

French revolution and napoleon

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Napoleon's claim that he saved the French revolution does not seem to hold due to the many changes he brought to the ideals of the French revolution. Of course he continued some of the policies which were in the spirit of the revolution but these policies were connected with education and civil codes rather than a proper system of government. In fact, it can be shown that the system of government established by Napoleon was a step back towards absolutism rather than a more democratic system. Undoubtedly, Napoleon took over the government of France as a popular ruler but he was also a dictator who went against the policies of the original revolutionaries (Spielvogel, 2005).

The first and most important way in which he differed from the revolutionaries was that his idea of civil liberties was quite different from the ideals supported by them. He imposed strict controls over the press, used spying tactics on his own people to look for enemies within and even though he had made a civil code, he arrested people without having real causes and sent his enemies to jail without bringing proper charges or having trials (Spielvogel, 2005). In this manner, his actions were closer to the monarchical system than revolutionary equality.

This violation of rights continued as he revoked the Declaration of the Rights of Man and established a system of hereditary privilege which would essentially bring back monarchy to the country and its various principalities. The brothers of Napoleon were made the rulers of areas such as Spain, Holland, Warsaw and Switzerland. His best generals were given hereditary titles which made them immediate members of the nobility in France

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(Spielvogel, 2005). This was certainly a departure from the ideals of the revolution but Napoleon could do it because he was a dictator and he remained popular.

In terms of religion, while the revolutionaries sought to break away from religion in all possible ways including changing the calendar and the number of days in a week, Napoleon saw no such need for removing the presence of the church from France. He made deals with the Catholic Church which allowed him to consolidate his power and give some concessions to the church at the same time. Of course he did not snatch the land from the bourgeoisie to give back to the church but he did establish a system under which priests became government servants so they could receive a stipend from the national treasury to support their activities (Spielvogel, 2005).

Finally, Napoleon did not stop in his ambition to become the ruler of Europe and just as monarchs before him had tried, he set out on a campaign of conquering and his military escapades are well known. In conclusion, it is easy to say that while Napoleon used the name of the revolution and the idea of the revolution to his own advantage, he did not seek out to be a revolutionary but in fact wanted to be a monarch of France much like the rulers who had come before his time.

Word Count: 517

Works Cited

Spielvogel, J. 2005, *Western Civilization*, Wadsworth Publishing.