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THE NATURE OF FRENCH LIBERALISM DURING THE RESTORATION

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Each generation of liberals is called upon to re-define the nature of liberalism, because the cluster of ideas that express it constitute less a systematic philosophy than a temperament, an outlook, a "climate of opinion". The liberals of the Restoration were living in a period of uneasy transition from the revolutionary quarter century to the period supremacy of middle-class liberalism which began with the Revolution of 1830. During the Restoration era this middle-class liberalism had existed and was the legatee of the 18th century Enlightenment and of the principles of the Revolution of 1789-91. With the defeat of Napoleon, under whom the middle class had exchanged their political liberties for the security of person and property, this class expressed a preference for a political system that would guarantee political liberty at the same time that it would ensure stability and protect the social and economic gains made during the previous twenty-five years.

In 1814 this middle-class liberalism with its concern for political liberty was conditioned by its fear of the returning émigrés, and among many Liberals also by fear of the Bourbons. This fear obstructed the vision of many Liberals during the Hundred Days, and their behaviour during that fateful period was to be one of the most basic factors in determining the orientation of liberalism in the following years. The Hundred Days and the White Terror that followed were constantly re-examined during the Restoration as was the Revolution and the Enlightenment. The Ultra-Royalists and the Liberals were both prisoners of recent history which they saw as the determining factor in current politics.

The Right became increasingly bitter during the three years that began with the dissolution in September, 1816 of the Chamber of Deputies which they controlled, the *Chambre Introuvable*. They despised the conciliatory policy of Louis XVIII and blamed it for the re-emergence of liberalism. On the other hand, the liberals of all shades united in a common front against the reaction that began with the murder of the Duke de Berri in February, 1820. They saw repression at home as another aspect of a Europe-wide conspiracy against liberty that had begun with Metternich's Carlsbad Decrees.

1820 was the turning of the tide against liberalism in France. Liberals had made considerable gains in the partial renewals of the Chamber in 1817 (7 seats), 1818 (20 seats), 1819 (39 seats) and these gains had frightened both the King and the Right. Even before the

murder of the Duke de Berri, the government had determined to change the election law of 1817 which granted the franchise to about 90,000 wealthy property owners out of about 30 million people, and which the Liberals defended as the palladium of their liberty. The change was now hastened by the crime, and thereafter the fortunes of the Liberals began to decline. Liberal hopes aroused by the revolutions in Italy and in Spain in 1820 were shattered by the Austrian intervention in Italy and by the French invasion of Spain in 1823. The general elections of the following year practically annihilated the Liberals. This nadir of liberalism coincided with the death of the moderate Louis XVIII, but the very magnitude of the Right's victory, and the accession to the front by their leader, Charles X, led them to extreme counter-revolutionary measures that divided the Right itself (since the Ultras could not be appeased) and evoked new opposition from the Left. The changed temper of liberalism can be seen in *Le Globe* (1824), the voice of young liberals who rejected the tired shibboleths of the 18th century and became the champions both of Liberty and Romanticism. The Liberal press prior to the twenties had always viewed Romanticism with disdain, apparently equating the acceptance of Romanticism with the rejection of the 18th century political philosophy as well as its literary form. By 1827 Victor Hugo had become a liberal and was defining Romanticism as Liberalism in literature. In 1830 Thiers was to young Liberals what that venerable symbol of liberty, Lafayette, was to the old — an irreconcilable symbol of opposition to the Bourbons. Restoration Liberalism achieved its goal when in the Revolution of 1830 Charles X by the Grace of God was replaced by Louis Philippe, King of the French by the Will of the People. As Lafayette put it, a popular throne surrounded by republican institutions.

Throughout the Restoration period, the Liberals, as children of the Enlightenment, espoused a fierce anti-clericalism and waged a relentless war against the church in general and the Jesuits — their *bêtes noires* — in particular. Since they could not attack the Bourbons directly, they sought to undermine the monarchy's supporters. And to achieve their end, all means were considered justified.

Who were the Liberals? A distinction must be made between liberals, i.e. liberal-minded people, and the Liberals who became known as such in 1819 and who until then had been known as Independents but whom the Right also called "Revolutionaries", "Jacobins", "Democrats", "Ultra-Liberals" and "Disciples of Bonaparte". Among the liberals would be included all those who accepted the Revolution and now supported the *status quo*. They were men who had welcomed the return of the Bourbons, had remained loyal to them during the Hundred Days and were to constitute or obediently support the various moderate ministries. They made up the Centre, the Right Centre and included the handful of Doctrinaires who were their intellectual leaders. In fact, the liberals

were the true conservatives who wished to implement Louis XVIII's desire, as he put it, to royalize the nation and nationalize the monarchy. In 1820 most of the liberals reluctantly made common cause with the Liberals who led the attack on the Ultras and, aided by Charles X's incompetence, brought down the Bourbons.

Though never a monolithic group, the Liberals organized themselves into a rudimentary party with a Comité Directeur that acted as a steering committee, some of whose members were later to lead the abortive military conspiracies of 1821 and 1822. In the 258 seats Chamber of Deputies, the Liberals never had more than about 75 members of whom only a dozen actively participated in the debates. But their determination and obstreperousness gave their cause eloquent and effective representation. The flag of the movement was Lafayette, the "Courageous Athlete of Liberty",¹ the symbol of the principles of 1789 of which he was a valiant but not brilliant exponent. Never a mature political thinker or effective leader, he spent a great deal of time reliving his years of past glory. In fact it may be said of him that he too had learned nothing and forgotten nothing. Yet, throughout these years he was a magnet that attracted to him anyone involved in the struggle for Liberty. While Liberty deserved a more effective representative than Lafayette, it did find a brilliant exponent in Benjamin Constant, the indefatigable and gifted writer who in pamphlets and in speeches preached liberal constitutionalism. The best orators were Jacques Manuel and General Foy. Manuel was most adept at vitriolic denunciation of the Right, and his pathological anti-Bourbonism finally led to his expulsion from the Chamber in 1823. General Foy had never been an admirer of Napoleon, but had welcomed his return from Elba because the Bourbons had disillusioned him. In the Chamber his passionate eloquence mingled with hatred for the aristocracy made him an ardent defender of the Army and of the national glory. The defence of the Army was also taken up by other Generals such as Sebastiani and Grenier. Less eloquent but no less prominent were the former jurist Dupont de L'Éure, the former diplomat Louis Bignon and the Marquis de Chauvelin, the aristocrat who had joined the Revolution in 1789 and who until 1792 had been French Ambassador to England. Of special importance, too, were the Parisian bankers such as Jacques Lafitte, Casimir Perier and Benjamin Delessert. The radical member of the group was the wealthy industrialist, Voyer d'Argenson, Lafayette's aide-de-camp in 1789. During the July monarchy he and Lafayette found the political climate uncongenial and he became a socialist. The Restoration Liberals had sided with the Revolution in 1789, many had filled key administrative posts under Napoleon, they had accepted the return of the Bourbons with various degrees of reluctance, but they had all turned to Napoleon during the Hundred Days. Thus, Liberals represented bourgeois liberalism with military overtones.

¹ *Bibliothèque Historique*, IV (1818), p. 200.

This liberalism found even greater expression in the Liberal press, the most vigorous and the most popular of the Restoration. During the two years (1818-1820) when France enjoyed a degree of press freedom, the Liberals could boast of the *Minerve Française*, the *Bibliothèque Historique*, the *Indépendant*, the *Renommé*, as well as the *Constitutionnel*, the only Liberal paper, a daily, that managed to survive the rigorous press regulations introduced in 1820. In 1826 there were 43,000 subscribers to Liberal papers and only 14,000 to papers supporting the government. All these papers dedicated themselves to the proposition that the Aristocracy and the Church were again returning to the position of prominence which they had enjoyed before the Revolution. None of the writers for these papers had a reputation of steadfast and vocal loyalty to the Bourbons, and in varying degree the Liberal press had a strong Bonapartist undercurrent, especially the *Bibliothèque Historique* and the *Indépendant*.

In the press and in parliament the Liberals championed the freedom of the individual and of the press against every encroachment by the government. The focus of political struggle was the Charter — Louis XVIII's effort to reconcile the liberal middle-class gains of the Revolution with the claims of the old monarchy. The ambiguity of much of the Charter made it a potential basis for several divergent lines of development under the new regime. At a time when the country was experimenting with the first serious effort at representative government, and few understood the workings of the parliamentary system, the Liberals wanted to give the Charter a liberal interpretation so that, instead of tempered absolutism, France would get a constitutionally limited monarchy. The Right, to whom the whole parliamentary system of constitutional monarchy was an unhappy legacy of the Revolution, were anxious to limit its scope. The Liberals praised the constitution of 1791 and argued that the Revolution had ended in that year, because what followed had been a perversion and not the necessary outcome of the principles of 1789. The Right, of course, saw the 1789-1815 period as a block. Just as the Revolution was the result of the Enlightenment so, too, the Terror was a necessary consequence of the principles of 1789 and Napoleon the logical outcome of the Revolutionary chaos. The Liberals identified the Ultras with the Ancien Régime, the Ultras identified them with the Terror and Bonapartism and ridiculed Liberal efforts to equate the Terror with the White Terror of 1815.

If one of the themes of Restoration Liberalism was the defence of the 1789-91 Revolution, the other was the pre-occupation with an 1688 English type of contractual monarchy. Many of the acrimonious parliamentary debates after 1820 centered on whether the Charter was, as Louis XVIII had said, freely granted by him, or, as the Liberals maintained, imposed on him in an implied, if not explicit, contract. The first indication of Restoration liberalism can be seen in the futile effort of

the Provisional Government and of the Imperial Senate in April, 1814 to impose a constitution of their making on the returning Bourbons. The constitution² stated that the people of France were "freely and without restraint" calling the future Louis XVIII to the throne of France, that the constitution would be submitted to the "will of the people of France", and only after they had accepted and Louis had sworn to do the same would he be crowned. Louis refused to accept any terms but issued a declaration at Saint Ouen on May 2nd in which he promised a constitution and also made other promises whereby he showed that he had reconciled himself to the fact that France had undergone considerable changes since 1789. But the King's dating of the Declaration "from the 19th year" of his reign and his emphasis, the following month, that the Charter that he was then giving was freely granted by him aroused disdain among those prepared to distrust the Bourbons.

In the beginning of the Hundred Days, as if to counteract Louis' repeated profession of liberalism and constitutionalism made in the Chamber of Deputies when news of Napoleon's landing had reached Paris, Napoleon, too, now voiced the language of constitutional monarchy, of liberalism, and posed as the son of the Revolution who had come back to protect its achievements against the émigrés. He persuaded Benjamin Constant, the leading theoretician of liberalism and a bitter opponent of Napoleon since 1800, to draw up a constitution. Even Lafayette, who had always opposed Napoleon, now rallied to him. Nearly all those who were to be leading Liberals during the Restoration now saw Napoleon as the lesser of the two evils and apparently were willing to go through the motions of convincing themselves that he could be masked under the guise of constitutional monarch. Napoleon presented the anti-Bourbon Liberals with a dilemma. If victorious, he would again be Bonaparte, if defeated France would be humiliated and they would be compromised. Waterloo rescued the Liberals from the absurd illusion of totalitarian liberalism. Amidst the confusion following the defeat at Waterloo the Chamber of Representatives elected during the Hundred Days spent many hours discussing the principles of a liberal constitution³ which it issued before the Allies re-entered Paris. These principles represented demands to be reiterated throughout the Restoration by the Liberals. It was essentially a re-statement of the Constitution of 1791. The last article re-affirmed the belief in the contract theory of government.

The first reference to 1688 in the Chamber of Deputies was made in 1817 by Lafitte in the course of the budget debate, when he declared that England owed her wealth and liberty from the "memorable moment when William of Orange received the crown in exchange for the guarantee

² Léon Duguit et Henri Monnier, *Les constitutions et les principales lois politiques de la France depuis 1789* (2nd ed., Paris, Librairie générale de droit et de jurisprudence, 1908), pp. 179-82.

³ Duguit et Monnier, pp. 198-99.

that he was giving on behalf of liberty".⁴ The comment caused an uproar in the chamber and the Duc de Richelieu asked him to make a public explanation of his remarks. At this time also Augustin Thierry, the young historian friend of Lafayette, was publishing in the *Censeur* his studies of the English revolutions of the 17th century.⁵ Madame de Staël, whose *Considérations* published the following year was to set the pattern of liberal interpretation of the Revolution, was now reported as saying that France was witnessing the recapitulation of English history. While she felt that Louis XVIII would die on the Throne, "surely", she asked, "you don't think his brother will succeed him? He will meet the fate of James II".⁶

The Liberals' concern with the outcome of the English Restoration betrayed their desire for a similar event in France with the Duc d'Orléans playing the role of William of Orange. This pre-occupation was noted by the Right and the *Conservateur* (1818-20), brilliantly edited by Chateaubriand, de Bonald, de Maistre, and Lammenais, spoke of the Liberals' dream of overthrowing the existing dynasty. A writer in that journal argued that there was no similarity between France and England, between the "principles of our Liberals" and those of the Whigs of 1688. The Whigs were a poor example to follow since they had succeeded only in disturbing James I, in executing Charles I, wearing out Charles II and in excluding James II, "all in a pathetic effort to pursue the 'phantom of liberty'".⁷

When the reaction of 1820 began the Liberals took refuge in the Charter which now became the palladium of Liberalism. "The Revolution of 1789 is the Charter; that is to say, the Charter is 1789 . . . All that we demanded in 1789 is found in the Charter."⁸ A proclamation circulated among some regiments at the time of the conspiracies of 1822 declared that a constitution should be "a contract between the people and the state".⁹

In the Chamber Manuel asserted that Louis XVIII had received his royal authority not from his ancestors but "from the Empire which had received it from the Revolution". The King had returned with the Declaration of Saint Ouen in hand and the Declaration "was the condition under whose terms France placed itself again under the rule of the Bourbons". Their arrival was seen "with repugnance" by the people and hence only

⁴ *Archives parlementaires* (2nd series), XVIII, p. 691.

⁵ Augustin Thierry, "Vues des révolutions d'Angleterre", *Censeur*, IV (1817), p. 1-73, V, 1-80.

⁶ Comte Molé, *Le comte Molé, 1781-1855, sa vie, ses mémoires* (6 vols., Paris, Ed. Champion, 1923), II, p. 388.

⁷ *Conservateur* (Oct., 1819), pp. 116-25.

⁸ *Indépendant*, Dec. 26, 1819.

⁹ A. Calmette, "Les carbonari en France sous la Restauration (1821-1830)", *La révolution de 1848*, X (1913-1914), p. 52.

after the Declaration were they re-accepted.¹⁰ By 1822 the Liberals spoke of the Charter as superior to the King himself. Only a constitutional convention representing the "nation" could revise it.¹¹ At this time also Bignon reminded the Chamber that the Liberals wished to surround the King with all the laws that guaranteed "the constitutional legitimacy" of the British royalty, while the Ultras wanted him to have "the divine legitimacy of the Stuarts".¹² He spoke of the "distressing analogy" between the state of France after 1820 and that of England in the years immediately preceding 1688. Benjamin Constant also presented an elaborate argument to prove that in England the Stuarts had been overthrown because after their restoration in 1660 they had proceeded to organize a counterrevolution. The suggestive analogy between the Stuarts and the Bourbons became increasingly important during Charles X's reign. In 1827 Armand Carrel in his book¹³ compared the events that had taken place in England during the Restoration period with those that had been happening in France since 1815, and in 1830 the *National* which he and Thiers founded was a frankly anti-Bourbon Journal dedicated to the advocacy of a French equivalent of 1688. Charles X was finally brought down with the slogan that the king reigns but does not rule.

Another aspect of Liberalism was its association with Bonapartism. The Right used Liberalism and Bonapartism as interchangeable terms and, though the Liberals had not conspired to bring about the return of Napoleon in 1815, their behaviour during the Hundred Days left them open to such accusations. It was not till the partial elections of 1818 and especially those of 1819 that many former officers entered the Chamber and joined the ranks of the Liberals. In the Chamber the Liberals made one of their main concerns the return of the officers banished after Waterloo. When the moderate Decazes-Dessoles ministry refused to allow the return of the regicides, the Liberals both in the Chamber and in the press used this incident as an excuse to refuse their support of this moderate ministry and made common cause with the Ultras to destroy it. The press even more than the deputies gave voice to the Bonapartist undercurrent of Liberalism. It carried the songs of Beranger, the famous and popular song-writer of the Liberal and Bonapartist opposition, songs about old Sergeants, old flags, heroic deeds, and especially of sorrow for the exiles. Every paper enumerated the military anniversaries for the day, and for every date noted in the period preceding 1789, there were as many as ten in the revolutionary and Napoleonic period and especially in the Napoleonic period. The press' lukewarm reception given to Madame de Staël's *Considérations* in 1818

¹⁰ *Archives parlementaires*, XXXIV (1822), p. 296.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 163.

¹³ Armand Carrel, *Histoire de la contre-révolution en Angleterre sous Charles II et Jacques II* (Paris, A. Sautet et Cie, 1827).

can be attributed to her scathing condemnation of Napoleon. She warned the Liberals "not to confound the principles of the Revolution with those of the Imperial government".¹⁴

Before Napoleon's death in 1821 most Liberals had neither rejected nor made use of Bonapartism which was strongest among the mass of the people and among the remnants of the old army. The Liberals' ambivalence was noted by General Lamarque who complained that too many Liberals had little understanding of the hold which memories of Napoleon still had over the mass of the people. "Brilliant theories, reasoned arguments and sophisticated epigrams are understood only by a few people."¹⁵ News of Napoleon's death made the "martyr" of St. Helena even more popular, and now that the Liberals no longer had to fear his return, they expected to recruit more followers. Even Lafayette, who had expressed concern over Bonapartism, was relieved by the news because he foresaw that "many Bonapartists" would now "attach themselves to the patriotic party", as he called the Liberal party.¹⁶ Bonapartism ceased to be a significant force within the Liberal party with the failure of the conspiracies of 1821-22 and, above all, with the success of the French army in the invasion of Spain in 1823.

In the realm of international relations the Liberals saw Europe divided between the forces of Liberty and those of Reaction. The various ministries were to them the acolytes of European reaction of which the Holy Alliance was the patron saint. Before 1818 the Liberals made little reference to foreign policy, but with the evacuation of France and the Carlsbad Decrees of the following year, the Liberals took every opportunity to attack the Holy Alliance as a conspiracy against the Liberal spirit that had been called forth by the campaign against Napoleon. As early as 1816 Lafayette saw Europe divided "on one side Coblenz and Piltitz [sic.], on our side the principles of 1789".¹⁷ Or, as Bignon put it, "two nations, two interests are still facing each other".¹⁸

The Liberals hailed with enthusiasm the 1820 rebellion in Spain that had been undertaken in the name of Liberalism and painted a picture in which the twilight of liberalism in France was contrasted with the dawn of a new era beyond the Pyrenees. Lafayette received encouragement

¹⁴ Staël-Holstein, Anne-Louise-Germaine-Necker, Madame la baronne de, *Considérations sur les principaux événements de la Révolution française, ouvrage posthume de Madame la baronne de Staël*. Edited by the Duc de Broglie and the Baron de Staël (3 vols., Paris, Delaunay, 1818), III, p. 169.

¹⁵ Général Lamarque, *Mémoires et souvenirs du général Maximin Lamarque publiés par sa famille* (3 vols., Paris, H. Fournier jeune, 1835-36), II, pp. 6-7.

¹⁶ Général Lafayette, *Mémoires, correspondance et manuscrits du général Lafayette*, publiés par sa famille (6 vols., Paris, H. Fournier aîné, 1837-48), VI, p. 128.

¹⁷ Lafayette to (James Madison?), Jan. 28, 1816. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania (Louis Gottschalk photostats, University of Chicago).

¹⁸ *Archives parlementaires*, XXI (1818), p. 650.

from Jefferson who welcomed "the volcanic rumblings from the bowels of Europe. The disease of liberty is catching".¹⁹

The Liberals supported the rebellions in Spain and in Italy, but were apprehensive over the secret diplomacy of the powers assembled at Troppau and Laybach. Since any intervention in the affairs of other nations would come from Austria, Russia and Prussia, they advocated a policy of open diplomacy and non-intervention. This policy would allow the Liberals in oppressed countries to revolt. They argued that if France was to intervene, she should do so to encourage liberalism and national independence, especially in the Greek uprising against Turkish rule. The Liberals were also fond of contrasting the difference between French pre-dominance under Napoleon and her present ineffectiveness. They scorned the weakness of the Duc de Richelieu and reminded him of the famous Cardinal's greatness.

The Congress of Verona (1822) affirmed the Liberals' fear that the two-year old Spanish rebellion would be crushed by France acting as a servile and obedient agent of the Holy Alliance. Opposition to the war came from all shades of liberal opinion. The attack was seen but a prelude to imposing greater reaction at home by a party which, since 1789, had been a tool of foreign powers. A speaker saw the invasion as a "hypocriso-politico-religious" war on liberalism, an attempt to restore the Inquisition and the Jesuits in Spain.²⁰ When the Right expelled Manuel from the Chamber for his alleged defence of the regicide of 1793, the Liberals followed him and boycotted future meetings.

Outside the Chamber, efforts to cause dissatisfaction among the ranks of the army ready to march into Spain failed. The Liberals' gloomy prognostication that the campaign would be long and a possible repetition of Napoleon's ill-fated effort proved wrong. Lafayette attributed the failure in Spain and in Italy to the fact that, with the exception of the "patriotic wishes of the less ignorant part of the people", the masses had been unequal to the challenge presented to them by the revolutions because they were still under the influence of "prejudice and superstition".²¹ The easy victory in Spain brought prestige to the Ultras and despondency to the Liberals whose crushing defeat in the general elections of the following year brought to end the first phase of Restoration Liberalism.

The Liberals with whom I have been dealing received the support of the more dynamic as well as more vocal members of society, such as the business and professional classes, retired army officers, students and professors. Their strongholds were Paris and other large cities as well

¹⁹ Thomas Jefferson to Lafayette, Dec. 26, 1820. The Pierpont Morgan Library (Gottschalk photostats).

²⁰ *Archives parlementaires*, XXXVIII (1823), p. 380.

²¹ Lafayette to Jefferson, Dec. 20, 1823, Massachusetts Historical Society (Gottschalk photostats).

as the eastern provinces, especially Alsace whose large Protestant population gave vigorous support to Liberalism. But the nature of the franchise allowed Manuel to be elected in the Vendée and Lafayette in the Sarthe — unlikely regions for liberalism. Their liberalism reflected the prejudices of the middle class which had acquired power since 1789. Blind to the economic issues, it was satisfied with the narrow franchise of 1817. The franchise modifications with it made after the victory of 1830 still left the vote as the private preserve of the wealthy property owners. Their narrow outlook wedded them to the past as much as the émigrés, except that their past was more recent.

Perhaps the chasm between the Right and the Left opened by the Revolution could not be bridged in the Restoration. The Liberal's implacable suspicion of the Bourbons and their indefatigable effort to stress anything that separated the old from the new France made reconciliation between the two impossible. They were abetted by the political stupidity of the Right with whose *pointus* they were often willing to make common cause, in order to render ineffective any combination of moderates. The Left and the Ultras needed each other in order to defend their *raison d'être*.

Restoration Liberalism, middle-class, anti-clerical and secular subscribed to the belief in the essential goodness and perfectibility of man, hence in the concept of progress and in the efficacy of the appeal to reason. It was dedicated to the protection of the principles of 1789 as the Liberals understood them.