty that would replace the Bourbons. He took the formal title of emperor, because by then France controlled several non-French peoples. As long as his wars went well, he was so popular at home that he could raise vast conscript armies and levy heavy taxes to support their expense, employing a legislature and bureaucracy that were completely his creatures. And the wars went well for France for several years.

Napoleon was perhaps the greatest military strategist of the modern era. He devised and led one victorious campaign after another, often against superior numbers, between 1796 and 1809. His implacable enemy was Britain, which actively supported the various coalitions against him by contributions of troops, ships, and money. War reigned between France and Britain almost without interruption for twenty-two years, 1793–1814. French armies conquered Spain, Portugal, the Italian Peninsula, Austria, Prussia, and Holland—all of which were incorporated into France directly, made into satellites, or neutralized. He also defeated a Russian army sent against France and was on the verge of invading England when his defeat in the decisive naval **Battle of Trafalgar** off the Spanish coast in 1805 put that plan to rest forever.

Napoleon's relations with Russia were always edgy, even after its decisive defeat at French hands in 1807. By 1810, Napoleon was convinced that the tsar, Alexander I, was preparing hostilities again and would form an alliance with the English. He decided on a preemptive strike. In the summer of 1812, the invasion began from its Polish base with a huge army of 600,000, including Frenchmen, their coerced allies, and some volunteers.

Napoleon's campaign in Russia is one of the epic stories of modern war. After initial successes against the retreating Russian army, the French belatedly realized that they had fallen into a lethal trap. Exposure and starvation claimed most of those who survived the guerrilla warfare of the long winter retreat from Moscow. Perhaps one-third of the original force found its way to friendly Polish soil.

La Grande Armée, Napoleon's magnificent weapon with which he had ruled Europe for the preceding decade, was irretrievably broken despite his frantic efforts to rebuild it.

Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY

PORTRAIT OF NAPOLEON. Though incomplete, this portrait of a still-youthful Napoleon by the artist Jacques David is possibly the most accurate likeness of him that has survived. Most later portraits were done after he had become emperor and tend to romanticize his appearance.

The culminating **Battle of the Nations** at Leipzig in 1813 ended in French defeat at the hands of combined Russian, Prussian, and Austrian forces. Occupied Europe was then gradually freed of French troops and governors. In March of 1814, Paris was surrendered and occupied, and Bonaparte was forced to abdicate.

Napoleon: Pro and Con

The debate over Napoleon's greatness as a leader and statesman has occupied the French and others for almost two centuries. Opinions divide nearly as sharply now as during his lifetime. Although some see him as a man of genius and the founder of a progressive, stable social order, others see him as a dictator whose visions for society were always subordinate to his concern for his own welfare and glory.

There can be little doubt that he was an able administrator and selector of talent. In those crucial capacities, he came closer to the ideal "enlightened despot" than any other ruler of his day or earlier. In contrast to the preceding Bourbon regime, his government was for years efficient, able, popular, and relatively honest. Men of ability could move upward regardless of their social background. Although by no means a revolutionary himself, Napoleon kept the promises that the French Revolution had made to the peasants and to the middle classes. He confirmed—though he may not have originated—many of the liberals' favorite measures, such as the disestablishment of the Catholic Church, equality before the law, and the abolition of privilege by birth. His codes provided a modern, uniform basis for all French law, both civil and criminal (though the subordination of women was kept very much intact). His administrative reforms replaced the huge mishmash that had been the French regional and provincial bureaucracy with a thoroughly rational centralized system. Now power was concentrated in the government in Paris, which appointed and oversaw the provincial and local officials.

But the imperial regime developed more than a few blemishes as well. After about 1808, the French government was a dictatorship in which individual liberties depended on Napoleon's wishes. No political parties were allowed, and the press was so heavily controlled that it became meaningless. Political life was forced underground and degenerated into a series of conspiracies. An internal spy system had informants everywhere.

In the occupied or satellite territories that made up the Napoleonic empire (see Map 31.2), governmental policies were often harsh even when enlightened, and patriots who opposed French orders were executed without mercy. The non-French populations were expected to pay new and onerous taxes, to furnish conscripts for the French armies, and to trade on terms that were advantageous to the French. Napoleon also strongly promoted the nationalist spirit that had been so important to the early years of the Revolution, but only as long as the subject peoples accepted the leadership of Paris. When they did not, they were regarded as traitors and dealt with accordingly. The Prussian liberals, especially, learned this to their dismay when, in true national spirit, they attempted to reject French overlords after royal Prussia's defeat in 1806.

The Vienna Settlement

With Napoleon exiled (in luxurious circumstances) to the island of Elba in the Mediterranean, the allies who had united against him went to Vienna to try to work out a general settlement of the extremely complex issues that two decades of war had created. Originally, France was not invited, but the brilliant and slippery Talleyrand, foreign minister to the now-restored Bourbon monarch Louis XVIII (brother to the last king), used his talents to ensure that France soon received an equal seat at the bargaining table.

In the midst of the discussions came the news in February 1815 that Napoleon had fled Elba, landed in southern France, and had issued a call to all of his followers to renew the war. They responded with enthusiasm in the tens of thousands. The Hundred Days' Campaign nearly succeeded but ended in total defeat for the Bonapartists

MAP 31.2 The Napoleonic Empire, 1810–1813

Except for Britain and Russia, Napoleon controlled almost all of Europe by 1810, either directly through incorporation into his empire or by coerced alliances.

>> MAP QUESTIONS

Check where the major battles of Napoleon were fought. Do you see a connection between these and the areas that had become allies or satellites of France?

at **Waterloo** in Belgium. This time, Napoleon was shipped off as a prisoner of war to a rock in the South Atlantic, St. Helena, where he lived out the remaining six years of his life, writing his memoirs.

In Vienna, the "Big Four" victors—Austria, Prussia, Russia, and England—were busy working out the political and territorial outlines of a new Europe. Actually, the conservative powers, led by Austria's Prince Clemens von Metternich, hoped to reconstruct the old Europe but found that this was impossible. Too much had happened since 1789; too many hopes had been awakened, borders changed, kings removed, and constitutions issued. In the years since, Europe had experienced a great watershed in political and social history. The "Old System" of European government and society (**l'ancien régime**: LAHN-cee-ahn ray-ZHEEM) was like Humpty Dumpty after his fall—it could not be reconstructed.

Eventually, the four victors hammered out a series of agreements that collectively gave Europe its political borders for the next hundred years. They were guided in their work by several underlying principles:

1. *Legitimacy in government.* Kings were restored to their thrones, and radical constitutions written by pro-French revolutionaries were thrown out or rewritten to reflect more conservative themes. Revolutions would henceforth be suppressed by international collaboration and intervention.

ARTS AND CULTURE

Goya: The Artist as Social Critic

Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes (1746–1828) was born the son of a master craftsman in the province of Aragón in northern Spain. In 1775, he left his family to begin life on his own, and soon took his first job as a painter of imaginary scenes, or "cartoons," for the royal tapestry factory in Madrid. By 1783, his talent had come to the attention of the royal family, and he very soon became sought after as a portraitist of the court and the nobility. Three years later, in 1786, King Charles III made him his official court painter. Throughout the remainder of his life, and despite changes of regime (Charles III, Charles IV, officers of the invading French army, King Joseph Bonaparte, and Ferdinand VII), Goya maintained personal and political connections to queens, monarchs, dukes and duchesses, who brought him considerable wealth and personal security despite the turbulent times in which he lived.

Yet Goya was a complex man, full of contradictions. Unlike his predecessor, Diego Velásquez (1465–1524), Goya did not confine his talent to portraying the lives of the comfortable. Velásquez enjoyed the luxury of living in a time when Spain was an emerging power, when few Spanish would have had reasons to distrust authority. Goya's life, on the other hand, spanned an era when Europe was transitioning from the Enlightenment to the Romantic era, when the Old Regime was literally falling to revolutionary forces, when Spain and the Spanish Catholic Church were suffering all the humiliations of steeply declining powers. So while Goya was deeply Catholic and continued as a demurring subject of Spain's rulers to the end of his life (even when they were foreigners like Bonaparte), he was an Enlightenment radical who shared many of the opinions of revolutionaries. Consequently, his art reflected the ambiguities present in his nature and the sufferings of his times. He loved peace and order, so he devoted much of his best art to portraying powerful figures and peaceful, bucolic scenes from life. On the other hand, in 1799, he issued *Los Caprichos* (caprices), 80 prints of goblins, black masses, grotesqueries, and even pornography, which satirized society. In later years, he sketched another series of etchings and lithographs, "The Disasters of War," and several gruesome paintings evincing all the brutalities visited upon ordinary Spanish by war and by the French army in particular.

So, while he was a success in life, Goya was an enigmatic and transitional figure. He believed in reason, but he became a social critic and early Romantic for whom the artist's imagination was paramount. He fully displayed his ambivalence about life in his art. His particular genius was in laying open human souls to display their emotions through depictions. (See the Images of History page.)

>> Analyze and Interpret

Do you think that Goya suffered from a physical or psychological malady? What artists do you know of who did? Did this affect their art? How does one distinguish between illness and genius?

2. *International cooperation to maintain peace.* The victors (and soon also France) formed an alliance with regular meetings of foreign ministers. The *Quadruple Alliance* lasted for only a decade, but its principles of international responsibility for peace guided diplomatic meetings throughout the century from 1815 to 1914.
3. *Discouragement of nationalism and liberalism in politics.* The conservative forces saw both nationalism and liberalism as evils brought by the French radicals to Europe. Neither was recognized as a legitimate demand of the citizenry.
4. *Balance of power.* No single state would be allowed to dominate the Continent as had France under Napoleon.

Within the framework created by these general principles, what now were the agendas of the four chief victors? Russia, under the visionary Tsar Alexander I (ruling 1801–1825), had been the main force in the final military defeat of the French and now for the first time played a leading role in European affairs. Alexander had originally sympathized with liberalism and constitutionalism but came to mistrust those concepts after the struggles with Napoleon began. Led by mystical hopes for peace and harmony, the tsar became a conservative autocrat in later years. Under Alexander and his successor, Nicholas I (ruling 1825–1855), Russia became a bastion of reactionary and anti-liberal forces.

Austria under the astute diplomat Prince Metternich also took a leading role in the reconstruction. Metternich was convinced that nationalism and popular participation in government would ruin the multinational state of Austria and then all of Europe. He fought these ideas with all of his considerable skill and energy. Austria stagnated intellectually and scientifically, however, as conservatism turned first into reaction and then paralysis.

Prussia originally tended toward liberalism and carried out internal reforms under a group of statesmen who

IMAGES OF HISTORY

FRANCISCO DE GOYA (1746-1828)

Goya's contradictions are fully in view in these two samples of his work. The first one, entitled *Dance on the Banks of the River Manzanares*, dates from 1777 and typifies the more orderly and peaceful conditions of the artist's youthful innocence. The second one was painted around the time of the French invasion of Spain. Its subject is the execution by a firing squad of French soldiers of civilians who participated in the defense of Madrid. Note the great attention given to the details of the victims' faces.

Prado Museum, Madrid, Spain/Bridgeman Art Library

Dance on the Banks of the River Manzanares (1777)

Prado Museum, Madrid, Spain/The Bridgeman Art Library

Execution of the Defenders of Madrid, 3rd May, 1808 (1814)

admired the constitutional phase of the French Revolution. But, after the defeat of the French, Prussian king Frederick William III made clear his distaste for constitutional government and succeeded in turning back the political clock for a generation. As a nation, Prussia came out of the wars with France strengthened and expanded, with improved technology and an aggressive entrepreneurial class. By the 1830s, it had the best educational system in Europe and was in a position to contest Austria for the lead in pan-German affairs.

Great Britain was clearly the leading naval power and one of the strongest military forces in Europe by 1815, but the British governing class primarily wanted to concentrate on its business interests to take advantage of the big lead it had established since 1780 in the race to industrialize (see the next chapter). The British liberals always felt uncomfortable on the same side of the table as Tsar Alexander and Prince Metternich, and by 1825, they had abandoned the Quadruple Alliance system. Having helped establish the balance of power on the Continent, they retreated into "splendid isolation" for the rest of the nineteenth century.

Overall Estimate of the Vienna Settlement

During the later nineteenth century, the treaty making at Vienna was criticized on many grounds. The aristocratic negotiators meeting in their secluded drawing rooms ignored the growing forces of popular democracy, national feeling, liberalism, and social reform. They drew up territorial boundaries in ignorance of and disregard for popular emotions and restored kings to their thrones without the citizenry's support. The treaty makers were a small handful of upper-class men, contemptuous of the ordinary people and their right to participate in politics and government.

All of these criticisms are more or less true. Yet if success is measured by the practical test of enduring peace, it would be hard to find another great international settlement as successful as the Treaty of Vienna of 1815. With the single exception of the Franco-Prussian conflict of 1870, Europe did not experience an important, costly war until the outbreak of World War I in 1914.

The Vienna Treaties were followed by a century of cultural and material progress for the middle classes and, toward the end at least, for the common people as well. That this was not the specific intent of the peacemakers is beside the point. Any judgment of the treaties must consider that the massive social and economic changes witnessed by the nineteenth century were successfully accommodated within the international relationships established in 1815.

SUMMARY

THE PROBLEMS OF THE FRENCH monarchy in the late eighteenth century were cumulative and profound. Inspired by the Enlightenment and the example of the U.S. Revolutionary War, many French were convinced that the weak and directionless regime of King Louis XVI must change. In 1789, they were able to overcome the stubborn resistance of both king and nobility to bring about a moderate constitutional monarchy. Within two years, however, this situation was turned into a radical social upheaval by the Jacobins and their supporters among the nation's poor. The *ancien régime* of rule by an absolutist monarch and a privileged church and nobility could not survive this challenge, despite the attempt by France's conservative neighbors to save it through armed intervention.

The exigencies of invasion and war combined to create the Reign of Terror, led by the Jacobin Committee of Public Safety. This egalitarian dictatorship was overthrown after two years, and a consolidation began under the Directory in 1795. Corruption and incompetence weakened the Directory to a point that allowed a military coup by the young general Napoleon Bonaparte in 1799.

Napoleon's authoritarian settlement of the Revolution's conflicts within France was successful, and his wars in the name of defense of the Revolution went well for several years. For a long and important decade, most of western and central Europe was under French sway. The 1812 Russia campaign was disastrous, however, and the retreat soon led to defeat in 1814 and its Waterloo sequel. At the Vienna congress of victors, a framework of compromise between reaction against and grudging acceptance of the Revolution's principles was worked out; despite its attempt to ignore popular nationalism, it allowed Europe a century of peace and progress.

Identification Terms

Test your knowledge of this chapter's key concepts by defining the following terms. If you can't recall the meaning of certain terms, refresh your memory by looking up the boldfaced terms in the chapter, turning to the Glossary at the end of the book, or accessing the terms online: www.cengagebrain.com.

Battle of the Nations
Battle of Trafalgar
Civil Code of 1804
Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen
Directory
Estates General
First Consul
First Estate
Jacobins
l'ancien régime
levée en masse
Maximilien Robespierre
Napoleonic Settlement
Second Estate
Third Estate
Waterloo

For Further Reflection

1. In your opinion, was absolutism a viable way of governing? Was it doomed to extinction? Explain your answer.
2. Was the French Revolution inevitable? Why did it follow the course it did? Could it have remained a relatively bloodless, bourgeois revolution without the radical bloodletting that followed the earlier, less violent phase? State the reasons for your answer.
3. To what extent do you think Napoleon's Civil Code conformed to liberal Enlightenment views on government? Again, please state your reasons.
4. Although the Napoleonic occupations evoked resistance, why do you think the principles of the French (and American) Revolution took root in many countries following Napoleon's defeats?