

Napoleon and the continental system after 1806 essay



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June 2010 (3) Assess the impact of the Continental System on Europe after 1806. Timed practise essay CPE The Continental System, introduced by Napoleon via his Berlin, 1806, Milan, 1807 and Fontainebleau, 1810, Decrees; aimed at usurping Britain's economic dominance and replacing her with France, on the whole had a detrimental effect upon the social, political and economic aspects of Europe. Moreover it led to the final defeat of Napoleon and the end of the Napoleonic era whilst affecting historical events for another hundred years. The Continental System was forced upon France's allies and states which it influenced; against their will.

Napoleon forced it upon them and if they refused France would invade and control such as Louis' Kingdom of Holland. However this military attempt to force the System led to many wars and campaigns that not only cost the enemy but also France. In the Iberian campaign, 1808-1813, and the Russian campaign, 1812, it led to deaths of soldiers who were not always French. In Russia Germanic states such as Wurttemberg and Bavaria provided 22 000 to serve Napoleon whilst the Kingdom of Italy produced 27 000. However the military failure cost these countries dearly.

Only 1500 returned to "Germany" whilst only 1000 returned to "Italy". The social effect was catastrophic as the population of these countries were depleted of working age men. Not only did France need to employ conscription due to Napoleon's desire for Anglo-Franco economic warfare but so did Britain. She increased the Portuguese army to 30 000 whilst demanding an additional 10000 to man the lines of Torres Vedras. The five years of conflict because of the British Orders of Council's, 1807 and Napoleon's Decrees

brought the population of Portugal down from 3.2 million in 1807 to 2.9 million in 1812.

Napoleon's Continental System had a significantly adverse social effect upon the European countries as it depleted their population of men that the states depended their growth upon. The fundamental aim of the System was to replace Britain with France and it was through the Continental Blockade that Napoleon sought to achieve this. His aim to block Britain from continental Europe meant that many traditional industries and areas of business were destroyed. In "Holland" Rotterdam and Amsterdam lost its trade and shipbuilding industry whilst "Switzerland's" cotton industry was damaged as it could not export to Britain and her colonies.

Moreover the Grand Duchy of Warsaw lost its grain industry and "Italy" lost its silk trade. For European countries the economic system was damaging and hampered their economic growth. However trade from France and into France prospered and these areas experienced growth from the concentration of trade. However this concentration also was negative when France was able to produce its own goods and this occurred when the agricultural industry provided enough for its 29 million people and foreign imports were not required.

Foreign agricultural industries then suffered a depression. Furthermore the economic activity was the fundamental factor that led to Napoleon's demise. Economic collapse began in 1810 and this was due to over speculation and collapse in banks outside of France. Bourgeoisie money was invested in land and property and diverted from enterprise which led to a halt in economic

progression and a rise in raw material cost. Within France and countries employing the System many firms became bankrupt and Europe faced a recession.

Economically the System had a detrimental impact upon the countries of Europe but it also “nearly” worked as Britain was under economic pressure but Napoleon’s failure in military campaigns sparked resistance against France and led to Napoleon’s downfall Overall the impact was great economically but predominantly negative as it changed traditional trade and halted economic growth. Due to the economic factor combined with the military factors the Continental System also helped foster anti-French feeling across Europe.

Its employment sustained continued opposition from Britain and led to her appearing as a ‘beacon’ against the ‘tyrant’ ‘ogre’. Britain’s help in Spain and financial support in Russia led to resistance of French rule: resulting in the formation of the War of Liberation 1814. Principally this was the beginning of the final downfall of Napoleon as it led to his abdication to Elba but secondly the “liberation” of these client states led to renewed ideas of nationalism. His effect can be assessed in the short term and long term.

Initially it led to the wars against Napoleon and their freedom but in the long it appears that the nationalism, that the Continental System fostered, resulted in the creation of Italy, 1861, and Germany, 1871, which invariably led to the First and Second World War which, one may argue, shows that the Continental System not only impacted the economic, social and political landscape whilst Napoleon was alive and ruling but it also had affects that

would last more than one hundred year. In conclusion the effect of the Continental System was profound. It led to social instability through its enforcement by military means and it led to economic problems in not only France but mainly upon its client states. Many industries were restricted and the Continental System changed the economic landscape of Europe.

However it also made a lasting impact on Europe and the System controlled the next 100 years of history through its effects on the economy and political factors of Europe. The effects were profound and perhaps Napoleon should have acknowledged that it was the Continental System that was his “greatest mistake”. But most lasting policy that Napoleonic France employed.