

Restoration and Regeneration: the constitutions of 1814 and 1830

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The fall of Napoleon put the existence of the new cantons in question. The patricians of Bern hoped to recover Vaud and Aargau, and Uri still regarded the Leventina as its own. In the event the European powers and the Diet confirmed the nineteen cantons of the Mediation and added three more. On 9 September 1814 the Diet approved the Federal Pact, and on 12 September Neuchâtel, Geneva and the Valais were admitted, which brought the number of cantons to twenty-two.¹ Ticino survived as a canton. The price was a constitution that its own people rejected and that foreign diplomats and federal commissioners imposed on it, in a sequence of events that made 1814 one of the most turbulent years in the canton's history.

1 The Giubiasco revolt and the imposed constitution of 1814

Ticino needed a new constitution because the Mediation constitution had fallen with the Act to which it was annexed. The Grand Council produced a first draft on 4 March 1814 that, according to the cantonal school journal, reflected "autentici principi democratici". The Diet rejected it.² A second draft, voted by the Grand Council on 29 July 1814, was rejected by the diplomats of the Allied powers as insufficiently restrictive. When the government tried to put a revised version into force on 21 August without consulting the assemblies of citizens, the assemblies rejected it as tyrannical. On 26 August armed bands of peasants, coordinated from Giubiasco near Bellinzona, rose against the government. The movement was led by members of the bourgeoisie, clergymen and officers such as Captain Francesco Airoidi. Historians have described it as a liberal revolution.³ The Confederation intervened with three extraordinary federal commissioners in succession: Ludwig von Sonnenberg of Lucerne, Vincenzo Salis-Sils of the Grisons and Johann Jakob Hirzel of Zurich, who

dissolved the constituent assembly that the insurgents had convened. An extraordinary federal court arrived on 7 November 1814 and conducted months of investigations, arrests and confiscations. The constitution that emerged in December 1814, the sixth version of the year, was signed by Giuseppe Rusconi as president of the Grand Council. The school journal dates its ratification to 15 December, while the study of the Giubiasco revolt dates the final text to 17 December 1814.⁴ Historians of Ticino describe it as aristocratic and reactionary in character, imposed by the powers of the Holy Alliance.

The constitution of 1814 reduced the Grand Council to seventy-six members and created the office of the *landamano*, the head of government who gave his name to the regime of the following fifteen years. It retained a census suffrage that confined political rights to men of property. Never ratified by the people, it contained no procedure for its own amendment.⁵ It also introduced the rotation of the seat of government among Bellinzona, Locarno and Lugano every six years, which the section on the capitals below examines.

2 Notes

1. Koller, "Restaurazione" (above). ↩
2. "La Costituzione del 1814", Scuola ticinese, no. 65, plate 15, https://m4.ti.ch/fileadmin/DECS/DS/Rivista_scuola_ticinese/ST_n.65/ST_65_tavola_15_Costituzione_1814.pdf. ↩
3. Martinola, study of the liberal revolution of 1814, Scuola ticinese, no. 78, https://www4.ti.ch/fileadmin/DECS/DS/Rivista_scuola_ticinese/ST_n.78/ST_78_Martinola_rivoluzione_liberale_1814.pdf, drawing on Eligio Pometta, "La rivoluzione di Giubiasco", Bollettino storico della Svizzera italiana, 1921–1924. ↩
4. "La Costituzione del 1814" (above); Martinola, revolution of 1814 (above). ↩
5. Marazzi, study of the reform of 1830, Scuola ticinese, no. 78, https://www4.ti.ch/fileadmin/DECS/DS/Rivista_scuola_ticinese/ST_n.78/ST_78_Marazzi_riforma_1830_e_contributo_Franscini.pdf. ↩

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