

Switzerland and Napoleon

Before 1798, Switzerland's social and political system was characterised by the domination of a ruling, aristocratic class that was not dissimilar to pre-revolutionary France. Following the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 (which granted Swiss independence from the Holy Roman Empire), most European powers began a process of **modernisation and centralisation** of the political system. This did not happen in Switzerland, in part because she did not feel the need to, but also because her independence was much appreciated by other European powers. Swiss cantons provided mercenary soldiers to other European powers until the 19th century and in return the cantons received significant wealth and a recognised neutrality that was in everyone's interest. So, despite deep internal divisions (notably between Catholic and Protestants), Switzerland gained a reputation for wealth and stability.

Causes of Revolution

Political Organization: Switzerland before the French Revolution was a set of largely feudal states dominated by powerful oligarchies drawn from regionally important families. In fact, from the 17th century political representation became increasingly narrow, as important political positions were passed on from father to son, which had not been the case in previous centuries. Gradually, over time, individual rights and popular political participation declined as increasingly powerful families became absolute rulers. Nor were all areas of the Old Swiss Confederacy equal. There were only 13 independent cantons, which along with Associate cantons, controlled vast areas of what would become modern-day Switzerland. For example, citizens of French speaking Vaud (which will play an important role in the 1798 revolution) had been under the control of German speaking Berne since the 16th century and its citizens enjoyed no political rights.

The impact of the Enlightenment: As in France, the political system in Switzerland came under increasing pressure for change throughout the 18th century, largely as a result of significant external forces. The Age of Enlightenment spread a range of new ideas about how society and government should work. Voltaire (who wrote *Candide* in Switzerland) and especially Geneva born Jean Jacques Rousseau, exercised considerable influence in Switzerland. Swiss society was becoming increasingly tolerant, executions for heresy and witchcraft stopped and the penal use of torture was increasingly criticised. The French *Encyclopédie* was published in Yverdon in the 1770s and Geneva, Lausanne and Neuchatel became important publishing centres that attracted intellectuals from all over Europe.

Industrialization: Switzerland became one of the first countries after Great Britain to be transformed by the Industrial Revolution at the end of the 18th century. Agricultural reforms, the increasing use of the potato and better hygiene, led to a significant population increase. The development of spinning and weaving, the 'putting-out' system and improved roads gradually encouraged the development of a capitalist market economy. Rural families moved beyond a dependency on subsistence farming and increasingly generated income independent of agriculture.

These cultural and economic forces made it increasingly difficult for the feudal oligarchies to resist reform and Switzerland became the scene of a string of attempted political revolutions throughout the 18th century.

For example, in March 1723 **Major Davel**, the commanding officer of the Lavaux region, marched on Lausanne and demanded an end to Bernese domination of Vaud and changes to how the deeply conservative Bernese church operated. He was beheaded. His death inspired later Vaudois 'patriots'.

In Geneva in 1762, the government ordered the burning of Rousseau's **Emile and Social Contract** because of their subversive content. As a result, a new opposition movement was created to prevent government from censoring books without discussion. Although new rights were won in the short-term, many opposition leaders were ultimately forced into exile.

Swiss National Identity: Franz Urs Balthasar's Patriotic Dreams inspired the creation in 1762 of the **Helvetic Society** which was to campaign for a unified Swiss state that would overcome the divisions between the cantons. The aims of the Society included a democratic reform of the Swiss constitution, and education for all, influenced by the ideas of Rousseau. The ideas behind the Helvetic Society will become increasingly important during and after the French Revolution which had an enormous influence on the future of the Swiss state.

The Impact of the French Revolution: Initially the Swiss Ancien Régime was able to contain the influence of the French Revolution. For example, the Vaudois peasantry, like the peasants in the later European revolutions of 1830 had no rebellious traditions and often supported the Berne government. The most important developments were led by Swiss exiled intellectuals, who for example, formed the Club Helvétique in Paris in 1790. One of the most influential of these was Frédéric-César de La Harpe a lawyer from Rolle. In Switzerland itself, the most significant support for the French Revolution was to be found in Vaud. Open-air political banquets were held to commemorate key events in the revolution. At Ouchy, Rolle and Vevey demonstrators waved the tricolour flag and wore revolutionary caps of liberty. They made toasts to the revolution and to Vaudois independence and petitioned the Berne government for tax cuts and political reform.

The response from Berne was typically counter-revolutionary. The government-imposed censorship and condemned La Harpe and his brother in their absence, but repression proved ineffective. Riots in Lausanne were followed later by clashes in Neuchatel and Geneva which appealed to France for support.

In 1794 a revolutionary constitution was established in Geneva the canton was annexed and become part of France by 1798. In 1793 there was a revolt against taxes at Gossau (St. Gallen) and in 1794 in Stäfa (Zurich) peasants asked for the restoration of old political rights, granted by documents dating back to 1489 and 1532, that had gradually been eroded in the previous two centuries.

When the French Revolution turned radical after 1792, (e.g. massacre of the Swiss Guards at the Tuileries palace in Paris) the conservative Swiss Confederacy broke with its traditional friendship with France and although it remained neutral in the European wars that followed, it readily welcomed fleeing French aristocrats and continued to resist domestic reform.

The French Invasion of 1789

In 1797 the French Directory staged a coup d'état in Paris. One of the leaders of the coup Reubell began discussions with La Harpe and Peter Ochs of Basel to consider the possibility of French intervention in Switzerland. France was interested in resources and access to Italy, La Harpe and Ochs were interested in implementing the political reforms of the Club Helvétique. In the end, the French invasion and the collapse of the Ancien Régime was quick and relatively bloodless. On 9 December 1797, Frédéric-César de La Harpe, asked France to invade Bern to protect Vaud. By February 1798, French troops occupied Mulhouse and Biel/Bienne. In Basel, 'patriots' drew up a new constitution and set up a first Swiss national assembly.

In Vaud, patriots seized Château Chillon and the Lemanic Republic was proclaimed. All over Switzerland thousands of liberty trees, often crowned with a 'Tell Cap', (See Basel opposite) were erected as symbols of support for the revolution. Importantly, all of these steps were supported by French troops. Throughout Switzerland revolutions and revolts toppled the governments of the Ancien Régime and abolished feudalism. The Confederation Diet broke up deeply divided and without taking any steps to prevent the French invasion. On 5 March, French troops entered Berne and the Confederation collapsed. By April the whole of the country was under French occupation.

Back in late 1797, it had been the young French general Napoleon Bonaparte who had pressed the French Directory to occupy Switzerland.

Napoleon: Rise to Power

Napoleon was born on the island of Corsica in 1769. He was the second of eight children. Just a year earlier, the king of France had bought the island from its Italian owners, so Napoleon was born French while his parents were Italian. At the age of nine, Napoleon was sent to school in France. He spent the next seven years in military schools, leaving at sixteen as a lieutenant in the French army. Four years later the Revolution began. As the army grew in size during the Revolutionary war, Napoleon gained rapid promotion.

The Siege of Toulon 1793: Bonaparte was appointed artillery commander of the republican forces at the Siege of Toulon. He adopted a plan to capture a hill where republican guns could dominate the city's harbour and force the British to evacuate. The assault on the position led to the capture of the city, but during it Bonaparte was wounded in the thigh. He was promoted to brigadier general at the age of 24.

13 Vendémiaire - Bonaparte crushes a rebellion – 1795: The death of Robespierre did not bring peace to France. There was much fighting on the streets of Paris between revolutionaries and royalists (supporters of the executed King). Elsewhere in France, many people who had sympathised with Robespierre were attacked and in some cases killed. Royalists began to emerge from hiding. France seemed more divided than ever. On 12th Vendémiaire, Year 4 (5 October 1795 by the pre-revolutionary calendar), royalists tried to seize power in Paris and stop the Revolution. Bonaparte used his guns to smash the rebellion. Bonaparte had started to make a name for himself.

The Italian Campaign – 1796: When the Directors took power in 1795, they continued the Revolutionary war against the Coalition. The French armies by this time were very large, and they quickly conquered Holland and Belgium. Their next targets were the states of northern Italy. This gave Napoleon his next promotion. In 1796 he was made commander of the Army of Italy, with orders to attack Austrian forces in northern Italy. Over the next eighteen months, Napoleon led his armies in a series of brilliant victories over the Austrians in Italy. By October 1797 all of northern Italy was under French control, and Napoleon was France's most famous general.

Napoleon in Egypt 1798: Following his success in Italy, the Directors put Napoleon in command of an 'Army of the East' with orders were to attack Britain's trade and colonies in the Far East. Napoleon quickly defeated the Egyptians at the Battle of the Pyramids in July 1798, but he never got to India. Only a week after the battle, the ships which had brought his army to Egypt were sunk by the British Royal Navy at Aboukir Bay, stranding them in Egypt. They could not advance to India, nor could they return to France. Napoleon and his army were marooned in the Middle East for a whole year. In addition, France's enemies had formed a Second Coalition and had driven them out of Italy and central Europe.

The 18th Brumaire - Napoleon seizes power – 1799: The government of the Directory had become very unpopular. One of the Directors Emmanuel Sieyès was planning a coup d'état to replace the government. He turned to Napoleon and Napoleon's brother Lucien (who was president of the lower house of parliament) to help. As well as popularity with the public, Napoleon also brought the support of the army that would be essential to a coup. On 9 November 1799, (18th Brumaire according to the republican calendar) they took action. They made up a story that rebels were about to capture Paris, and asked the legislature (Council of Ancients and the Council of Five Hundred) to take emergency action. The Councils did as they were asked and made Napoleon commander of all the troops in the Paris district. Napoleon requested that the Councils leave Paris for a safer meeting place in nearby Saint-Cloud. Soldiers then forced the other three Directors to resign.

The next day, Napoleon went to the Councils to ask them to change the government. By this time, however, they had discovered that the story about rebels was a lie. They immediately took an oath to defend the Directory. When Napoleon appeared before them, they shouted at him, pushed him

around and tried to declare him an outlaw. According to the Council's own records, angry deputies tried to kill him: Some of the deputies shouted out 'kill! kill!' They rushed forward trying to grab him, some armed with pistols and knives. The soldiers rushed in and shielded Napoleon from the killers with their bodies. Napoleon's brother Lucien played a critical role in persuading both the Deputies and the soldiers of Napoleon's honest intent.

Most of the deputies fled when they saw the soldiers, many jumping from the windows. A handful who stayed voted to give Napoleon and two of the other plotters the power to run the country until a new type of government could be formed.

The Consulate - Napoleon the ruler: It took only a month to create a new government. France was to be governed by three Consuls, with only the First Consul having the power to make decisions. The other two Consuls were to advise him. Napoleon took the post of First Consul and thus became the head of the government. France's 9 million voters were then given the chance to show by voting whether or not they liked this new government. 3 million voted in favour and only 1,500 against. Although 6 million did not bother to vote, Napoleon said that the result showed that the people supported him. The constitution preserved the appearance of a republic but in reality established a dictatorship.

Now that he was in power, Napoleon set about reforming France. Some of what he did was a change from the revolutionary era, some was a continuation. Whilst there was no complete return to the pre-revolutionary era, there were some signs of reactionary policies which harked back to the ancien regime. And it must be remembered throughout that in reforming France his intention was always to strengthen his position.

Napoleon's Reforms

The Concordat and the Catholic Church: As we have seen, during the Terror, churches had been closed and France was 'de-christianised'. Millions of loyal Catholics hated this. Napoleon had to end this religious conflict if his new government was to last. He began by dropping the ten-day week of the Revolutionary Calendar and allowed people to take Sundays off. He told rebel leaders that he would deal with their religious complaints. Most important of all, in 1801 he signed an agreement with the Pope called the Concordat. In the Concordat, Napoleon agreed to allow Catholics to worship freely again. In return, the Pope allowed Napoleon to appoint all the bishops in France and agreed that all priests should take an oath of loyalty to Napoleon. As a result of the Concordat, priests were able to come out of hiding and churches re-opened. It gave Napoleon the support of millions of Catholics who had spent the last ten years hating the revolution.

Education: In 1802 he began a reform of the country's schools. The education system was reorganised in France, giving more boys an opportunity to learn. The main change was the creation of a new kind of secondary school, the lycée which was not controlled by the Church. Living under strict military discipline, pupils at these high schools studied a curriculum drawn up by the government which aimed to produce skilled administrators and soldiers. On leaving, they took an examination called the Baccalaureate for entrance to university. All teachers were to be properly trained and paid for by the state.

Law: Perhaps his greatest achievement was a reform of the French law into seven books called codes. He began in 1804 with a Code of Civil Law called the Code Napoléon. Codes of criminal and commercial law were added over the next five years. These codes simplified the very complex laws that had existed for centuries. They also made into law some of the things that revolutionaries had demanded in 1789. Individual rights, freedom of belief, and equality before the law were all included in the codes. When Napoleon established a European empire in the years that followed, the fundamental rights enshrined in the Code Napoléon would transform every country France controlled.

Politics: By 1802, Napoleon had made peace with Europe and ended the religious conflict at home. A grateful Senate increased his powers, raised his pay, and made him 'Consul-for-Life'. Voters were asked to show what they thought of this. 3-5- million voted in favour, only 8,000 against. The government of France was organised under a new prefect system. A prefect was a government official. One prefect was appointed to each of the 83 departments (regions) of France to run the area and make sure that the government's commands were obeyed.

1804 – Emperor: In 1804 Napoleon increased his power still further by making himself Emperor. Again, voters showed their support with a massive vote of approval. France thus became an empire after twelve years of being a republic. As Emperor, Napoleon brought back some of the things that had been abolished during the Revolution. For example, he insisted on being crowned in a coronation ceremony like that of the old French kings. Next, Napoleon brought back noble titles for members of his family. For example, his brothers Joseph and Louis became Grand Elector and Grand Constable of the Empire. Later, in 1808, he created an Imperial Nobility consisting of princes, dukes, counts, barons, and knights. Nobles had to be very rich if they wanted to pass their titles on to their children: a prince, for example, had to leave his son an income of 200,000 francs a year to keep the title in the family. Unlike nobles before 1789, however, Napoleon's nobles had no privileges.

The Helvetic Republic 1798-1803

121 representatives of the territories Aargau, Basel, Berne, Fribourg, Léman (Vaud), Lucerne, Oberland, Schaffhausen, Solothurn and Zurich met in Aarau on April 12th, 1798, to proclaim the Helvetic Republic and confirm its new constitution. The new régime abolished cantonal sovereignty and feudal rights. In its place, the French occupying forces established a centralised state based on the ideas of the French Revolution, a new tricolour flag and an official seal (with William Tell and a liberty tree). The new constitution was not so much a democratic experiment, but an attempt to make French control easier. The Helvetic Republic faced opposition from the very beginning from supporters of the Ancien Régime, Catholics who resented the revolutionary anti-religious (secular) policies and the cantons who had lost power.

Resistance spread when new taxes were imposed, and French soldiers exploited the territory they occupied. And then in February 1799 Switzerland became the battle ground as France launched the War of the Second Coalition against Austria and Russia. Swiss soldiers were called up to fight for France, Swiss land and property was requisitioned and Switzerland was officially stripped of its neutral status.

The war severely weakened the Helvetic Republic. Its attempts to introduce radical reforms, to abolish tithes and feudal dues, lacked the resources to make it possible. And the leadership became increasingly divided. Firstly, La Harpe forced out Ochsen and then La Harpe in turn was forced into exile after a failed attempted coup. Instability in the Republic reached its peak in 1802–03. When the French soldiers left Switzerland in 1802, Napoleon had confiscated all weapons to prevent the Swiss from fighting back. But federalist rebels from the cantons of Bern and Zurich launched an assault on the forces of the Helvetic Republic with wooden clubs, earning the brief war the name Stecklikrieg, or 'war of sticks'.

A solution to the problem was finally forced on the Swiss by Napoleon who was by 1803 convinced that Switzerland was federal 'by nature'. He imposed a ceasefire between the conservative Federalists and radical Unitarians and then a new constitution which was called the Act of Mediation.

The Helvetic Republic had failed, but it had given Switzerland unity, national symbols, institutions and citizenship for the very first time. Importantly for places like Vaud, it had also expanded the number of independent cantons.

Swiss Confederation 1803-1815

The Swiss Confederation was re-established as a result of the Act of Mediation issued by Napoleon Bonaparte on 19 February 1803. It restored the 13 former cantons and added 6 more. There was also a Federal Diet. It was very much a compromise.

There was no return to absolute rulers from before 1798, popular assemblies were restored and there were to be no privileged classes. But former rulers did return and most importantly, Switzerland remained a protectorate of France, bound by a military alliance and a requirement to provide soldiers for the French army. The mediation period of the Swiss Confederation was a big improvement on the instability and war that had characterised the Helvetic Republic. Napoleon's Continental System cut off British exports of textiles and encouraged the development of a domestic Swiss industrial capitalism. Agriculture modernised and the Mediation governments encouraged public works. New national Swiss institutions were encouraged such as the Helvetic Society of 1807 and the Swiss folk games in Interlaken in 1805, which featured wrestling and yodelling. For the first time, Swiss patriotic identity extended beyond the educated elite.

But Switzerland was never fully independent at this time. 30,000 Swiss served in Napoleon's Grand Army; some marines even served at Trafalgar. In 1806 the principality of Neuchâtel was given to Marshal Berthier. Ticino was occupied by French troops from 1810 to 1813. Also, in 1810 Valais was occupied and converted into the French department of the Simplon to secure the Simplon Pass. Napoleon regularly considered annexing the whole country, but as long as he ruled, the divisions between conservative federalists who wanted to restore the Ancien Régime and radicals who wanted to preserve their revolutionary gains, remained contained. As soon as Napoleon was weakened civil war threatened once again.




Napoleon's Europe

The peace that Napoleon made in 1802 did not last. Britain, Russia and Austria formed another Coalition in 1805 and restarted their war against France. Napoleon's armies won that war and conquered half of Europe in the process. In the lands that they took, the French made great changes to the way they were organised and run. Napoleon defeated the Coalition's armies in a series of battles in central Europe. In 1805 he smashed the Austrian armies at Ulm and Austerlitz. When the Prussians joined the Coalition in 1806, he defeated them in the battles of Jena and Auerstadt. In 1807 he beat the Russians in the battles of Eylau and Friedland. With three major enemies beaten, there was nothing to stop Napoleon enlarging his empire.

In 1807 he made the Italian states of Tuscany and Parma into French provinces. In 1809 he took the Illyrian Provinces and the Papal States. And in 1810 he added Holland and north-east Germany to the empire. As well as enlarging the French empire, Napoleon made changes to the countries which shared a border with it. In 1808, for example, he occupied much of Spain. In central Europe, he forced the rulers of many small German states to join their lands together. This reduced the number of German states from 300 to thirty. Then, in 1806 he brought the leading German rulers together in a union called the Confederation of the Rhine, with himself as their leader. As in Switzerland, Napoleon's actions in the German and Italian states would be critically important to the creation of sense of national identity in these regions and the future creation new national states.

Unwilling to trust others to govern his empire, he made his brothers Kings of Holland, Westphalia, and Spain. His stepson became Viceroy of Italy and his brother-in-law King of Naples. His sisters were given the smaller Italian states to rule. The Bonaparte family made many changes to the states they ruled. They reformed laws that were out of date and replaced them with the Code Napoleon, he got rid of feudal rights, took away land from the Church, and modernised the way their states were governed. In this way, French revolutionary ideas about how to organise and run countries spread to many parts of Europe.

Napoleon's Europe: 1810

-  The French Empire, ruled by Napoleon
-  States ruled by the Bonaparte family or by supporters of Napoleon
-  Confederation of the Rhine

-  Allies of France
-  Independent states

0 250 500 750 1,000km



Kingdom of Holland
 Ruled by Napoleon's brother Louis Bonaparte from 1806 to 1810.
 He:
 • introduced a new, fairer code of criminal law
 • helped farmers
 • set up a Science Academy and a Royal Library.
 (In 1810 Napoleon took personal control of Holland after making it part of the French Empire.)

Grand Duchy of Berg
 Ruled by Napoleon's brother-in-law Joachim Murat from 1806 to 1808, then by Napoleon and his nephew Louis from 1808 to 1814.
 They:
 • ended feudal rights and dues
 • got rid of serfdom
 • introduced the *Code Napoléon*
 • reduced the power of the Church
 • gave equal rights to Jews
 • gave citizens equal rights.

Principality of Lucena
 Ruled by Napoleon's sister Elisa Bonaparte from 1805 to 1814.
 She:
 • modernised industry
 • helped artists, writers and sculptors.

Kingdom of Spain
 Ruled by Napoleon's brother Joseph Bonaparte from 1808 to 1813.
 He:
 • ended feudalism
 • abolished nobles' privileges
 • closed many monasteries and abolished the Inquisition
 • introduced a constitution allowing an elected parliament and giving people equal rights
 • organised a new system of Law Courts
 • divided Spain into regions run by Prefects.

Kingdom of Westphalia
 Ruled by Napoleon's brother Jerome Bonaparte from 1807 to 1813. He:
 • introduced a constitution giving people equal rights and freedom of religious belief
 • abolished privileges
 • abolished serfdom
 • introduced the *Code Napoléon*
 • improved trade.

Principality of Guastalla
 Ruled by Napoleon's sister Pauline Bonaparte from 1806 to 1814. She did not live there until 1810 and did little to change it.

Kingdom of Italy
 Ruled by Eugene Buonaparte.
 Napoleon's stepson, from 1806 to 1814.
 He:
 • ended feudalism
 • reduced the power of the Church
 • took land from the monasteries
 • introduced a constitution giving people rights and allowing an elected parliament
 • introduced the *Code Napoléon*
 • divided Italy into regions run by Prefects
 • built new roads and canals
 • improved schools and built new ones
 • helped artists, writers and musicians.

Kingdom of Naples
 Ruled by Joseph Bonaparte from 1806 to 1808, then by Joachim Murat and his wife Caroline Bonaparte from 1808 to 1815. They:
 • ended feudalism
 • reduced the power of the Church
 • took land from monasteries
 • introduced a constitution giving people rights
 • introduced the *Code Napoléon* and French-style law courts
 • improved schools and colleges
 • gave help to farmers.