Reform and Revolution in Great Britain and France

TIME LINE

1814-1830	The Bourbon Restoration in France
1814-1824	Reign of King Louis XVIII of France
1819	The Peterloo Massacre takes place in Manchester
1820-1830	Reign of King George IV of Great Britain
1824-1830	Reign of King Charles X of France
1829	King Charles X appoints the Prince of Polignac as premier
1830	The French July Revolution overthrows King Charles X
1830-1848	The July Monarchy of King Louis Philippe in France

Great Britain had emerged from the upheavals of the seventeenth century as a stronghold of constitutional monarchy and political liberty. Now, in the early nineteenth century, conservative rule gradually gave way to a movement for reform. The most important reform of these years was the Reform Bill of 1832, which redistributed seats in the House of Commons and granted the right to vote to most adult middleclass males. Nevertheless, the British ruling classes rejected the demands of the Chartist movement for full political democracy. In the area of trade policy, the British moved toward the adoption of free trade.

*In France, the restored Bourbon kings, Louis **XVIII** and Charles **X**, gradually became more arbitrary in their exercise of power. The July Revolution of 1830 resulted in the overthrow of the Bourbons and established the rule of the citizen king, Louis Philippe. Although the July Monarchy of Louis Philippe was based on liberal principles, the king's government became increasingly more authoritarian in practice. Opposition to the king gradually intensified, culminating in the February Revolution of 1848.*

Great Britain

Conservative Rule and Repression of Civil Unrest

For several years after 1815, the British ruling classes lived in fear of revolution. The country experienced a postwar economic depression, and mounting unemployment resulted in widespread hardship and unrest.

Lord Liverpool (1770-1828), a Tory, served as prime minister from 1812 to 1827, heading a reactionary cabinet that initially opposed demands for reform and sought to repress expressions of discontent.

The "Peterloo Massacre"

In August 1819, troops fired on a large crowd that had gathered at St.

Peter's Fields in Manchester to hear speeches on parliamentary reform and the repeal of the Corn Laws. Eleven people were killed. The affair became known as the "Peterloo Massacre," in ironic contrast with the British victory over Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815.

The Six Acts

Following the Peterloo Massacre, Parliament adopted the Six Acts in December 1819. This repressive legislation restricted the freedoms of speech and assembly and other civil liberties, increased taxes on newspapers and fines for seditious libel, expanded the right of the police to search private homes, and provided for the speedy trial and harsh punishment of offenders against public order.

The Cato Street Conspiracy

In January 1820, following the death of King George III, the prince regent succeeded to the throne as George IV (r. 1820-1830). The following month, the government uncovered a plot to assassinate the entire cabinet. The leaders of the Cato Street Conspiracy, as it was known, were arrested and tried, and four were executed.

Tory Reform in the 1820s

Although Lord Liverpool remained prime minister until 1827, a younger group of Tory leaders gradually began to push for a program of moderate reform.

Criminal Codes

Robert Peel (1788-1850), who served as home secretary from 1822 to 1827, won parliamentary approval for a reform of the criminal codes, substantially reducing the number of capital crimes. Peel also reorganized the London police, who came to be known as bobbies in his honor.

Trade

William Huskisson (1770-1830), the president of the Board of Trade from 1823 to 1827, began the process of moving away from mercantilist regulation toward free trade by reducing tariffs on imports.

Religion

Religious restrictions were also removed. In 1828, Parliament repealed the Test Act, which had been enacted in the late seventeenth century. The Test Act barred Nonconformists from public office (see Chapter 7). In 1829, Parliament passed Catholic Emancipation, extending to Roman Catholics the right to vote and hold public office. Political restrictions against Jews remained in effect for several more years.

The Reform Bill of 1832

In the early nineteenth century, the British Parliament was far from democratic and not representative of the population. The House of Lords consisted of the hereditary nobility and the bishops of the Church of England. In addition, from time to time the king invoked his right to create new peers (noblemen), who acquired the right to sit in the House of Lords. The House of Lords could block the adoption of legislation passed by the House of Commons.

The House of Commons consisted mainly of prosperous country gentlemen (the gentry) and wealthy business and professional men. Only a small percentage of the adult male population met the property qualifications for voters. Many members of the House of Commons represented "rotten boroughs" (towns with very small populations whose voters could readily be bribed or otherwise influenced) or "**pock**et boroughs" (towns whose representatives in the House of Commons were selected by noble landowners). The new industrial towns were either completely without representation or seriously underrepresented.

Whig Support of Reform

From 1828 to 1830, the Duke of Wellington (1769-1852) served as prime minister. While the victor of Waterloo was a great national hero, he was a reactionary Tory and had no sympathy for reform. In 1830, however, the Tories lost the general election to the Whigs.

In 1831, the new Whig prime minister, Earl Grey (1764-1845), won the approval of the House of Commons for a parliamentary reform bill, but the Lords rejected it. When the Commons passed a second reform bill the same year, the Lords rejected it once again. Grey now appealed to the new king, William IV (r. 1830-1837), who promised to create enough new Whig peers to assure the Lords' passage of a reform bill.

The threat sufficed. In 1832, the House of Lords approved the third reform bill passed by the House of Commons.

Provisions of the Reform Bill of I832

The Reform Bill of 1832 deprived 56 rotten and pocket boroughs of their III seats in the House of Commons, while 32 other small boroughs each lost one of their two members. The 143 available seats were then distributed to boroughs that had been either underrepresented or without any representation at all.

In addition to this redistribution of seats in the House of Commons, the

Reform Bill of 1832 extended the right to vote to middle-class men. Property qualifications continued to bar most workers from voting. Nevertheless, the Reform Bill of 1832 represented the beginning of a decisive shift in political power from the landed aristocracy to the middle class.

Other Reforms

Abolition of Slavery

In 1833, the Parliament abolished slavery throughout the British Empire. This represented a victory for the abolitionists led by William Wilberforce (1759-1833).

Limitations on Work by Children and Women

A Factory Act adopted in 1833 placed restrictions on child labor in the textile industry. Children under the age of nine could not be employed in textile mills, while those between the ages of nine and thirteen could not work for more than nine hours a day. Work by children between the ages of thirteen and eighteen was limited to twelve hours a day. The Factory Act provided for a system of inspectors to make certain that the law was being observed. Later legislation placed further restrictions on work by women and children.

Municipal Councils

The Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 established a system of elected councils to govern most cities and towns.

Political Trends

During these years, British politics was experiencing change, as the two major political factions, the Tories and the Whigs, gradually evolved into modern parties, known as the Conservatives and Liberals, respectively.

In 1837, when King William IV died, he was succeeded by his niece, the eighteen-year-old Victoria (r. 1837-1901), whose reign proved to be the longest in English history. In 1840, Victoria married Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (1819-1861), a German prince. His untimely death in 1861 left her disconsolate.

The Repeal of the Corn Laws

The campaign for the repeal of the Corn Laws provided powerful evidence of the increased political power of the British middle class.

The Anti-Corn Law League, which was established in 1839, campaigned for the repeal of the Corn Laws (the tariff on wheat and other grains) and more broadly, for the introduction of free trade. The Corn Laws, which had been adopted in 1815, provided the great landowners with a protected market for their crops. The leaders of the Anti-Corn Law League included the

prominent industrialists Richard Cobden (1804-1865) and John Bright (1811-1889).

The Anti-Corn Law League argued that reducing the price of food would improve the workers' standard of living, while reducing the cost of raw materials would increase the profits of industry. In addition, low food prices would make it easier for the industrialists to pay their workers lower wages.

Irish Famine

During the winter of 1845-1846, a severe famine struck Ireland following a failure of the potato crop. Starvation and diseases such as typhus and cholera took the lives of some 700,000 people. Hundreds of thousands of survivors emigrated, with many finding new homes in the United States.

Establishment of Free Trade

The Irish famine demonstrated the need for lower food prices, and in 1846 Parliament voted to repeal the Corn Laws. Repeal was a victory for Britain's urban dwellers, who for the first time comprised a majority of the population. In the following years, the British eliminated the remaining tariffs, establishing a free trade policy.

The Chartist Movement

Following the adoption of the Reform Bill of **1832,** agitation developed for further parliamentary reform. In **1838,** a group of working-class leaders drew up the People's Charter, which contained six demands:

1. Universal manhood suffrage.
2. The secret ballot in place of voting in public meetings.
3. The abolition of property requirements for members of the House of Commons.
4. The payment of salaries to members of the House of Commons.
5. The creation of equal electoral districts. (Members of the House of Commons should represent approximately the same number of people.)
6. Annual elections for the House of Commons.

The Chartists won support among many intellectual reformers, as well as from urban workers. In 1839, the Chartists presented to Parliament a petition setting forth their demands. However, the British middle classes were not yet prepared to share political power with the masses, and Parliament ignored the petition. Although Parliament also ignored Chartist petitions presented in 1842 and 1848, all the demands of the Chartists were ultimately enacted, except for annual elections for the House of Commons.

France

The Bourbon Restoration

From **1814** to **1830,** France was ruled by the two kings of the restored Bourbon dynasty: Louis XVIII and Charles X. Both monarchs were younger brothers of King Louis XVI, who had been executed in 1793. (The supporters of the Bourbons regarded the young son of Louis XVI, who died in prison in 1795, as Louis XVII, although he never reigned.)

King Louis XVIII (r. 1814-1824)

Louis XVIII acknowledged the fact that the Old Regime could not be restored and believed it was essential to pursue a moderate course. As king, he sought to balance the interests of the old aristocracy, which had returned to France hoping for a restoration of their traditional position and privileges, with those of the liberal bourgeoisie, who had profited from the reforms of the revolutionary and Napoleonic eras.

The Charter of 1814

The French constitution, the Charter of 1814, provided for a two-house parliament. The king appointed the members of the Chamber of Peers, while the Chamber of Deputies was elected by property-qualified voters. The charter also contained guarantees of civil liberties, including freedom of religion, although Roman Catholicism was recognized as the religion of the state. The Napoleonic Code remained in effect, and the revolutionary redistribution of land confiscated from the church and the nobility was confirmed.

The Ultra-Royalists

The reactionary Ultra-Royalists, who represented the cause of the returned *emigré* nobility, did not accept this moderate settlement. The Ultras, as they were known, were led by the king's brother, the Count of Artois. Winning the 1820 elections for the Chamber of Deputies, the Ultras reduced voting rights and placed restrictions on civil liberties, including freedom of the press.

King Charles X (r. 1824-1830)

In 1824, the Count of Artois succeeded his brother, becoming King Charles X. The new king's actions quickly angered the bourgeoisie. In 1825, he reduced the interest on government bonds, held mainly by the bourgeoisie, from 5 to 3 percent in order to get money to compensate the aristocracy for

the land they had lost during the revolution. In 1827, he disbanded the National Guard, whose members were drawn chiefly from the bourgeoisie.

When liberals and moderate royalists gained control of the Chamber of Deputies in 1827, Charles X sought for a time to govern in association with them. In 1829, however, he abandoned this policy and named the reactionary Prince of Polignac (1780-1847) as premier.

This enraged the liberals, who won a majority in the Chamber of Deputies in the May 1830 elections. Charles X and Polignac responded by enacting the Four Ordinances without parliamentary approval. These laws imposed further limitations on freedom of the press, dissolved the Chamber of Deputies, scheduled new elections, and restricted the electorate further in order to weaken the opposition.

The July Revolution

On July 27-29,1830, the artisans and tradespeople of Paris, spurred on by the bourgeoisie, rose up in revolt against Charles X and Polignac. The king abdicated and sought refuge in Great Britain.

Some of the revolutionaries favored the establishment of a republic, but the liberals in the Chamber of Deputies, led by Talleyrand (17541838), Adolphe Thiers (1797-1877), and François Guizot (1787-1874), supported the creation of a constitutional monarchy. They proclaimed Louis Philippe, the Duke of Orleans, as king.

The July Monarchy: King Louis Philippe (r. 1830-1848)

The July Monarchy of the "citizen king" Louis Philippe ruled France from 1830 to 1848. Louis Philippe was a cousin of the deposed CharlesX and the son of the revolutionary figure, Philippe Egalité (see Chapter 14). Prior to becoming king, Louis Philippe had carefully cultivated an amiable bourgeois image.

Reforms

Louis Philippe was known as "king of the French," rather than king of France, and the red, white, and blue revolutionary tricolor replaced the white and gold flag of the Bourbons. While Roman Catholicism was recognized as the religion of the majority of the French people, it was no longer the state religion. A revised version of the Charter of 18 14 increased the electorate, but the property qualification for voters remained high.

Louis Philippe and his ministers believed that their primary duty was to support private property and its owners, promote prosperity, and maintain peace. During most of the **1830s,** the most prominent figure in the government was Adolphe Thiers.

Economic Policies

France maintained high tariffs in order to protect industrialists from the competition of imported manufactured goods, especially from Great Britain, and to protect French farmers from the competition of imported grain. The government showed little concern for the needs of the urban poor, however.

End of the July Monarchy

From 1840 to 1848, François Guizot dominated the government. More conservative than Thiers, Guizot led the government in an increasingly more arbitrary direction. Opposition to the July Monarchy mounted and became more serious in the wake of a poor grain harvest in 1846 and an industrial depression that began in 1847. The political crisis reached a head in the February Revolution of 1848,which resulted in the overthrow of Louis Philippe and the proclamation of the Second Republic.

During the early nineteenth century, the British succeeded in averting possible revolution by carrying out a program of gradual reform. The most important of the reform measures, the Reform Bill of 1832, marked a decisive step in the shift of political power from the landed aristocracy to the middle class. This shift made possible the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 and the subsequent adoption of free trade. While Parliament ignored the demands of the Chartists for full political democracy, the impetus for reform continued, and by the early years of the twentieth century, the British had created a truly democratic political system.

In France, the events of the early nineteenth century revealed the difficulty the French experienced in trying to establish a workable system of government that could balance the interests of the bourgeoisie, whose importance had increased during the revolutionary and Napoleonic era, with those of the returned aristocracy. Moving in an increasingly more arbitrary direction in the years from 1814 to 1830, the restored Bourbon monarchy was overthrown. While the July Monarchy of Louis Philippe supported the interests of the bourgeoisie, it also gradually lost support and fell from power in the February Revolution of 1848.