

Restoration and Reaction

What follows is a review-in-brief of domestic developments relating to the post-1815 theme of states restoring traditional governments and attempting to ensure stability. France and other nations that experienced revolutions are covered in the section “Revolutions and Reform.”

Great Britain

Conservative Tories controlled British politics after 1815 and were intent on clearing away latent radicalism in the kingdom, often with censorship. Parliament remained unrepresentative, as none of the new industrial towns in the north elected members. Landed interests passed the Corn Laws protecting British grain from competition, but at the same time the policy harmed consumers by raising prices. Democratic movements agitated for political reform; one such peaceful gathering in 1819 in Manchester was met with armed force, killing 11 and wounding hundreds. Opponents of the government derisively dubbed this event the Peterloo Massacre. A gradual loosening of repression in the 1820s paved the way for Liberal reforms in the 1830s.

Germany

The personality of Metternich dominated politics through the German Confederation. Idealistic young student nationalists formed the *Burschenschaft* to celebrate liberal German culture and discuss political issues. Viewing these fraternities as a threat, Metternich convinced the Confederation to issue the Carlsbad Decrees (1819), forcing the dissolution of the *Burschenschaft*, censoring the press, and appointing government officials to supervise universities.

Russia

With an inconsequential middle-class and autocratic tradition, Russia proved infertile ground for political Liberalism. Nonetheless, army officers influenced by revolutionary ideology had formed the Decembrist Society to push for a constitutional government. When Alexander I died in 1825, the Decembrist Revolt agitated for the accession of Constantine, considered a Liberal, rather than his reactionary brother, Nicholas. Nicholas I (r. 1825-1855) crushed the revolt and ruled Russia in succeeding decades guided by the motto “Autocracy, Orthodoxy, and Nationality,” relying on a secret police,

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religious uniformity, and imposition of Russian language and culture on ethnic minorities.

The “Isms”

The period 1815-1850 was the Age of Ideologies. In response to the issues raised by the Dual Revolution, many Europeans adhered to a set of ideas that provided both a systematic view of human affairs as well as a blueprint for changing the world. Such ideologies or “isms” influenced how people viewed events as well as motivated them to action.

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It can be difficult to get a handle on the Ideologies, but you may find it helpful to attempt some role-playing, i.e., Imagine the world from the perspective of each ideology. Often it is easier to understand an intellectual system from the “inside-out” rather than simply memorizing terms. All of the ideologies represent systematic Intellectual (OS) responses to the Dual Revolution, but of course, each offers a political solution that flowst from its political world view (SP).

Conservatism

Conservatism should not be equated with complete rejection of change (such adherents are known as reactionaries). Defying the optimistic views of human rationality associated with the Enlightenment and French Revolution, Conservatives believed that human nature was driven primarily by the passions. Edmund Burke (1729-1797) became a leading advocate for change through adaptation, not violent revolution, with his statements against events in France (see Chapter 10). Humans are capable of reason, he argued, but often employ it as an excuse for self-interested actions. Customs and traditions, which have evolved over time to meet the needs of particular human societies, act as checks on the passions and should not be discarded lightly. Along with Burke, French philosopher Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821) demonstrated how once the revolution in France broke from its traditions of church, monarchy, and nobility, it descended into violent chaos. Burke and de Maistre were not opposed to constitutions per se—as Burke supported the American Revolution – only those based on abstract and supposedly universal principles not in keeping with a society’s experiences. Conservative philosophy supported the restoration governments of the post-1815 order.