

# The French Revolution and Napoleon 1789-1815

## THE STORY MATTERS...

The French Revolution was a major turning point in Western history. At its most essential, it was a struggle for representational government, equality of opportunity, and a response to the near collapse of the French economy. As a child of the revolution, Napoleon Bonaparte created a legal code for France that realized some of the dreams of the revolutionaries: economic freedom, legal equality, and religious toleration, at least in part.

## Lesson 22-4

# The Fall of Napoleon and the European Reaction

### READING HELPDESK

#### Academic Vocabulary

civil constitution

#### Content Vocabulary

conservatism principle of intervention  
liberalism

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What causes revolution?
- How does revolution change society?

### IT MATTERS BECAUSE

After the turmoil of the French revolutionary years and the eventual fall of Napoleon, European rulers wanted to return to a conservative order, keeping a balance of power among nations. Liberals and nationalists, however, struggled to achieve more liberal governments and new nations.

## The Fall of Napoleon

### GUIDING QUESTION *How did Napoleon lose his empire?*

Napoleon's downfall began in 1812 when he decided to invade Russia. Within only a few years, his fall was complete.

The Russians had refused to remain in the Continental System, leaving Napoleon with little choice but to invade. He knew the risks in invading such a large country, but he also knew that if he did not punish the Russians for ignoring the Continental System, other nations would follow suit.

In June 1812, a Grand Army of more than 600,000 men entered Russia. Napoleon's hopes depended on a quick victory over the Russians, but they refused to do battle. Instead they retreated for hundreds of miles. As they retreated, they burned their own villages and countryside to keep Napoleon's army from finding food. When the Russians did fight at Borodino, Napoleon's forces won an indecisive victory, which cost many lives.

Finally reaching Moscow, the Grand Army found the city ablaze. With no food or supplies for his army, Napoleon abandoned the Russian capital in late October. As the winter snows began, Napoleon led the "Great Retreat" west across Russia. Thousands of soldiers starved and froze along the way.

Fewer than 40,000 of the original 600,000 soldiers arrived back in Poland in January 1813.

This military disaster led other European states to rise up and attack the crippled French army. Paris was captured in March 1814. Napoleon was soon sent into exile on the island of Elba, off the northwest coast of Italy. The victorious powers restored monarchy to France in the person of Louis XVIII, brother of the executed king, Louis XVI.

The new king had little support, and the French people were not ready to surrender the glory of empire. Nor was Napoleon ready to give up. Restless in exile, he left the island of Elba and slipped back into France. The new king sent troops to capture Napoleon, who opened his coat and addressed them: "Soldiers of the 5th regiment, I am your Emperor .... If there is a man among you [who] would kill his Emperor, here I am!"

No one fired a shot. Shouting "Long live the Emperor!" the troops went over to his side. On March 20, 1815, Napoleon entered Paris in triumph.

Russia, Great Britain, Austria, and Prussia again pledged to defeat the man they called the "Enemy and Disturber of the Tranquility of the World." Meanwhile, Napoleon raised another French army of devoted veterans who rallied from all over France. He then readied an attack on the allied troops stationed across the border in Belgium.

At Waterloo in Belgium on June 18, 1815, Napoleon met a combined British and Prussian army under the Duke of Wellington and suffered a bloody defeat. This time, the victorious allies exiled him to St. Helena, a small island in the south Atlantic. Napoleon remained in exile until his death in 1821, but his memory haunted French political life for many decades.

### READING PROGRESS CHECK

**Analyzing** How did Napoleon's disaster in Russia affect both his Grand Army and the French nation?

## European Reaction

**GUIDING QUESTION** *Why did the turmoil of the French revolutionary years result in a conservative European reaction?*

After the defeat of Napoleon, European rulers moved to restore the old order. This was the goal of the victors—Great Britain, Austria, Prussia, and Russia—when they met at the Congress of Vienna in September 1814 to arrange a final peace settlement.

The haughty Austrian foreign minister, Prince Klemens von Metternich (MEH • tuhr • nihk), was the most influential leader at that meeting in Vienna. Metternich claimed that the principle of legitimacy guided him. He meant that lawful monarchs from the royal families who had ruled before Napoleon would be restored to their positions of power. This, they believed, would ensure peace and stability in Europe. The victorious powers had already restored the Bourbon king to the French throne in 1814.

Practical considerations of power were addressed at the Congress of Vienna. The great powers rearranged territories in Europe, believing that this would form a new balance of power. The powers at Vienna wanted to keep anyone country from dominating Europe. This meant balancing political and military forces that guaranteed the independence of the great powers. To balance Russian territorial gains, for example, new territories were given to Prussia and Austria.

The arrangements worked out at the Congress of Vienna were a victory for rulers who wanted to contain the forces of change that the French Revolution had unleashed. These rulers, such as Metternich, believed in the political philosophy known as **conservatism**.

Most conservatives at that time favored obedience to political authority. They also believed that religion was crucial to keep order in society.

Conservatives hated revolutions and were unwilling to accept demands from people who wanted either individual rights or representative governments.

To maintain the new balance of power, Great Britain, Russia, Prussia, and Austria (and later France) agreed to meet in conferences to discuss their common interests and to maintain peace in Europe. These meetings came to be called the Concert of Europe.

The great powers adopted a **principle of intervention**. According to this principle, they had the right to send armies into countries in order to restore legitimate monarchs to their thrones. Britain argued that they should not interfere in the internal affairs of other states. However, the other great powers used military force to end revolutions in Spain and Italy.

#### **READING PROGRESS CHECK**

**Identifying** Central Issues Why did European leaders think it was important to apply conservatism at the Congress of Vienna?

## **Forces of Change**

**GUIDING QUESTION** *What happened to revolutionary ideas after the French Revolution was over?*

Between 1815 and 1830, conservative governments throughout Europe worked to maintain the old order. However, powerful forces for change—known as **liberalism** and nationalism—were also at work.

Liberalism is a political philosophy that grew out of the Enlightenment. Liberalism held that people should be as free as possible from government restraint. Liberal beliefs included the protection of civil liberties, the basic rights of all people. Civil liberties included equality before the law and freedom of assembly, speech, and the press. Liberals believed that freedoms should be guaranteed by a document such as the American Bill of Rights.

Many liberals favored a government ruled by a constitution—a concept called constitutionalism. For example, in a constitutional monarchy a king must follow the laws of the constitution. Liberals believed that written documents would help guarantee people's rights.

Most liberals wanted religious toleration for all, as well as separation of church and state. Liberals also demanded the right of peaceful opposition to the government. They believed that a representative assembly (legislature) elected by qualified voters should make laws. These liberal ideals were similar to republicanism, the belief that a government's power comes from the rule of law and the citizens who are allowed to vote.

Liberals did not believe everyone had a right to vote. They thought the right to vote and hold office should be open only to men of property. Liberalism was tied to middle-class men who wanted voting rights for themselves so they could share power with the landowning classes. The liberals feared mob rule and had little desire to let the lower classes share power.

Nationalism arose when people began to identify themselves as part of a community, a nation, defined by a distinctive language, common institutions, and customs. In earlier centuries, people's loyalty belonged to a king or to their town or region. In the nineteenth century, people began to feel that their chief loyalty was to the nation.

Nationalism did not become a popular force for change until the French Revolution. From then on, nationalists came to believe that each nationality should have its own government. Thus, the Germans, who were separated into many principalities, wanted national unity under one central government in a German nation-state. Subject peoples, such as the Hungarians, wanted the right to establish their own governments.

Nationalism was a threat to the existing order. A united Germany would upset the balance of power set up at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. An independent Hungarian state would mean the breakup of the Austrian Empire. Conservatives feared such change and tried to repress nationalism.

Nationalism found a strong ally in liberalism. Most liberals believed that freedom could only be possible in people who ruled themselves. Each group of people should have its own state.

## READING PROGRESS CHECK

**Identifying** Why did nationalism become popular after the French Revolution?

## REVIEWING VOCABULARY

- conservatism** a political philosophy based on tradition and social stability, favoring obedience to political authority and organized religion
- principle of intervention** idea that great powers have the right to send armies into countries where there are revolutions to restore legitimate governments
- liberalism** a political philosophy originally based largely on Enlightenment principles, holding that people should be as free as possible from government restraint and that civil liberties-the basic rights of all people-should be protected