MODERN EUROPE IN THE MAKING

From the French Revolution to the Common Market

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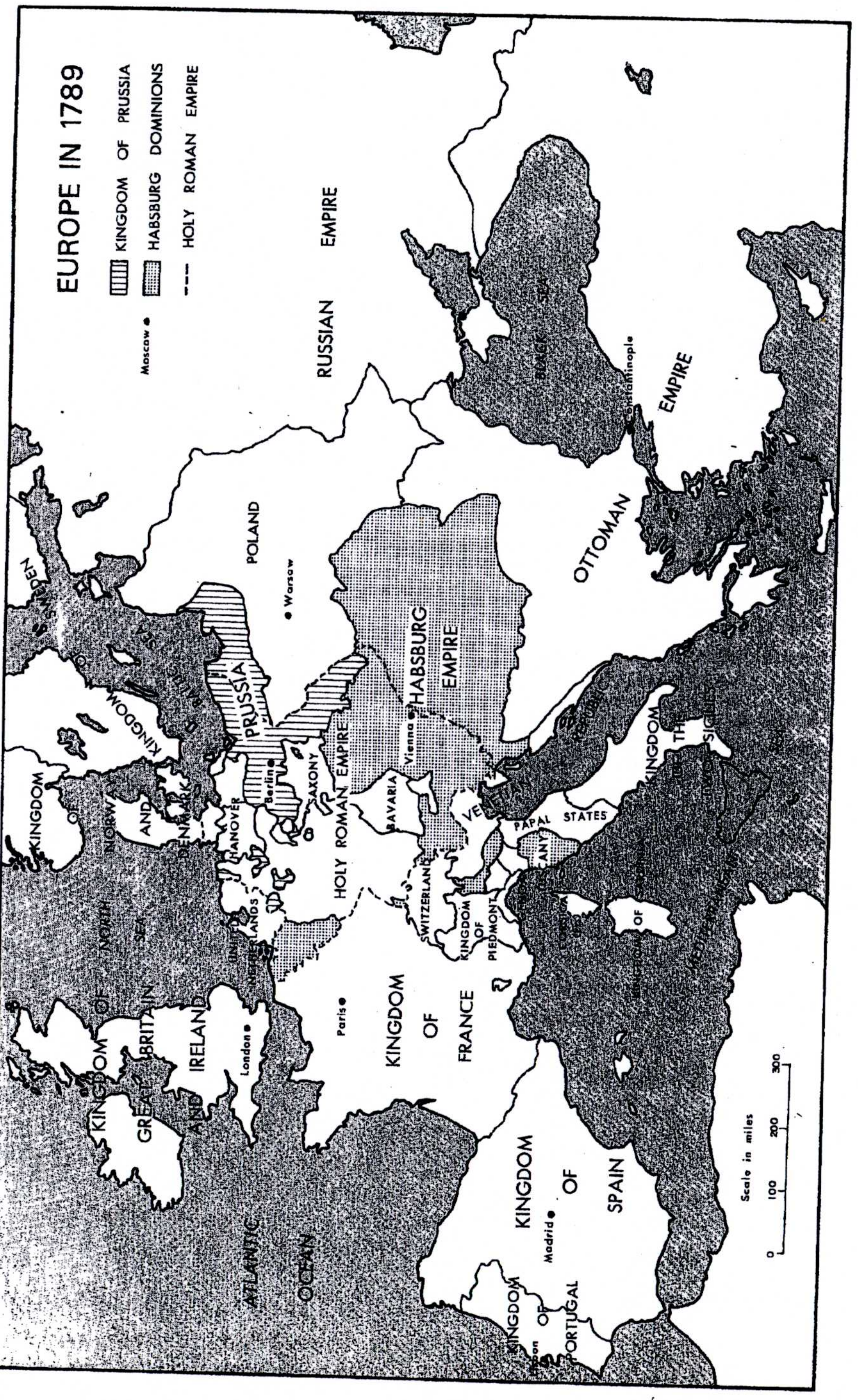
Historians have widely regarded the passing of the Old Regime in France as symbolic of its demise throughout all of Europe. The French Revolution thus becomes a sort of watershed between two large expanses of historical terrain—the Old Regime and modern Europe. It is convenient to have such disjunctions: they provide handy jumping-off places for academic courses and for books such as this one, and they make it easy for professional historians and their students to establish neatly defined areas of specialization. But if the human past is a story of change, close inspection of it reveals that such abrupt changes and clean severances are the exception rather than the rule. They happen, as we shall see, but with a frequency more akin to that of earthquakes and tidal waves than to the less dramatic but equally decisive processes of erosion which reshape the land. The revolutionary-Napoleonic era did not dispatch the Old Regime—in France or elsewhere—either so quickly or so completely as the watershed metaphor suggests. Even though the revolution did level a few prominent outcroppings, of which the most notable was the head of King Louis XVI of France, in general new configurations tended to emerge less suddenly. Nor were events in France alone in generating erosive forces (see Chapter 2). Moreover, just as much of the Old Regime stubbornly persisted well beyond the French Revolution, counter to all the imperatives of tidy historical periodization, the French Revolution itself had its energizing sources deep in the Old Regime.

Absolutism and Its Critics

Government in eighteenth-century Europe was not a public affair. Hereditary monarchs ruled the major states through large, growing bureau-



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cracies, and "politics" was largely a matter of administration. Outside of Great Britain, there were few legislative institutions which could rival the power of the throne. In a few lesser kingdoms, such as Sweden, the prince was little more than a decorative figurehead. In most places, however, political initiative—though not uncontested political supremacy—lay with the monarchy. Royalty argued that its powers were "absolute"; and though this claim was not so much an accurate description of reality as an aspiration, its fulfillment appeared to be within the realm of possibility.

Absolute monarchy was a relatively recent creation, the product of widespread dissatisfaction with the extensive civil upheavals of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Medieval monarchs had tended to share political power with the nobility, with its considerable landed wealth, social prestige, and control of large private armies upon which the monarch was frequently dependent. Besides exercising many important administrative and judiciary functions, the nobility largely dominated the various pseudo-representative institutions—semilegislative and semiconsultative—which sprang up in the middle ages. These bodies made no pretense of democratic representation and were mostly composed of nobles elected by their peers, though they claimed to guard the interests of all subjects. Often, they had some version of a right to consent over taxation, as well as a limited legislative role.

The distinction between political partnership and political rivalry in these arrangements was hard to draw. Increasingly, monarchs complained that nobles were using their positions of responsibility to frustrate "legitimate" royal prerogative and amass what was simply private power. Noblemen in their turn regarded royal ambitions to independent authority with deep suspicion, and some of them sought to establish further constitutional limitations upon the throne. The rivalry for power between dynasty and nobility periodically erupted into civil war; with the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, religious violence intersected these struggles and escalated them into international conflicts. Spiritual and secular motives intermingled in wars which set nobles against their king, state against state, and sometimes one faction of the nobility against another.

The political chaos into which western and central Europe had descended by the mid-seventeenth century formed the context for renewed royal claims to increased power. Monarchy alone, of all institutions, appeared capable of guaranteeing public order and a return to domestic tranquility. To do so, however, the monarch had to be free of three traditional restraints. First, he needed something like a monopoly on coercion so that he was no longer dependent upon the privately recruited armies of the nobility either to keep the public peace or to defend against for-

eign attack. As a result, most states witnessed the expansion of standing armies, loyal to the king rather than being paid and commanded by one of his potential competitors. Next, he needed an instrument of government responsive to his own will, one which was not infested by nobles whose sense of responsibility to the crown was often vague. Therefore, most monarchs began to elaborate the royal administration into a larger and more efficient institution and to staff it with professional bureaucrats obligated to the king for their position and advancement. Finally, the monarch who would command such a bureaucracy, as well as a standing army, had to be able to pay for it all. In other words, he needed independence from the pseudo-representative bodies and their rights of approval over taxation. The public temper was so overwhelmingly in favor of restoring civil order, however, that most monarchs could simply ignore—rather than going to the trouble to abolish—these bodies and could proceed to collect taxes without any formal consent to them.

Thus the political synthesis known as absolute monarchy grew from the development of standing armies, bureaucracy, and fiscal independence. European princes approached the fulfillment of absolute power in widely varying degrees, though none of them exercised uncontested political supremacy. Whatever progress absolutism made, however, was almost everywhere accomplished at the expense of the nobility and of their pseudo-representative institutional strongholds.

Two structural faults in absolutism condemned it to a relatively short life. To begin with, the gap between the nobility's continued high social status and its political powerlessness could not persist for long. Power may not always coincide with high social status, but those with high social status will usually try to see that it does. Aristocrats refused to accept the role of mere social ornaments to the throne, and once the immediacy of civil turmoil had abated they launched a campaign to reconquer the political responsibilities which they deemed commensurate with high birth. Had absolute monarchs successfully shorn their nobles of prestige and wealth in addition to power, the socio-political discrepancy would not have existed. But far from attempting such a revolution, most monarchs profoundly believed in the necessity of a hierarchical society, ordered from the top downwards by decreasing degrees of prestige and privilege. Thus, while concentrating political authority, they sought to fortify aristocratic social domination, and also thereby to compensate for the nobles' loss of a significant political role. Reinforced noble privilege—sometimes honorific, but often enough material, as with the French nobility's exemption from the main direct tax—was supposed to take the place of power. In other words, nobility still occupied a strategic social position from which it might mount an assault upon absolutism. The special prestige of the nobility, the deference it commanded, made it the

only social group which could plausibly challenge the throne and mobilize opposition to absolutism behind its leadership.

The second fault lay in the fact that most princes did not see the structure of absolute government as serving exclusively domestic ends. Standing armies, centralized administration, and the relatively uninhibited disposition of money combined to create more effective war machines. It was a rare dynasty which was not internationally ambitious, seeking new territories to be chiseled off one's neighbor and added to one's own domain, seeking weak or soon-to-be vacant thrones which might be reoccupied by representatives of one's own line, seeking new reservoirs of wealth overseas. Louis XIV of France, the very model of an absolute monarch, ruling from 1661 to 1715, was a relentless expansionist whose territorial ambitions involved him in war for nearly twenty-nine of his fifty-four years in power. The crowned heads of the eighteenth century proved scarcely less belligerent; and major wars involving most or all of the large states raged from 1733 to 1735, 1740 to 1748, and again from 1756 to 1763, the latter war spreading from Europe to India and North America.

These conflicts were massively expensive. All governments were therefore forced to enlarge their revenues in order to pay for wars past, present, and future. Frequently, this imperative meant increasing the financial exactions upon their respective populations, and it was at this point that the structural faults of absolutism joined, as it were, to create a dangerous weakness at a vital point. Nobles objected to new taxes—especially when their own traditional exemptions were threatened—and began to argue that taxation could only be legitimate if approved by the old "representative" institutions. European aristocrats began to shriek about a "despotism" which ran roughshod over "traditional liberties" and "natural rights." In hopes of exerting some leverage upon financially desperate monarchs, nobility took its case before larger segments of the public, trying to create a broad front of resistance to new, unilateral levies.

Aristocratic motives in this movement were complex, and it is difficult to sort out the selfish from the altruistic ones. Some noblemen doubtless saw themselves as the guardians of public liberties being threatened by the monarchy, as the necessary checks or balances which kept royal prerogative from degenerating into unrestrained tyranny. But it was equally true that the revivification of the faltering pseudo-representative institutions would be an important step toward restoring the nobility to a position of political authority, not to mention that it would make any violations of noble privileges and exemptions considerably more difficult. However that may be, the issue of royal finances became almost identical with the issue of the allocation of political responsibilities. If the monarchs surrendered the exclusive power of the purse and admitted any sig-

nificant degree of prerogative to aristocratically dominated bodies, they compromised the principle of absolutism at its very core.

In the aftermath of the dreadfully expensive Seven Years War, which ended in 1763, Europe's aristocrats and monarchs attacked and counterattacked one another over this dual issue. Although each side could claim victories, it was clear by the 1780's that absolute monarchy was conducting a sort of strategic withdrawal. Whether by assertion of right or by prudent royal concessions, the pseudo-representative bodies had begun to reappropriate some of their historical jurisdictions and prerogatives. Few princes renounced their claims to absolute and undivided authority, but absolutism at this time plainly occupied a position slightly closer to pretension than to practice.

The resurgence of European nobility in the late eighteenth century not only deflected the process of absolutism, it also inspired a variety of political activities which sometimes supported, sometimes enlarged, and even sometimes contradicted aristocratic conceptions of how government ought to be organized and operated. When titled spokesmen of the pseudo-representative institutions demanded that their rights be restored, they frequently presumed to speak on behalf of *all* the people whom their institutions supposedly represented. Rebellious grandees were not above appealing to well-to-do commoners when they tried to round up a following against "despotism." In so doing, however, they only further awakened the political interests of people who did not customarily concern themselves with politics. Financiers and merchants and professional men had habitually regarded government as the preserve of a tiny elite; middle-class civil servants in the provincial or local administration had hitherto resigned themselves to the fact that important decisions would be made by the centralized bureaucracy. Aristocratic agitation in the second half of the century invited them to imagine a politics more public, to express themselves in favor of a government open to a broader range of influence and opinion.

It can be dangerous to posit a uniquely middle-class political program and mentality—in part because the social groupings we refer to by the term "middle class" were in fact bewilderingly diverse and in part because well-to-do commoners followed no single political line.* Indeed, exclusively non-noble political movements were rare in the late eighteenth century, and even those commoners who came to oppose both absolutism and its aristocratic alternatives generally found themselves joined—and sometimes led—by like-minded nobles. The majority of the nobility in

* Strictly speaking, "middle class" is a term which could apply to all urban commoners from a fabulously wealthy banker to the corner greengrocer. In the present context, it refers to the educated and at least relatively well-off strata of non-nobles who were liable to take an interest in politics.

most countries urged a return to the arrangement whereby the pseudo-representative bodies would share power with the throne and block any intrusion upon the traditional rights, privileges, prerogatives, and autonomies of various social groups, institutions, or regions. Although this was a program which generated noteworthy backing outside the aristocracy, some commoners thought that aristocratic talk about "liberties" too readily translated into a reality which confined participation in politics to the bearers of noble titles. Accordingly, they began to talk of expanding the old bodies so as to include some meaningful representation of non-noble elements. Such suggestions occasionally went even further and posed the ideal of a representation so much more equitable—though still very far from truly egalitarian—that the influence of the privileged orders would dwindle to a level somewhat closer to their actual numbers in the society at large. Again, however, although these daring schemes had little support from the majority of aristocrats, neither did they have anything like the unanimous support of politically interested commoners. Moreover, the aristocracy experienced some fragmentation in the political ferment of the late eighteenth century, and certain of its members began to think in terms of recasting the state on more solid and rational foundations than of merely establishing the rule of a single class. Each of the reformist camps therefore included both aristocrats and delegates from the middle classes, though not in equal numbers.

Origins of the French Revolution

From one perspective, this selective sketch of eighteenth-century politics, emphasizing but one set of characteristic problems, may seem to make the eruption of revolution in France more intelligible. The French crown's flirtation with financial calamity and its struggle with a politically ambitious aristocracy reached crisis proportions in the 1780's. Reluctantly, King Louis XVI conceded that his destitute regime could no longer survive on its existing tax base and also could not summon the legitimacy to demand new taxes without seeking approval from a consultative assembly. After backing and filling for a few years, in 1788 he finally authorized elections to the Estates-General, a pseudo-representative institution which had last convened in 1614. But the Estates-General was a medieval institution, ill adapted to cope with eighteenth-century problems. Of its three Estates, the first represented only the clergy, so that 300 deputies would speak for roughly 130,000 clerics—out of a total population of perhaps 26 million souls. The Second Estate represented solely the nobility; another 300 men would stand for the approximately 210,000 parents and children in France's titled families. The Third Estate represented *everyone* else. However, since political responsibility was bound to

flow toward people of means and education and some social standing, the deputies of the Third Estate—of whom there were also 300—were preponderantly drawn from the more comfortable layers of the middle classes. But the Estates-General voted "by order" (which is to say that each Estate cast one vote, determined by a majority ballot within its own ranks) and not "by head."

Historically, therefore, the First and Second Estates had been able to count on domination of the Estates-General by virtue of the combination of their two votes, since—as privileged orders—their interests tended to coincide.* However, the Third Estate, politicized by the aristocratic activities of a generation, rejected this traditional organization of the Estates-General. A number of prominent aristocrats, like the Marquis de Lafayette and the Duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, also deemed this form of representation outdated and joined the commoners in agitating for its reform.

The crux of the reformist position was that the monarchy, by virtue of its financial straits, had demonstrated that France needed a new instrument of government. The Estates-General, moreover, at least as traditionally organized, was not equal to the task. The accident of birth conveyed a wildly disproportionate share of power upon the nobility; privileged tax exemptions made no sense in a time of government bankruptcy. The reformers sensed that the time was right for constructing a government in which power was more rationally and more equitably distributed, in which access to positions of political influence and responsibility was open to more than those of noble lineage. Consequently, advocates of reform demanded that the Third Estate should number 600 delegates (equal to the First and Second Estates combined) and that votes within the Estates-General be by "head" rather than by "order." They also called for change in the tax structure, the administration of justice, the system of internal economic tariffs which impeded the free circulation of goods from one province to another, and so forth.

The winter of 1788–89 was one of unprecedented political activity in France. Delegates to the Estates-General were to be chosen by a complicated process of indirect election which began at the village level and involved a remarkably large number of commoners. (Suffrage was extended to all persons paying *any* direct taxes, which meant that a good many peasants of distinctly modest circumstances were enfranchised.) But the king had also asked that each electoral assembly submit a list of grievances (the *cahiers de doléances*) for his consideration. In other words, besides simply nominating candidates, voters were given an opportunity to verbalize their discontents, to focus upon the abuses which most troubled them, and (at least implicitly) to hold out some hope for reform. The *cahiers* ranged from complaints about aristocratic privilege and the crushing burden of taxes which lay upon the peasantry (who made up perhaps four-fifths of the population) to grumblings about rural bridges in need of repair. They are principally important because the very process of drawing them up helped politicize the great mass of people, literally forcing them to think in political terms, and sparked expectations that their grievances would be remedied.

* The Roman Catholic Church of France owned between 6 and 10 percent of all land, yet still enjoyed exemption from direct taxation. The harmony of interests between at least the upper clergy and the Second Estate may be suggested by the fact that, after 1783, all 135 bishops of the French church were also titled noblemen.

But when the Estates-General finally convened in May 1789 at Versailles, just outside of Paris, the advocates of change quickly discovered that Louis XVI neither planned any major restructuring of the Estates-General nor envisaged any substantive role for it. Rather, the king apparently expected the Estates merely to rubber-stamp a disappointingly modest program of royal reforms and to vote approval of new taxes. A timely offer of meaningful reform would probably have won Louis solid support in the Third Estate. Instead, his intransigence forced the reformers into demands which were truly radical by eighteenth-century standards. With considerable justification, the Third Estate claimed that it alone of the three orders truly represented the nation and therefore renamed itself the National Assembly. Along with sympathizers among the other two orders, the National Assembly refused to disband until it had produced a written constitution for France, one which would redefine the nature of government and redistribute political power. Formerly fractious aristocrats now realized that their assault upon absolute monarchy had gotten badly out of hand, that their talk of restoring narrowly representative institutions had excited visions of broadly representative ones in which the influence of nobility would be submerged. The blue-blooded rebels suddenly became arch-royalists and urged the king to concede nothing to the National Assembly.

Violence ultimately shattered this political deadlock. In mid-July, Louis dismissed a government minister popular with the National Assembly, Jacques Necker; rumors bristled through heavily pro-reform Paris that this was the overture to a royal coup d'état. Bad crop harvests had sent food prices soaring, and the Paris poor—goaded by hunger and holding authority responsible—began to riot. On the 14th, they turned their fury against the Bastille, a fortified prison thought to house arms; with some aid from defecting army units, they conquered it and slaughtered some of its defenders. When order resumed on the next day, the Paris delegation to the National Assembly asserted control over the capital through a hastily concocted municipal government. But violence was not confined to Paris. There had been scattered peasant rioting through-

out 1789. When wild stories of a violent revenge being planned by noble landlords began to spread, huge numbers of peasants in several major regions responded defensively with attacks upon the lords' castles, destruction of tax records, and a generally successful defiance of authority. By early August, no one could doubt that the old order was dead, that absolute monarchy no longer ruled in France, and that it would not be replaced by aristocratic government. What precisely would replace it was a matter of far less certainty.

Major revolutions are uncommon occurrences; detached from their context, they may appear so strange that there is an inclination to attribute them to accident, to odd quirks of historical development. When the French Revolution is seen as arising from certain typical issues of eighteenth-century politics, issues which troubled most European states, then it may become somewhat more comprehensible. Yet if this approach is useful, it hardly confers omniscience. Indeed, the fact that Frenchmen engaged in political contentions which were anything but unique in their time only makes it *more* difficult to deal with the question: why was there revolution in France and not elsewhere? There is no dearth of answers, several of which are plausible and none of which has commanded anything remotely approaching consensus. It has been suggested that the burden of oppression and want was so great in France that it could simply no longer be borne. Conversely, it has been argued that conditions in France were not only better than elsewhere, but also improving distinctly—yet not fast enough to satisfy the expectations of improvement which the first stirrings of reform (like the calling of the Estates-General) had generated. In these terms, France may have undergone the first major "revolution of rising expectations." Others have insisted that the French monarchy was more financially strapped—and thus politically weaker—than its counterparts, so that it was more easily toppled. Still others maintain that the explanation is to be found not in the vanquished but in the victors—that is, that France alone had a middle class sufficiently large and sufficiently conscious of its interests and potential to move beyond the aristocratic alternative to absolutism.

Most recently, certain historians have tried to change the terms of this inconclusive debate by pointing out that political change was no more confined to France after 1789 than political conflict had been confined to France before that date. They point to the considerable ground gained by opponents of absolutism in several places and urge us to agree that the French Revolution was actually but the most dramatic instance of a broad—though admittedly not comprehensive—European revolution. This interpretation, though provocative, still overlooks the fact that absolute monarchy suffered numerous setbacks, but few routs. Moreover, its adversary was most commonly aristocracy, which preferred the sort of

pseudo-representative institutions and caste politics which French reformers were trying to render obsolete. The French Revolution emerged from general circumstances which most other politically literate Europeans would have found familiar. But the rest of Europe did not follow France into revolution; even more striking than the continued retreats of absolutism is the fact that French politics appeared to give the rest of Europe some pause. Pro-French reformers doubtless dreamed of following in the footsteps of the National Assembly, and sometimes they made a small start. But monarchs and rebellious aristocrats alike, while hardly reconciling their differences, could reflect that the French version of their rivalry had led to the superseding of them both.

Events in France at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century surely inspired revolutionaries elsewhere in Europe, but they did not inspire successful revolution. Rather, they provided a set of models or examples. Other revolutionaries would try to emulate the French models, or perhaps adapt them to fit local conditions. Reactionaries would reject them, especially when the French tried to export their politics by force of arms. Conservatives, who favored stability but not stagnation, sought to appropriate certain features of the French political models without profoundly dislocating the status quo. Curiously, the proponents of a strong monarchy and those of aristocratic government fell into both of the latter categories. In short, the French Revolution did not exactly revolutionize Europe, but rather marked out for other countries forms of change they might accept, modify, or repudiate.

Europe and French Politics

The French Revolution was far too complex an upheaval to be narrated here. For the purposes of studying *European* history, it may be most useful to consider the political models which the revolution built and presented to Europe. By far the most important was the system of constitutional and parliamentary government which the National Assembly hammered out and substituted for absolute monarchy. The constitution which went into operation in 1791—the first written constitution in a major European state—did more than define and guarantee such fundamental political rights as freedom of expression and assembly. It also redefined sovereignty, which it removed from the crown and placed in "the nation," while a major share of political responsibility passed to the nation's elected representatives. A "civic oath," or pledge of allegiance, contained in the constitution suggests the new institutional priorities: "I swear," it read, "to be faithful to the nation, to the law, and to the King, and to maintain with all my power the Constitution. . . ." The king him-

self was obliged to swear loyalty to the nation, the law, and the constitution. Legislative authority appertained solely to a Legislative Assembly, and though its decisions were submitted for royal approval, the king could not flatly quash them, but only exercise a suspensive veto which might delay enactment. Neither could he dissolve the Assembly.

Yet if the revolutionaries of 1789–91 determined to destroy absolutism, they were still not republicans; and they reserved for monarchy real, though sharply reduced, powers. The king alone selected government ministers; he directed the bureaucracy, the armed forces, and was primarily responsible for the conduct of foreign relations. On the other hand, "royal justice" disappeared in the sense that, as the constitution put it, "Under no circumstances may the judiciary power be employed by the legislative body or the King."

Besides disdaining republicanism, the early revolutionaries disdained democracy. The constitution guaranteed political *rights* to all Frenchmen, but political *responsibilities* it reserved to those who did not fall into the illiterate majority of the population. The vote went to those who paid a certain amount annually in direct taxes, on the assumption that such assessments were indicative of a level of income likely to be accompanied by education and a certain social standing. The constitution struck down privileges which discriminated against citizens before the law: "Neither privilege nor exception to the law common to all Frenchmen exists for any part of the nation or for any individual," declared the Preamble, which also disallowed nobility, "hereditary distinctions," and "distinctions of birth." Beyond this, however, no attempts were made to level the social hierarchy.*

The constitution of 1791 provided a clear alternative to both absolute monarchy and aristocratic government, whose respective advocates generally treated it like some savage beast—to be destroyed if possible, to be domesticated if not. The constitution, and variant versions of it, was a central issue in European politics for another generation or two. Yet it had become unworkable in France within a year of its enactment. Part of the problem was that Louis XVI and much of his nobility failed to regard the constitution as the quintessence of political wisdom. Their resistance sometimes took extreme forms—as when numerous aristocrats took up residence outside France in hopes of creating a counterrevolutionary force which would overthrow the new regime, or when the king tried unsuccessfully to flee the country in June 1791 and join them. Royal and

* In 1790, the Assembly nationalized church land and put it up for sale. It is by no means certain, however, that this redistribution of property drastically altered French social structure. Indeed, it would appear that in most cases church land was purchased by persons of some means—from the middle classes or at least the well-to-do strata of the peasantry. The measure did little by way of closing the gap between the very rich and the very poor.

aristocratic resistance to the revolution prompted some pause among certain revolutionaries, who began to argue that change had gone too far. Among others, it stirred doubts about the necessity for monarchy itself.

But the very existence of the throne was only truly endangered when war broke out in the spring of 1792 between France and two conservative monarchies, the Austrian Habsburg Empire and Prussia. The war had its origins in French expansionist impulses, in the desire of certain French politicians to generate patriotic enthusiasm and then ride what wave of feeling into office, and perhaps in a dash of missionary zeal as well—for the most ardent advocates of the revolution yearned to extend its benefits to their oppressed brethren elsewhere on the continent. The Habsburg Emperor Leopold, brother of the French queen, Marie Antoinette, helped mobilize European resistance to the revolution; ultimately, the coalition he initiated embraced all the major powers (including Great Britain). Clearly, the defeat of France would mean not merely a halt to the spread of revolutionary infection; it would mean destruction of the revolution itself, as the émigré French nobles who joined the foreign armies made unmistakable.

The war went badly for France at first, and by the summer of 1792 coalition forces were advancing steadily upon Paris. Moreover, the war placed Louis XVI in an impossible position. A French defeat would reverse the revolution and free him of the shackles imposed by the constitution, so that he could hardly give the French war effort unqualified support. By the same token, many of his subjects sensed the paradox of fighting under a supreme commander whose sympathies lay with the enemy, who stood to gain from the coalition's victory, and who (it was widely rumored) had been engaging in a host of secret treasons designed to weaken the French cause. The closer to Paris the invaders marched, the more unbearable these contradictions became; at last, in August 1792, armed crowds successfully executed a planned invasion of the royal palace and dethroned the king. The Legislative Assembly dissolved, and elections to a new body—the National Convention—followed. The Convention met in September, when it officially proclaimed France a republic and, within a few months, had Louis executed on charges of treason.

The French republic was born of circumstances rather than of philosophical preference. A year prior to its abrupt appearance, few persons thought the republic a desirable or practicable form of government. It owed its creation to the fact that the alternative, monarchy, had allowed itself to become thoroughly identified with the counterrevolution. Yet there were also growing sentiments—in Paris, at least—that a monarchy would no longer square with the more democratic sort of government which was increasingly finding advocates. The urban poor, and those middle-class politicians who sought a following among them, found the

constitution of 1791 too conservative—especially when it reserved the franchise to the more well-to-do strata. Besides, although the constitution was firm in its protection of the rights of property owners, it said little of the needs of manual laborers. Arbitrary distinctions based upon wealth went down no better with the poor than had arbitrary distinctions based upon birth with the comfortable middle classes. The Paris poor, stimulated to far greater political involvement and awareness, argued that the revolution would not have occurred in the first place without their contribution, as on July 14, 1789. They demanded a more literal application of the constitution's doctrine of sovereignty of the people and a government which would not simply defend the revolution from foreign reversal, but would extend its libertarian and egalitarian benefits to the lower reaches of society.

In the abstract, there is nothing which compels republicanism to be democratic. In the concrete circumstances of the 1790's, however, the model of republicanism which Frenchmen created became inextricably associated in the European mind with democracy—and with a great deal else besides. The National Convention had been elected by universal manhood suffrage (though in fact the distractions of war and revolution led to extremely high abstentionism). It soon prepared a new constitution, which announced that "All men are equal by nature and before the law" and which vested power largely in a democratically elected legislature. Adopted in June 1793, this constitution remained a virtual dead letter for the two years of its existence; under the pressure of foreign and civil war, the Convention and the executive committees it elected ruled France by decree.

Support for the war and for the drastic political changes it had entailed was hardly unanimous. Fighting against massive odds, the republican government had to resort to extreme measures to supply its armies, feed the civilian population, and keep its swelling ranks of critics at bay. The execution of the king horrified much of the peasant population, which continued to regard monarchy as near sacred, if not exactly infallible. Confiscations of food and price controls alienated some rural areas, and the wartime dislocations of the economy intensified suffering everywhere. Provincial observers came increasingly to feel that the Paris mob was ruling France, and in mid-1793 civil war erupted in parts of the west and south.

Civil war, when added to foreign invasion (though the French armies had for the moment staved off the threat to Paris), prompted a strenuous response from the government. The Convention granted its chief executive organ, the Committee of Public Safety, broad exceptional powers to repress insurrection and eliminate persons thought to be threatening the republic and the revolution. It is important to recall that this so-called reign of terror was not designed merely to satiate the blood lust of madmen, though it sometimes degenerated into that. Rather, it grew from patriotic determination to protect a France which the Committee and the Convention saw as endangered by foreign agents, reactionary monarchists, and political opportunists. It is indisputable that some of the estimated 14,000 persons executed during the terror of 1793–94 fell into at least one of those categories; most of the victims were open insurgents against the republic, and it is hard to imagine that they would have had a gentler fate under any other government. But there was also a broad streak of paranoia in the terror, not to mention a dose of cynicism, so that innocent persons were killed because someone thought them royalists or perhaps because someone in power held a grudge against them. Some of the most sensational executions came in March and April 1794, when Maximilien Robespierre, who had dominated the Committee of Public Safety since the previous autumn, dispatched some thirty of his political opponents—including two former members of the Committee. For a half-century thereafter, it was difficult to pronounce the word "republic" in Europe without evoking Robespierre and the guillotine as well as "democracy."

Most of those who supported the terror had thought it a strictly temporary expedient, a means of self-defense against domestic treachery. Once civil war had been ended and the foreign armies repulsed from French soil, the terror therefore seemed less justifiable, and many of its original advocates feared Robespierre would continue to employ it to build a largely personal regime. In July 1794, the Convention overthrew Robespierre, and along with 70 supporters he perished under the guillotine in the bloodiest single day of the terror.

However, enemies of the revolution—which included a large number of former friends appalled by the lengths to which it had gone—claimed to detect some intimate relationship between republican democracy (or even revolution) and terror. They argued that to tamper with the restraints imposed by traditional authority was to summon the basest human instincts to the surface. Government existed to check those instincts, to protect men from one another; and history had delivered government into the hands of a few because most people—"ordinary" people—were bound to abuse its powers and privileges, to exercise it for personal ends rather than for the general welfare. Rule by the majority could also lead to the tyrannical oppression of minority groups, especially where the majority was ignorant, politically inexperienced, and susceptible to the urgings of republican demagogues. Reformers who endorsed something like the constitution of 1791 were convinced that to go further, into republicanism and democracy, was to issue an invitation to terror. Even more implacable opponents of the revolution insisted that any seri-

ous tampering with the status quo was bound to lead directly and inevitably to something like a reign of terror rather than settle down into the moderate constitutionalism of 1791. Ignoring the impact of the war upon revolutionary politics, they quoted freely from the English parliamentarian and political writer Edmund Burke. For Burke, political change had to proceed by slow, "natural" processes which did not threaten to fracture the delicate and intricate structure of government in the course of refining it. "A spirit of innovation," wrote Burke in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), "is generally the result of a selfish temper and confined views. People will not look forward to posterity who never look backward to their ancestors." The fact that Burke combined this conservatism with an accurate prediction that the revolution would go on to greater violence and disorder gave his work a profound influence.

The model of republican democracy held up by France was therefore too widely associated with the terror to inspire much enthusiasm elsewhere in Europe, and future generations of republicans found it difficult to overcome their inherited reputations as political murderers.* One might even consider the model of parliamentary and constitutional monarchy compromised to the extent that one thought it cleared the path for republicanism and terror. Reformers of the early nineteenth century were constantly dogged by charges that they would end up plunging the nation into revolutionary chaos.

The Napoleonic Era

After the fall of Robespierre and the abolition of the Committee of Public Safety, something like a power vacuum existed at the center of the French republic. Once a new constitution of 1795 had established a two-house legislature and reattached suffrage to a property qualification, a variety of political factions sought control of the new five-man executive council, known as the Directory. Beyond cracking down on democrats and alleged ex-terrorists, the Directory never expressed a coherent domestic policy, nor even effectively exercised its authority over most of the nation. It did continue the war, now conducted largely on foreign soil, though with no clear-cut set of aims and goals. The Directory was neither so corrupt nor so inept as it was painted by Napoleon Bonaparte, the thirty-year old army general who overthrew it by a coup d'état at the end

* The terror had also had a conspicuous anti-Christian streak which horrified the faithful in other countries. The abolition of church privileges and the nationalization of church lands in 1790 had driven into opposition even those clerics who had supported the early policies of the National Assembly. Assaults upon Church property and upon priests who failed to swear allegiance to the new regime were increasingly common under the Convention.

of 1799. But because it stood for so little, it could be blamed for much, and few persons lamented its passing.

Bonaparte swiftly converted the republic he had conquered into a personal dictatorship and, in 1804, an empire with himself upon the hereditary throne. It was an impressive achievement for the little Corsican whose cosmic ambitions had propelled him rapidly up through the ranks of the French army and whose luck had enabled him to survive the numerous political turnabouts and purges of the revolution. Bonaparte's political support after 1799 lay in the hope he offered of strong leadership guaranteeing order after a decade of internal convulsion and in the clever promise that he would "save" the revolution—that is, consolidate its most popular accomplishments and protect them from the dangers of foreign assault and domestic disorder. In point of fact, the Napoleonic episode represented nothing like the revolution's essence, in part because the revolution meant too many different things to too many different people for anyone to have distilled a recognizable "essence" from it. But even if one could get agreement that the French Revolution had something to do with establishing a more libertarian political atmosphere than that of the Old Regime, it is obvious that Napoleon had no intention of saving even a moderate version of constitutional and parliamentary government.

Although Napoleon allowed parliamentary institutions to exist, he allowed them no meaningful constitutional function. Thus, if all adult males had the vote, there was nothing of significance they could vote upon. In any event the constitution deprived universal suffrage of vital force by an elaborate process of indirect election and by reserving to Napoleon personally the right to appoint part of the legislature. The constitution and the legislature were thus mere fig leaves over an autocracy which Napoleon exercised through a centralized bureaucracy. All potentially competitive institutions were reduced to complete subordination; public criticism was thoroughly strangled by official censorship; the legal system, the church, the schools were all made into extensions of the imperial will. Napoleon did sanctify the partial redistribution of property which had occurred in the 1790's and, although he recreated a titled nobility, he also opened the bureaucracy to talent rather than simply to high birth. In general, however, his regime amounted to a return to the absolutism which the revolutionaries had overthrown—though an absolutism distinguished by a degree of efficiency and central control of which few eighteenth-century princes could boast.

Napoleon largely established his rule upon a broad desire for order, and maintained it through repression and coercion. But much of his astonishing popularity grew from his military exploits. He had achieved prominence prior to 1799 as the youthful director of some spectacular campaigns, and thereafter he depended heavily upon the patriotic and

militaristic passions which his battlefield victories stimulated. Napoleon's continuation of the war which had been raging with few pauses since 1792 was, of course, far more costly of human life than the terror had been, yet somehow more respectable (to many historians as well as to contemporaries). People electrified with outrage at terrorism thrilled to the thunder of Napoleonic cannons, even though the state of scientific knowledge in the early 1800's strongly suggested that bullets might be entirely as fatal as the guillotine. But the Emperor's determination to stop at nothing less than French hegemony over all of Europe, frequently replacing existing sovereigns with members of his own family (which sprang from a modest strain of Corsican nobility), stirred deep springs of French national pride and ambition. Glory gained in combat has lost some of its glitter in the twentieth century, but no one will ever comprehend an important part of Napoleon's appeal if he fails to appreciate its powers of attraction in the nineteenth century.

Even under the republic, French conquest of foreign countries had often meant the imposition upon that country of some version of French institutions (whatever they might be at that moment). Napoleon continued this practice, at least with the lesser states that he overwhelmed. Conquest was frequently followed by the substitution of efficient (if authoritarian) administrations, for ramshackle governments riddled with outmoded survivals and weakened by recent aristocratic counteroffensives. Napoleonic rule was thus a mixed blessing for Europe. Although it represented military humiliation and foreign occupation, it also brought streamlined government and the elimination of numerous annoyances which local reformers considered intolerable. Patriotic impulses thereafter dictated that one reject Napoleonic influences; the impulses of domestic reformism urged that one accept any benefits that defeat brought with it. From one perspective, a nation vanquished by Napoleon might be able to overlap France's decade of upheaval, acquiring a more modern and efficient—though also autocratic—government without paying the price in civil discord.

The Napoleonic preference for rational and efficient order did not stop with bureaucracy; it extended to boundaries as well. The map of Europe in 1789 was the product not of a controlling intelligence, but of helter-skelter historical development. The Italian peninsula, for instance, was politically divided into a fistful of sovereign states ranging in size from the Kingdom of Naples (which included nearly half the peninsula and the island of Sicily) to petty dukedoms and independent city states. Central Europe in the eighteenth century (a nightmare for historical cartographers) contained hundreds of principalities between larger Prussia to the north and the Habsburg Empire to the south. The larger dynastic states were not always compact units: the Habsburgs ruled Austrians,

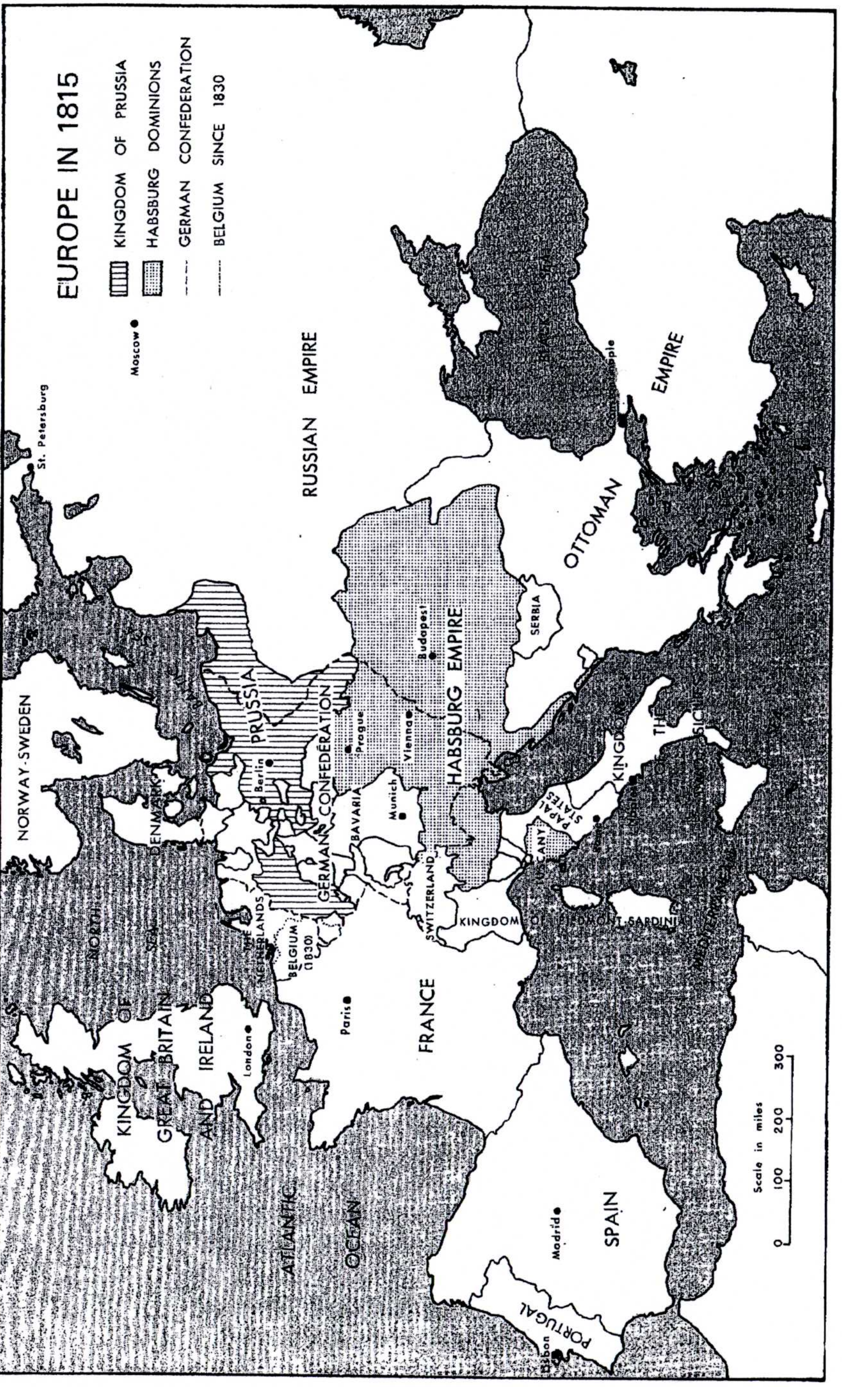
Magyars, and Slavs in central Europe, but also parts of Italy and what is now Belgium; Protestant Prussia also held territories in the Catholic Rhineland. Napoleonic conquest drastically simplified all this, annexing large chunks of neighboring territory to France and, more important, consolidating micro-states into far larger units. The Emperor never meant creations like the Kingdom of Italy, the Kingdom of Westphalia, or the Confederation of the Rhine to be more than his satellites; and of course French invasion and occupation stirred local patriotism profoundly. But the brief experience of unity also provided another political model, the national one, which posed the ideal of political unification and independence for culturally common people.

Napoleon, for all his military genius, ultimately proved himself an incorrigible overreacher. Even prior to his invasion of Russia in 1812, there were signs that his grip on the rest of the continent was weakening. By the time his shattered army was in full retreat westward, having failed to subdue the Russian behemoth, guerrilla resistance to his brother Joseph's rule in Spain threatened his rear and provided the opening for British invasion. Within two years, Napoleon had been sent packing and the Bourbon dynasty restored in the person of Louis XVI's brother (who took the title of Louis XVIII). In 1815, Napoleon briefly returned, rallied enough popular backing to frighten Louis into exile, and took one last fling at the coalition armies. Defeated at Waterloo, he was now consigned to definitive exile on a bleak south Atlantic island.

The Restoration

The conclusion of this quarter-century of conflict stirred up by French politics inaugurated a period known as the Restoration. The name can be misleading, however, if it is taken to imply either a faithful reconstruction of prerevolutionary Europe—in the way that one can restore a decrepit antique automobile to its original working condition—or a clean break between the revolutionary-Napoleonic episode and the succeeding generation. Pure and simple reaction was impossible, although that did not dissuade a few rulers from attempting it. The victorious statesmen who formalized the peace in diplomatic conference at Vienna determined to undo much that the French had wrought. But the European map they redrew by treaty clearly demonstrated that 1788 was not to be resurrected in 1815.

The diplomats nominally restored the old order, but they also recognized that it would face new challenges. Napoleonic consolidations in Italy had prompted renewed yearning there for genuine unification and independence. The appeal launched by petty German princes in 1812–13, to "free the fatherland" of foreign invaders, quickened hopes



that a genuine German fatherland might be born. The creation of large, unified nation-states in these areas threatened not only the swarm of lesser sovereigns who ruled there but the traditional interests of the great powers—and especially the Austrian Empire, long accustomed to a dominant influence in both central Europe and the Italian peninsula. Thus, the Habsburgs ceded their Belgian territories to the Dutch and acquired in turn more defensible holdings in adjacent northern Italy. The Congress of Vienna also rejected literal restoration when it decided to let most of the lesser German princes survive as nothing more than quaint historical memories. A new German Confederation appeared, containing but thirty-seven small and middling independent states grouped together loosely under the dominance of its other two members, Prussia and Austria. The Confederation was not designed as a step toward unity; it was a device for frustrating the national model. Its very creation, however, acknowledged the impact of that model and admitted that French politics had rendered the Europe of 1788 obsolete.

The members of the coalition defeating Napoleon even went so far as to experiment with a new version of foreign policy. Between 1818 and 1822, the foreign ministers of the Quadruple Alliance (that is, Britain, Prussia, Russia, and Austria) met in a total of four diplomatic congresses to ensure execution of the peace settlement and to discuss matters of common interest. When the settlement appeared threatened, the continental members of the alliance were not above armed intervention into the affairs of independent states. Revolutions in Spain, Naples, and the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia were all snuffed out by foreign troops which intervened on allied authorization. It was a frank admission that the French Revolution had helped knit European politics closer together; murmurs of reform in Madrid now set off quivers of panic in Vienna. Allied cooperation soon foundered on mutual suspicions and rivalries, however, and the British decided to revert to their traditional aloofness from European entanglement. But the brief heyday of the so-called congress system still implied a new community of conservative interests.

Restoration monarchies paid lip service to the sanctity of prerevolutionary structures, but in fact they were eager to assimilate selected features of at least the Napoleonic regime. In exile, Napoleon boasted: "I have saved the revolution, which was on the point of death; I have washed off its crimes, I have held it up to the eyes of Europe resplendent with glory." The monarchs who defeated him knew better. They appreciated that his rule had reactivated the centralizing tendencies of absolutism which had faltered in the period of aristocratic and liberal attack. Although there was a certain revulsion from things French early in the Restoration, Napoleonic institutions which rationalized and modernized central government frequently persisted where they had been installed and were copied

where they had not. Even Louis XVIII of France, who missed few opportunities to refer to Napoleon as "the usurper," saw no reason to dismantle the administrative structure or law codes which he inherited in 1814 or to alter the imperial arrangements which had so firmly placed the church and the educational system under the central authority.

When it came to the liberal model of politics, however, the instinctive reflex of most Restoration governments was resistance and repression. There were exceptions: France and a few small states in the German Confederation experimented with limited versions of parliamentary and constitutional government. In all these cases, the constitutions guaranteed certain minimal civil liberties, although the executive was still free to crack down on overly broad interpretations of them; the parliaments, all elected on a highly restricted suffrage, exercised some degree of control over the royal budget. It was indicative of the conservative nature of these experiments that the constitutions were royally authored and granted to the nation out of princely generosity—"handed down," in the phrase of the time, which implied that the monarch might just as quickly snatch them back. No monarch actively sought limitations on his own prerogatives, and the ones who accepted them did so because they felt that liberal sentiment in their realm was too powerful to ignore. Those who thought they could crush constitutionalism usually tried. Spanish liberals had patched together a constitution after Joseph Bonaparte's departure; but when King Ferdinand VII returned to Spain from his wartime captivity in France, he successfully reimposed absolute rule. Louis XVIII reasoned, however reluctantly, that to follow a similar line in France was to invite a reenactment of the events which had destroyed his brother. The coalition powers agreed, just as reluctantly—and determined to quarantine parliamentary and constitutional government to those few preserves in which the alternatives to it seemed even worse.

This expedient, if grudging and watchful, toleration did not extend to more radical recrudescences of French politics. Democratic republicanism had developed such a sinister reputation that it scarcely dared show its face during the Restoration. Yet its presence was felt all the same. Though the few actual republicans (mostly French and Italian) rarely surfaced from the underground secret societies in which they tended to group, the very fact that they could not be seen and counted led to an exaggeration of their numbers and influence. When authorities on occasion ferreted out a republican cell, most people assumed that only a tiny fragment of a huge conspiracy had been unearthed. Liberal reformers suffered the consequences of this mentality nearly as much as revolutionaries, since—by Burkean logic—to meddle with the structure of authority at all was to give the lurking swarms of terrorists an opening just wide enough for them to wheel through the guillotine.

The Restoration is customarily depicted as a reactionary epoch in European history, a period in which rulers tried to ignore the preceding twenty-five years and pick up where they had left off when the French Revolution erupted. But the image of the political pendulum swinging to the extreme right is accurate only if we can establish that it had already swung to the extreme left. Only in France itself had home-grown revolutionaries destroyed the Old Regime; and the Restoration government there demonstrated that total reaction was impossible—however much a few persons who "had learned nothing and forgotten nothing" from the revolutionary-Napoleonic experience may have desired it. Elsewhere, nobody was exactly trying to put Humpty-Dumpty back together again because he had not been smashed to smithereens in the first place. French politics posed a threat to traditional European political institutions, a few of which buckled under the strain; but the revolution did not dismantle the whole structure. The Restoration makes more sense as adaptation than as reaction. Traditional institutions met the challenge of French politics not only by repression and a reassertion that the old ways were best, but also by incorporating certain elements of French political models designed to make the established order stronger, more efficient, and even (now and then) a bit more palatable to reformers.

This interpretation may puzzle those accustomed to thinking of the French Revolution as a savage riptide upending anyone who tried to stand his ground in its path. The revolution was part of a broad movement of protest against absolutism, but only in France did that movement become revolutionary—a fact that retarded rather than stimulated reform elsewhere. To be sure, it inspired liberal reformers all across the continent; but they were of little political consequence prior to 1830. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the French political writer Alexis de Tocqueville noted that although the French Revolution had been directed in part against the absolutism of the Old Regime, it ended up by hastening the progress of administrative centralization. In fact, the paradox holds true for Europe in general, for at least in the short run, the events of 1789–1815 enhanced royal power. Though there were certain institutional changes, they did not betoken any substantial redistribution of political power (except where aristocrats resurgent in the 1780's suffered a post-Napoleonic setback). Rather, the role of the French Revolution in early nineteenth-century politics was to suggest some models for achieving such redistributions.

This introductory essay has ignored two important issues which merit some attention. First, its sketch of Old Regime politics has focused exclusively upon the continent, deliberately neglecting the somewhat special case of Great Britain. Since the late seventeenth century, British politics had been edging gradually (if unevenly) toward parliamentary domi-

nance. By 1789, the king was still very far from being a figurehead, yet absolutism was unmistakably dead. No single written constitution existed, yet a series of constitutional acts—bolstered by powerful traditions rooted in the system of common law—served to restrain royal prerogatives. There was nothing remotely democratic about Parliament: all hereditary nobles sat by right in the House of Lords, which exercised a veto on measures proposed by the House of Commons (elected on a narrow suffrage and dominated by wealthy landed interests). To a degree, then, British institutions anticipated the liberal model of French politics and even, it should be noted, owed an important part of their development to revolution—both violent (in the 1640's and 1650's) and nonviolent (in 1688). Such defenders of the British system as Burke, however, liked to portray it as the product of long and cautious evolution over centuries. Besides, Great Britain had been the mainstay of the anti-French coalition. Few continental supporters of the Restoration status quo therefore regarded British parliamentarism as an immediate danger, however much they may have disliked it in principle.

In the second place, this chapter has largely neglected the social dimension of politics and has perhaps misleadingly suggested that political change is an exclusively institutional matter. As a matter of fact, European social structure altered about as much between 1789 and 1815 as did the structure of political institutions. In France, legal privilege disappeared; and the church and (to a lesser degree) the nobility had much of their property confiscated. Again, however, such wealth as shifted hands *tended* to pass from the elite to adjacent strata, and not to the great mass of peasant poor. Outside of France, social change was even more restrained; the most notable development came with the abolition of legal serfdom in Prussia, although this reform of 1808 was carried out on terms which strengthened noble landlords and even further depressed the conditions of their peasants. The social consequences of French politics were confined largely to France.

The society of the Old Regime survived the era of the French Revolution with even less damage than had been done to political institutions. But just as the models of French politics posed a continuing threat to those institutions, British machines were generating forces which would gradually undermine traditional society.

2 / British Machines

The French Revolution was an abrupt, dramatic upheaval, concentrated into a few years and full of conspicuous shifts in power and institutional changes. The industrial revolution consisted of no such neatly focused and easily visible events. It began toward the end of the eighteenth century in Great Britain, with innovations in the mode of industrial production, innovations which were not widely emulated on the continent until the 1850's. But it did not stop there. The industrial revolution ultimately accomplished a radical renovation in economic and social structures everywhere and served as an engine of political transformation as well. It was not so much an event as a process, and evidence of its workings appears throughout this book. The present chapter deals with its British origins and with its early, halting progress in continental Europe.

The First Industrial Revolution

In the twentieth century, industrial revolution takes place by imitation. Economically "underdeveloped" nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America attempt to "modernize" by simply copying the industrial structures of more "advanced" nations. Under the direction of central planning agencies, they seek to leap directly into economic viability by patterning themselves after those nations which have already achieved it. In the eighteenth century, no such models existed. Change came by trial and error, by response to local and immediate needs, and not in pursuit of articulated national goals. In retrospect, it is plain that the process of industrial revolution in Britain was under way—though very far indeed from completion—by 1800. But the British people at that time were not *consciously* trying to create the first "modern industrial state," since that

was a goal no one could begin to understand for another half-century. The British built the first model of industrialized society without knowing that they were doing so, for the obvious reason that the concept would make no sense until the thing itself existed.

Contemporary industrial revolution is a misleading guide to the British experience in yet another respect. Although the existence of clear and successful models facilitates rational planning, making industrialization less haphazard, the so-called third-world nations presently aspiring to modernize usually have to build on an economic base which is largely agrarian and which has been undermined by recent imperial exploitation. The chasm between them and industrially modernized states is vast and murderously expensive to bridge; delays in narrowing the distance between economic "backwardness" and the visible affluence of the model nations generate deep frustrations. Since the British did not, as it were, know where they were going, they were spared the pain of thwarted ambitions (though they suffered a great deal else along the way). More important, Britain in the late eighteenth century was already the most prosperous nation in the world. Then appropriate metaphor for its industrial revolution is not, therefore, a mighty vault from poverty to plenty, but rather, in the term of one economist, a "takeoff"—a sharp acceleration accomplished only after a running start.

Britain's preeminent economic position in the eighteenth century helps to explain why the industrial revolution began there rather than elsewhere. The thriving British economy, which depended largely upon overseas trade, generated both the demand which made innovations in production necessary and the resources which made them possible. It is worth emphasizing that the industrial revolution marked the transformation of industry, but not its birth. Small-shop manufacturing with simple manually powered machinery had for centuries been producing goods for export, especially textiles. The woolen trade loomed largest in this industry, though in the mid-eighteenth century, cotton cloth came into its own. The British began to import raw cotton from India (a recent colonial acquisition), convert it into cloth, and then sell it abroad. The demand for cotton—cheaper than wool, better suited to warmer seasons and climates, and washable besides—quickened perceptibly in both the domestic and colonial markets. The traditional spinning wheel was not producing cotton fiber fast enough for it to be woven and finished; to keep up with demand, technological improvement in spinning was necessary. A series of mechanical inventions introduced (though by small stages) machinery which spun cotton faster. Toward the end of the century, steam power replaced human power as the motive force, and the long and agonizing transition into modern industrial production had begun, if only barely.

But the critical point is that innovation, and all that followed from it,

sprang from the stimulation of a mature and prosperous economy. Without the existence of a large textile industry, however structurally different from its successor, and without the large and growing colonial markets for its goods, change would not have come when and where it did. Moreover, change was possible because there was at hand the engineering experience to effect it and the money to finance it. Technological advances, and even occasional breakthroughs, were not the product of some mysterious mechnical ingenuity lodged in the collective British psyche. It was rather that Britain had long been in the textile business, and had a considerable number of persons who lived by making, repairing, and generally tinkering about with manufacturing equipment. Commerce had also prompted the elaboration of a reasonably effective banking system accustomed to paper transactions and capable of providing the credit for promising business ventures. Prosperity created ready capital in abundance—more than actually proved necessary for the very earliest stages of industrial advance, which were accomplished at a relatively low cost. Finally, a long tradition of colonial trade meant that the British possessed both a large merchant fleet for getting products to overseas markets quickly and a navy powerful enough to protect the merchant vessels.

In the twentieth century, industrial revolution is the response to economic backwardness; in the eighteenth, it was the result of economic growth. In the latter, the expansion of the traditional economy, and especially of overseas trade after mid-century, provided what the historian E. J. Hobsbawm has called "the runway for the industrial 'takeoff'."

The industrial revolution was at bottom an attempt to employ new technology and business organization in the pursuit of greater profits. The maximization of profit and business activity in general were more or less acceptable forms of social conduct in Britain, carrying less of the stigma of vulgarity than they did in continental countries. In France, for example, the nobility considered trade mere money-grubbing, beneath the dignity of noble blood. Such attitudes did not keep numerous aristocrats from investing in commercial ventures, but they persisted strongly enough to prevent high status from attaching to mercantile enterprises. In Britain, as on the continent, the political and social elite were large landowners—an hereditary nobility and a lesser strata of untitled gentry—and the preferred form of wealth was therefore land. But in Britain, nobility and property passed only to the eldest son; the rest of the nobleman's family had to make its own way in the world (though usually with the benefit of excellent family connections). Younger sons of noblemen often headed toward army commissions, government service, the church, and the legal profession. But commerce also absorbed a share, which both demonstrated that trade and gentle birth were compatible and conferred a certain degree of social legitimacy upon commercial life.

The social flow also operated in the other direction. Eighteenth-cen-

tury Britain was a highly stratified society, but the lines of stratification signified different levels of status, not closed and rigid castes. Advancement through the hierarchy was the exception rather than the rule, and yet it was easier and more common than anywhere else in Europe. The best vehicle for upward mobility was money; and with the remarkable economic expansion of the eighteenth century, one of the best sources of money was commerce (and therafter, of course, industry). If a man made enough money, he could hope to invest it in a landed estate; assume the life style of the gentry; and even, perhaps, reasonably expect that his heir might be granted (or purchase) a title. Older, better established noble houses were not above contemptuous remarks about the pretensions of newly rich merchants; but neither were they above replenishing their order with liberal injections of mercantile wealth.

Besides, the commercial spirit was not absent in the landed aristocracy. On the continent, noble landlords were generally content to lease their holdings to tenants (and live off the rental income) or have the land worked by serfs (and live off a combination of feudal dues and profits from sale of the produce). In neither case did the lord see his estate as an improvable resource whose capacity for profits might be increased; rather, it was considered the source of a constant and certain income.* From the end of the seventeenth century, however, British landlords increasingly showed a greater interest in the productivity of their estates and began to bring them even more under direct cultivation—working them, that is, through hired rather than tenant labor, and living off the sale of the harvest rather than rents. The nobility and the gentry alike began to experiment with various means (many of which originated in the Netherlands) of increasing the yield of their lands; in contrast, few continental landlords went beyond trying to increase the yield of the peasants who worked their land. By using fertilizers, crop rotation, and a variety of other methods, British lords successfully enlarged their harvests and their profits from them. Nor was it unusual for some of these profits to find their way into commercial investments or even industrial enterprises. In such an atmosphere, the quest for profits in business suffered little serious disrepute. British social structure and social values thus furnished an enabling framework for industrial revolution, just as British economic growth furnished it the stimuli of demand and resource.

Rapid increases in population are customarily regarded as an economic bane in the nations presently undertaking industrial modernization. Often, the economy simply cannot keep pace with a rampaging birth rate, and gains are literally eaten up. Yet Britain also experienced a

* One exception was if mineral resources should be discovered on the estate. In such circumstances, it was common for the lord to mine and market the product like any industrial entrepreneur.

sharp surge in population growth concurrent with its industrialization, as the following estimates (in millions of persons) show:*

	1700	*1750*	*1800*	*1850*
England & Wales	5.8	6.5	9.0	17.9
Scotland	1.0	1.3	1.6	2.9
Ireland	2.7	3.1	5.0	6.5
Total	9.5	10.9	15.6	27.3

The sudden population leap after 1750 might have staggered a less vigorous economy, and it did entail profound misery and social dislocation. But from a purely economic point of view, it provided infant industries with two important advantages. First, it meant an expanding domestic market which was far more stable than the overseas market, itself subject to wild gyrations when disrupted by war or colonial revolt (as in North America during the 1770's and 1780's). In this respect, the growth of the British population backstopped foreign trade. Second, it meant cheap labor. With so many people in need of work, employers could be certain of attracting sufficient labor even though they kept wages hovering around the subsistence level. The glut on the labor market not only kept overhead low, it strengthened the industrialist's hand in other ways: he could, for example, dispense with workers who complained of wages or working conditions in full confidence that their place would be taken by men desperate for work under any circumstances.

One final contrast with present-day patterns demonstrates the unplanned character of British industrialization. It is a rule of thumb that underdeveloped nations must begin with heavy industry—metallurgy, which produces the steel for other machines, and energy, which produces the fuel (like petroleum) to power them. Once this foundation is firmly laid, then the elaboration of "light' consumer industry may follow. In Britain, the pattern was reversed. Technological innovation had penetrated deeply into textile production long before it began to reshape—indeed, to create—capital industry. Steam power was driving textile machinery years in advance of its use to power vehicles on land and sea. In a sense, heavy industry grew out of consumer industry, or rather out of its effects.

Industrial revolution was marked not only by technological innovations, but by new forms of enterprise to accommodate them. Cotton spinning had hitherto been conducted in small shops and, even more commonly, in the homes of rural families. A middleman would bring fibers

* Since the first British census was taken in 1801, the figures for earlier dates can only hope to convey an order of magnitude.

to be spun on the family reel, pick them up when finished, and take them to a home weaver. Mechanization rendered these procedures obsolescent (though not overnight); larger, more efficient machines were owned by entrepreneurs rather than by the producers themselves. The spinner now came to the machine, which could mean moving to the town in which it was located. He was often joined by other immigrants from the countryside in search of work—surplus agricultural laborers, small farmers who had been squeezed off the land by the expansion and rationalization of large aristocratic estates, or (in the early nineteenth century) refugees from Ireland, where overpopulation left little choice between immigration and starvation. Industrial boom towns sprouted like ugly, irrepressible weeds. In 1750, there were in all England but two cities counting over 50,000 persons; fifty years later, there were six more; by the middle of the nineteenth century, nearly one of three Britons lived in towns of 50,000 or more.

This incredible convulsion, initiated by textiles but reinforced by other urbanizing industries, set off a massive social crisis, several features of which receive attention below. For present purposes, its result was to create a massive demand for coal to heat urban dwellings and fuel their stoves. To supply this burgeoning market, it was not enough for the coal industry to explore the application of steam power to mining. It also had to get the mined coal to the towns faster. It was in this sense that—as Professor Hobsbawm has put it—coal mining "invented" the railroad. The railroad both synthesized the new technology (it carried coal, but also burned it to power its steam engine) and pushed it forward by necessitating the refinement and drastic enlargement of metallurgical industry. When the steel industry began to shift into high gear, around the middle of the nineteenth century, the British industrial revolution had completed its first, formative stage, and could prepare to move on into maturity.

Workers and the New Industry

From the strictly economic point of view, the British industrial revolution clearly signified progress: steam-powered machines in factories produced more goods cheaper and faster than ever before. But the industrial revolution had consequences far beyond the enhancement of the gross national product. From the broadly social point of view, it is a matter of debate whether industrialization brought progress (in the sense of improvement).

It is generally accepted that, over the long run, industrialization measurably improved the standard of living for the great mass of people: by the end of the nineteenth century, that convenient fiction, the average

British worker, ate better, was better clothed and sheltered, and was paid more for his labor than his counterpart at the end of the eighteenth century. But what of the short run? If one could graph social improvement beginning in the 1780's, would the result be a steadily ascending line? Or would there be meaningful irregularities—perhaps even, as some historians have argued, a noticeable decline in the standard of living from the beginning of the industrial revolution until around the middle of the nineteenth century? Did the first two or three generations of laborers in the industrial era pay with their sufferings for the improvements which their descendants enjoyed? For all the brainpower that has been applied to these questions, no conclusive answers have emerged.

Part of the difficulty is the absence of reliable data—particularly for the mid-eighteenth century—so that one cannot be confident whether later developments represent progress, decline, or no significant change at all. Moreover, the industrial revolution did not proceed evenly through all sectors of the economy and all regions of the country: laborers in some trades clearly suffered; others benefited from steadier work and perhaps even increased purchasing power; and still others went untouched by the new manufacturing. Handloom weavers undercut by factory competition were driven to economic extinction and starvation. Some home textile workers, however, who spun or wove cotton supplied them by a middleman, were able to embezzle enough raw material to set themselves up as modest entrepreneurs and turned a tidy profit, thanks to the booming demand.

Although most statistical generalizations for the period 1780–1850 are therefore liable to be suspect, it seems clear that in many of the new industries, at least, the workers' lot was not particularly enviable (though it was doubtless preferable to starvation if unemployment was the alternative). The hours were long, the wages were low, and the work often exhausting, even though humans did not power the machines. The new industrial boom towns were unequipped to absorb the new labor force: housing and sanitation conditions were usually wretched at their best, and the absence of any recreational facilities meant that workers had little to occupy their off-hours besides alcohol. Observers could not help being struck by the contrast between industrial progress and social misery; when the French political writer Alexis de Tocqueville visited Manchester—northern England's most prodigious industrial center—in 1835, he marveled that "From this foul drain the greatest stream of human industry flows out to fertilize the whole world. From this filthy sewer pure gold flows. Here humanity attains its most complete development and its most brutish; here civilization works its miracles, and civilized man is turned back almost into a savage."

Whether or not the industrial revolution improved the situation of

working people, it certainly *changed* it in some important ways—though in ways which do not always submit to precise measurement. Technological innovation had been a response to the need for more efficient production; the ethos of "more, and faster" had also to be imposed upon those who worked in the factory. Waste of time and motion meant a loss of advantage in the marketplace for the owner—the longer it took to produce something, then the more it cost him, and the greater the delay before the product could be sold. It had not always been so. Before the growing market stimulated mass production, the imperatives of efficiency were less stringent, and wages were often linked to the job to be done. A domestic spinner might be paid a certain wage to work a certain amount of cotton and have it ready when the middleman made his rounds a week hence; how many hours were spent on the work in the interim concerned no one, since the payment was a factor of the amount of cotton to be spun. An agricultural laborer might be paid a set sum to clear a small field; though whether it took him two days or three to finish was probably not a part of the transaction.

The industrial revolution not only hastened the economic rhythms; it demanded as well a new work-discipline, one which emphasized regularity and temporal thrift. To compete effectively, an industrialist had to produce as much as possible as quickly as possible. Workers were therefore paid by the day, or the week, and expected to keep pace with the tireless machines. Rest breaks, except for the midday meal, were largely unheard of; the worker who dared to take one on his own or otherwise idled about during working hours was subject to penalty—either by fine or by corporal punishment at the hands of factory overseers. With labor unions officially prohibited (prior to 1825) and in the absence (prior to 1833) of any legal restrictions upon employers, factory managers were free to demand a rigorous work discipline. Workers who failed, or refused, to internalize that discipline could be replaced from the oversupply of labor. Increasingly, industrial entrepreneurs turned to female and child labor, and not solely because women and children would work for lower wages than adult males; it was also widely supposed that they were more pliant and thus more readily adaptable to the new factory regimentation.

Even if it could be convincingly demonstrated that the factory workers' standard of living improved during the industrial revolution, the fact remains that the new work-discipline was a harsh and unpleasant regime. The transplanted agricultural worker was suddenly deprived not only of fresh air, but also of the more varied pace of work in the fields; whether or not he found factory employment more remunerative, he was likely to find it more strenuous. There may have been little to covet in the circumstances of a home cotton spinner, but at least within certain confines he set his own pace and was not assaulted for any irregularities in it.

Where pride in craftsmanship may have existed before, artisans whom mechanized competition drove into the mills now dealt with only one phase of production and were enjoined to concentrate on quantitative rather than qualitative goals. In sum, though it may well be mistaken to glamorize preindustrial labor—it could be mean, backbreaking, ill-compensated toil—it is just as mistaken to suppose that the transition to modernized industrial production was smooth and painless. The new industry had numerous enthusiasts who sang its praises as a superior productive mechanism; but few of them came from the working classes.

If, in fact, workers were better off in the first half of the nineteenth century than before, their gratitude was not conspicuous. To the contrary, the strikes, rioting, and machine breaking which greeted industrialization in several regions suggest that more than one worker failed to be moved by arguments regarding "progress." Machine breaking and violent agitation reached such proportions in parts of northern England during 1811–13 that the government actually dispatched more troops there than it had fighting Napoleon in Spain—the main theater of British infantry operations at the time. These disturbances were both attempts to apply pressure for higher wages and outright resistance to the new machines themselves, which would displace traditional manual labor. Moreover, machine breakers commanded surprisingly broad support from the local community. The reason was not that most people approved of disorder and condoned the destruction of property, but rather that industrialization itself was clearly a disruptive force, destroying the structure of the traditional economy and violating widely accepted practices.