

ment's leaders believed that France should be "governed by its best citizens, who are found among the property-owning class." Consequently, the Directory was headed by a council of five men called directors, who were chosen by a two-house legislature. The universal male suffrage of 1793 was rejected, and the vote was given only to men who paid taxes. Women and poor men, who did not own property, were thus deprived of a voice in the new government.

Political power was in the hands of the upper middle classes and former nobles, who had been pardoned and returned from exile. Since the Directory excluded much of the population and all people who had extreme political views, its base of power was shaky from the start. Repeatedly, directors had to violate the constitution, by removing royalist or radical legislators who had been legally elected, in order to hold on to power. The new government became corrupt and inefficient and was unable either to solve the country's problems or to achieve national unity. The time was ripe for a strong leader to seize power.

## 2 *Napoleon became ruler of France.*

A strong, new leader for France appeared in the person of **Napoleon Bonaparte** [nə pō'lē ən bō'nə pärt]. He came from a family of the lesser nobility on the Mediterranean island of Corsica.

### **Napoleon rose to power.**

Because he lacked an important name and high connections in the royal army, Napoleon Bonaparte would have had little hope of advancing into the higher ranks of the officer corps before the Revolution. However, his fortune changed with the coming of the revolution, and the doors to power opened before him.

**Military career.** As you have read, many nobles fled France at the beginning of the Revolution, among them a large portion of the army leadership. As the French Republic rapidly built the largest army in French history, a shortage of skilled and experienced field officers arose. During this leadership crisis, many officers from the lower ranks, were able to advance to unexpected heights. For example, Napoleon Bonaparte advanced from the position of lieutenant in the artillery to full-fledged general.

By 1797 Napoleon was put in charge of the French army in northern Italy. After several victories there, he crushed the Austrians, who controlled Italy at that time, and became a hero. After this triumph Napoleon thought of a bold plan to reduce England's domination of India by taking control of the British trade route across Egypt. According to plan, he landed his army in Egypt in 1798. However, the British fleet destroyed the French supply ships, cutting off the army.

Napoleon was forced to desert his army in Egypt and return to France. Always a very skilled politician, he concealed the full extent of the Egyptian disaster from the French public. At the same time, the tide was again turning against France on the European war front. Many people saw Napoleon, with his previous victory against Austria and his false news of conquest in Egypt, as France's savior. Indeed, he timed his arrival to coincide with France's hour of need, when foreign enemies again gathered at the borders.

The military was not the only arm of the French government that was in trouble. After four years under a corrupt and unstable political system, the French people were becoming increasingly unsatisfied with the Directory. Napoleon, a man of limitless ambition, quickly moved to seize power. In November, 1799, he led a conspiracy to overthrow the Directory.

**Establishment of the dictatorship.** Napoleon had a deep knowledge of history and law, as well as of military science. People were dazzled by his sharp mind and tricked by his cunning. Although Napoleon used many of the phrases of liberal government, he had every intention of becoming a dictator. Soon after seizing power, he held a referendum in which all French men could vote to approve or disapprove of the new regime.

The people accepted Napoleon's seizure of power by a vote of 3 million to 1,500. With the solid support of the French people, he then moved

The French artist David succeeded in capturing on canvas the tremendous pride of Napoleon, as he led his famous march across the Alps in 1800.



to deprive them of virtually all political rights. Although the new constitution did include an elected legislature, as First Consul, Napoleon held all the real power. Claiming to represent the interests of the entire nation, he savagely crushed all opposition. He limited free speech, and severely censored the press. Even without political liberty and representative government, most French people liked Napoleon. After years of chaos, defeat, and disorder, he offered order, stability, efficiency, and above all, military victory.

**The crowning of the emperor.** By 1804 Napoleon's popularity was so immense that he was able to change France's form of government. After only 12 years as a republic, France became an Empire. General Napoleon Bonaparte, First Consul of the French Republic, crowned himself Napoleon I, Emperor of the French. The Republic was dead. Once again, the French people overwhelmingly approved this change in a national referendum.

### **Napoleon made important reforms.**

Napoleon ruled France for 15 years—five years as First Consul and ten as emperor. During his reign, he carried out several important reforms and significantly increased the power and efficiency of the central government.

In many ways Napoleon finished the work of the revolution. No privileges were allowed, and the tax system was reformed. Promotion within the government or army was based on proven ability and achievement. In addition, Napoleon made an agreement with the pope. In it Napoleon confirmed the government's control over the Catholic Church, and, at the same time, ensured the Church's safety after a decade of turmoil and repression. Freedom of religion for all people was also established. However, Napoleon's best known work was the modernization of French law. The **Code Napoleon** set forth the principle of equality of all citizens before the law. This work remains the basis of French law today and has been adopted by other countries around the world.

### **Napoleon made himself master of Europe.**

Although he was appreciated as a reformer, Napoleon was above all a warrior. Of his 15 years of rule, he spent 14 of those years at war. Driven by

his ambition to rule all of Europe, he nearly succeeded. However, this obsession would eventually lead to his destruction.

**Victory over Austria and Russia.** When war broke out in 1803, Napoleon welcomed it as an opportunity. By 1805 a group of countries that included Britain, Austria, and Russia had allied against France. Of these countries, Napoleon defeated Austria and Russia with amazing speed.

In defeat, the Austrians were forced to give up control of the hundreds of German states that made up the Holy Roman Empire. Napoleon then dissolved the Holy Roman Empire, creating in its place the **Confederation of the Rhine**. This group of 38 states was placed under Napoleon's "protection," which really meant that they were under his domination. Nevertheless, in the Confederation and in every other country he conquered or dominated, Napoleon sought to impose modernizing reforms. His acts included the establishment of religious freedom, the abolition of serfdom and noble privilege, and the institution of the Napoleonic Code of law.

**Defeat by Britain.** After his victory over Austria and Russia, Napoleon next dreamed of invading Britain and conquering its empire. However, the British navy stubbornly resisted. In October, 1805, Lord Horatio Nelson, the British admiral who had defeated Napoleon in the Egyptian campaign of 1798, humiliated the combined French and Spanish fleets in the battle of Trafalgar. That victory proved British naval superiority and ensured Britain's safety from invasion.

From 1806 to 1812, Napoleon controlled most of the European continent, either directly, through puppet governments, or by imposing harsh and demeaning peace treaties. Since he could not defeat the British navy, he decided to try to wreck the country with economic warfare.

**Economic warfare.** In 1806 Napoleon instituted an economic boycott, closing all European markets to British goods. Even Russia, under threat of a French invasion, agreed to follow the plan. However, Napoleon's policy failed, partly because the British developed other markets, such as Latin America, and partly because successful smuggling operations were carried out all along the coast of western Europe.

One European country in particular, Portugal, refused to close its ports to British goods, and smuggling was rampant through Portugal's neighbor, Spain. To control the Iberian peninsula, Napoleon invaded Portugal, placed his brother Joseph on the Spanish throne, and stationed a large French army in Spain. The Spanish people fought back. Napoleon referred to the rebellion of the Spaniards as the "Spanish ulcer." It was the beginning of the downfall of his empire.

### **European powers joined forces to defeat Napoleon.**

People in the other countries Napoleon had conquered were inspired by Spain's example. They were angered by Napoleon's demands for money and soldiers and resented the shortages of goods caused by his economic blockade. Most important, there was an upswelling of patriotic feeling that incited people to turn against the French. However, rebellion might never have broken out if Napoleon had not exposed his fatal weaknesses by trying to conquer Russia.

**War with Russia.** The loss of trade with Britain caused serious economic problems in Russia. Thus, in 1810 Tsar Alexander I revoked his agreement with Napoleon and resumed trade with the British. Napoleon, angry that Russia had blocked his plans to dominate all of continental Europe, decided that Russia must be crushed. He gathered a huge army of more than 500,000 men, many of whom came from countries conquered by France, and invaded Russia in the summer of 1812. Napoleon won several battles and advanced far into the Russian interior, but he could not destroy the Russian army. Even worse for Napoleon, many Russian landowners burned their crops as they fled. This "scorched earth" policy made it difficult for Napoleon to feed his soldiers.

In September, 1812, Napoleon and his armies reached Moscow, already evacuated by the Russians. The next night, a mysterious fire broke out and destroyed most of the city. With Moscow destroyed and winter approaching, Napoleon had neither adequate food or shelter for his vast armies. Within a few weeks, Napoleon ordered a retreat from the heartland of Russia. This was both a military defeat and a political humiliation. Dur-