

France 1815–1848

Checkpoint 2

How did the circumstances of the restoration undermine the monarchy from the start?

Following the defeat of Napoleon in 1814 the Bourbon monarchy was restored in 1815, and again following the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo. From the beginning the regime was beset by problems. The unpopularity of Bourbon rule increased once Charles X succeeded Louis XVIII in 1824, culminating in the July Revolution of 1830. Louis Philippe, the Duc d'Orleans, then became king. The initial enthusiasm for his reign waned and he too was overthrown in the first of the 1848 Europe-wide revolutions.

The Bourbon restoration

Checkpoint 3

Did the charter satisfy any of the main political groupings in 1815?

The decision to restore the Bourbon monarchy was taken by the coalition of European powers responsible for the final defeat of Napoleon. It was insisted that Louis rule within the confines of a liberal constitution, the **charter of 1814**. Crucially, however, Louis still expressed a belief in **divine right**, and the king retained sole executive power (only he could initiate legislation, and he had a veto on any amendments proposed by parliament).

Increasing unpopularity 1815–1830

With a moderate constitution in place and France's undoubted economic potential, the Bourbon monarchy seemingly had a good chance of long-term survival. Why was it increasingly unpopular? Key factors:

- The '**White terror**' of 1816 ordered by the **Ultra**-controlled government against former Bonapartists (supporters of Napoleon).
- The assassination of the Duc de Berri. This allowed the Ultras to persuade Louis XVIII to backtrack from the liberal policies he had been pursuing between 1816 and 1820 (electoral system changed, censorship restored – carried out by Chief Minister Villele).

1824 saw the accession of Charles X. Charles was far more 'Ultra' in his political views. Key decisions:

- **Compensation Law** (1825).
- **Sacrilege Law** (1826).
- Continuing press censorship.
- Charles's refusal to select liberal ministers following their election victory in 1827 and his hostile attitude to parliament.
- The appointment of the extreme Ultra Polignac as chief minister in 1829. His proposed Ordinances of St Cloud (or Four Ordinances) would have effectively destroyed the 1814 charter.

Also adding to the government's unpopularity was the severe economic depression France was suffering. Rioting began in Paris in July 1830 and Charles, lacking loyal troops, was persuaded to abdicate (the **July Revolution**).

"More royalist than the king himself"

Checkpoint 4

What were the effects of Ultra-inspired policy?

The accession of Louis Philippe

The middle-class leaders of the July Revolution were clear in their desire to retain monarchical government in France. Louis Philippe, the Duc d'Orleans, was from an ancient French aristocratic family and related to the Bourbons. However, he held liberal views in politics, generally supporting the ideals of the French Revolution of 1789. This background made him acceptable to a broad cross-section of French opinion. On becoming king he enacted a series of reforms:

- Alterations to the charter of 1814. The franchise was doubled to about 200 000.
- Press freedom confirmed again.
- The end of the Catholic Church's role as France's state religion.
- The tricolour replaced the white flag of the Bourbons.

Increasing unpopularity 1830–1848

Initial enthusiasm for the new monarchy soon dissipated. Key factors:

- The unrepresentative nature of government and parliament:
 - Ultras excluded because of their political views.
 - Lower classes excluded by limited franchise.
- The refusal of the government to intervene during times of severe economic hardship (the early 1830s and late 1840s).
- Uninspiring **foreign policy** – successful in keeping France on good terms with other European powers but did not satisfy the public's wish for a return to the 'glory days' of Napoleon.
- Louis Philippe's uninspiring character – the 'ordinary man'. Years of poverty and exile in his early life meant that he did not behave, dress, etc. in the way people believed a king should.
- Press freedom led to a stream of hostile propaganda, including caricatures comparing the king's head to the shape of a pear.

Laws restricting open political gatherings led opponents of the regime to form the **Banquet movement**. These moderate reformers (e.g. Thiers) were frustrated by the king's refusal to consider any change in policy.

The government's decision to ban a meeting planned for February 1848 led to full-scale rioting on the streets of Paris. Following the refusal of the National Guard to fire on the demonstrators, Louis Philippe abdicated on 24 February 1848.

Checkpoint 5

How did the circumstances of Louis Philippe's accession create problems for him?

Checkpoint 6

What was the reaction of the major political groups to these reforms?

Checkpoint 7

What similarities were there between the revolutions of 1815 and 1848?

Exam questions

answers: pages 99–100

- 1 Why was it that revolution continued to be a factor in French history between 1815 and 1848? (45 min)
- 2 'Louis XVIII resisted the Ultras, while Charles X embraced them'. Is this a satisfactory explanation for the initial success but ultimate failure of the restored Bourbon monarchy? (45 min)