Conservatism

Conservatism arose in reaction to the violence, terror, and disorder unleashed by the French Revolution. Early conservatism was allied to the restored monarchical governments of Austria, France, and Russia. Support for conservatism came from the traditional ruling classes. Intellectual ammunition came from the pens of the Englishman Edmund Burke, the Frenchmen Joseph de Maistre and Louis de Bonald, the Austrian Friedrich von Gentz, and several early romantics. In essence, conservatives believed in order, society and the state, faith, and tradition.

Characteristics

Conservatives saw history as a continuum that no one generation could break. They believed society was organic, not contractual. Society was not a machine with replaceable parts. Stability and longevity, not progress and change, marked a good society. The only legitimate sources of political authority were God and history. Conservatives rejected social-contract theory (see Chapter 5) because contracts did not make authority legitimate.

Concentrating on individuals ignored social ties and undermined the concept of community, which was essential to life. Conservatives said self-interest lead to social conflict, not social harmony. They preferred *noblesse oblige*: help from on high.

Conservatives argued that measuring happiness and progress in material terms ignored the spiritual side of humans. Charity, mixed with moral injunctions, not revolution, was helpful.

Conservatives rejected the philosophy of natural rights and believed that rights did not pertain universally, but were determined and allocated by each state.

Conservatives denounced the *philosophes* and reformers for ignoring emotional realities and for underestimating the complexity of human nature. To conservatives, society was hierarchical, that is, some humans were better able to rule and lead than those who were denied intelligence, education, wealth, and birth. The motto of conservatives before the 1860s was "Throne and Altar."

Impact

Conservatism was basically "anti-" in its propositions. It never had a feasible program of its own. The object of their hatred was a liberal society, which

they claimed was antisocial and morally degrading. While their criticisms contained much justification, conservatives ignored the positive features of liberal society. Conservative criticism did poke holes in liberal ideology, and pointed toward a new social tyranny, the aggressive and heartlessly selfish middle classes.

Europe in Crisis (1815-1833): Repression, Reform, and Revolution

The peace settlement crafted by the Congress of Vienna signaled the triumph of the conservative order, socially and politically. Dangerous ideas (liberalism and nationalism) associated with the French Revolution and Napoleonic period had been "contained" by the territorial provisions of the 1815 agreement. The status quo had been once again defined. Order and stability were to be expected from the European state system.

Underestimating the power of ideas, conservative leaders after 1815 faced a dramatic confrontation between those sponsoring the "new" ideas (which required political change) and those of the traditional ruling classes, reluctant to make any accommodation with the believers in "new" ideas. The result in most states was government-sponsored repression followed by revolution. Few states chose to answer the call for liberal reform. Only nationalist impulses in Greece and Belgium were successful, for reasons that hardly comforted liberals. The intellectual climate of romanticism provided a volatile atmosphere in which these events unfolded, because this artistic and historical movement strangely accommodated warring political ideologies, from liberal to reactionary.

Postwar Repression (1815-1820)

Initially, the great powers followed the lead of the Austrian statesman Prince Metternich (1773-1859) in suppressing any expression of liberal faith. Most leaders attempted to reinstitute conservative means of governmental control, in order to prevent reforms that would further increase people's participation in government. The literate middle class, supported by urban workers, demanded reform, and at least the latter group was willing to use violence to obtain it.

England

The Tory (conservative) government that defeated Napoleon was in control of England. Facing serious economic problems that had produced large numbers of industrial unemployed, the conservatives tried to follow a reactionary policy.

The Corn Law of 1815 effectively halted the importation of cheaper foreign grains, aiding the Tory landholding aristocracy, but increasing the cost of bread, and driving the poor and unemployed to protest and demand parliamentary reform.

The Coercion Acts of 1817 suspended habeas corpus for the first time in English history, provided for arbitrary arrest and punishment, and drastically curtailed freedom of the press and public mass meetings.

The Peterloo Massacre of 1819 occurred when members of a large crowd who were listening to reformers demand repeal of the Corn Laws and other changes, were killed with hundreds of others injured when police authorities broke up the meeting.

The Six Acts of Parliament in 1819, in response to Peterloo, were a series of repressive measures that attempted to remove the instruments of agitation from the hands of radical leaders and to provide the authorities with new powers.

The Cato Street Conspiracy of 1820 took place when a group of extreme radicals plotted to blow up the entire British cabinet. (This has been a recurring threat in English politics, from the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 to attempts on the life of Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s.) It provided new support for repression by the Tories, as well as discrediting the movement for parliamentary reform.

By 1820, England was on the road to becoming a reactionary, authoritarian state, when protests among younger Tories argued that such repressive legislation was not in the English tradition, and that the party itself might need to change its direction.

France

France emerged from the chaos of the revolutionary period (1789-1815) as the most liberal power on the Continent. The period from 1815 to 1830 is referred to as the Restoration, signifying the return of the legitimate royal dynasty of France-the Bourbons, who reputedly never learned and never forgot anything.

Louis XVIII (reigned 1814-1824) governed France as a constitutional monarch by agreeing to observe the "Charter" or constitution of the Restoration period. This moderate document managed to limit royal power, grant legislative powers, protect civil rights, and uphold the Code Napoleon and other pre-Restoration reforms.

Louis XVIII wished to unify the French, who were divided into those accepting the Revolution and those who did not. The leader of the *refuseniks* was the Count of Artois (1757-1836), brother of the king and leader of the ultra-royalists. The 1815 White Terror saw royalist mobs murder thousands of former revolutionaries.

New elections in 1816 for the Chamber of Deputies resulted in the ultra-royalists being rejected, in favor of a moderate royalist majority dependent on middle-class support. The war indemnity was paid off, France was admitted to the Quadruple Alliance (1818), and liberal sentiment began to grow.

In February 1820, the Duke of Berri, son of Artois and in line for the throne, was murdered. Royalists charged that liberals were responsible and that the king's policy of moderation had encouraged all of those on the left.

Louis XVIII began to move the government more to the right, as changes in the electoral laws restricted the franchise to the most wealthy, and censorship was imposed. Liberals were driven out of legal political life and into near-illegal activity. The triumph of Reaction came in 1823, when French troops were authorized by the Concert of Europe to crush the Spanish Revolution and restore another Bourbon ruler, Ferdinand VII.

Austria and the Germanies

Until his ouster in 1848, Prince Metternich ruled Austria and the German Confederation. He epitomized conservative ideology. To no other country or empire were the programs of liberalism and nationalism potentially more dangerous. Given the multiethnic composition of the Habsburg Empire, any recognition of the rights and aspirations of any national group would probably usher in the dissolution of the empire.

It was Napoleon who reduced more than three hundred German states to thirty-nine, and the Congress of Vienna that preserved this arrangement under Austrian domination. The purpose of the German Confederation (the Bund) was to guarantee the independence of member states and, by joint action, preserve German states from domestic disorder or revolution. A diet (an assembly) at Frankfurt acted as a diplomatic center presided over by Austria, as president.

The two largest states in the confederation were Austria and Prussia. Austria, through Metternich's anti-liberal and nationalist pathology, held the line against any change in the status quo. Prussia followed suit in most matters, with the single exception being its leadership of the Customs Union (organized 1818-1834), in which Austria was not welcome. The century-old rivalry between Austria and Prussia bubbled underground.

Prussia was ruled by the Hohenzollerns, an aggressive royal family when it came to expanding the borders of this northern German state, sometimes at the expense of other German rulers. For a short time after 1815, liberals looked to Prussia as a leader of German liberalism because of reforms in government enacted after a humiliating defeat at the hands of Napoleon. However, these reforms were intended to improve the efficiency of government and were not the portent of a general trend. The Prussian government and its traditional ruling classes (Junkers) decided to follow the lead of Metternich in repressing liberal-nationalist agitation, despite the king's promise of a constitution in 1815.

Liberal-nationalist agitation was very vocal and visible in German universities in the first half of the nineteenth century. Student organizations, such as the *Burschenschaften*, openly promoted political arrangements that seemed radical-revolutionary. At the Wartburg Festival (1817), students burned symbols of authority. Such agitation continued until 1819, when a theology student, Karl Sand, a *Burschenschafter,* stabbed to death Germany's most popular playwright, August von Kotzebue, because he was considered a bad moral influence on youth and was suspected of being a Russian agent (he did send long reports to the tsar, but this was hardly treason).

The Carlsbad Decrees (1819) were pushed through by Metternich to end seditious activity by German liberals and nationalists. The supplementary Vienna Act of 1820 even provided that any prince offended by opinions or actions in another principality could use the machinery of the Confederation to prosecute the offending prince.

Russia

From 1801 to 1825, Tsar Alexander I governed in traditional authoritarian style. A man of many moods, this Russian emperor thought he was called upon to lead Europe into a new age of benevolence and good will. After the Congress of Vienna, he became increasingly reactionary, mystically Christian, and subservient to Metternich.

Alexander was torn between an attraction to the ideas of the Enlightenment and reform, and a very pragmatic adherence to traditional Russian autocracy (absolutism).

With the help of a liberal adviser, Mihkail Speransky, the tsar made plans to liberalize Russian government, owing to the tsars admiration for Napoleon's administrative genius. But such liberal policies alienated the nobility, so Speransky was dismissed in 1812.

Alexander came to regard the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and Napoleon in biblical terms, seeing all as anti-Christian. Turning to a reactionary adviser, General Arakcheev, he let loose the dogs of repression. His regime would tolerate no opposition or criticism. The early years of possible liberal reform had given way to conservative repression.

Revolutions I (1820-1829)

Nationalism, liberalism, and socialism were all factors in the outbreak of revolution in the first half of the nineteenth century. All three *isms* were opposed by conservative groups (royalists, clergy, landed aristocracy) rooted in the way of life before the Revolution. Promoting forces of change was a younger generation, the heirs of the Enlightenment who believed in progress.

The International System: The Concert of Europe

At the 1815 Congress of Vienna, enforcement provisions of the settlement were designed to guarantee stability and peace in the international arena. The Quadruple Alliance (Austria, England, Prussia, and Russia) that had defeated Napoleon was to continue through a new spirit of cooperation and consultation that would be referred to as the "Concert of Europe,"At the suggestion of Lord Castlereagh, Britain's foreign minister, foreign policy issues affecting the international order would be worked out in meetings or congresses so that no one nation could act without the consent of the others. But under the leadership of Metternich, the congress system became a means to preserve the political status quo of autocracy in Europe against all ideas. The congress system was short-lived because continental powers could not always agree on cooperative action, and the English refused to support interference in the domestic affairs of nation-states. In the end each nation became guided by its own best interests.

The Congress System of Conferences

The Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle (1818) arranged for the withdrawal of the allied army of occupation from France, and the admission of France into

the Concert of Europe (resulting in the Quintuple Alliance). The Jewish Rothschild brothers had their first international success at this conference, being the go-betweens for French indemnity payments to the Allies-for a low handling fee and interest. The Rothschilds had started as Hessian moneylenders, but then the founding five brothers branched out from Frankfurt in Germany to Paris, London, Naples, and Vienna to set up branches. Working in secret and at great peril, they helped the anti-Napoleonic coalition to overthrow the tyrant. All were made barons by Francis l, first Austrian emperor, in 1816. With close ties to Metternich and many princes, the Rothschilds prospered mightily in the nineteenth century.

The Congress of Troppau (1820) was summoned by Metternich because of the outbreak of revolution in Spain. A policy statement (Protocol of Troppau), which would authorize armed intervention into any state that underwent revolutionary change, was opposed by England.

The Congress of Laibach (1821) authorized Austrian troops to crush revolution in the kingdom of the Two Sicilies, where revolutions had spread from Spain. No decision was made concerning Spain.

The Congress of Verona (1822) was called because of continuing unrest in Spain and the outbreak (1821) of revolution in Greece. When Russia. Prussia, and Austria agreed to support French intervention in Spain, the new English foreign minister, George Canning (1770-1827) – a replacement for Castlereagh, who had committed suicide – withdrew England from the Concert of Europe. Verona marked the effective end of the congress system.

The Monroe Doctrine and the Concert of Europe

British fears that Metternich would attempt the restoration of Spain's colonies, then revolting in Latin America, prompted Canning to suggest, then support, the foreign policy of the United States of America known as the Monroe Doctrine (1823), which prohibited further colonization and intervention by Europe in the Western Hemisphere.

England hoped to replace Spain in establishing her own trading monopoly with these former Spanish colonies. Throughout the nineteenth century, British commercial interests dominated Latin America, in spite of the Monroe Doctrine.

Latin America in Revolution

Inspired by the French Revolution and Napoleon, Latin American nationalism between 1804 and 1824 witnessed the end of three centuries of Spanish colonial rule and the emergence of new heroes such as Toussaint

L'Ouverture, Jose San Martin, Bernardo O'Higgins, Simon Bolivar, and Miguel Hidalgo in Haiti, Argentina, Chile, and Mexico, respectively.

The Revolutions of the 1820s

Spain (1820-1823). In January 1820, a mutiny of army troops arose in opposition to the persecution of liberals by the restored monarch. King Ferdinand VII. The Congress of Verona (1822) authorized a French army to invade Spain and crush the revolutionaries, who wanted to revive the liberal constitution of 1812.

Italy (1820-1821). Incited to revolution by the activities of secret liberal-nationalist organizations (*carbonari*), liberals revolted in Naples in 1820, protesting the absolute rule of Ferdinand I of the kingdom of the Two Sicilies. The Congress of Laibach (1821) authorized Austria to invade and suppress the rebels. An attempted uprising (1821) in Piedmont was crushed by Austrian forces.

The Greek Revolt (1821-1830). The revolution that broke out in Greece in 1821, while primarily a nationalist uprising rather than a liberal revolution, was part of an issue known as "The Eastern Question." Greece was part of the Ottoman Empire, whose vast territories were receding in the early nineteenth century. The weakness of the Ottoman Empire, and the political and economic ramifications of this instability for the balance of power in Europe, kept the major powers in a nervous state of tension.

Because of conflicting interests, the great powers were unable to respond in a pragmatic way for years. The revolt dominated European organs of opinion throughout the 1820s. It immediately set afire the sensitivities of romantics in the West. A Greek appeal to Christian Europe did not move Prussia or Austria, but did fuse England, France, and Russia into a united force that defeated a combined Turkish-Egyptian naval force at Navarino Bay (1827). Greek independence was recognized through the Treaty of Adrianople (1829). In the process, the poet George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824), died in Greece fighting for independence – and unsuccessfully fighting a fever.

Russian intervention on the side of Greek revolutionaries was based on Russian national interest (that is, any diminution of Ottoman power increased Russian chances of further expansion into the Turkish Empire).

Greek nationalism triumphed over the conservative Vienna settlement, and three of the five great powers had aided a movement that violated their agreement of 1815. The self-interests of the great powers demonstrated the growing power of nationalism in the international system.

The Decembrist Uprising in Russia (1825). The sudden death of Tsar Alexander on December 1, 1825, resulted in a crisis over the succession to the throne and produced the first significant uprising in Russian history. The expected succession of Constantine, older brother of Alexander I, believed to be more liberal than the late tsar, did not occur. Instead, the younger brother Nicholas, the antithesis of all things liberal, prepared to assume the throne that Constantine had secretly renounced.

Hoping to block Nicholas's succession, a group of moderately liberal junior military officers staged a demonstration in late December 1825, in Saint Petersburg, only to see it quickly dissipated by artillery attacks ordered by Tsar Nicholas I.

The Decembrists were the first noble opponents of the autocratic Russian system who called attention to popular grievances in Russian society. The insurrection hatched in Nicholas I a pathological dislike for liberal reformers.

Nicholas promulgated a program called *Official Nationality*, with the slogan "Autocracy, Orthodoxy, and National Unity." to lead Russia back to its historic roots. Through it, Nicholas I became Europe's most reactionary monarch.

On the domestic front, Russia became a police state with censorship and state terrorism. The government allowed no representation, no comment on public affairs, and no education that was not strictly prescribed and carefully monitored. A profound alienation of Russian intellectual life ensued that gave birth to that special Russian class, the intelligentsia.

In foreign affairs, the Russian regime demonstrated the same extreme conservatism. It crushed the Polish Revolution of 1830-1831, and Russian troops played a key role in stamping out Hungarian nationalism in the Habsburg Empire, during the revolutionary uprisings of 1848-1849. Russia's traditional desire for expansion at the expense of the Ottoman Empire produced a confrontation between France and Russia over who was entitled to protect Christians and the holy places in the Near East. When the sultan of Turkey awarded France the honor, Nicholas I was prepared to go to war against Turkey to uphold Russia's right to speak for Slavic Christians. The result was the Crimean War (1854-1856), which Russia lost. Nicholas died (1855) during this war.

England Chooses Reform over Revolution

The climax of repression in England was the passing of the Six Acts (1819). Yet even as Parliament enacted those laws, young conservatives were

questioning the wisdom of their party elders (the Duke of Wellington, Lord Castlereagh) and calling for moderation. During the 1820s, a group of younger Tories would moderate their party's unbending conservatism.

George Canning and Robert Peel promoted reform, in opposition to the reactionary policies of earlier Tory leaders. With the help of liberal Whig politicians, the younger Tories found enough votes to put England on the road to liberal reform.

Canning inaugurated a liberal policy in foreign affairs, including abandonment of the congress system. Peel reformed prisons and the outdated criminal code, as well as established an efficient metropolitan police force (thus, police officers came to be called "bobbies," nicknamed after Peel).

Parliament acted as well. It liberalized mercantile and navigation acts, enabling British colonies to trade with nations other than England. It repealed the 1673 Test Act, a religious test that barred non-Anglicans from participation in government. (It was defiance of the Test Act that led to the election of Irish leader Daniel O'Connell, a Catholic, to the British parliament.) The Catholic Emancipation Act (1829) granted full civil rights to Roman Catholics.

The momentum for liberal reform continued into the 1830s, as Britain realized that accommodation with the new merchant and financial classes was in the spirit of English history. The acid test of liberal reform, however, would come to focus on the willingness of Parliament to repeal the Corn Laws and reform itself.