

Conservative Order

The **Conservative Order** is the period in European political history after the defeat of Napoleon in 1815. From 1815 to 1830 a conscious program by conservative statesmen, including Metternich and Castlereagh, was put in place to contain revolution and revolutionary forces by restoring old orders, particularly previous ruling aristocracies. In South America, on the other hand and in light of the Monroe Doctrine this was a time in which the Spanish and Portuguese colonies gained independence.

Britain, Prussia, Russia and Austria renewed their commitment to prevent any restoration of Bonapartist power and agreed to meet regularly in conferences to discuss their common interests. This period contains the time of the Holy Alliance, which was a military agreement. The Concert of Europe was the political framework that grew out of the Quadruple Alliance in November 1815.

Congress of Vienna

In March 1814 the military coalition of Napoleon's four major opponents — Britain, Austria, Prussia, and Russia — had agreed to remain united not only to defeat France, but to ensure peace after the war. After Napoleon's defeat this alliance restored the Bourbon monarchy to France and agreed to meet in Vienna, Austria in September 1814 to arrange a settlement. This meeting would become to be known as the Congress of Vienna.

The goal of the conservatives at this meeting, led by Prince Klemens von Metternich of Austria, was said to be to reestablish peace and stability in Europe. To accomplish this, a new balance of power had to be established. The way in which Metternich and the other four represented states sought to do this was to restore old ruling families and create buffer zones between major powers. So, to contain the still powerful French the House of Orange-Nassau was put on the throne in the Netherlands, which formerly comprised the Dutch Republic and the Austrian Netherlands (Belgium). To the southeast of France, Piedmont (officially part of the kingdom of Sardinia) was enlarged. The Bourbon dynasty was restored to France and Spain as well as a return of other legitimate rulers to the Italian states. And, to contain the Russian empire, Poland was divided up between Austria, Prussia and Russia. Austria and Prussia were allowed to keep some of their Polish territory while a new, nominally independent Polish kingdom was established with the Romanov dynasty of Russia as its hereditary monarchs. Also the German Confederation was created to replace the Napoleonic Confederation of the Rhine.

During the Congress of Vienna, Napoleon had escaped from Elba and launched his unsuccessful 'Hundred Days'. This ultimately did not disrupt the meeting but as a punishment to the people of France for allowing Napoleon back in power they were forced to pay an indemnity, accept an army of occupation for five years and have France's borders returned to those of 1790. The European order put into action by the Congress of Vienna led to the avoidance of a general European conflict for nearly a century (1818-1914).

Ideology of conservatism

The Congress of Vienna was only the beginning of a conservative reaction bent on containing the liberal and nationalist forces unleashed by the French revolution. Metternich and most of the other participants at the Congress of Vienna were representatives of the ideology known as conservatism. Conservatism generally dates back to 1790 when the best-known figure of conservatism, Edmund Burke, wrote *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Burke, however, was not the only kind of conservative; Joseph de Maistre was a very influential spokesperson for a counterrevolutionary and authoritarian conservatism. De Maistre believed in hereditary monarchies because they would bring "order to society," a commodity in short supply in his eyes after the chaos of the French Revolution. Despite differences, most conservatives held to some general principles and beliefs, those being:

- Obedience to political authority
- The centrality of organized religion to social order
- Hatred of revolutionary upheavals
- Unwillingness to accept liberal demands for civil liberties and representative government and nationalistic aspirations generated by French revolutionary era.

- Precedence of community over individual rights
- Structured and ordered society
- Tradition as a guide for an ordered society

Many conservatives, such as Metternich, were not opposed to reforming governments, but said that such changes must be taken gradually, and that radical revolutions are not aimed at benefiting the masses, but rather are simply a power grab by the new middle-class.

After 1815, the political philosophy of conservatism was supported by hereditary monarchs, government bureaucracies, landowning aristocracies and revived churches (Protestant or Catholic). The conservative forces appeared dominant after 1815, both internationally and domestically

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