

## Revolts Against the Old Order: 1815-1850

*In reaction to the French Revolution and Napoleon, European royalty led a conservative movement to return Europe to life under the old order. Movements for liberalism and nationalism combined with social and economic unrest brought about by the Industrial Revolution, however, overwhelmed the continent throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.*

### The Congress of Vienna

With the defeat of Napoleon, the Quadruple Alliance – Great Britain, Prussia, Russia, and Austria, the four major European powers – met to arrange a peace settlement; the Congress of Vienna was led by Austrian foreign minister Klemens von Metternich, the very symbol of nineteenth-century reactionary politics. His goal was to return Europe to the stability of the old order and check the spread of liberalism and nationalism. The issues to be dealt with included who should rule France, the balance of power, security, territorial concerns, and the place of France in Europe. The four great powers reached four settlements. However, in the 1820s, as Britain became concerned with Spanish and Portuguese moves to squelch Latin American revolts, it gradually shifted away from the more conservative nature of the alliance.

One settlement, the principle of legitimacy, was crucial to those who wanted to restore order: legitimate monarchs needed to return to their thrones. Louis XVIII, the brother of Louis XVI, had been put on France's throne after Napoleon's initial defeat. Monarchs in Spain and the Italian states were also returned to power.

Another settlement dealt with the principle of compensation: the victorious nations were rewarded with land. Russia gained some Polish lands, Prussia got part of Saxony, and Austria gained control of parts of Italy. Territorial changes were designed to balance power so that never again could one nation dominate Europe. Of special concern was the prevention of any growth of French hegemony, the authority exercised by one power over others. To that end, France's borders were put back to their pre-revolutionary boundaries, and the country had to pay compensation, as well as accept an occupying army.

Two other settlements that had deep repercussions during the first half of the nineteenth century were the denial of democracy and the denial of nationalism. The primary mechanisms for that were wars, led especially by Austria and France, in which foreign forces invaded a neighbor to squelch liberal and national

movements. Under Metternich's leadership, the Quadruple Alliance sought to deny any voice to the people in selecting their rulers or governments. Concerned about the nationalism that grew up in response to the Napoleonic Wars, they also worked to deny nationalist groups both independence and unification with others of the same nationality.

The Quadruple Alliance, also known as the Concert of Europe, was the backbone of the conservative reaction, and lasted until Metternich fled Austria in 1848. It had two purposes: to enforce the Vienna settlements and to suppress revolutions. By 1818, with the solidification of the Bourbon French government, France joined the Concert.

Believing that conservatism – the maintenance of order using traditional sources of power – would help Europe remain free of revolution, the Concert supported hereditary powers and refused the call of liberalism. Indeed, the Concert asserted its right to intervene in any country to quell revolts that threatened order.

Revolts tended to be based on liberalism and nationalism. Liberals believed in some sort of representative government, allowing for participation by the middle class, if not the working class. Nationalist forces usually helped groups fight for independence from the powers that controlled them.

### **AP Tip**

Be sure you understand the Congress of Vienna – why it was called, who called it, who attended, and the decisions made there. Be able to compare it to other major treaties – the Peace of Westphalia (1648) for example or the Versailles Treaty after WWI. Another way to think about these treaties is as “turning points” of history. To what extent did the Congress of Vienna mark a major change in the history of Europe? Was the treaty a success or did more problems arise because of it? Were things totally different afterward or were there things that stayed the same? These questions of periodization, historical causation, and patterns of continuity and change over time are all historical thinking skills that are tested on the AP Exam.