

ANATOMY OF REVOLUTION

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I. The Old Regime and Symptoms of the Coming Revolution

Although the society is often times economically improving, the government is in financial trouble, may be even close to breakdown.

Pressure groups intensify their activities, often outside normal, politically acceptable channels.

The intellectual class within the society (artists, poets, scientists, philosophers, i.e. those people who earn a living through aesthetic, intellectual activity) transfers its allegiance away from the existing government. There is a tendency to look upon the existing society as being corrupt, evil, and the ruling class as being decadent, impotent. Their allegiance is now transferred to a more abstract belief in the coming of a New Era, a model Utopia, a more perfect human community where existing cruelties and human sufferings will be destroyed.

Class antagonisms seem to intensify. Lower classes look upon the upper, ruling class as being corrupt and want to **dislodge** them instead of becoming a member of them. Class antagonisms seem to be the most strong and dangerous when a lower class has achieved economic wealth yet without receiving similar political power.

II. First Stage of the Revolution

Although there is revolutionary talk in the air, it seems as though when the revolution breaks out, it comes as a surprise. The first stage of the revolution is not often clear to the revolutionaries themselves, let alone the rest of the society. The transition from agitation to action is not a sudden clear, or definite thing.

What usually touches off the revolution is when the existing government tries to gather money (taxes) from the people, and they **refuse** to pay. People organize themselves to protest such action and end up further agitating for the elimination and replacement of that existing government.

The confusing events of the early days of the revolution polarizes society into two groups - members of the old regime vs. the party of the revolutionaries, and the revolutionaries win a major victory. The old regime tries to strike back but with a noticeable lack of success. There is a resulting period of joy, a well spring of optimism, and a sense that a "new era" is beginning.

The reason for this initial success during the first stage of revolution is that the people are **united** in their opposition to the corruptions of the old regime. When the people now assume the reins of government and face its problems, the short period of honeymoon, or joy, is over.

III. Rule by the Moderates

The first group that comes to power are politically moderate, (i.e. they want changes in the society, but not all encompassing or violent changes.) Once in power this group loses the sense of homogeneity they had as a result of their initial opposition to the old regime. They find they have different reasons for being in opposition and once in power, these different political philosophies begin to emerge. Nevertheless, they face these common problems:

1. Write a new Constitution.
2. Although they are in the process of constructing a new government (i.e. constitution), they must carry on the mundane responsibilities of governance those everyday chores which keeps society from falling apart, e.g. mail service, police protection, maintenance of civil bureaucratic agencies which keeps goods and services flowing in the society.
3. Maintain an army against possible negative reaction from internal and external enemies of the revolution.
4. Facing conservatives on the right who support the old regime and radicals on the left who believe that the revolution should move further along in terms of more changes and reforms.

Once again we see the society split into different groups. Why can't the moderates maintain power?

1. They cannot effectively censor the radicals (after all, didn't they oppose the old regime for using censorship practices; a **new**, humanly good society simply doesn't use such techniques...)
2. Because they have to maintain civil order until they write a new constitution and have new elections, they have to rely on governmental institutions of the old regime, at least temporarily. As a result they themselves become identified with the corrupt political order they have taken over.
3. As the revolution moves forward and intensifies in violent activity or the threat of violent activity, the moderates must face the task of organizing for the probability of war, thus necessitating the organization of the government and society along quasi-military lines. They simply don't have the stomach for it.
4. They can't honestly believe that the radicals are their enemies. They can not believe they are falling behind in the revolution. They are too "realistic" when the coming crisis demands **idealism**. /?

IV. Accession of the Radicals

The beginning of the struggle between the moderates and the radicals is marked by increased tension and acts of violence (e.g. street fighting, forced seizure of property). Tempers are strained to the breaking point over matters that in a stable society are capable of almost automatic solutions.

What is so surprising is the small number of radicals.

Why are the radicals able to come to power?

1. Although their numbers are small, most of them live in urban areas, such as the capital city, where they can have an impact on the government greater than their numbers would indicate.
2. A great majority of people just don't participate daily in the on-going activities of the revolution; the radicals **do**, therefore having a disproportionate impact on the future of the revolution.

*Just like now,
most don't act
in war in Iraq*

3. The chaos of the revolution has created a society which has become more tolerant of violence.
4. Having no major responsibilities in the moderate government, the radicals can freely criticize the existing power structure, pointing out limitations and stirring up resistance, grievances, and idealistic attitudes without a sense of reason and compromise.

V. Reign of Terror and Virtue

Once the radicals are in power, there is no more finicky regard for the liberties of the individual or concern over questions of constitutional legality.

Once the radicals seize control, their revolutionary ideals of are still looked upon as being ultimate goals, but they will not be instituted into the fabric of government immediately because to do so would allow "corrupt," counter-revolutionaries to misuse these opportunities. As the French radical Robespierre argued, "The revolutionary government is the **despotism** of liberty against tyranny."

Machinery of dictatorship government during the Reign of Terror:

1. Final decisions are taken away from previously formed democratic organizations and concentrated in the hands of the few.
2. Characteristic form of the dictatorship is rule by committee.
3. Courts of law are replaced by revolutionary tribunals with corresponding suspension of civil liberties.
4. Special "secret" police appear and the carrying out of mass executions.

There is a mania for destroying all the reminders of the corrupt, decadent past, frequently manifested in renaming things (e.g. streets, buildings, cities, people).

Radicals develop an ascetic, puritanical style. In order to achieve this new utopian society, the New Era - there is a concern for eradicating minor vices - e.g. dancing, sexual promiscuity, drinking, music.

There is an almost "religious" fanaticism to bring about the New Era. As a result, political disagreement is looked upon as "heresy". Outsiders are looked upon as being sinners, inhuman - hence the guillotine, the firing squad. At the same time there develops a cult of saints, a deification of revolutionary heroes - e.g. Franklin, Robespierre, Cromwell, Rousseau, Marat, Lenin, Castro.

Although the idealism of the Terror almost takes on religiously fanatic dimensions, almost all European revolutions are opposed to organized Christianity.

There is usually civil war, confiscation of land and other property of the losers or enemies of the state, and war against other countries.

How is the Terror possible?

1. As a result of previous years and months of illegal violence during early phases of the revolution, people have become conditioned to accept violence more easily.

2. The pressure of civil and foreign wars increases fear and violence at home. The need to hysterically "stamp out" the enemy, no matter who he is, before he gets you.
3. Acute economic crisis (resulting from new investments frightened away, unstable environment discourages new business enterprises, slowdown in agricultural production, difficulty of administering inadequate supplies) makes people desperate in their search for security, and hence enraged against those people, innocent or otherwise, who are perceived as guilty for causing such economic chaos.
4. Class struggle intensifies.
5. The breakdown of government machinery forces people to resolve internal conflict by violence.
6. Leadership has learned from previous phases of revolution how to effectively use violence and propaganda for their purposes.
7. The fury of idealistic fanaticism, which all phases of the revolution has continually espoused, provides a rationale for such action.

VI. Thermidorian Reaction (i.e. Convalescence)

- 1. Politically, the most striking development to be noted is the establishment of a tyrant, a one man rule, usually resulting from his ability to represent and control the army.
- 2. The army becomes the final arbiter of power, decision, and control because when the normal checks and balances of society have been destroyed by years of revolutionary activity, the army is the only intact instrument of power left.
- 3. There is a noticeable reduction of violence within the society. The puritanical zeal ends. There is a relaxation of moral standards, with the resulting re-emergence of gaiety, dancing, promiscuity, etc.
- 4. The new governing class that works with the tyrant seems to be a very miscellaneous lot. They seem to be tame and unenterprising in many ways. They come from all classes. They usually do a fairly good job in getting institutions, laws, routines, the standard ways of doing things, back to work again.
- 5. The grand slogans and goals of the revolution (e.g. "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity", "All Power to the Working Class", "We hold these truths to be self-evident", etc.) which the radicals believed could be achieved over night, now become frozen into an ideal. People then more realistically see goals as long term. Such goals now will be achieved more slowly, more peacefully, without violence.
- 6. The new ruling class is quite content with social stratification (i.e. lower, upper, and middle class differentiations). The new political order will once again, like the Old Regime, resolve conflicts with the more traditional methods, (e.g. laws and courts, civil liberties, discussion and debate, legislation of new programs with popular consent, legitimization of authority.)

BACKGROUND TO THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

I. Social Structure of the Old Regime

A. The First Estate - The Clergy

1. 100,000 out of a population of 25 million (less than 1% of the population).
2. Owned about 10% of the land of France.
3. Were tax exempt, although they met every five years to determine their financial donation to the national treasury.
4. There was an increasing division between the upper membership of the Church hierarchy (i.e. archbishops, bishops, abbots) and the lower clergy (i.e. local parish priests). For example, of the 130 French bishops holding offices during the decade preceding the Revolution, only 1 was of common birth.
5. The Church ran most of the schools in France, it also had the responsibility of administering censorship of the press, books, journals, etc.
6. In the Estates-General, the clergy will have approximately 300 representatives, these clerics will be almost evenly divided between high church officials and lower parish priests.

B. The Second Estate - The Secular Nobility

1. 400,000 out of a population of 25 million (about 2% of the population).
2. Owned about 20% of the land of France.
3. Were also largely tax exempt.
4. During the relatively ineffectual reigns of Louis XV and Louis XVI, the aristocracy had significantly reasserted its power; they occupied most of the key positions in the king's court, the officer corps, the high Church offices, the regional parliaments. Through the Parliament of Paris, they effectively had blocked both kings' feeble attempts at tax reform in the decades leading to the Revolution.
5. They still controlled the local courts and continued to legally demand from the peasantry a few remaining feudal privileges (e.g. forced labor, they held monopolies over local breweries, wineries, bakeries, etc.). They continued to have hunting rights on the commoners' land and they could prevent peasants access to forests and common pasturage.
6. They had 300 representatives at the Estates-General meeting. Similar to the First Estate, there were some nobles of liberal-reformist ideas.

C. The Third Estate - The Remaining 97% of the French Population

1. The Bourgeoisie

- a. 2.5 million people out of 25 million (10% of the population).
- b. Owned about 20% of the land.

95% of 3rd E. in 1789

c. This class provided the **leadership** during the course of the French Revolution. This class had economically reaped the rewards of a five-fold increase in the French foreign trade (1715-1789). This class had significantly internalized the ideas and reforming zeal of the Enlightenment. They were frustrated with the aristocratic-controlled government and their successful attempts to block tax reform. Hence, the bourgeoisie desired a share in the political power which would equitably echo the growing economic power of this class. As R. R. Palmer states, "The bourgeoisie resented the nobleman for his superiority and his arrogance. What had formerly been customary respect was now felt as humiliation. And they felt that they were being shut out from offices and honors, and that the nobles were seeking ever more power in government as a class..."

d. They not only paid a significant amount of taxes, but they had made considerable loans to the government to fund the national debt. (There's a certain irony to this that maybe only Voltaire could appreciate!)

2. The Urban Artisans - The Sans-culottes

a. Approximately 2.5 million out of the population of 25 million (10%) of the population)

b. These people were largely urban wage earners - e.g. housekeepers, servants, tradesmen in a decaying guild system, small shop owners, people such as Madame Defarge which Dickens so poetically, yet ominously described in his *Tale of Two Cities*. They owned no land because they were urban workers with low wages.

c. Similar to the bourgeoisie, they were a small percentage of the population, yet living in Paris, a city of 800,000, as well as the provincial capitals (e.g. Lyon, Dijon, Marseille, Strassbourg, Lille, etc.). Hence, they will exercise a **disproportionate** influence upon the course of the Revolution, for these cities housed the centers of government.

d. This class had suffered financially during France's rapid economic expansion during the 18th century. Between 1730-1780 prices had risen over 65%, but wages rose only an average of 22%. Given the fact that almost 50% of their income went towards purchasing food, the bad harvests during the 1780's, resulting in a business depression and food shortages, hit this class particularly hard.

e. William McNeill in his fascinating work, *The Pursuit of Power*, suggests that the antiquated political-social structure in France did not adequately absorb 18th century France's rapidly growing population. Food shortages caused inflation and economic depression, resulting in massive urban unemployment or underemployment. He estimates there were 100,000 urban workers seeking jobs in Paris alone! In Strassbourg, home of the national anthem, *The Marseilles*, the city of 50,000 possibly had 20% of its population unemployed! This will have explosive repercussions upon the course of the Revolution.

3. The Peasantry

a. Approximately 20 million out of 25 million (80% of the population).

b. They owned about 40% of the land.

c. These farmers were basically legally free, but as has already been noted, they still owned lingering quasi-feudal dues to the nobility, not so much an economic hardship, more of an aggravation, a humiliation similar to the resentment the bourgeoisie also felt towards the aristocracy. During the 18th century, the nobility had not only regained control over the central government at Versailles, but it attempted to reassert more

lingering obligations

control over the peasantry. Their control over the local courts gave them legal leverage over the peasantry who saw this action as an infringement over their previously hard-won freedoms.

- d. Similar to the **sans-culottes**, these peasants also paid heavy royal taxes and church tithes, both mandatory by law, enforced through aristocratically-dominated courts backed by royal troops.
- e. Although the peasantry as a whole did not suffer as grievously from the bad harvests, the poorest peasantry did (i.e. sharecroppers and renters) in a sense, they were the rural counterpart to the urban **sans-culottes** - maybe as high as 30% of the rural population.

The Third Estate were given **double** the representation of the first two Estates - approximately 600 representatives, elected in the winter and spring of 1788-89. The bourgeoisie, having the wealth and leisure time which enabled them to travel to Versailles, as well as the education which provided them with the oratorical skills to articulate and focus the grievances of the entire Third Estate, provided over 95% of the Third Estate representatives.

II. Differing Political Ideologies - Conservative, Moderate, and Radical

A. Conservative

(e.g. The royal family, including Louis XVI's two brothers, the Count of Artois and the Count of Provence; members of the nobility and the upper clergy.)

1. Monarchical absolutism - guided and ideologically underpinned by divine right.
2. No separation of church and state - the Church and nobility should continue to exercise its feudal privileges, maintaining a hierarchical class structure. Nobility, hence political power and economic status, result from birth.
3. Maintain mercantilism - since the royal monopolies, government and church offices go to the aristocracy. Tax exemption should continue for the clergy and aristocracy. There continued a certain traditional contempt by the secular and clerical aristocracy towards "getting one's hands dirty," i.e. getting involved in capitalistic enterprises.
4. Maintain feudal control - through taxes and local courts, over the peasantry.

B. Moderate

(e.g. Members who dominated the national government during the moderate and convalescent phases of the French Revolution. Leading figures were Abbé Sièyes, Mirabeau, Talleyrand, Lafayette, the Duke d'Orleans, (a nephew of the king), liberal members of the aristocracy, lower clergy, and the middle class.)

1. Constitutional monarchy - kings power should be checked by having a constitution and a national parliament. Provincial governments and the legal system should have autonomy, to a certain degree, from the central government at Paris.
2. Separation of church and state - a person should be guaranteed intellectual freedom as long as he was not civilly disobedient.

3. **Laissez-Faire** capitalism - embrace the ideals of the French physiocrats and the economic ideas of Adam Smith. That is, break up the remaining feudal vestiges of the nobility/peasantry in the countryside. Destroy the antiquated guild system in the cities, allowing for uninhibited, free market transactions.
4. Political power should remain somewhat limited to the educated, property owning classes. Education and the ownership of property has a **moderating** influence upon people. If one is not a property owner or literate, work harder, eventually earning one's way into the opportunity to politically become active (i.e. vote or run for office). But basic civil liberties should be guaranteed to all citizens, regardless of economic status.

C. Radical

(e.g. Many members of the urban artisan class, (i.e. **sans-culottes**), and the rural proletariat as well. Its political and intellectual leadership came from the middle class who were sensitive to their needs - e.g. Robespierre, Danton, Marat, Saint-Just, Babeuf, Hébert and other leading members of the Paris Commune (i.e. city government), the radically dominated National Convention, and the Committee of Public Safety.)

1. Democracy - anti-monarchial, anti-aristocratic, ^{must precede in radical thought} [but the emerging military crisis of the radical phase demanded the establishment of a dictatorship.] As Robespierre stated, "The Committee for Public Safety is the despotism of democracy against the forces of the counter-revolution."
2. Antagonistic to any organized church - ideologically the radicals were not only anticlerical, but anti-Christianity, seeing it as lingering Medieval superstition which should give way to Enlightenment precepts. At best, as Robespierre attempted in the spring of 1794, there should be only a Deist faith, the institutionalized worship of the "Supreme Being."
3. In terms of economic philosophy, there was a split between the leftist leadership (e.g. Robespierre, Danton, etc.) and the ultra-left exemplified by such people as Hébert and Babeuf. Most of the middle class radical leadership continued to embrace the idea that private property was sacred. Hence, only in cases of emergency (i.e. food shortages, armament needs during the military crisis, etc.) should the government overrule private property rights, appropriating such wealth for the public good. But the ultra-left, which never gained power, argued for a vague form of socialism/communism - i.e. that property should be collectively owned, that wealth should be more equitably distributed. Members of the clergy, aristocracy, food hoarders, speculators should be executed and their wealth redistributed to meet the public needs.
4. Universal manhood suffrage - All people should have the right to vote and run for office. If political power is to be denied to anyone, it is only to those who oppose the revolution, (i.e. counter-revolutionaries).

What does this mean?

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Old Regime: Events Leading to the Revolution

July 5, 1788 In view of aristocratic resistance to tax reforms, Louis XVI promises to call the Estates-General the following May. Various classes were called to elect representatives and draw up lists of grievances.

September 1788 Aristocratic controlled Parlement of Paris decrees that the Estates-General should vote traditionally (i.e. 1 vote per Estate). This causes great resentment among lower classes towards the aristocracy.

January 1789 Abbé Sièyes writes pamphlet, *What Is the Third Estate?* In this popular work, he argued that political power should be given to the Third Estate because it represents 97% of the population. This pamphlet was strongly influenced by the ideas of Rousseau's *Social Contract*, typical of the feelings of the Third Estate.

May 1789 Estates-General meets.

Moderate Phase

June 17, 1789 Third Estate declares itself to be the "National Assembly," and requests sympathetic members of the First and Second Estates to join with them.

June 20, 1789 Tennis Court Oath - Third Estate reaffirms itself as the National Assembly and vows that it will not disband until it has implemented a national constitution for France. (*moderate*)

July 14, 1789 **Sans-culottes** and other Parisian townspeople storm the Bastille to search for arms to protect the National Assembly. A new Parisian municipal government is established as well as a National Guard (under the leadership of Lafayette). The King recognizes both the National Assembly and these revolutionary changes in Paris. (*Radicals*)

July-August 1789 "Great Fear" in the countryside. Armed peasants destroy aristocratic homes, burning records and confiscating property. This destroys the last remaining feudal privileges of the nobility.

August 4, 1789 Nobility in the National Assembly legally surrender their feudal privileges. Property thus becomes modernized in the sense that peasants who own farms no longer owe labor obligations or taxes to the nobility.

August 26, 1789 "Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen." Similar to the American Declaration of Independence and influenced by it, this great French document stated the ideals of the Enlightenment. This declaration would serve as the underlying ideological foundation for the French Revolution.

October 4, 1789 Women of Paris travel to Versailles to bring the royal family to Paris where they can keep a closer eye on them. The National Assembly follows...From this point in time, the national government will remain in Paris where it will be under the periodically strong influence of the Parisian masses.

July 12, 1790

Civil Constitution of the Clergy.

Church property is confiscated for purposes of paying off the national debt and stabilizing the currency, economy, and government finances. Clergy are elected locally and placed on government salary if they take an oath of allegiance to the Revolution. Only half of the clergy do. The King silently opposes this, the Pope openly denounces it. This legislation, more than any other revolutionary action, splits France deeply, for now Frenchmen must decide to embrace their Catholicism or the Revolution.

June 1791

Flight to Varennes - Royal family attempts to flee the country. They are captured at the frontier, brought back to Paris. National confidence in the King is lost. Hence, the moderate revolutionary leaders who have been arguing for a constitutional monarchy are politically undermined.

August 1791

Declaration of Pillnitz - Austrian and Prussian kings meet. These monarches declare they will actively restore order in France if other European powers will join them. This enrages the French and stimulates the war faction in the French national government.

European nations frightened out by French monarchs losing power.

April 20, 1792

France declares war on Austria.

July 25, 1792

Brunswick Manifesto - successfully defeating the ill-equipped French troops only 200 miles from Paris, Brunswick, head of the Austrian and Prussian armies, declares that if any harm falls upon the royal family or other members of the nobility, Paris will be dealt with harshly at the hands of his invading forces.

Radical Phase

August 10, 1792

Responding to the growing military crisis, the artisan class revolts in Paris.

- They attack the royal family, putting them under arrest and calling for the King's abdication.
- They dissolve the moderate national government, calling for new elections (universal manhood suffrage) and a democratic government.
- Create a more radical municipal government in Paris (i.e. Commune)

September 3-6, 1792

September Massacres. Sixteen hundred priests, nobles, and other suspected counter-revolutionaries are murdered. *1600 - in 4 days!*

September 20, 1792

National Convention convenes - Year 1 of the French Republic is declared. At Valmy, French forces defeat the Austrians and Prussians, temporarily preserving the Revolution.

January 1793

Louis XVI is executed. His wife will follow him to the guillotine 9 months later.

May 31, 1793

Sans-culottes again demonstrate, stimulated by chronic inflation, military defeats, and the revolutionary rhetoric of the Paris city council and the Jacobins. As a result, the National Convention is purged of its

moderate radicals (e.g. Danton). Now the radical Jacobins truly control the national government. They are sympathetic to the Parisian **sans-culottes** and willingly use terror and leftist governmental measures to mobilize the country against counter-revolution.

June 1793 to July 1794

Reign of Terror - Possibly as many as 40,000 people are killed, 300,000 additional people are arrested. France is invaded by other European powers and civil war erupts throughout the country.

The rule of France is under Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety. Although a violent time which saw even Christianity temporarily banned, it is also a time of great democratic and nationalistic experimentation (e.g. universal manhood suffrage, public education, mass conscription of troops, attempts at public works, wage-price controls, and the eradication of slavery in the colonies).

July 27, 1794

Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety falls - Revolutionary tribunals disbanded — Reign of Terror comes to an end. The National Convention reasserts control, eventually calling for the creation of a new, more-moderate government.

Convalescence (def)

August 22, 1795

Directory government is established

September 4, 1797

Purging of conservative elements of the Directory with the assistance of a rising young star in the French army - Napoleon. Democratic and foreign expansionistic tendencies of the Revolution are reaffirmed.

November 9, 1799

Napoleon comes to power through a military coup of the ineffectual Directory government. He establishes a military dictatorship.

December 2, 1804

Napoleon crowns himself Emperor of France.

How is it that those who oppose a monarch create a dictatorship?