

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **THE FRENCH REVOLUTION II: THE ERA OF NAPOLEON, 1799–1815**

After the first ten years of revolution, the shift to a new group in power in 1799 did not prepare anyone in France for the most dramatic changes that would distinguish this era from the previous changes of government of the past ten years. France was about to be mastered by a legendary “giant” and Europe overwhelmed by a mythical titan.

### **2.1 BACKGROUND OF NAPOLEON’S LIFE**

Napoleon was born of Italian descent on the island of Corsica, August 15, 1769 to a prominent Corsican family one year after France annexed the island. He pursued a military career while advocating Corsican independence. He associated with Jacobins and advanced rapidly in the army when vacancies were caused by the emigration of aristocratic officers. His first marriage was to Josephine de Beauharnais, who was divorced by Napoleon after a childless marriage. In 1810 Napoleon ar-

ranged a marriage of state with Marie Louise, daughter of the Austrian emperor. Their son was known as Napoleon II, "King of Rome."

Napoleon was a military genius whose specialty was artillery. He was also a charismatic leader with the nationalist's clarity of mind and the romantic urge for action. Napoleon galvanized a dispirited, divided country into a unified and purposeful nation at the price of individual liberty.

## **2.2 ROLE IN DIRECTORY GOVERNMENT, 1795 – 1799**

In 1793 Napoleon was responsible for breaking the British siege of Toulon. Because of his loyalty to the revolution, he was made Commander of the Army of the Interior after saving the new Directory government from being overthrown by a Parisian mob in 1795. He was selected to lead an army into Italy in the Campaign of 1796 against the First Coalition (1792 – 97) where he defeated the Austrians and Sardinians and imposed the Treaty of Campo Formio (1797) on Austria and effectively ended the First Coalition. England was thereby isolated.

The election results of 1797 forced the Directory government to abandon the wishes of the country and establish a dictatorship of those favorable to the revolution ("Post-Fructidorian Terror"). After defending the government, Napoleon launched his invasion of Egypt (1798), only to have his navy destroyed by England's Lord Nelson at the Battle of the Nile. Napoleon and the French army were isolated in North Africa.

Popular indignation against the Directory government, along with financial disorder and military losses, produced a crisis atmosphere in France. Fearing a return to monarchy, a group of

conspirators headed by the Abbé Siéyès decided to save the revolution by overthrowing the Directory. Napoleon was invited to furnish the armed power and his popular name to the takeover (Coup d'État Brumaire, November 9, 1799).

## **2.3 CONSULATE PERIOD, 1799 – 1804 (ENLIGHTENED REFORM)**

### **2.3.1 *Domestic Accomplishments***

The new government was installed on December 25, 1799 with a constitution which concentrated supreme power in the hands of Napoleon.

Executive power was vested in three consuls, but the First Consul (Napoleon) behaved more as an enlightened despot than revolutionary statesman. His aim was to govern France by demanding obedience, rewarding ability and organizing everything in orderly hierarchical fashion.

Napoleon's domestic reforms and policies affected every aspect of society and had an enduring impact on French history. Among the features were the following:

- 1) strong central government and administrative unity;
- 2) religious unity (Concordat of 1801 with the Roman Catholic Church);
- 3) financial unity (Bank of France), emphasizing balanced budget and rigid economy in government;
- 4) economic reform to stimulate the economy, provide food at low prices, increase employment and allowing peasants to keep the land they had secured during the revolution; and

- 5) educational reforms based on a system of public education under state control (University of France).

The Legal Unity provided the first clear and complete codification of French law (Code Napoleon) which made permanent many of the achievements of the French Revolution. It stipulated equality before the law, freedom of conscience, property rights, abolition of serfdom, and the secular character of the state. Its major regressive provisions denied women equal status with men, and denied true political liberty.

Thus, in the tradition of enlightened despotism, Napoleon repressed liberty, subverted republicanism and restored absolutism to France.

## **2.4 EMPIRE PERIOD, 1804 – 1814 (WAR AND DEFEAT)**

### **2.4.1 *Restoration of Monarchy***

After being made Consul for Life (1801), Napoleon felt that only through an Empire could France retain its position and relate to other European states. On December 2, 1804, Napoleon crowned himself Emperor of France in Notre-Dame Cathedral.

### **2.4.2 *Militarism and Empire Building***

Beginning in 1805 Napoleon engaged in constant warfare that placed French troops in enemy capitals from Lisbon and Madrid to Berlin and Moscow, and temporarily gave Napoleon the largest empire since Roman times. Napoleon's Grand Empire consisted of an enlarged France and satellite kingdoms, as well as coerced allies.

The military campaigns of the Napoleonic Years included

the War of the Second Coalition (1798–1801), the War of the Third Coalition (1805 – 1807), the Peninsular War (1808 – 1814), the “War of Liberation” (1809), the Russian Campaign (1812), the War of the Fourth Coalition (1813 – 1814), and the Hundred Days (March 20 – June 22, 1815)

French-ruled subject peoples viewed Napoleon as a tyrant who repressed and exploited them for France’s glory and advantage. Enlightened reformers believed Napoleon had betrayed the ideals of the Revolution.

The downfall of Napoleon resulted from the interaction of these events:

- 1) his inability to conquer England;
- 2) economic distress caused by the Continental System (boycott of British goods);
- 3) the Peninsular War with Spain;
- 4) the German War of Liberation; and
- 5) the Invasion of Russia

The actual defeat of Napoleon was the result of the Fourth Coalition and the Battle of Leipzig (“Battle of Nations”). Napoleon was exiled to the island of Elba as a sovereign with an income from France.

After learning of allied disharmony at the Vienna peace talks, Napoleon left Elba and began the “Hundred Days” by seizing power from the restored French king, Louis XVIII.

Napoleon’s gamble ended at Waterloo in June 1815. He was now exiled as a prisoner of war to the South Atlantic