

# The Importance of Being French

The History of Modern France  
(1815-2020)





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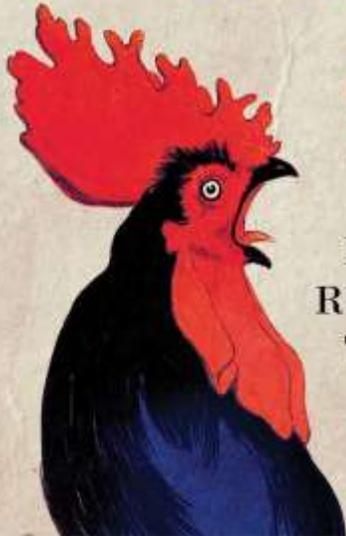
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# Course outline

- The Bourbon Restoration or how to end the Revolution (1814-1839)
- Louis-Philippe: *“We are the last possible kings”*
- From Napoleon to de Gaulle: the providential savior
- Napoleon III (1852-1870): a visionary
- 1870: the terrible year
- The Great Illusion: when France lost the peace (1914-1920)
- 1940: the unforgivable defeat
- From Charles de Gaulle to Macron: restoring the *grandeur* of France?

JONATHAN FENBY  
THE  
HISTORY  
— OF —  
MODERN  
FRANCE



'A tumultuous study ...  
bringing historic figures  
to life with vivid details'  
*Sunday Times*

FROM THE  
REVOLUTION  
TO THE  
WAR ON  
TERROR

LOUIS XVIII

— PHILIP MANSEL —







1814: the  
invasion of  
France

Napoleon had married Marie-Louise  
(Archduchess of Austria) in 1810





20 March 1811: the birth  
of the King of Rome



Napoleon left Paris  
(January 1814)

His instructions: the little  
king of Rome and  
Empress Marie-Louise  
NOT to fall into the hands  
of the enemy coalition

To maintain the Bonaparte dynasty  
on the throne (Napoleon II)?

The Austrians: Marie-Louise as  
regent

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Diplomatic discussions with  
Napoleon until March 19<sup>th</sup>







Alexander I

Napoleon: a threat to  
peace – To be removed  
from power  
permanently

Napoleon II?

A regency:  
« *No guarantee of  
tranquility* »



Talleyrand



Alexander I

What about the  
Bourbons?

Largely forgotten in  
France

The Allies **divided**  
A Bourbon restoration  
collectively approved  
only on March 31<sup>st</sup>



Talleyrand

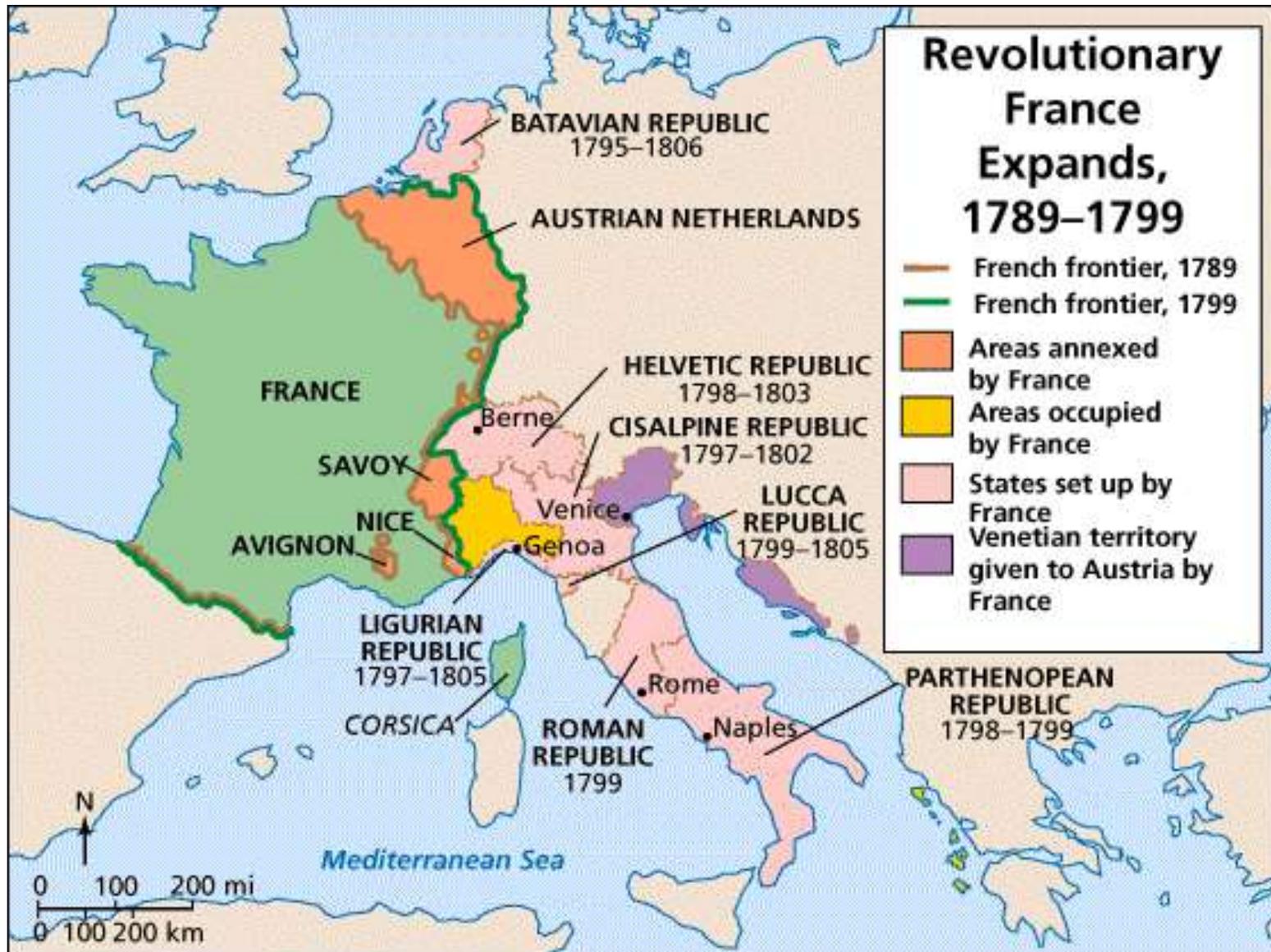
## Talleyrand's arguments in favor of the Bourbons:

Their "historic" rights to rule over France

The Bourbons to accept France's pre-Revolution borders

The Bourbons: a guarantee of peace and stability to Europe





1814: a majority in  
France is calling for **peace**  
**and tranquility**

Revolutionary &  
Napoleonic wars: 25  
years





Napoleon at  
Fontainebleau





**FONTAINEBLEAU WEDNESDAY, APRIL 20TH, 1814**

## The Bourbon restoration

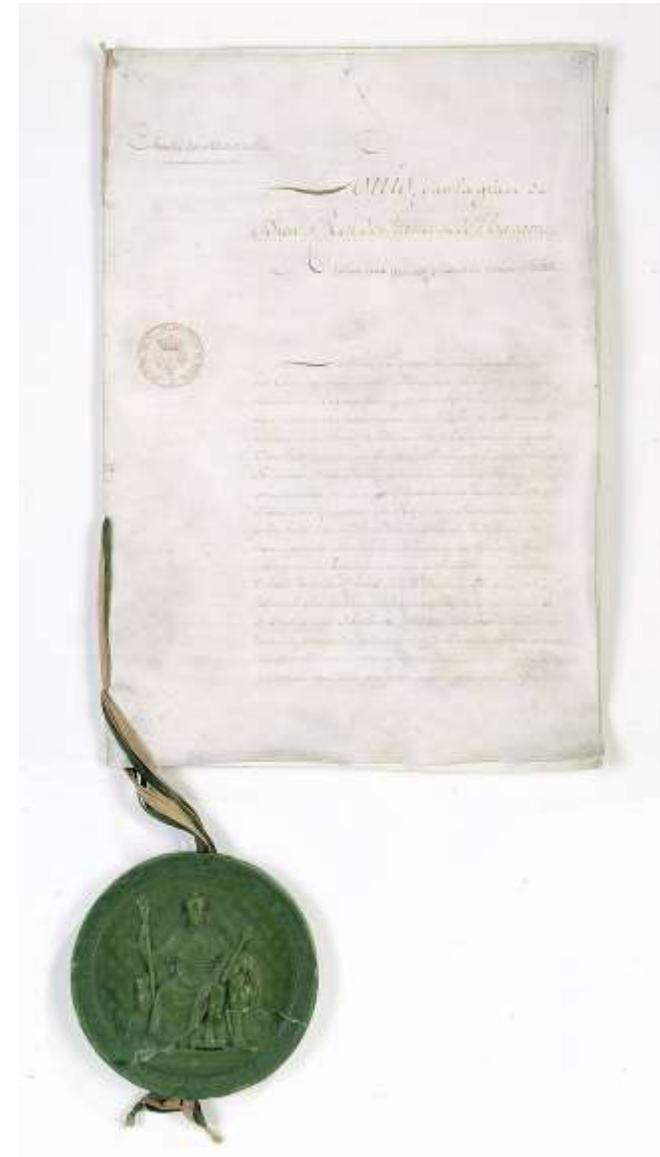


Restoration: from the Latin *restaurare* (rebuild, repair...)

April-June 1814: not a return to the Old Regime

The Restoration: an attempt to end the Revolution

1814: a **Constitution** for France (*Charte Constitutionnelle*)



Louis XVIII: a king made in exile

Left France in June 1791 at 36

Nearly 60 in 1814 (a third of his life in exile)

Self proclaimed king "Louis XVIII" in June 1795 (death of his young nephew)





A 23 year exile across Europe



**Constantly on the move** depending on France's victories & changing political priorities of his "allies"



Louis XVIII never relinquished his rights to ascend the throne



*“I have received, Sir, your letter... You must not wish your return to France; you would need to march over 100 000 cadavers... Sacrifice your interest to the peace and stability of France. History will thank you for that.”*

Napoleon to Louis XVIII  
(7 September 1800)

Increasing  
pressure to  
abdicate vs.  
generous annuity  
  
Kidnapping plots



Proclamation (2  
December 1804):

*“We will never  
compromise over the  
heritage of your fathers;  
we will never abandon  
our rights”*

To George III in 1807:

*“I am certain of serving  
Your Majesty by offering  
him a powerful ally. This  
ally, this is not my  
person, this is the king  
of France”*

*“I cannot forget I am the  
king of France”*

*“The dignity of my  
crown”*



## Louis XVIII: a pragmatist



The French Revolution and its social consequences cannot be ignored

A return to the Old Regime is not an option

Slow evolution towards a liberal & constitutional monarchy

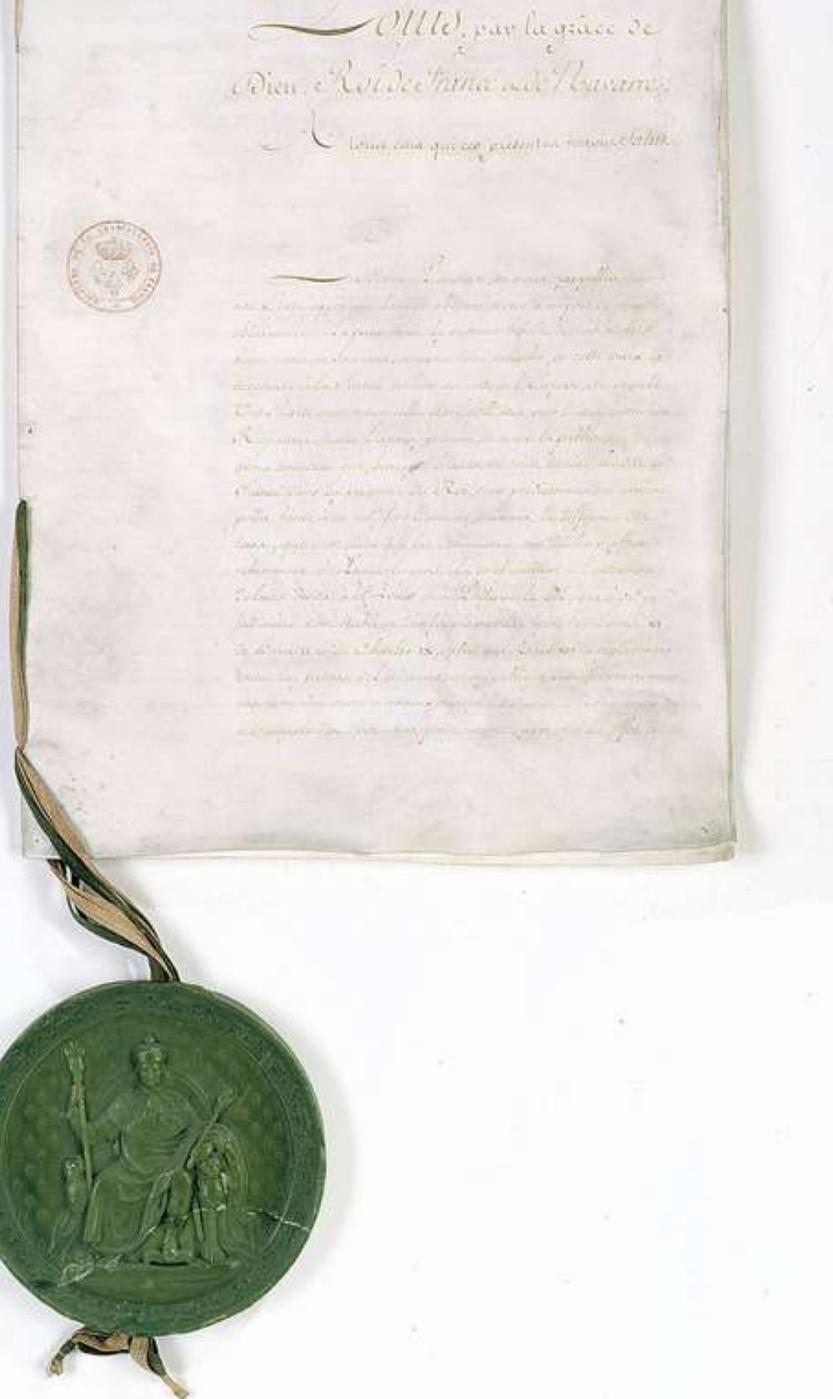
1814: a shrewd  
politician who  
played his only card  
well



A key argument: Louis  
XVIII as the only likely  
option

Why?

The only one capable of  
restoring and guarantee  
peace in Europe



## Louis XVIII and the Charter

The aftermath of periods of crises: the need to **innovate**

How “to end the Revolution” while preserving its political and social gains?

The Restoration: a unique experience

A Charter **freely granted** by  
Louis XVIII (4 June 1814)

*“We have voluntarily, and by the free exercise of our royal authority, accorded and do accord, grant and concede to our subjects, as well for us as for our successors forever, the constitutional charter which follows”*

France’s **constitution** until 1848

A short (76 articles), vague and **flexible** document



A spirit of **reconciliation**

Preamble: *“The dearest wish of our heart is that all Frenchmen should live as brothers”*

A large consensus (initially)



*“A peace treaty after a long war, a series  
of newly added articles, by joint  
agreement, to the ancient union between  
the nation and the king”*

François Guizot



## The king's historical rights

*“the kings, our predecessors”*  
*“the enduring examples of past ages”* (list of past kings)  
BUT  
Reference to *“the change of the times”* and *“the wish of our subjects”*

The Charter: a **new institution**, yet the **product of an ancient heritage**



No direct mentions of the  
Revolution

*“We have replaced by the Chamber of Deputies  
those former assemblies...”*

*“To renew with the chain of the times”*

*“Given at Paris, in the year of grace 1814, and of our  
reign the nineteenth” (as if the Revolution, the  
Republic & Napoleon’s Empire had never existed)*



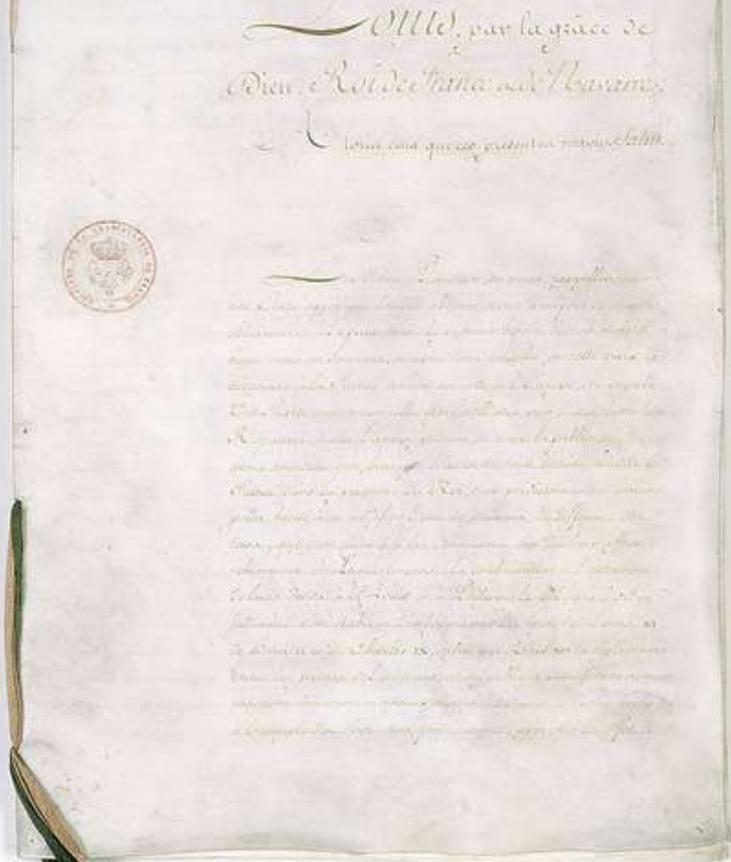
Forgetting the Revolution but  
not its social gains

*“we have banished from our recollection, as we  
could wish it were possible to blot out from history,  
all the evils which have afflicted the fatherland  
during our absence”*

The tradition of past royal edicts of pacification

Collective amnesia required to move forward

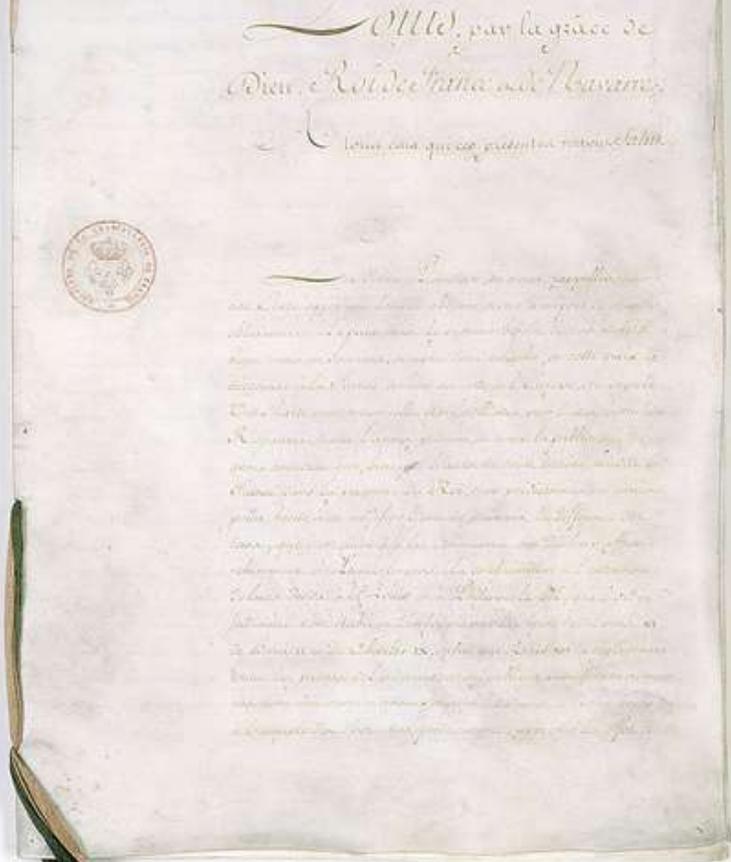




Reconciling the “divine rights of kings” with the “rights of the nation:

**Article 13:** *“The person of the king is inviolable and sacred”*

**Article 14:** *“The king is the supreme head of the state, commands the land and sea forces, declares war... and makes necessary regulations and ordinances for the execution of the laws and the security of the state”*

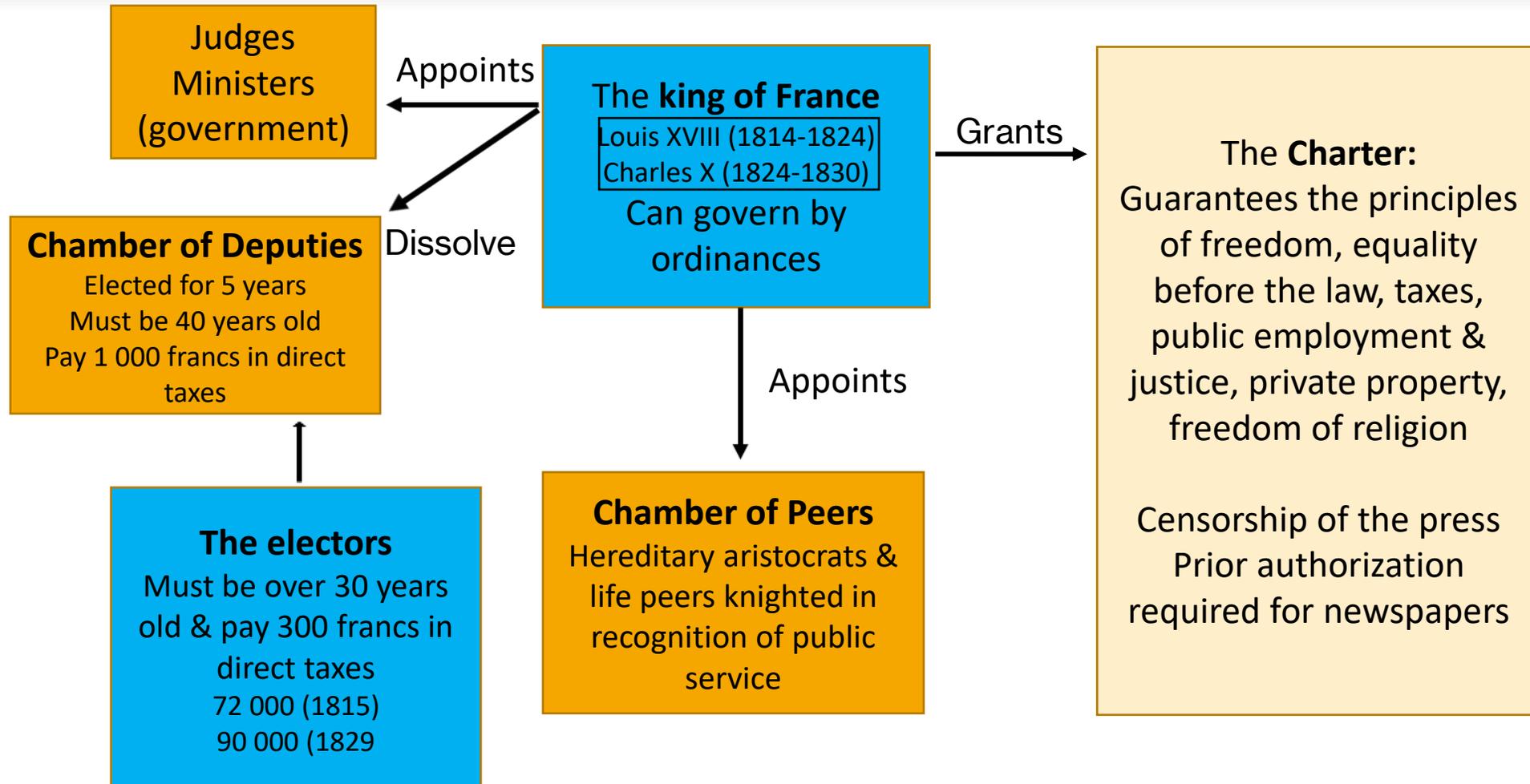


The Charter: the constitutional basis for Europe's most equitable, liberal and tolerant political system

**Article 13:** *"The person of the king is inviolable and sacred"*

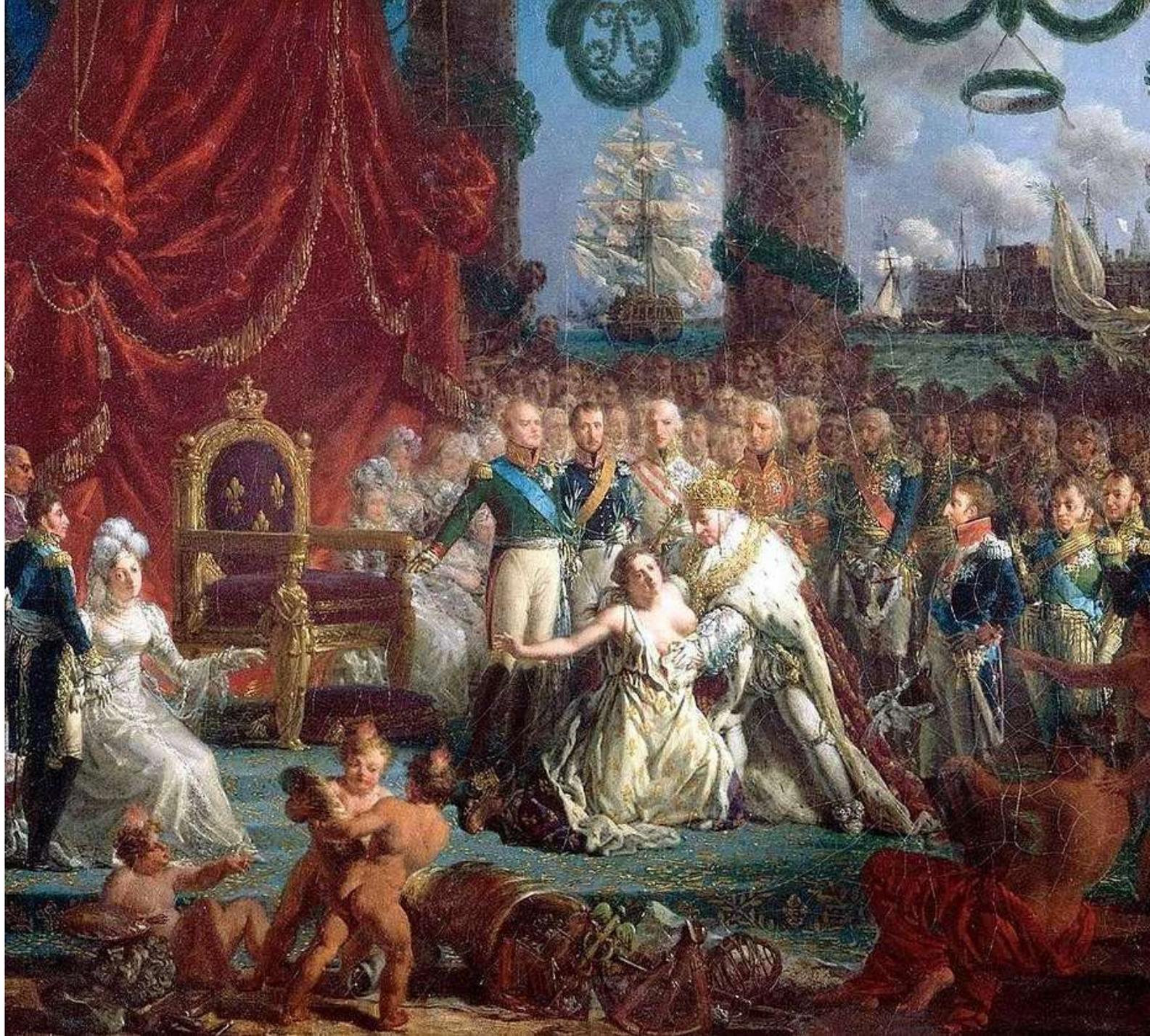
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# The Charter of 1814: how it worked



# The First Restoration (1814-1815)

Louis XVIII: to resuscitate court  
life at Versailles?





Louis XVIII at the **Tuileries Palace**: a temporary decision

Versailles to be restored to its former glory

Increased budget (200 000 francs): the **highest** of all the royal residences







Projects to return to Versailles  
interrupted by **the return of  
Napoleon (1815)**

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June 1815: Paris  
occupied  
Hefty war indemnity

The return of the King and  
his Court to Versailles  
abandoned for financial  
reasons



July 1815: Louis XVIII  
back in Paris

Two-thirds of France  
occupied

September: elections  
favored the “ultra-  
royalist” faction



An **ultra-royalist** majority  
vs. **moderates** (reconciling  
the monarchy & the  
Revolution's legacy)

The birth of  
**parliamentary practices**  
in France (the Chamber  
of Deputies vs. the king's  
ministers)



**Charles X (1824-1830): the return  
of the “absolute” monarchy?**

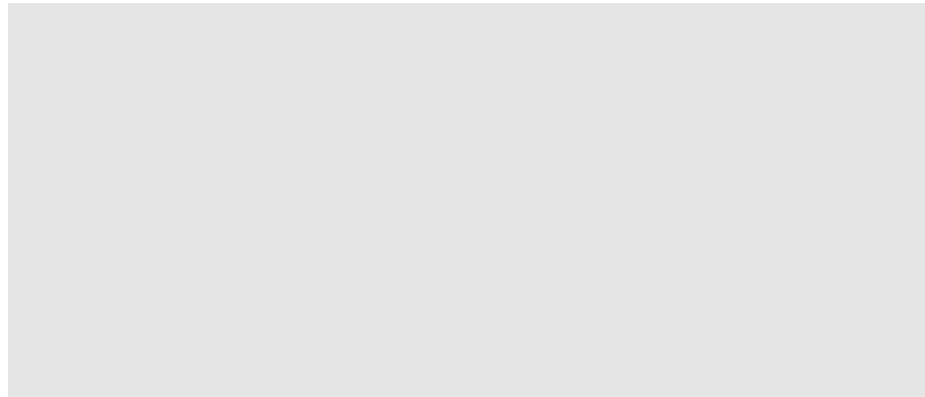




The youngest brother of Louis XVI

King at 67

*“There is only M. de La Fayette and myself  
who have not changed since 1789”*

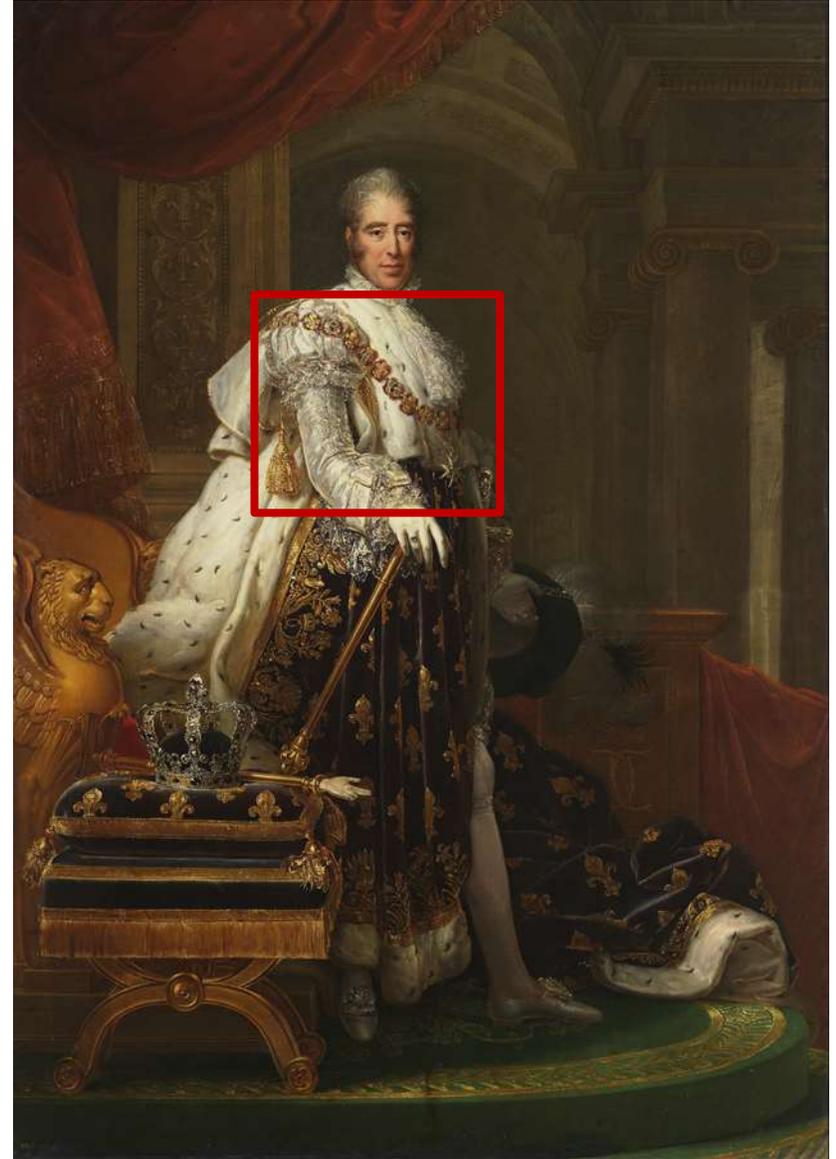




Short-lived popularity

An **indemnity** to nobles whose estates had been confiscated during the Revolution

The **Anti-Sacrilege Act** (against blasphemy)



Symbolic return to the fashion  
of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Louis XIV)

Shoulder pad, lace tie...





Charles X represented in front of a **column** (a symbol of stability following the “evils” of the Revolution)





The **central element** of the painting is not the king himself but the royal crown





The royal crown and the other symbols of royal power next to a golden throne: a **show of power**

A fragile legitimacy & a **king not in phase with the changing times**



The **controversial**  
coronation of Charles X  
(29 May 1825)

No coronation in France  
since 1775 (Louis XVI)

Louis XVIII: the 100 days &  
ill health prevented him  
from being crowned



Why a coronation?

To renew the **divine origin**  
of the king's power & his  
ties with his subjects

The Coronation as a  
“national holiday”

A reconciled France on  
display





France introduced to the **parliamentary system**:

1. The right to petition the government
2. The right to amend proposed laws
3. The collective responsibility of ministers before the Chamber of Deputies (“responsible government”)

“Liberal” practices of government deemed too revolutionary by Charles X and his ministers

August 1829: the appointment of a new Cabinet led by **Jules de Polignac**

The **primary objective**: to put an end to the “dangerous” practice of “liberal” governance

The Chamber of Deputies elected in 1827 hostile to the government

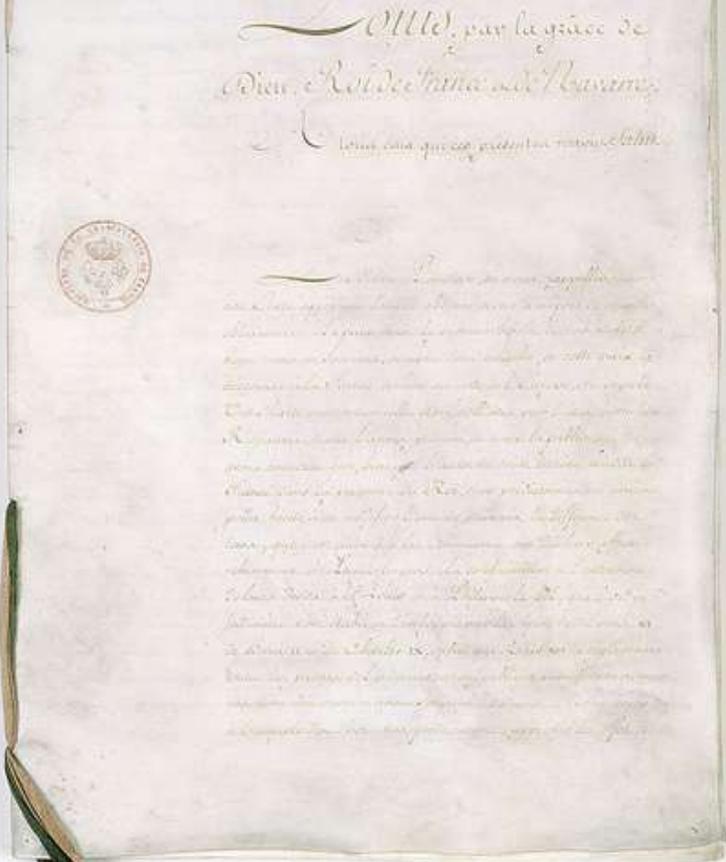
New elections in June 1830: greater opposition to the government





Charles X decided to govern by **ordinances**:

1. Censorship of the press re-established
2. the newly elected chamber dissolved
3. reform of the electoral system
4. New elections called for September 1830



Remember article 14 of the Charter?

**Article 14:** *“The king is the supreme head of the state, commands the land and sea forces, declares war... and makes necessary regulations and ordinances for the execution of the laws and the security of the state”*

The July Revolution of 1830





Violent reaction to the ordinances

The first barricades (July 27)

Street pavement removed to prevent cavalry and artillery from patrolling the **narrow streets** of Paris

28 July: 1 000 barricades

Charles X in residence at  
Saint-Cloud

30 July: royal troops in full  
retreat

The only option: exile





Delacroix's *La Liberté guidant le peuple*

Initial title: the barricade

The **symbolic role** of the barricades  
A key moment of the revolution  
(28 July 1830)



Delacroix's *La Liberté guidant le peuple*

A pyramidal structure

**Marianne** holding the French flag  
at the centre



Who is *Marianne*?

Mysterious origins of a republican symbol

French Revolution: a female figure representing “Liberty” and “Reason”

*Marianne* came to personify the French Republic in 1848



*Marianne on the barricades*

Recalling 1789

*Marianne* is holding the French flag and a rifle

She wears a Phrygian cap (symbol of freed slaves)



The towers of Notre-Dame in the background (symbol of eternal France)



The people in arms

Far left: a worker (likely a  
typographer)

Possibly Eugène Delacroix  
himself (bourgeois)

Child wearing a soldier's hat

Background: the people in  
arms emphasizing social  
diversity





Shipwrecked fighters for  
freedom



Amidst the barricades, the victims (recent and violent deaths)

The three colors of the Revolution on display



## A new king for France: Louis-Philippe

