

from
**MEMOIRS OF
PRINCE KLEMENS VON METTERNICH**
1820

Prince Metternich

After the French Revolution and the defeat of Napoleon, European rulers wanted to establish long-lasting peace and stability. Austrian minister Prince Klemens von Metternich pushed for keeping the traditional aristocratic order in Europe. He told European rulers that they had to unite if their monarchies were to survive. The following excerpt is from a secret memo that Metternich sent to the Russian czar. He encouraged the czar to support his policies.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY: Summarizing

What group does Metternich fear most? Why?

Kings have to calculate the chances of their very existence in the immediate future; passions are let loose, and league together to overthrow everything which society respects as the basis of its existence; religion, public morality, laws, customs, rights, and duties, all are attacked, confounded, overthrown, or called in question. The great mass of the people are tranquil spectators of these attacks and revolutions, and of the absolute want of all means of defence. A few are carried off by the torrent, but the wishes of the immense majority are to maintain a repose which exists no longer, and of which even the first elements seem to be lost.

The scenes of horror which accompanied the first phases of the French Revolution prevented the rapid propagation of its subversive principles beyond the frontiers of France, and the wars of conquest which succeeded them gave to the public mind a direction little favourable to revolutionary principles. Thus the Jacobin¹ propaganda failed entirely to realise criminal hopes.

Nevertheless the revolutionary seed had penetrated into every country and spread more or less. It was greatly developed under the *régime* of the military despotism of Bonaparte.² His conquests displaced a number of laws, institutions, and customs; broke through bonds sacred among all nations, strong enough to resist time itself; which is more than can be said of certain benefits conferred by these innovators. From these perturbations it followed that the revolutionary spirit could in Germany, Italy, and later on in Spain, easily hide itself under the veil of patriotism.

The evil exists and it is enormous. We do not think we can better define it and its cause at all times and in all places than we have already done by the word

1. **Jacobin:** radical revolutionaries

2. **Bonaparte:** Napoleon Bonaparte, the former French emperor

“presumption,” that inseparable companion of the half-educated, that spring of an unmeasured ambition, and yet easy to satisfy in times of trouble and confusion.

It is principally the middle classes of society which this moral gangrene has affected, and it is only among them that the real heads of the party are found.

For the great mass of the people it has no attraction and can have none. The labours to which this class—the real people—are obliged to devote themselves, are too continuous and too positive to allow them to throw themselves into vague abstractions and ambitions. The people know what is the happiest thing for them: namely, to be able to count on the morrow, for it is the morrow which will repay them for the cares and sorrows of to-day. The laws which afford a just protection to individuals, to families, and to property, are quite simple in their essence. The people dread any movement which injures industry and brings new burdens in its train.

There is besides scarcely any epoch which does not offer a rallying cry to some particular faction. This cry, since 1815, has been *Constitution*.³ But do not let us deceive ourselves: this word, susceptible of great latitude of interpretation, would be but imperfectly understood if we supposed that the factions attached quite the same meaning to it under the different *régimes*. Such is certainly not the case. In pure monarchies it is qualified by the name of “national representation.” In countries which have lately been brought under the representative *régime* it is called “development,” and promises charters and fundamental laws. In the only State which possesses an ancient national representation it takes “reform” as its object. Everywhere it means change and trouble.

We are convinced that society can no longer be saved without strong and vigorous resolutions on the part of the Governments still free in their opinions and actions.

We are also convinced that this may yet be, if the Governments face the truth, if they free themselves from all illusion, if they join their ranks and take their stand on a line of correct, unambiguous, and frankly announced principles.

By this course the monarchs will fulfil the duties imposed upon them by Him, who, by entrusting them with power, has charged them to watch over the maintenance of justice, and the rights of all, to avoid the paths of error, and tread firmly in the way of truth.

Union between the monarchs is the basis of the policy which must now be followed to save society from total ruin.

In short, let the great monarchs strengthen their union, and prove to the world that if it exists, it is beneficent, and ensures the political peace of Europe: that it is powerful only for the maintenance of tranquility at a time when so many attacks are directed against it; that the principles which they profess are paternal and protective, menacing only the disturbers of public tranquility.

Source: Excerpt from *Memoires of Prince Metternich*, Volume 3, edited by Prince Richard Metternich and translated by Mrs. Alexander Napier (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1881), pp. 455, 462–463, 465–467, 469–471, 475.

3. **Constitution:** In this case, Metternich is writing about the movements that wished to set up democratic principles of government.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY: ANSWER

In Metternich's opinion, the middle class is the most threatening group. If the aristocracy weakened, people from the educated middle class would want to grab the power.