

THE CONGRESS OF VIENNA



Congress of Vienna Sept., 1814-June, 1815, one of the most important international conferences in European history, called to remake Europe after the downfall of Napoleon I.

Congress Participants

The Austrian emperor Francis I (formerly Holy Roman Emperor Francis II) was the host. Among the many monarchs to attend the congress the most important were Czar Alexander I of Russia and King Frederick William III of Prussia. Fürst von Metternich was the chief Austrian negotiator and presided over the congress; Viscount Castlereagh and, for a time, the duke of Wellington represented Great Britain; the Russian delegation included Count Nesselrode, Count Capo d'Istria, and Carlo Andrea Pozzo di Borgo; among the Prussian diplomats were Karl August von Hardenberg, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and Karl vom und zum Stein.

A peace settlement with defeated France had been reached before the congress convened (see Paris, Treaty of, 1814), but France was represented by Charles Maurice de Talleyrand, who, by skillfully exploiting differences among the allies, soon obtained an equal voice with the

four great victorious powers. All other European states, large and petty, that had legally existed before the Napoleonic upheaval were represented by an army of delegates and agents, but the important work was carried out in committees under the tutelage of the major powers.

Issues

The problems confronting the congress were extremely thorny and complex, for the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars had swept away the entire structure of Europe. Although the principle of legitimacy—restoration of the pre-Revolutionary dynastic and

territorial states—was often ceremoniously invoked, it was the determination to achieve a balance of power for the preservation of peace that guided congress decisions. The principle of national self-determination, although invoked in certain cases, was neglected in practice. The congress opened with a round of magnificent balls and entertainments, while its serious business was stalled by intrigues and rivalries.

Territorial Adjustments

Major territorial changes were unavoidable, partly because of previous secret agreements reached among individual allies and partly because of the pressure of power politics. Major points of friction were the settlement of the Polish question, the conflicting claims of Sweden, Denmark, and Russia, and the adjustment of the borders of the German states. Russia and Prussia were generally opposed by Austria, France, and Britain, which at one point (Jan., 1815) went so far as to conclude a defensive triple alliance. The shock of this crisis and of the return of Napoleon I from Elba so upset the delegates that the congress began to find solutions for its many difficulties.

In place of the defunct Holy Roman Empire or

its several hundred princes, the German Confederation was created. The Confederation's constitution was accepted on June 8, 1815, and was incorporated into the Final Act of the congress, signed on June 9, nine days before Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo. The restoration of Louis XVIII in France and of Ferdinand VII in Spain was confirmed.

Italy was dealt with as a geographic rather than a political entity, and its hopes for unity were dashed. Naples and Sicily were reunited under Bourbon rule; the Papal States were restored; the duchies of Parma, Piacenza, and Guastalla were awarded to French Empress Marie Louise for her lifetime; Tuscany and Modena were restored to the house of Hapsburg-Lorraine; the Lombardo-Venetian kingdom was set up under Austrian rule to compensate Austria for its loss of the Austrian Netherlands; and the formerly Venetian part of Dalmatia also went to Austria. The kingdom of Sardinia was restored and recovered Savoy, Nice, and Piedmont, and it received Liguria with Genoa.

Poland was redivided among Russia, Prussia, and Austria, with Russia benefiting primarily; part of Poland, with Warsaw, was set up as a kingdom in personal union with Russia; Kraków and its surrounding territory were made a republic under the protection of Russia, Austria, and Prussia. Since Austria received Italian territories to compensate for Russian gains, Prussia was awarded much of Saxony as well as important parts of Westphalia and Rhine Province. Great Britain, more interested in acquiring strategic colonial territories, retained the former Dutch colonies of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Cape Colony, received parts of the West Indies at the expense of the Netherlands and Spain, kept Malta and Helgoland, and obtained a protectorate over the Ionian islands.

The former Austrian Netherlands was united with the former United Provinces as the kingdom of the Netherlands, under the house of Orange. Russia retained the formerly Swedish Finland. The congress confirmed the transfer of Norway from the Danish to the Swedish crown; W Pomerania, the claim to which Sweden had ceded to Denmark in the Treaty of Kiel (1814), was given to Prussia, which compensated Denmark with the duchy of Lauenburg. Bavaria received its approximate present-day

boundaries, as did Württemberg and Baden. Switzerland was enlarged, and Swiss neutrality was guaranteed. As regards France, a new peace settlement was reached on Nov. 20, 1815 (see Paris, Treaty of, 1815). The Final Act of Vienna was subsequently ratified by the powers concerned, but several separate treaties were required to complete the settlement.

Consequences

Although the territorial changes brought about by the Congress of Vienna did not endure long in entirety, they represented a practical if not always equitable solution and an attempt at dealing with Europe as an organic whole. The Quadruple Alliance and the Holy Alliance, designed to uphold the decisions of Vienna and to settle disputes and problems by means of conferences, were an important step toward European cooperation. The Concert of Europe, which functioned—even though imperfectly—through the 19th cent., may be credited to the Congress of Vienna.

An auxiliary accomplishment of the Congress was the adoption of standard rules of diplomacy. Serious defects, however, included the disregard of the growing national aspirations and the social changes that brought about the revolutions of 1848, and the failure to include the Ottoman Empire in the settlement and to deal satisfactorily with the Eastern Question.