

# **Magadh Mahila College**

**Patna University, Patna**

**HISTORY**

**B.A. – II**

**PAPER – IV**

**HISTORY OF MODERN EUROPE**

**Unit – 4**

**REACTIONS AND REVOLUTIONS**

**Topic: - THE ERA OF METTERNICH**

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## Introduction

Count Metternich, the Austrian Chancellor, who presided over the deliberations of the Congress of Vienna (1815) was the most dominant diplomat from 1815 to his fall in 1848. His influence was so great that it was not confined to Austria only, but it penetrated beyond, to the German Confederation, and the rest of Europe. So great was his hold on the political stage of Europe that the period of European History from 1815 to 1848 is called the "Era of Metternich".



### CHARACTERISTIC'S OF THE "ERA"

**(1) Reactionary and Conservative.** Metternich was essentially reactionary and conservative and believed in preserving the old order. He was an ardent supporter of absolute monarchy and the privileges of the nobility and the clergy. He did not believe in the principles of Equality, Liberty and Fraternity.

**(2) Opposition to all liberal movements.** He was especially allergic to all liberal and revolutionary movements because they aimed at the destruction of the "old order". Moreover, they tended to bring in their wake violence, bloodshed and untold miseries. Hence they should be suppressed wherever they raised their heads.

To combat liberal movements within the Austrian dominions and the German Confederation, he instituted the reactionary "Metternich system" of government. And to suppress them elsewhere in Europe he readily encouraged the establishment of the Holy Alliance and the Quadruple Alliance whose real object was to see that the Settlement of Vienna was not upset and that the princes were not coerced to grant constitutional governments. He was the chief architect of the "Concert of Europe" for the suppression of all revolutionary movements.

**(3) Bitter Hostility to Nationalism.** Metternich strongly opposed the principle of "Nationality", as it would disrupt the Austrian Empire which was inhabited by a number of nations like Germans, Magyars, Czechs, etc. Therefore he was a bitter enemy of the "Nation" States. Then, again, he had been scared by the militant nationalism of the French which had caused so much bloodshed.

Having given the reader a brief concept of the special features of the "Era of Metternich", we shall now discuss a length, how the "Era" affected (a) the Austrian Empire, (b) the German Confederation and (c) the rest of Europe.

(b) The German Confederation and

(c) The rest of Europe

Political, Social and Economic Conditions of the Austrian Empire in 1815

**(1) Compactness of the Dominions.** Before the Congress of Vienna, the Austrian Empire was geographically not contiguous, but after it she had gained territorial compactness and so she was politically quite strong in 1815.

**(2) Lacked political and national unity.** But the vast empire was composed of heterogeneous nationalities, like the Germans, Magyars, Czechs, Slavs, Italians, Poles and others, who spoke different languages and had different political institutions. The only connecting link was the Emperor. It was well nigh impossible to fuse the various nationalities into one nation. On the other hand, the rise of nationalism among them was bound to lead to the disruption of the Empire. Each nation had been, to some degree, affected by the spirit of French nationalism and nursed the hope of establishing a national state some day.

**(3) Absolute Government.** The form of government was absolute monarchy and the government had done nothing to improve the social and economic condition of the masses.

**(4) Social and Economic Conditions.** The people were divided into three classes, the nobles, the bourgeoisie and the peasants. The nobility, like its counterpart in France in 1789, formed a "privileged" class. The peasants lived under abominable conditions and had no rights and were miserably poor. The bourgeoisie was a very small class and wielded no influence in the social and political life of the Empire yet. The people were mostly agriculturists and industries were in a very primitive state.

In short, "Absolutism in government, feudalism in society, special privileges for the favoured few, oppression and misery for the masses, such was the condition of Austria in 1815".

### **The Aims of Metternich**

The very heterogeneous nature of the state and the economic backwardness of the people provided a rich enough soil for the seeds of the revolutionary principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity to germinate and grow.

And, "In this medley of States, races and languages there lay numberless possible causes of division and contention".

Therefore Metternich's aims were as follows:

**(1) To Maintain an Absolute Form of Government.** Under the circumstance's only an arbitrary, absolute and reactionary 'government could keep the various nationalities together. The status quo should be maintained in the form of government as well as in the structure of society.

**(2) To Oppose all Liberal and Constitutional Movements.** All liberal and revolutionary movements undermined the absolute power of the monarchy and led to the break-up of the Empire. Hence all such movements must be suppressed.

### **The Metternich System**

**His Policy.** In pursuance of his aims he adopted a reactionary and conservative policy and instituted a system of government popularly known as the "Metternich System" to strengthen his hold over the Austrian Empire.

#### Its Special Features

**(1) Control of Education.** Metternich wanted to control the minds and ideas of the younger generation and so he instituted a strict control over University education. All higher education was strictly supervised and controlled. Textbooks were censored and professors were screened lest they might impart liberal ideas. Political meetings of students were banned. Spies attended lectures and kept a strict watch on the activities of the professors and students. Any sign of liberalism in education was ruthlessly suppressed. Political Science and History were removed from the curriculum.

**(2) Censorship of the Press.** The press was muzzled and could not publish any liberal news or articles.

**(3) Frontiers Guarded.** Frontiers were closely guarded to stop the infiltration of liberal ideas, books or revolutionaries.

**(4) Foreign Travel Banned.** The people in general and students in particular were not allowed to travel abroad so that they might not be infected with revolutionary ideas.

**(5) Arbitrary Imprisonment.** Persons suspected of liberal and revolutionary tendencies were imprisoned without trial.

**(6) Reinforcement of Police.** The Police system was strengthened to keep all liberal movements in check.

**(7) Garrisoning of the Empire by Alien Troops.** The various parts of the Empire were garrisoned by alien nationalities, e.g, to Austria he sent Czech soldiers, to Hungary, Slavs and so on, so that there would be no difficulty in suppressing national uprisings.

#### The Results of the System

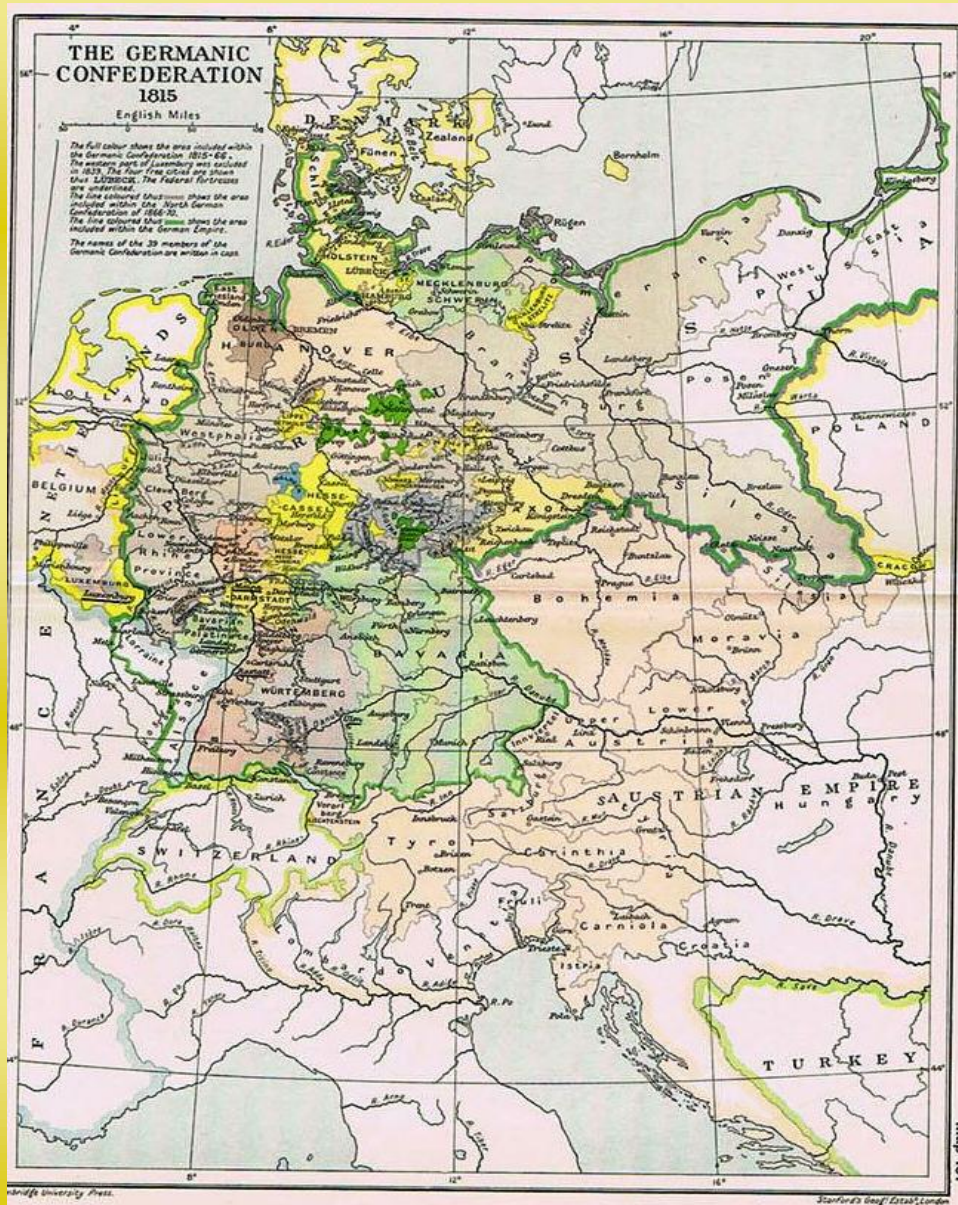
**(a) Intellectual Stagnation.** Censorship of the Press and control of Universities resulted in intellectual stagnation for some time. \*

**(b) Economic Stagnation.** The preservation of the feudal society with a large number of serfs was not conducive to economic improvement. Agriculture remained in a primitive state and hardly any industries were developed. Foreign artisans were not encouraged to settle in the Empire lest they might bring with them revolutionary ideas.

**(c) Suppression of Liberalism and National Feelings.** The various nationalities of the Empire, the Germans, Magyars,

**\* He forgot that he could suppress the people for some time but. He could not repress their ideas for ever. And so, in spite of spying and censorship, revolutionary ideas continued to infiltrate and in 1848 the absolute regime and the Metternich system were overthrown.**

Czechs, etc. were kept under control by his "garrisoning" methods and so there were not serious national or constitutional uprisings up to 1848. \*



The Congress of Vienna was baffled by the problem of Germany. All the princes who had been deprived of their States by Napoleon could not be restored and the Holy Roman Empire could not be revived as Emperor Francis I was not enthusiastic about it. Then what was to be done with the German States?

The German patriots wanted a unified state, but their hopes were thwarted by the rivalry of Prussia and Austria. Prussia was not yet strong enough to accept the German leadership and King Frederick William III was too loyal to the Hapsburgs to defy Austria.

Metternich did not favour a unified German state on account of the following reasons:

(1) He did not want to encourage the establishment of "nation" states, because that would encourage other nations too to demand nation states for themselves and the entire Austrian Empire would collapse.

(2) Austria ruled over vast non-German territories and therefore she could not become the leader of a United Germany. If she did, she would lose her hold over her non-German territories. Therefore, in the interest of preserving her non-German Empire; she was hostile to the idea of a single German state.

(3) She would not allow German unity under Prussian leadership, as that would undermine her influence in Germany because the Hapsburgs had been leaders of Germany for centuries.

(4) Metternich had promised the small German princes that they would not be deprived of their sovereignty. He did not want to let them down. Therefore, he favoured a loose

**\* The Metternich system was quite effective and successful within the Austrian Empire and soon Metternich proceeded to extend it to the Confederation of Germany.**

confederation of the 39 states which had survived the Napoleonic Wars. Hence the Confederation of Germany under the leadership of Austria was established.

### **The Constitution of the Confederation**

(1) **"Obligations" of Constituent States.** All the 39 states were independent in all respects but they could not wage wars against one another they could not make treaties with foreign Powers against by other member state and in times of war they had to fight for the Confederation.

### **(2) The Diet-The Principal Organ of the Central Government.**

(a) The Diet met at Frankfurt under the presidency of Austria and was composed of delegates appointed by the different princes. The larger states enjoyed more votes than the smaller states.

(b) Ordinary matters were decided by a simple majority. But important matters required a two-thirds majority.

(c) Any change in the constitution could only be effected by a unanimous vote.

### **(3) Special Features of the Confederation.**

(a) It did not create one state, there was to be no German Emperor, no German flag or German citizen.

(b) Each state controlled its own foreign policy.

(c) There was a good deal of outside influence. England, Holland and Denmark by virtue of their possessions of Hanover, Luxemburg and Holstein respectively, interfered in the internal affairs of Germany. So the character of the Confederation was international rather than national.

(d) Austria and Prussia both possessed territories outside the Confederation.

(e) It was also stipulated by Article XIII of the Constitution, that a representative form of government would be adopted in all the federating states. This was never put into practice universally.

### **Political Unrest in Germany and Intervention by Metternich**

The following incidents led to Metternich's intervention:

**(1) German Patriots frustrated.** The German patriots felt frustrated since a unified independent German state was not created and liberal constitutions were not granted by the German princess under Article XIII.

**(2) Disaffection in Universities.** The "liberals" were extremely dissatisfied and Universities were the chief centres of discontent. Students' secret societies like the "Tugendbund" and "Burschenchaf", whose main object was to promote patriotism in all states, were organized.

**(3) The Wartburg Festival (Oct. 1817).** The students celebrated the 300th anniversary of Martin Luther's revolt against the Pope. Speeches were made criticizing the reactionary government, Bonfires were lit and unpopular books were burnt.

**(4) The Murder of Kotzebue (1819).** Kotzebue a journalist and a Russian spy, was murdered by Karl Sand, a student. The Wartburg Festival and Kotzebue's murder alarmed Metternich who summoned a meeting of German statesmen at Carlsbad to decide how to arrest student liberalism.

The Carlsbad Decrees (1819): An extension of Metternich system to Germany

The German Diet promulgated the following decrees:

(1) Supervision of Universities. At every University spies were appointed to watch students and professors. Professors with liberal ideas were sacked and could not be employed in any other University. No student expelled by a University could be admitted to any other University.

(2) Textbooks were censored.

(3) All societies were banned, the secret societies were declared illegal.

(4) Strict press censorship was enforced.

(5) The "Mainz" committee was set up to investigate the causes of liberal movements and to arrest persons suspected of revolutionary tendencies.

(6) No constitution "inconsistent with the monarchical principle" was to be granted.

Results of the Decrees

Liberalism was crushed and reaction became the order of the day. Metternich and his system triumphed over liberalism for some time and hopes of German unity receded still further.

The Revolution of 1830 and its Reaction in Germany

Metternich's hold was so great over Germany that the Revolution of 1830 had minor reactions in a limited number of states. Saxony, Hanover, Hesse and Brunswick saw popular risings and the rulers were forced to grant a constitution on the model of the French Charter of 1814. But Metternich soon intervened and suppressed the revolts and restored absolutism in all states. The Metternich system was further strengthened and political meetings were banned, stricter control over Universities was enforced and the Press was further muzzled.

Metternich developed the doctrine of the "Right of Intervention" in the internal affairs of European states on the assumption that any changes of government was not a domestic but an international affair and that if revolution succeeded in one state it was bound to have reaction in other states. Therefore he persuaded the Quadruple Alliance to act as the guardian of the peace of Europe. Great Britain strongly opposed this theory of intervention, but from 1815 to 1822 Metternich succeeded in suppressing revolts in Italy and Spain through the "Concert of Europe". The Congress of Troppau (1820) and the Congress of Laibach (1821) dealt with the Neapolitan revolt and the Congress of Verona (1822) with the insurrection in Spain. (For details see Chapter 10).



So for some time Metternich also succeeded in arresting the ' liberal movements outside the Austrian Empire and Germany.

### Causes of the failure of the 'Metternich System'

**(1) Could not crush Revolutionary Ideas.** Metternich could crush the revolutionaries but he could not repress their spirit and ideas and in the long run in spite of his stringent measures, the revolutionary principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity triumphed over his conservatism in 1848.

**(2) Opposition of Great Britain.** Great Britain did not subscribe to Metternich's theory of intervention and at every Congress bitterly opposed it. She sympathized with liberal movements and finally intervened by force in the affairs of Portugal. (For details see Chapter 10.)

**(3) British and French support of National Movements.** The British and French support of the Belgian patriots in the struggle for Belgian independence, the independence of the Spanish colonies in America and the War of Greek Independence further weakened Metternich's hold on Europe.

**(4) The "Monroe Doctrine" (1823).** This was another blow to Metternich's theory of intervention.

Though Metternich continued to hold his sway up to 1848, he could not arrest for ever the spread of liberal ideas and demands for reforms and constitutional governments. With the fall of Louis Philippe in France as a result of the Revolution of 1848, he also fled the country.

### Suggested Readings:-

1. Meenakshi Phukan : Rise of Modern West
2. G. Clark : Early Modern Europe
3. Raghubir Dayal : Modern European History
4. Jain and Mathur : World History (1500 – 1950)
5. G.M. Trevelyan : Social History of England
6. Parthsarathi Gupta (ed.) : आधुनिक पश्चिम का उदय
7. लाल बहादुर वर्मा : आधुनिक यूरोप का इतिहास