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A Time of Turmoil

The French Revolution was one of the most influential events of modern history. The ten year period from 1789 to 1799 when France went from a Monarchy to a Republic, to a Reign of Terror, to Dictatorship was one of the most tumultuous times in European history.

Myth and Reality

Much myth and romantic legend has been written on what some politicians would like the French Revolution to have been, but the reality was that the French Revolution was a monstrous horror. In the name of *"liberty, equality, fraternity or death!"* over 40,000 people lost their heads to the guillotine , 300,000 people were publically executed by firing squads, drownings and other methods of mass murder and ultimately many millions died in the 25 years of war and upheavals that resulted.

The Prototype Revolution

The French Revolution has been the inspiration and model for all socialist and communist revolutions in modern history.

Deliberate Design

Lord Acton in his Lectures on the French Revolution observed: *"The appalling thing in the French Revolution is not the tumult, but the design. Through all the fire and smoke we perceive the evidence of calculating organisation . The managers remain studiously concealed and masked; but there is no doubt about their presence from the first."*

Tools of Revolution

The tools of the French Revolution were: dis-information, propaganda, the subversion of language, malice, envy, hatred, jealousy, mass murder and foreign military adventurism as a diversion to distract the masses from the failure of government. These tools have been implemented by more modern revolutionaries: Vladimir Lenin, Trotsky, Joseph Stalin, Mao Tse Tung, Fidel Castro, Che Guevare , Patrice Lumumba, Nicolai Ceausescu, Pol Pot, Ho Chi Minh and Robert Mugabe.

Revolutionary Ideas

The power mad and disenchanted have continued to sing the praises of the French Revolution, and to attempted to replicate its ideals in revolutions as far afield as Russia, China, Cuba, North Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Angola, the Congo and Zimbabwe. Demonic forces and the Enlightenment ideas of humanist philosophers such as Jean- Jacques Rousseau and Voltaire prepared the ground for revolution.

Disenchantment and Degeneration

Historian Otto Scott observed: *“French intellectuals, middle and upper classes had grown ashamed of their country, history and institutions. Such a phenomenon had never before arisen in any nation or race throughout the long history of mankind. ...a great loosening began; the country slowly came apart... for the first time since the decadent days of Rome, pornography emerged from its caves and circulated openly in a civilised nation. The Catholic Church in France was intellectually gutted; the priests lost their faith along with the congregations. Strange cults appeared; sex rituals, black magic, satanism. Perversion became not only acceptable, but fashionable. Homosexuals held public balls to which heterosexuals were invited and the police guarded their carriages... the air grew thick with plans to restructure and reconstruct all traditional French society and institutions.”* (Robespierre – Inside the French Revolution, the Reformer Library, New York, 1974.)

The Role of the News Media

“The heirs of the Enlightenment of the late 18 th century... launched the first Revolution in all history against the ideas of Christianity, and Christianity’s God. ...the press... was spearhead, font, and fuel for these discussions... the journals were mixtures of politics and smut. They admired agitators extravagantly and never discussed the Church without mention of scandal, nor the government without criticism. They relied heavily on tales of sin in high places and high handed outrages of the court; no name, however highly placed and illustrious , escaped. ...through its journals and pamphlets ...it could distort, colour , plead, argue, lie, report, and mis-report the information upon which the balance of the realm depended.” (Otto Scott, Robespierre)

The Debt Crisis

The French involvement in the American War of Independence against Great Britain created an enormous debt for France. This debt added to the financial crises which had started with France’s involvement in the earlier ruinous Seven Years War against Great Britain and Prussia. The colossal debt added to the financial crises which propelled the French state into bankruptcy.

Sidelined from Recovery

King Louis XVI began his reign wisely. He dismissed the large number of corrupt and incompetent ministers inherited from the court of his father, Louis XV and he appointed an excellent economist, Anne Robert Jacques Turgot as Controller General. Turgot proposed drastic solutions to France's crises: the cancelation of tax privileges for the nobles, the abolition of industrial monopolies, removal of restrictions on free enterprise, and other bold, practical measures. However, the nobles pressured Louis XVI to dismiss Turgot.

Stop Gap Measures to Stave off Economic Collapse

The young banker Jacques Necker was then given the task of managing the unmanageable bankrupt economy. He bravely tried some short-term measures to stave off the inevitable economic collapse. But when he attempted to move towards adopting Turgot's free market strategies, the privileged nobles and wealthy middle-class forced the king to dismiss him too. This was in 1781. Louis entrusted one hapless man after another with the financial crises, but all to no avail. France's international credit rating was plummeting and the country was no longer able to secure loans.

Bankruptcy

By mid 1788, the government had become paralysed and no longer able to avoid admitting bankruptcy. The king was forced to re-instate Necker and call for a meeting of the Estates-General to be convened in May 1789.

The Estates General

The Estates-General consisted of three houses, the first Estate was the Clergy, the second Estate was the Nobles and the third Estate were merchants and the common people. Although the third house had twice as many people as the other houses, each house was understood historically to have only one vote. Louis' government failed to specify how the three houses of the Estates-General were to function, nor did he provide them with any Agenda or Constitution.

The National Assembly

The commoners in the third house boldly organised themselves as a self-contained National Assembly. The nobles were outraged and convinced Louis XVI to send troops to blockade the hall where the Assembly planned to meet. The third Estate then met on a nearby tennis court and vowed to continue in session until they could complete a new Constitution for the nation. This was outright rebellion against the authority of the king. Yet on 27 June 1789 Louis ordered

the other two estates to join the commoners in a new combined Assembly.

The Liberals

The National Assembly spent most of its time debating the latest philosophical and political theories. The Marquis de Lafayette, who had achieved fame through his involvement in the American war of Independence, espoused the cause of freedom and rallied the liberal wing of nobles around him. The Count of Mirabeau dominated the Assembly through his eloquent campaign for a constitutional monarchy.

The Fanatics

The most fanatical extremists gravitated to Maximillien Robespierre who was a strong devotee of the writings of radical philosophers Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Voltaire. Rousseau wrote that: *"It is necessary to have a cohesive force to organise and coordinate the movements of (societies), members."* Rousseau advocated constant agitation for *"equality"* in order to maintain an atmosphere of fear where individual differences will not be tolerated. Inspired by the defiance of the Assembly and stirred up by revolutionary pamphlets and speeches, mobs began to roam the streets of Paris attacking and murdering royal officials.

Coordinated Chaos

France's financial house of cards collapsed. Capital fled the country and economic depression resulted. A series of events combined to create food shortages and hunger. Agitators panned out across the countryside to destroy the grain stores and terrorise the inhabitants. Hired mobs staged *"spontaneous"* riots in Paris. The powers of government then collapsed. Everything fell apart with astonishing co-ordination.

Reaction

In reaction, some of the nobles persuaded the king to seek to reassert royal authority. Soldiers were ordered into the streets of Paris as a show of strength. The appearance of the soldiers inspired mobs to seize whatever weapons they could find and to storm the old fortress of the Bastille.

Revolution

The French Revolution is officially dated from this point: 14 July 1789. The Bastille had become a symbol of hated tyranny and much legend has grown out of this event. As it so happens, there were no political prisoners at the Bastille at that time, and despite the fact that the Lieutenant

Governor of the Bastille, M. de Launay , was guaranteed safe conduct and surrendered the fortress under a white flag of truce, the mob massacred his soldiers, and the governor, cutting off their heads and carrying them on spikes throughout the streets. As body parts of the defenders of the Bastille were paraded through the streets, a mere seven prisoners were found in the Bastille. When the news reached the palace of Versailles, King Louis was astonished: "This is revolt!" He said. The Duc de la Rochefoucauld -Liancourt responded: "No, Sire, it is a Revolution!"

Appeasement

The next day King Louis arrived, simply dressed and with no bodyguards or attendants, and spoke at the National Assembly. He had ordered the troops to leave Paris, so that the people would have no reason to fear their king. Louis assured them that he had confidence in the Assembly. The deputies rose to their feet cheering with great fervor. 88 of the deputies gathered at the Paris City Hall and took turns speaking to the enormous crowd from the balcony. The famous 32-year-old Lafayette was elected General of the National Guard.

Deterioration

While many seemed optimistic for the future, Marie Antoinette was filled with foreboding and burned her private papers. Nobles fled the court and the country, with many settling across the border. On the 17 July the king travelled to Paris to identify with the revolutionary mob. In October a mob marched to Versailles demanding that the king transfer his residence to Paris. On 6 October, the royal family were escorted by the rioters to Paris where they could be under the control of the revolutionaries.

Manipulation of the Masses

Otto Scott observed that: *"Paris, like the nation, was divided into the politically active and the passive, between the many confused, disorganised and abstracted and the highly concentrated organised and intent few."* (Robespierre).

Radicalisation

Two clubs came to dominate the Assembly at this time: The Cordeliers were led by Georges Jacques Danton and Jean Paul Marat. The Jacobins were skillfully manipulated by Robespierre.

The Origin of the Left Wing

It was in the French Revolution that the terms *"left wing"* and *"right wing"* were first coined.

Those on the left were the Radicals, who proudly adopted the designation as a symbol of their Revolutionary defiance of Christian tradition which always represented those on the right hand of God as saved, and those on the left as damned. (James Billington , *Fire in the Minds of Men: Origin of the Revolutionary Faith.*)

The Hijacking of the Church

On 4 August 1789, the Nobles and Clergy renounced their privileges in the name of revolutionary equality. On 2 November 1789, the Assembly voted to confiscate church property and issue new paper money, called *Assignats* . This sparked off rampant inflation. In July 1790 the Assembly nationalised the Roman Catholic Church by enacting the *Civil Constitution of the Clergy*

. The Assembly undertook to pay the salaries of the priests from the National Treasury and to create a French church under the control of the government. Pope Pius VI excommunicated all clergymen who took the new oath demanded by the Assembly. Most of the clergy refused to take the oath and were evicted from their pulpits and parishes. France was divided into 83 Departments (counties).

Declaration of the Rights of Man

The National Assembly produced the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizens*. Although this was patterned after the English Bill of Rights of 1689 and the American Bill of Rights which had been appended to the United States Constitution, the French Declaration embodied mostly humanistic ideas of the Enlightenment. While attempting to adopt many of the forms of the Biblically orientated Magna Carta and the English Bill of Rights, the French Declaration of the Rights of Man failed to recognise the Creator and ignored the Biblical foundations for true freedom. A new Constitution was completed in 1791, with a unicameral legislature elected by “*active citizens*”.

Before Mirabeau died, in April 1791, he predicted that all their well-deliberated efforts at Reform would collapse and be washed away in a bloodbath.

Abolishing the Monarchy

Louis XVI attempted to flee with his family from France on the night of 20 June 1791. When radicals discovered them, they blocked their path and escorted the royal family back to Paris. Danton and Robespierre seized upon this event as an opportunity to proclaim that France was a Republic. As the new Legislative Assembly met, 1 October 1791, the Girondists proposed replacing the just-adopted Constitution and creating a Republic.

War

Deeply concerned for the fate of the royal family, Austria, ruled by Leopold II, the brother of Mary Antoinette, prepared to invade France. The Assembly declared war on Austria in 1792. The French were soon defeated by the Austrians and the Prussians.

Massacre

The mob stormed the king's residence and massacred the royal Swiss guards. The Assembly voted to depose the king and write a new constitution. On 10 August 1792 the municipal government was overthrown and Danton became the self-appointed national dictator. The entire male population was drafted for military service and weapons production entered high gear. In September 1792, terrorist mobs swarmed through the prisons and massacred thousands of prisoners including many nobles who had been arrested for no other reason than that they were nobility.

Killing the King

A new National Convention was called on 21 September 1792 to write a new constitution. In December, the Convention summoned the deposed King, Louis Capet as he was now called. On 21 January 1793 King Louis XVI was beheaded on the guillotine .

Coalition Against Revolution

All of Europe was horrified and a coalition was formed against France. Austria, England, Holland, Prussia, Spain and Piedmont prepared to restore order to France and prevent the exporting of revolution to their own regions.

The Reign of Terror

The Jacobins mobilised the mob to invade the Convention and arrest the 31 leading Girondists . This launched the Reign of Terror, which officially began 2 June 1793. Robespierre established the Committee of Public Safety. A policy of mass public terror was unleashed with Revolutionary Tribunals, in which all "*enemies of the Revolution*" were summarily tried. Mere accusations were tantamount to verdicts of guilt. The trials were abrupt with no real opportunity granted to the accused to prepare or present any defence . The accused were quickly convicted and carted off to the guillotine .

Killing of the Queen

The Queen, 38 year old Mary Antoinette, was dragged through the mockery of a trial on 16 October and guillotined the very next day. Her son, later recognized as Louis XVII, died as a

result of inhuman treatment by his revolutionary jailers.

Heads Roll

Twenty one Girondist leaders, including Madam Roland, were also beheaded shortly after the Queen. The Duke of Orleans who had joined the Jacobins and taken the name of *citizen Egaliter*, even voting for the death of his cousin the King, was also executed at this time.

Big Bang Social Science

Romantic occultism taught a big bang theory of social science. If one could blow up, or burn down, enough buildings, kill enough people and destroy enough things, you could produce *Utopia!*

Destruction

The Reign of Terror spread throughout France. When one city sought to resist, it was destroyed. The revolutionaries set up a pillar outside Lyons inscribed: "*Lyons waged war with Liberty. Lyons is no more.*" Toulon was subjugated under the leadership of a young artillery officer from Corsica, Napoleon Bonaparte.

War Against God

The Committee of Public Safety launched a vicious atheistic war against Christianity. They invented a new religion which they called the Cult of Reason. At a festival at the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris an actress was enthroned as the "goddess of the French people." France was renamed "The Republic of Virtue". Ancient Rome was lifted up as its model. The press and theatres were turned into instruments for state propaganda. Fashions changed to immoral loose Roman robes. Over 2,000 churches were renamed Temples of Reason and hijacked for the promotion of this cult.

A Secular Religion

Historian Arnold Toynbee wrote: "*In the Revolution a sinister ancient religion suddenly re-erupted with elemental violence... the fanatical worship of collective human power. The Terror was only the first of the mass-crimes that have been committed... in this evil religions name.*"
(John Willson, The gods of Revolution.)

Meltdown

The revolutionaries began to turn on one another. Danton was executed 5 April 1794. On 7 May, Robespierre sought to impose a new religion on France, declaring a new calendar to replace the Christian calendar. 21 September 1792, the day the Monarchy had ended, was declared the First day of year one of their revolutionary calendar. Robespierre appointed himself as high priest of the Supreme Being in this new cult.

Reaping What They Had Sown

On 27 July 1794, Robespierre and 20 other of his henchmen were seized and executed by the survivors of the Convention. More than 40,000 victims had been murdered on the guillotine under the Reign of Terror. Over two-thirds of those victims had been peasants, artisans and workers. As Madam Roland was being ushered up to the platform to be guillotined she faced the statue of the goddess Liberty and cried out: *“O Liberty, Liberty! What crimes are committed in thy name!”*

Unleashing Forces of Destruction

The end of the reign of terror was not the end of the French Revolution. It would be followed by the Directory and by the Dictatorship eventually culminating in Napoleon’s Empire which embroiled all of Europe in ruinous war. Even after the death of Robespierre, the Revolution continued to talk about liberty and equality, to fight against the Christian Faith, and to inspire more communes, voices of virtue, Vladimir Lenins, Joseph Stalins, Fidel Castros and Mao Tse Tungs.

Revolutionary Tyranny

The French Revolution was the prototype, which was followed by the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, the Cuban Revolution, the Cambodian Revolution, the Vietnamese Revolution, the Ethiopian Revolution, the Mozambiquan Revolution, the Angolan Revolution, the Zimbabwe Revolution and many others. In every case they proved that yesterday’s revolutionaries become tomorrow’s tyrants and dictators.

“While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption.” 2 Peter 2:19

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