

**What problems faced Napoleon III when he came to power
and to what extent did he manage to overcome them?**

Name

Date

Introduction

The reign of Charles Louis Napoleon Bonaparte (1808-1873) spans an era of history in which global changes were beginning to happen that involved political and social ideologies, and industrialization of the work force. As a major force in Europe, and the world, at this time, Napoleon III was in a position to create big changes within France and initiate events in Europe, as well as the Americas and the East.

The opinion of Napoleon's rule is varied, to say the least, from one of demanding dictatorship to that of progressive and popular leader. Much more research would be involved to ascertain the reality of this. This paper purports to lay out the evolution of Napoleon III's reign and the method with which he handled difficulties, and let the reader come to conclusions.

The nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte I, NIII seems to have inherited the ambition, drive, even obsession with ruling France. At the age of 28 he confronts the throne but is overpowered at Strasbourg and exiled to the United States, where he lives for a year until moving to London. The second military try for the throne comes in 1840 at Boulogne from which he is imprisoned for 6 years. During this imprisonment, he corresponds with politicians in France opposed to the leadership (Cavendish 1848). After his escape to England, NIII writes political essays that speak of gradual change and gaining popular support. In *Fragments Historiques 1688 et 1830* he writes, "March at the head of your century, and its idea will follow and support you. March behind them and they will drag you along. March against them and they will overthrow you." (MacMillan 1991)

Based on this belief system of the importance of popular support, Napoleon III works through the Bonapartists to become the elected Deputy of Paris in 1849, and through the Party of Order wins the Presidential election in September (Cavendish 1848) (Funk & Wagnall.1979) of that year at the age of 40. Almost despite his beliefs, or in a twisted view of them, Napoleon III overthrows the constitution in 1851 by coup d'etat and extends his presidency for 10 more years (Funk & Wagnall.1979). A year later, he is named Emperor. The management of his presidency swings between dictator and democrat, between strict ideology and liberal progressiveness. The ambitions he has for France are both grand and unrealistic.

The Reign of Napoleon III

Karl Marx, in the preface to his article on *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, a political paper written in 1852, describes Napoleon III's reign as "the class struggle in France that created circumstances and relations that made it possible for a grotesque mediocrity to play a hero's part" (Price 2003). Considering that Marx writes this during NIII's reign, it is clear that there is some strong critique of his leadership. Price writes that in Napoleon's zeal to be the "guardian of the Napoleonic tradition, he combined the outlook of a romantic mystic with the instincts of a political opportunist." The ambition portrayed by NIII has been considered a precursor to Hitler and Mussolini. But there are few papers to show how NIII really thought. It has been left to historians to conclude from his actions what may have been the truth.

Despite Marx's irreverence, NIII does create a "cult" of followers and supporters that causes the 5.4 million voters to favor him over his rival. The range of supportive ideologies behind his rule included monarchists, Catholics, Bonapartists, businesses and workers. But in addition to this support comes some very opposing viewpoints as to how the country should be run.

James McMillan writes in his book *Napoleon III* that "the Second Empire was a much more important episode in European history than the First, and its ruler, NIII, was the man who, more than any other individual, shattered the status quo of the Vienna Settlement, leaving both map and the moral order of Europe revolutionised."

The 'Vienna Settlement' or 'Congress' (Funk & Wagnall 1979) is established after the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the downfall of Napoleon I. A meeting that lasts from September 1814 to June 1815 remaps Europe and the territorial divisions. Alexander I, Prince Klemens von Metternich, Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Prigord, Britain's Robert Stewart and Prussia's Carl August von Hardenberg are major participants who negotiate this event. France loses all the conquered territories. In addition, the Germanic Confederation is established that unite 39 sovereign states, including Prussia, under the presidency of Austria (Funk & Wagnall 1979). This congress also condemns slave trade and provides for freedom of travel on rivers between the different states. A balance of power has been achieved for 40 years, and peace.

Popular support

Retaining popular support, which is the mainstay of Napoleon's political beliefs, involves conceding some powers to the Council of State, paying dues to radical supporters while also alleviating the threats from the monarchists, and others. His competitors, such as the Orleanists, also offer a parliamentary monarchy system. NIII has to find more methods to instill confidence in his voters for his own agendas.

The Reforms of 1860 include rights to the House of Representatives to reply to NIII's speeches, as well as to discuss expenditures. But they also have to defend their government policies in Parliament. Following these reforms, comes freedom of the press (1863) (after suppression of the press¹), right to public meetings, right to strike (1864) and right to form trade unions (1868) In addition to these changes, NIII institutes changes to develop a new constitution that would give Parliament full power over initiating legislation, and make the Ministers responsible to Parliament (McMillan 1991). Some consider these changes to be the "seeds to his own destruction" but Napoleon answers, "I may founder, but upright and not worm-eaten" (McMillan 1991). According to radical Republican Gambetta, "the Emperor is stronger than ever." But because of the Ministry's efforts, the Empire falls 4 months later in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, and NIII is captured in the horrendous Battle of Sedan in which 17,000 French forces and 9,000 German forces were killed or wounded. The Germans have a major victory.

Nonetheless, during the 22 years of NIII's reign, he is to accomplish some unprecedented things and influence nations across the globe while initiating popular citizen's rights in his own country. However, it is a constant balancing act whereas he gains support of one faction only to lose support from another, that would later be supportive again (Corley 1961).

¹Social and political unrest during the Second Republic had frequently been blamed on the outpouring of cheap printed materials which had followed the February Revolution. Ironically, the liberal Bonapartist newspaper imparted the truth in its statement, "It provides the news that it is necessary to know, when it is necessary to know it; it determines what is true". Price 2001

Commercial liberalism

NIII's personal commitment to economic prosperity is in line with the Bonapartism's populist streak. Saint-Simon argues that the hybrid of state interference combined with economic liberalism are in keeping with Bonapartism. The regime has the welfare of the people, and the working classes in particular, as its priority.

In combination with the zeal to improve economics in France comes industrialization and the free trade connection with Great Britain. These two very profitable occurrences lead to a massive state rail project, increased production of coal and iron, new employment and new markets in Africa, southern Europe and the Mediterranean. There are also new markets for agriculture that benefit the 'peasants' and expand the regime.

A form of bank in France, Credit Mobilier, and the Suez Canal project of 1858-69 aid in opening connections to Egypt which brings prestige to France. Prior to these progressive changes, the regime of NIII had been the most protectionist. In this way, NIII is very different from NI, for 'running with the wind'. And the implications becomes ominous for countries such as Russia and their opposing standards.

The Vienna System

Napoleon III's reign is in particular opposition to the Pentarchy (the 5 Vienna System powers), who base their regimes on the divine right to rule. With NIII's coronation as emperor, his increasing interactions with Great Britain and America, and the reforms of France, the balance in Europe is being compromised. The influences of popular votes, freedom of speech and other citizens' rights are becoming threatening.

NIII's attitude toward Vienna is that the system is meant to keep France down and controlled. His ambition is primarily to get France back to its position of influence within the Vienna System. There are many motives for this.

The Crimean War of 1854-6 is a collaboration (with Austrian backing) to push the Russians back from their invasion of the Ottoman empire (Turkey) and their naval base at Sevastopol (L.of C. website 2006). It takes a long fight with many losses but France and Britain wins, at



least for the moment. The result is the reshaping of the political map of Europe for the next 50 years. The photo to the left is of an officer of the 57th regiment during the Crimean War (L.of.C 2006)

The Treaty of Paris in 1856 that forbids Russia and Turkey from having naval fleets in the Black Sea, also gives NIII what he wants: containment of Russia, a neutral Black Sea, an opened river Danube, and assurances to the Turks. France also wins prestige (Watson 1952).

Italian Unity

The Plombières (Corley 1961) meeting in 1856 is a ploy of Cavour's dream of Italian unity but is initiated by Napoleon III (Carrie 1950). It divides Italy into thirds, the Northern Kingdom ruled by France, the Central Kingdom ruled by the papacy, and the Southern Kingdom. France overtakes the Austrian influence in Italy. Carrie writes that Napoleon's scheme is "too clever (a way of attempting to ride the twin steeds of liberal nationalism and imperial and dynastic advantage" and that Cavour envisions the problems that pulling Austria out of Italy might entail (Carrie 1950).

Last stand

Learn this, my Prince, that to have received power from Providence is no longer enough in these times: it requires great brains and a strong character to succeed in being a despot.
STENDHAL: *La Chartreuse de Parme* CHAP. XVII (Corley 1961)

In the 1860's, Napoleon III is in increasingly less control of his plans than he should be. The Pope and clergy refuse to recognize the new Italian state. There is trouble with Poland and Russia. The German states are fearful of another French invasion, which Bismark uses to his own advantage. There are no real long-term alliances with Britain or Russia, leaving France fairly insecure globally, and the Vienna System, while destroyed, has no new system to go by.

The Battle of Sedan on September 1870 in the north of France ends Napoleon's rulership decisively. Napoleon had joined the forces there that afternoon and is captured.

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