

3 Metternich's Austria: Pyrrhic Victory Abroad, Social Question at Home

The period from the 1790s to 1848 is the least discussed in modern Austrian history. This is a pity because if ever irreversible patterns were set in the Monarchy's long slide to dissolution it was most probably in these paradoxical years, when an ossifying elite repudiated Joseph's radicalism while steady progress was made towards many of his goals. In much of the empire (Francis called himself Emperor of Austria from 1804) the lineaments of a centralised bureaucratic state using a German lingua franca became clearer. The Josephinist state church and the commitment to primary education were consolidated, while a limited economic modernisation got under way. Yet in the absence of the nexus between centralism and social reform which had characterised the Josephinist experiment, the Monarchy's lumbering advance gave it no real place in its polyglot subject's hearts. The sense of a lack of inner vitality, of deviation from the European norm, which was to haunt the Monarchy's last decades, was already the subject of recrimination well before 1848.

The Anti-revolutionary wars

The protracted wars with revolutionary and Napoleonic France brought out both the strengths and weaknesses of Austrian Europeanism. On the one hand the alone of continental powers joined Britain in all five anti-French coalitions between 1792 and 1815, during which her peoples united behind the dynasty despite French revolutionary blandishments. Yet the impact of the reformer Johann Philipp Stadion (1806-09) cannot be compared with that of his Prussian contemporaries, Stein and Hardenberg, under whom serfdom was abolished and real administrative reform achieved. The patriotic movement of the doomed campaign of 1809 had less lasting effect than stirrings in other German lands. Austria's crab-like progress from enforced pro-French neutrality after this to Prussia and Russia's side at the battle of Leipzig (1813), for all Metternich's diplomatic

skill, bespoke the caution of a wounded and still vulnerable protagonist in these great events.

These wounds had grown more grievous as the conflict lasted. Leopold, who had initially greeted the French Revolution, felt obliged for the sake of his sister Marie Antoinette to adopt a threatening posture: an Austro-Prussian alliance in February 1792 encouraged French revolutionaries to declare war on encircling 'reaction' in April. French belligerence, the conservatism of Leopold's son and successor Francis (1792-1835) and numerous points of contact of Habsburg and Imperial lands with an expansionist France in Belgium, Italy and Alsace made co-existence impossible. To the dogged Thugut, Austrian foreign minister from 1793 to 1801, fell the difficult task of relating the balance of power politics of the eighteenth century to a new, revolutionary challenge, for the second and third partitions of Poland were taking place (1793, 1795) at the same time as France advanced in the Austrian Netherlands and old ideas of a Belgium/Bavaria swap revived. Austria participated only in the Third Partition whereby Poland disappeared from the map. But Napoleon's advance through north Italy to the Austrian Alps (1796-97), then his victories at Marengo in north Italy and Hohenlinden in southern Germany (1800), ended Austrian participation in the first and second anti-French coalitions respectively, through the treaties of Campo Formio (1797) and Lunéville (1801). How, lamented Thugut after the former treaty, could one challenge the energies of a Bonaparte with the typical Viennese, who cared nothing for 'the honour of the Monarchy' or its longer-term future, provided he could steal the old city bastions (now a recreational area) and eat his fried chicken in peace. Actually, the treaties retained some traditional balancing features. Austria lost Belgium and Lombardy but was compensated by the acquisition of Venice and its provinces in Istria and Dalmatia, four million subjects gone for one and a half million gained, as Thugut sourly calculated.

However, the Third Coalition, formed with Britain and Russia in 1803 and ending for Austria at the field of Austerlitz (December 1805), was a different story. By the Treaty of Pressburg Austria was obliged to cede Dalmatia to France, the Tyrol to Bavaria and lost the remaining *Vorlande*, gaining only Salzburg in paltry exchange. This time Vienna itself was occupied by the French. Though the equalable Viennese do not seem to have resented their uninvited guests, the upper reaches of Austrian society were goaded into a self-assertion not unlike the Prussian response to defeat at Jena (1807). Austria's