

## ‘Not yet saved’

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Call'd ‘Saviour of the Nations’ - not yet saved,  
 And ‘Europe’s Liberator’ - still enslaved

Byron, *Don Juan* (canto IX)

Our generally vague but negative impression of the years after Waterloo - a sort of Dark Age between the excitement of the French Revolution and the excitement of the upheavals around 1830 - I would guess owes rather a lot to literature. In this country, especially to certain verses of Byron and Shelley (‘I met murder on the way / He had a mask like Castlereagh ...’).

The return to peace and quiet and routine certainly disappointed some of the more turbulent Romantics. Long before, back in 1789, Wordsworth and Coleridge had famously welcomed the Revolution and suddenly discovered that politics could be thrilling:

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
 But to be young was very heaven! -

Years of Terror and war - and perhaps just advancing age - had cured most of their early enthusiasm. France’s unprovoked invasion of Switzerland, symbol of freedom, had broken the spell, except for a few convinced radicals and religious millenarians. Wordsworth dolefully concluded that England, with all its many faults, was on the right side - ‘Oh grief that Earth’s best hopes rest all with Thee!’ was how he put it. He even joined the militia.

But Napoleon, although widely detested as ‘the Corsican ogre’, whose rule had caused mass resistance in Portugal, Spain, Italy, Austria and eventually Germany, still cast a spell even in defeat. His civil servants and soldiers, with careers and promotions at stake, were pretty solid in their support until about 1814, and many of them rallied again when the Emperor returned from Elba in 1815. Businessmen in many countries had found opportunities under Napoleon’s rule (though smugglers evading his blockade of Britain had found even more). Workers supplying the war had enjoyed high wages. Religious minorities had been emancipated. Many progressives - including some English Whigs -

saw Napoleon as a reformer. And finally, many intellectuals and artists, notable among them the above mentioned Byron and Shelley, and of course the likes of Goethe and Beethoven, had for a time adulated Napoleon as a macho version of themselves: he fitted Romantic ideas of genius: a man who had risen to the heights of power and glory by sheer force of mind, an artist shaping human history.

Wellington and many of his soldiers also admired Napoleon as one of the great commanders, all the more to be admired because they had finally beaten him. Wellington's men were keen on picking up souvenirs - though Wellington's acquisition of the ultimate souvenirs, a huge marble statue by Canova of Napoleon in the nude, proved rather an embarrassment as Apsley House had to be partly rebuilt to accommodate it. In 1816, Napoleon's carriage, abandoned near Waterloo, was exhibited in London, and attracted over 100,000 people. Byron, though disappointed in Napoleon for letting the Romantics down by not having died gloriously, eventually bought the carriage and went off in it to follow in Napoleon's footsteps round Europe.

In short Napoleon still cast a spell, and he had every intention of increasing its potency. New Year's Day, 1816, was his first on the island of St Helena, where he had been hastily sent by the British government, escaping both the Prussians who wanted to shoot him, and his British admirers who wanted him to settle in Britain. In his damp and gloomy new residence, Longwood House, his entourage came to present their New Year's compliments, and they then went for a walk in the garden. As a concession, the British authorities had given him his guns back, but there were no birds to shoot: it must have seemed another dastardly British plot to annoy him. So it could hardly have been a jolly party, though it was enlivened by the arrival of young Betsy Balcombe, whose family lived on the island. She, understandably star-stuck, became friendly with Napoleon, who found her amusing. On 17 January, he began to learn English, so as to be able to read the newspapers - he had certainly not lost interest in European affairs. He practised with Betsy, and by early March he was able to send notes in English. His progress then seems to have stalled. His strategy on St Helena was to win over public opinion in Europe by presenting himself as a victim of British persecution - which he did very successfully: 'Every day strips me of my tyrant's skin'; and also by dictating his memoirs to show himself as an altruistic and far-sighted moderniser, forced into war by his reactionary enemies, particularly perfidious Albion.

While Napoleon was settling in to Longwood House, Europe was having to cope with the consequences of a quarter of a century of war, the latter part of it largely down to him. 'Just as 1939 was Hitler's war,' writes Paul Schroeder in his magisterial history, 'so all the wars after 1802 were Bonaparte's wars.'<sup>1</sup> Europe from Lisbon to Moscow had been set alight, often literally. The Muslim world, the Caribbean, the United States, and India had all been drawn in. The total numbers of casualties is incalculable; but runs into

millions. The collateral damage was enormous, including devastation and famine. Much of the violence had been particularly atrocious, especially Napoleon's attempt to reimpose slavery in the Caribbean, and the two way slaughter in the guerrilla war in Spain.

The material costs are often easier to calculate, because governments and armies kept accounts. But it still takes an effort of the imagination to recapture the impact on a poor pre-industrial society. The French, and not least Napoleon, had been very good at passing on the costs of the war to the countries they conquered and to their often unwilling allies. After Napoleon's victories in 1805-09, Austria was forced to pay 125 million francs, and Saxony 25 million. Prussia, the worst treated, was stripped of wealth equal to over sixteen years' total taxation. The effects of this impoverishment were such that in Berlin 75 percent of newborn babies died, and the suicide rate rocketed.

Some lucky people did very well out of revolution and war: bankers, smugglers, military contractors made spectacular fortunes. Revolutions can be a godsend to the art world too: 'bliss indeed was it to be a collector in that dawn, but to be a dealer was very heaven.'<sup>2</sup> During the revolution the Duc d'Orléans (who ended on the guillotine) sold his family's collection of 400 pictures, considered the world's greatest in private hands, including multiple works attributed to Leonardo, Michaelangelo, Raphael, Titian, Rembrandt, Correggio, Tintoretto, Veronese, Rubens, and Velasquez. The whole collection was eventually bought pretty cheaply for £43,000 by a syndicate led by the Duke of Bridgewater. Lord Yarmouth started what later became the Wallace Collection. The French had rampaged through Italy, Holland, Germany and Spain levying huge contributions in cash and in hundreds of named works of art, forcing aristocratic families to sell their collections to pay the French. Most of what was not taken for the Louvre, which Napoleon made into the greatest museum in the world, came to London. After Waterloo, Wellington oversaw the return of most of the confiscated works in the Louvre (other than the considerable amount the French managed to hide) to their rightful owners. But Wellington himself did very well: his army had rescued a large part of the Spanish royal collection from the French at the battle of Vitoria in June 1813. The King of Spain insisted that he should keep it, and it can now be seen in Apsley House.

There had been a whole generation of upheaval and uncertainty. As the British Foreign Secretary George Canning had put it in 1807:

[Until] there can be a final settlement that shall last, every thing should remain as unsettled as possible; ... no usurper should feel sure of acknowledgement; no people confident in their new masters; no kingdom sure of its existence, no spoliator sure of his spoil; and even the plundered not acquiescent in their loss ... [It] is our business to shew what England, as England, is: ... it is only through us

alone that they can look for secure and effectual tranquillity.<sup>3</sup>

The cost in money was of course gigantic. Some Belgian towns were still paying off the costs in the 1920s. Britain had ended up subsidising all its Allies. By 1814 it was spending six times its prewar annual budget, and the public debt had gone up by 150% over the course of the war. The British government closed its subsidy and loan accounts for the Napoleonic wars only in 1906.

After so much upheaval, there was no going back to prewar Europe. We conventionally call this period 'the Restoration', but there was little to be restored, and few people thought in those terms. On the contrary, there was a further huge postwar upheaval - what one historian calls 'a complete geopolitical revolution'. This was starting to come into effect in 1816.

The victor powers, led by the Foreign Secretary Viscount Castlereagh and the Austrian chancellor Prince von Metternich redrew a considerable part of the map to create a stronger barrier to possible future French aggression. In Germany, the number of states was reduced to 41 (still more than in the rest Europe combined); and a Confederation (the Bund) was set up under Austrian presidency to preserved order and security in what had broadly speaking been the old Holy Roman Empire. Prussia was shifted westwards by being given territory in the Rhineland and Westphalia (which it hadn't asked for) to provide a solid bulwark against the French. Holland and Belgium (formerly the Austrian Netherlands) were formed into a short-lived United Kingdom to solidify France's northern border. Austria itself - the Habsburg Empire, was not only president of the German Bund; it also pushed back into Italy, directly governing Lombardy and Venetia, and exercising hegemonic power over the whole peninsula: Italy had become the main focus of the Habsburg government's activity, with most of its army being stationed there, and a large slice of its revenue now derived from Italian taxation.

There is a tragic irony in these arrangements, done with the best of intentions by Allied statesmen to prevent or at least deter future French aggression and keep the European peace. What they did was understandable, for France was, even after Waterloo, probably the most powerful and potentially the most dangerous European state. But - with hindsight - we can say that France's power was on the wane; that France was a problem that had, though no one knew it, been solved. The precautions they took were therefore excessive; but worse, they stored up future wars. Austria proved to be overstretched: it would lose wars against France and Piedmont in Italy, against Prussia in Germany, and would finally start a fatal war in 1914 in a doomed attempt to hold on to its position in the Balkans. Prussia was expanded up to the Rhine: here were the seeds of its later hegemony over Germany and arguably the seed of two world wars in the next century.

But back to 1816: all these changes meant that much of Europe was once more in a state of political flux, after already enduring years of upheaval. New rulers in new territories faced a dilemma: how much of the Napoleonic system of government should they keep, and how many of the former personnel of that system? Napoleonic rule had been detested by the mass of the population, the peasantry, for whom it meant heavy taxation and conscription, and often attacks on their religion; they often hated the people who had run it. But those people knew how to run it still, and they were often quite powerful. The so-called 'Restoration' governments often felt they had to keep Napoleon's administrators in office. So they often ended up pleasing nobody: disappointing their supporters without conciliating their enemies - a classic problem of so-called 'restored' governments.

Nowhere was this more acute than France, on which I have so far said little. Louis XVIII (the brother of the guillotined Louis XVI) had returned in 1814 with a constitutional 'Charter', much of whose terminology and concepts were inspired by English precedents. It promised an amnesty -- 'pardon et oublie' -- but what seemed a good start was disrupted by Napoleon's 100 days ending at Waterloo. This had shown the fragility of the Bourbon Restoration, and the hostility of much of the army and civil service. Louis had un-heroically decamped to Ghent. When he returned after Waterloo, it was clearly 'in the baggage train of the Allies'; the Romantic writer René de Chateaubriand (a supporter) lamented that 'Legitimate monarchy would re-enter Paris behind those red coats that had just renewed their colour in Frenchmen's blood.' The Allies now imposed tougher treaty conditions: a loss of territory and fortresses (to make France more vulnerable), and a big indemnity (700 million francs). Allied armies of occupation were stationed in northern and eastern France, paid for by French - another 500 million francs.

A 'White Terror' and the election in September 1815 of a 'Chambre introuvable' ('an incredible parliament') featured an anti-Bonapartist 'ultra-royalist' reaction (the Ultras were 'plus royaliste que le roi'). This included mob violence, assassinations and lynchings, especially in the South, where there had been sporadic political violence for twenty years. This bitter conflict would leave a trace on the French political map for more than a century. A legal 'White Terror' was also conducted during 1816 against suspected Bonapartists and republicans, with special tribunals judging summarily without jury or means of appeal. One ultra-royalist deputy thundered in January 1816 that 'to stop their criminal plots we need chains, hangmen, executions'. In fact they rarely went as far as that, but there were probably about 5,000 prosecutions, many resulting in acquittals or minor sentences. There was also a major purge of the army and civil service: probably 50-80,000 civil servants were demoted or sacked. This left a vast underground of resentment that finally got its revenge in the 1830 Revolution.

The Allies had little confidence in the restored Bourbons. Their return had certainly not been a forgone conclusion merely on the grounds of a legitimate hereditary claim to the throne: indeed, other European monarchs were tempted to regard them as a pretty useless lost cause. The Austrians had thought of another Bonaparte (such as Napoleon's half-Austrian son). The Russians had considered Marshal Bernadotte, one of Napoleon's clever generals who had somehow come to be Crown Prince of Sweden (his descendants still reign there). The British were keenest on the Bourbons, who had come to be British protégés, and who seemed (at least at first) to be quite popular. The royalist writer Chateaubriand said they were as little known to the French people 26 years after the Revolution as the emperor of China. No-one was sure they were strong, popular or intelligent enough to hang on to their throne, and the White Terror seemed to show that the Ultra-royalist party and the government were being dangerously extreme. So the Allies -- whose spokesman was Wellington -- pressed them to follow a moderate line and in September 1816, Louis XVIII was persuaded to dissolve the *chambre introuvable*, and in new elections the relatively liberal royalists won a majority.

So things seemed to be calming down. But in parts of the country - probably above all Paris - there remained memories of revolution and fervent support for the former emperor. Inevitably there was friction with the Allied armies of occupation, angrily aware of what the French had done to their countries. It was probably wise not to tangle with the Prussians, Austrians or Russians (you probably know the origin of the word 'Bistro' - it's Russian for 'hurry up!') There were the usual problems that occur when soldiers are billeted in enemy territory - violence, theft, sexual violence, sexual encounters that were not necessarily violent but caused problems of another kind among outraged patriots. Was it worse for national pride if a French woman voluntarily slept with an enemy soldier or if she did so by force?

British troops do seem to have been pretty conciliatory: after all, Britain had never been invaded, so there were fewer scores to settle. The army established generally untroubled relations with the population.<sup>4</sup> According to Alexandre Dumas, it was at the hands of Wellington's soldiers, that the French discovered *le steak* - since regarded as their national dish. Wellington, who did not blame the French people for Napoleon's Hundred Days, was commander-in-chief of the Allied armies of occupation. He remained determined to minimise friction, and was tough on troublemakers. Except in the case of his own indiscreet *repos du guerrier* with Napoleon's ex-mistress the singer Giuseppina Grassini, which many French regarded as insulting (and which was surely taking his admiration of Napoleon to a rather Freudian degree of intensity), Wellington was generally sensitive to symbols. He told one of his officers -- who had bought the battlefield of Agincourt -- to stop archaeological excavations there; he resisted London's instructions to take back British flags captured by the French (some I think still hang in the Invalides); and he stopped the Prussians blowing up the Pont de Jéna by posting a British sentry on it.<sup>5</sup>

Many British soldiers sympathised with their former antagonists. Ordinary redcoats were eager collectors of Napoleonic memorabilia and, reported a French official, 'spoke of [the ex-emperor] with enthusiasm.'<sup>6</sup> Sergeant Wheeler had little time for Louis XVIII, the king he had helped restore: 'His pottle belly Majesty ... who blubbered like a big girl ... an old bloated poltroon, the Sir John Falstaff of France.'<sup>7</sup> When Marshall Ney, one of the heroes of Waterloo, was executed by the Bourbon government, it was reported to have caused universal displeasure in the British army. One of Napoleon's other generals avoided a firing squad thanks to three Englishmen who aided his escape.

British tourists flooded into France and Paris in 1816 - about 14,000 in 1816, 70-80 percent of all visitors. They swamped the foreign potentates, politicians and adventurers who came to France to enjoy what their armies had won, so much so that all foreigners were assumed to be British.<sup>8</sup> They got a degree of welcome from those French people who looked forward to peaceful and profitable relations - which may have been most of them. 'English' hotels and English-speaking waiters emerged after long hibernation. France was also now a place in which the British had privileges. Pauline Bonaparte had moved out of her palace in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré; Wellington moved in, succeeded by every British ambassador since. The dais of Pauline's bed acquired a plush throne for visiting monarchs.

Both British and French were struck by physical differences between them, to which wartime conditions must have contributed. The British seemed taller and plumper. A candid teenager, Mary Browne noted that most French women were 'as flat as boards' - something that fashion encouraged. Some English women, lamented one Henry Mathews, copied them by 'compress[ing] their beautiful bosoms as flatly as possible, and destroy[ing] every vestige of those charms for which, of all other women, they are perhaps the most indebted to nature.'<sup>9</sup> French cartoonists made the British absurd in body, dress and behaviour. Men and women are outsized: sometimes fat (in the 'John Bull' style) but often angular. Their fashions are eccentric and exaggerated. English girls may be shown as pretty, but are insipid, gawky, awkward and charmless.

It was not only from cartoonists that they sometimes encountered hostility, which could be quite frightening. The many opponents of the Bourbons (who included former Republicans, Bonapartists, and many Parisian workers) blamed Britain for political and economic ills. 'Hatred for the English is growing daily,' a police agent reported late in 1815, 'They are regarded as the destroyers of French industry.' Ordinary travellers frequently complained of ill treatment by customs officials. British families had to beat a hasty retreat from the Tuileries gardens after being surrounded by a hostile crowd. British officers in Paris had to be ready to fight duels with demobilized Napoleonic officers, who systematically picked quarrels with them. The British were certainly the main targets of cartoonists. Probably this was partly because Russians and Prussians

were too risky as subjects, partly because mocking the British was an indirect way of mocking the Bourbons, and partly because British visitors were far more numerous and seemed to be happy to buy satirical cartoons of themselves - rather a nice trait. Nevertheless such cartoons indicate a lively spirit of Anglophobia. In many literary works – including by Vigny, Stendhal, Nerval and Balzac - the English characters (unlike in eighteenth-century literature) were villains: nearly all the 31 English characters in Balzac's novels are bad. The popular (and frequently prosecuted) songwriter Béranger, France's first great chansonnier, produced catchy lines that could sound friendly but in context are bitterly sarcastic, as in a famous one entitled 'Our friend the enemy':

Every whore in Paris cries  
 'Long live our friend the enemy!'

Something similar struck Victor Hugo, a teenager at this time. Decades later, he wrote a whole chapter in *Les Misérables*, recalling the tense atmosphere: 'Whether one said "regicides" or "voters", "enemies" or "allies", "Napoleon" or "Buonaparte" - this could divide two men more than any abyss.'<sup>10</sup>

What about Britain? It had emerged as the world's richest and most powerful state. The Prussian General von Gneisenau thought that

Britain has no greater obligation to any mortal on earth than to this ruffian [Bonaparte]. For through the events that he has brought about, England's greatness, prosperity, and wealth have risen high. She is the mistress of the sea and neither in this dominion nor in world trade has she now a single rival to fear.

Vast crowds in London 'all went mad' at the victory over Napoleon, with a funfair in Hyde Park and miniature naval battle on the Serpentine. At Yarmouth, 8,000 had feasted on nearly half a ton of roast beef, 1,800 plum puddings and 80 barrels of beer at a table three-quarters of a mile long, with Napoleon burning in effigy. One woman found this worrying: 'I begin to be afraid, like the frog in the fable we shall all burst with national pride, for never, to be sure, did we stand so high before.' Moreover, a determined minority of Whigs and Radicals clung to different sympathies. 'What is it, after all, the people get?' rhymed a Whig paper, 'Why! Widows, Taxes, Wooden legs, and Debt!'<sup>11</sup>

England in 1816 was almost a one-party state, run by William Pitt's heirs, professional politicians who had built up an invincible body of support. The prime minister was Lord Liverpool. Who but real experts know anything about him, although he was prime minister for 15 years - the second longest tenure in history? Meanwhile, the Pittites' official opponents were pretty feeble. The opposition Whigs were largely the aristocratic disciples of Charles James Fox (their secret, said one, was that they were all

cousins), whose position rested on their wealth, status and ownership of parliamentary boroughs. They clung to a sense of themselves as the nation's true but misunderstood elite ('the ancient nobility, the great property of the Realm'), who had deplored the war, often admired Napoleon (Lady Holland sent him books on St Helena), and despised the meritocratic Pittites as parvenus – Grey dismissed George Canning as 'the son of an actress [and] *ipso facto* disqualified from becoming prime minister'.<sup>12</sup> The Radicals were few in number and were divided. Their obsessive attacks on the State as corrupt, and their demands to reduce taxation and public spending damaged many of the people they claimed to represent. Whigs and Radicals combined held only some 150 seats in 1815, and the veteran 'Orator' Hunt won only 18 votes when he stood at Westminster in 1818.

Britain faced several serious problems in 1816. It was experiencing a population explosion unique in its history, with numbers more than tripling in 150 years. Population rose from 8.6 million in 1801 to 17 million in 1851 – an increase of 98 percent, with the highest ever recorded growth in 1811-21 (16 percent in a decade). So 1816 was the peak. Around 40 percent of this population was under 15, comparable with much of Africa today. The total urban population, already the highest in Europe, tripled during the first half of the century. London more than doubled, making it by far Europe's biggest conurbation. In a decade, Manchester grew by 47 percent, West Bromwich by 60 percent, and Bradford by 78 percent. Average life expectancy at birth was around 40 – also comparable with much of Africa in the 2000s. We probably have a vague sense of this time as one of oppression by 'rulers who neither see, nor feel, nor know', in Shelley's words; of hunger, rick-burning, the workhouse and transportation. There was indeed hunger and economic instability. But there was no economic disaster – as there might well have been had Napoleon won and wrecked British trade. And there was no political catastrophe. However, at the time many, at home and abroad, thought that an overpopulated England was heading for famine. The most notorious and influential alarmist was an Anglican parson with radical connections, Thomas Malthus.<sup>13</sup> His *Essay on Population* (1798) mixed heterodox Christianity with what would now be called finite ecology, arguing that population growth inevitably tended to outrun food supply, and would inevitably be 'checked' either by restraining births or by famine, hunger and war. In his own time and since he has been the object of controversy and denunciation - he himself apologized for his 'disheartening' conclusions. But his argument seemed incontrovertibly logical, and it had become, wrote one Utilitarian, 'the fixed, axiomatic belief of the educated world'.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, not for the only time in our history, the situation was made worse by well meaning political dogma. The war had left England with a paper currency, unprecedented tax levels (23 percent of GDP), and a huge national debt of some £800 million, over 250 percent of GDP – a larger burden than that in 1918 or 1945. As I

suggested a moment ago, this caused vehement denunciation of the State by Whigs and Radicals as 'Old Corruption', a machine for extracting wealth from the citizens and giving it to the rich. They demanded large cuts in taxation and government spending. The Radical Henry 'Orator' Hunt, later famous as the speaker at Peterloo, saw this as the root of all evil: 'What is the cause of the want of employment? Taxation. What is the cause of taxation? Corruption.'<sup>15</sup> Some version of this blinkered view was the received wisdom not only in Britain but on the Continent, where intellectuals, economists and politicians waited with alarm or satisfaction for Britain to collapse under the weight of taxation, debt and pauperism. Often the same people were pressing for a return to a gold currency to replace the paper money introduced during the emergency of the 1790s. To the government's consternation, a Whig-Radical alliance in 1816 abolished income tax, leaving the State more dependent on regressive indirect taxes, which increased popular resentment. Government revenue fell by 20 percent - almost certainly the biggest fall in recorded history. This forced a hasty rundown of the armed forces throwing many thousands of soldiers and sailors onto the labour market during 1816. As after all wars, the end of many contracts of arms and military equipment also caused unemployment. On top of all this, a rush to return to gold had a seriously deflationary effect on the whole economy.

So in 1816, Britain and France were facing their own particular difficulties, even crisis. We could extend this picture to the whole of Europe: Spain and Portugal trying to repair the damage of years of guerrilla war and occupation under weak and disputed governments; much of Italy under new (or restored old) masters and all under Austrian surveillance; the map of Germany redrawn and again facing new governments, new laws and new administration; Holland and Belgium forced together as a new single kingdom, for the first time since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. We could relate similar stories for Scandinavia, Poland, the Habsburg empire, and Russia. Thousands of people who had lost, and thousands who had gained, from Napoleon's defeat, were looking for chances to do the other side down.

So there could hardly have been a worse moment for the largest volcanic explosion known to history, in April 1815 in the East Indies, to be causing world-wide temperature falls, the worst American and European food shortages for more than 100 years in 1816-17, and the consequent trail of disease and unemployment.

In England, it there came the steepest rise in crime of the nineteenth century. There were several violent incidents. The main rural unrest was in East Anglia, near Ely - the so-called 'Bread or Blood riots' in May 1816. This was an area of large-scale cereal farming with labourers working in gangs - an unusual system. 1816 had seen a huge rise in the price of bread. The rioters demanded a minimum wage and the prohibition of threshing machines. There was little serious violence - one soldier was wounded and

one rioter killed in the village of Littleport. The Ely magistrates rapidly agreed to a minimum subsistence wage. But in June more than 80 rioters were prosecuted for the riots. Five men were hanged for stealing or looting during the disturbances, and several more were transported to Australia. The main urban incident was in London on 2 December 1816, the Spa Fields riot, which grew out of protests against imprisonment for debt - a serious problem for artisans and small businesses during a postwar slump, and in which a number of unemployed former sailors also took part. It featured an attack on a gunsmith's shop and a spontaneous (and unsuccessful) march on the Tower of London. There was, moreover, a lot of low level violence against politicians, who -- astonishing by today's standards -- had no protection and seem not to have expected any: Castlereagh, when his house was attacked by a mob, had to push his way through to his front door, and then himself close the shutters to keep the brickbats out. Most protests in Britain were however pretty peaceful, though a small radical underworld did call for assassination and revolution. A total of 83 people were hanged during 1816 -- well above the average in a country rather unusually given to capital punishment. Castlereagh introduced a suspension of Habeas Corpus (to permit detention without trial) after an attack on the Prince Regent, though he told the Commons 'I have never had to perform a more painful duty ... after having passed through all the dangers and pressures of war.'<sup>16</sup> Should we think of all this as the sign of a harsh society on the brink, or does the infrequency of serious conflict suggest a society coping with a multitude of stresses? In fact, England coped relatively well. If on one hand there was harsh legal repression, on the other, spending on poor relief was rising from £5.4 million to £8 million between 1814 and 1818.

The other governments in Europe, with all their weaknesses, cruelties and faults, also seem to have done their best to cope. In France, where grain stocks had been run down in part due to the need to feed the foreign armies of occupation, the terrible failure of the 1816 harvest led to a vertiginous rise in wheat prices, which in places went up by 400 percent, making a loaf of bread cost far more than a worker's daily wage. In the rural north east, people were eating grass and tree bark. People attacked grain convoys, bakeries, and markets; hungry vagrants plundered isolated farms. Troops were called out and blood was spilt. But the government took more positive steps, ordering 70 million francs worth of grain from Russia, subsidising imports, setting up job-creation schemes. Inevitably, the crisis had a disastrous effect on the whole economy. And then, when the climate recovered, good harvest caused a collapse in prices in 1818 and 1819, which also devastated the rural economy.<sup>17</sup>

A similar story can be told of northern Italy, where there was chronic brigandage and also corruption and collusion among the authorities. The new Austrian police and local government in northern Italy were both relatively effective and sensitive to

peasants' sufferings, urging remission of taxes, and introducing soup kitchens, job creation schemes, and bans on grain exports. Concludes a recent study, 'The prompt action of the Austrian authorities had not only done much to minimise the impact of the famine, but also to win over the potentially rebellious population.'<sup>18</sup>

So to sum up, it is hard not to see the year 1816 as one of the alarming and most unexpected crises of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We have a world and a continent trying to emerge from a generation of revolution and war during which millions had died, often in horrific circumstances. At the same time, much of it - and particularly England - were experiencing a population explosion, which many (and not only Malthus) thought was inevitably leading to a future of impoverishment and famine. It was governed by often new, unknown and shaky regimes, none of them elected by more than a small minority, and many of them not elected at all, but dependent on royal and aristocratic authority that had been bloodily contested during decades of revolution. Some of them, as in France but not only there, had returned to power precariously, and had the difficult choice either of keeping or of sacking an administrative class many of whom despised, feared or hated them. Many of these rulers inherited huge wartime debts, and also huge pressures to cut taxes and public spending, which caused other problems and aggravated the usual postwar slump. And then, to crown it all, a volcano caused an inexplicable climatic disaster which created the last general European famine. Is it surprising there was gloom and discontent? Perhaps really surprising is that there was no general collapse, as was to come a generation later in 1848. We might think that the peoples of Europe were so punch drunk with disasters that they couldn't face more upheaval. But it may also be that these despised and outdated rulers, who had learnt survival techniques the hard way during the French Revolution, were not all so bad after all: despite what Shelley thought, some of them do seem at times to have been able to see, and feel, and know.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics 1763-1848* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 230

<sup>2</sup> Francis Haskell, *Rediscoveries in Art: Some Aspects of Taste, Fashion and Collecting in England and France* (London, Phaidon Press, 1976) p. 27

<sup>3</sup> George Canning, 1807, quoted in Schroeder, *The Transformation*, p. 330

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Hantraye, *Les Cosaques aux Champs-Élysées: l'occupation de la France après la chute de Napoléon* (Paris, Belin, 2005) pp. 19-20

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Longford, *Wellington: The Years of the Sword* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) vol. 2, pp. 16, 26, 42

<sup>6</sup> Sudhir Hazareesingh, *The Legend of Napoleon* (London, Granta, 2004) p. 64

<sup>7</sup> *The Letters of Private Wheeler*, ed. B.H. Liddell Hart (London, Michael Joseph, 1951) pp. 176-7

<sup>8</sup> Christophe Lérubault, *Les Anglais à Paris au 19<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, Editions des Musées de la Ville de Paris, 1994) p. 7

<sup>9</sup> Mary Browne, *Diary of a Girl in France* (London, John Murray, 1905) p. 84

<sup>10</sup> Victor Hugo, *The Wretched*, transl. C. Donougher (London, Penguin, 2013) p. 109

<sup>11</sup> Philip Shaw, *Waterloo and the Romantic Imagination* (Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) pp. 4, 37

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. pp. 221-2

<sup>13</sup> See Gareth Stedman Jones, *An End to Poverty? A Historical Debate* (London, Profile, 2004) pp. 89-109

<sup>14</sup> Humphry House, *The Dickens World* (Oxford UP, 1942) p. 76

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- <sup>15</sup> Rohan McWilliam, *Popular Politics in Nineteenth-Century England* (London, Routledge, 1998) p. 40
- <sup>16</sup> John Bew, *Castlereagh: Enlightenment, War and Tyranny* (London, Quercus, 2011) p. 435
- <sup>17</sup> Guillaume de Berthier de Sauvigny, *Au Soir de la monarchie* (Paris, Flammarion, 1955), pp. 217-8
- <sup>18</sup> David Laven, *Venice and Venetia under the Habsburgs, 1815-1835* (Oxford UP, 2002) p 223