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Essay Two

The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries marked a period of turmoil in Europe. With the ideas of several renowned philosophers in mind, much of the public was beginning to consider a liberal style of government. However, there were also many who advocated avidly for upholding the status quo. Both sides grappled constantly. Of notable importance were two documents, one from each side of the debate. The *Declaration of the Rights of Man* was a call for liberal governmental reform, based on the idea that all men have certain rights which the government must protect. Written in 1789, this had a great impact on the French revolution and getting the ball moving on the European continent. On the other hand, there was *The Conservative Confession of Faith*, written by Metternich. After the revolution had come and gone, this was a call for governments across Europe to enforce monarchical rule and cure the diseased public. These documents draw a lot from the ideas of influential philosophers, and their differences accurately illustrate the conflicting ideologies of Europe at the time.

In *The Conservative Confession of Faith*, Metternich put forth his views of 1815 Europe and what he believed must be done to remedy things. Metternich thought the revolution and all of its ideas were a plague, and that this plague was attacking the great order and peace that the nations in Europe had spent so long trying to achieve. At the core of this plague was the presumptuous man, generally of the middle class. This kind of man thought of himself as enlightened and saw the current societal structure and government as outdated. Metternich claimed that revolution occurred in France because that was where this kind of person was most highly concentrated. To fix this problem, he looked toward the existing monarchies in Europe. He believed that strong action by the government was necessary, and that the monarchs must join together and fulfill their duty to the people. Otherwise, the world as they knew it would be lost.

Taking a much different stance was the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*, which did not directly advocate for revolution but did put forth some very liberal ideas for the time. While Metternich was conservative and wished to maintain monarchical rule in Europe, the *Declaration* said just the opposite. With respect to France, it claimed that the existing government had forgotten its real purpose and neglected its duties toward its citizens. Essentially, the document was a list of qualities that a good governmental system should possess. For example, it said all men are equal and that a government should protect the natural rights of liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression. It also made revolutionary suggestions such as equitable taxation and equality before the law. Generally speaking, it was quite ground shaking in its time.

There are several key differences between these two documents which highlight some important ideologies of the period. Metternich is conservative, while the *Declaration* is liberal. Metternich calls for monarchies to forcefully impose their rights to rule and the status quo, while the *Declaration* calls for a new government which actually does its job and gives the people what they deserve as citizens. This is interesting, because these ideas can be seen scattered all over. The revolution in France embraces the *Declaration*. Later, the Congress of Vienna effectively sides with Metternich, restoring monarchies and trying to maintain the old ways. However, at the same congress, Poland ironically is given to Russia as a test of its own version of a liberal constitution. Then, the redrawing of the map that takes place causes some, such as the Belgians, to be more and more unhappy as time elapses. Overall, these two documents serve accurately as outlines for the sentiments of Europe at the time.

But where do the ideas originate from? Both documents contain notions proposed by influential philosophers. Hobbes said a lack of common power results in war, which could be taken as support for Metternich’s argument that monarchies across Europe are necessary for peace. Also, Voltaire had a low opinion of the masses, which clearly shows through in Metternich’s words. On the other hand, several other philosophers show up in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*. John Locke proposed many of its key points, such as natural rights and all men being equal and free, while Condorcet was a republican set against monarchical rule. This just goes to show even further the division of ideologies in Europe at the time.

While the Congress of Vienna did take a decent stab at peace on the European continent, it would not last forever. The ideas of the revolution had spread, and the monarchies did not realize how deeply they had penetrated. Although it ended up taking a long time to finally sink in, the writing of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man* was truly one of the most important events in European history, and it was not something that citizens were ready to forget.