

European History:

Deliberate in Detail the Causes and Consequences
Part 1 of the French Revolution.

The Causes and Consequences of French Revolution:

The French Revolution was a massive movement of the French people who rose up against:

- The absolute rule of the king.
- The privileges of the nobles and clergy and the unfair social and economical system.

It began in 1789 when France faced a deep financial crisis, hunger, and widespread injustice, and it continued until 1799, ending with the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte.

Causes of French Revolution:

1) The Inequalities of the Ancient Regime:

French society was divided into the Three Estates:

a) First Estate - Clergy (= 1%)

- owned 10% of all land.
- enjoyed tax exemptions.
- Received tithes () from peasants.
- Served in powerful state roles (education, censorship)

b) Second Estate — Nobility ($\approx 2\%$)

- Owned 25-33% of land.
- Exempt from many taxes.
- Held high military/government offices.
- Lived lavishly at Versailles; resented reforms that threatened privileges.

c) Third Estate: — Commoners (Common People) $\approx 97\%$.

- Bourgeoisie (educated professionals, merchants, bankers)
 - Peasants (heavily taxed)
 - Urban workers (sans-culottes).
- Burden of taxes fell on the Third Estate:
Land tax, salt tax, and forced labour.
- Resentment () grew because;
- The Third Estate paid more taxes.
 - Had least political representation.
 - Caused the economic burden of the entire state.

This rigid feudal structure was outdated and unjust.

2) Enlightenment Ideologies:

The 18th Century Enlightenment provided intellectual foundations

for revolution.

Major thinkers

1) Montesquieu:

He opposed the absolute monarchy of his home country. He believed that the best form of government was one in which the legislative, executive, and judicial powers were separate and mixing these powers would lead to despotism.

2) Voltaire: (1694-1778)

Voltaire opposed the Catholic Church b/c it controlled education, supported superstition, suppressed free thinking and was intolerant toward other religions.

He said, "I may not agree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

He supported reason, scientific thought and education.

3) ROUSSEAU (1712-1778)

Rousseau believed that authority comes from the general will of the people not from kings and nobles. According to him, people are the true source of political power. He argued that society should be based on a social contract which means that freedom of the and equality of the people should be protected. If it doesn't happen, ~~per~~ they have the

right to change or overthrow the government' In 1762, Rousseau published his most important work on political theory, *The Social Contract*, its opening line is still striking today:

"Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains."

4) John Locke (1632 - 1704)

According to the ideology of John Locke, people/ Every individual has the right of life, liberty, and property and no government has the right to take away these. He strongly opposed monarchs, their unlimited power and rule without consent of people. Lock clearly stated:

"If a government becomes tyrannical, the people have the right to overthrow it."

He argued that all humans are born "blank slates" - *Tabula Rasa* in Latin - and hence access to the human faculty of reason ~~and~~ had entirely to do with the proper education. He believed in a contract between government and people by limiting government power and protecting private property.

3) Weakness of the Monarchy:

Louis XVI's ~~personal~~, who was the king

of France continued the Bourbon tradition of absolute monarchy. Absolute monarchs claimed divine rights, meaning they ruled as God's representatives.

- Decision-making was centralized in Versailles, isolated from people's needs.
- The weak leadership of Louis XVI, indecisiveness in his nature, ^{and} inexperienced,
- His wife, Marie Antoinette, nicknamed "madame Deficit", was extravagant.
- Louis XVI's inability to implement reforms deepened the financial crises and public discontent.

4) Economic Causes:

a) Financial Crisis:

France had accumulated debt from wars, including:

- Seven Year's war (1756-1763)
 - American Revolutionary War (1775-1783)
- Government faced near bankruptcy by 1789.

b) Financial Taxation Inequality:

- Nobility and clergy avoided taxes; the burden fell entirely on the Third Estate.
- Attempts to ~~introduce~~ introduce fair taxation were blocked, causing resentment.

c) Agrarian Crisis and Famine:

- Poor harvest in 1787 - 1788 led to food shortages.
- Bread prices doubled, causing widespread hunger and unrest.
- The urban poor, dependent on bread, became increasingly desperate, creating a revolutionary atmosphere.

d) Industrial Lag:

- Unlike Britain, France's industrial sector was underdeveloped.
- Economic stagnation, coupled with rising population, intensified social tensions.

Proximate Factors:

a) Estate-General of 1789:

- Summoned by Louis XVI to address the financial crisis.
- The Third Estate demanded voting by head rather than by estate, which was refused.
- On June 17, 1789, they declared themselves the National Assembly, asserting sovereignty.

b) Storming of the Bastille (14th July 1789)

- Bastille was a royal prison, symbolizing tyranny.

→ Its storming by Parisians became a symbol of revolution and ignited widespread uprisings.

c) Popular Uprisings:

- The Great Fear (Summer 1789):
Peasants revolted against nobles, burning manors and feudal records.
- Urban unrest and strikes in Paris accelerated the revolutionary momentum.

Consequences of The French Revolution:

The revolution had profound and lasting effects on France and Europe.

1) Political Consequences:

a) Abolition of Monarchy and Establishment of Republic:

- The execution of King Louis XVI in 1793 marked a radical political shift.
- The monarchy was abolished.
- This created the first French Republic, which replaced the old system.
- It rejected the idea of ~~divine~~ divine right of kings, asserting instead that sovereignty belongs to citizens.

b) Rise of Political Ideologies:

The revolution encouraged the development of new political ideologies:

- Liberalism:

Emphasized individual freedoms, equality before law, and democratic governance.

- Republicanism:

Advocated for a government without a monarch, emphasizing civic participation.

- Nationalism:

Inspired people to identify with their nation rather than a king or dynasty.

Radical groups like the Jacobins, promoted centralized control and equality.

c) Napoleonic Era:

- Napoleon Bonaparte rose to the power.
- Exported revolutionary principles across Europe through the Napoleonic wars.
- Merit-based governance spread.
- Liberal and Nationalist ideas spread which influenced political structures.

d) European Repercussions:

The Revolution shocked European countries monarchies, many of whom feared that similar uprisings would happen in their own countries. This fear led to the Coalition wars, where multiple European

powers like Austria, Prussia, and Britain tried to contain the revolution.

- The revolution introduced the idea that ordinary citizens could challenge traditional authority, inspiring later uprisings in Europe.
- Marked the beginning of a broader movement toward modern nation-states where loyalty shifted from monarchs to nations.

2) Social Consequences:

a) End of Feudalism:

- Feudal privileges were abolished and serfs gained personal freedom.
- Peasants were given the right to own property which broke old hierarchies.
- Ordinary citizens could now rise socially and economically, creating a more mobile society.

b) Legal and Social Equality:

- Revolution proposed the principle that all citizens are equal before the law.
- Laws were no longer biased ~~and~~ in favor of aristocracy or clergy.
- Meritocracy replaced birth right: positions in government, the military, and professions were open to talent rather than noble lineage.
- This promoted the idea that citizens

have inherent rights.

c) Role of women:

- Women played active roles in political clubs, protests, and riots.
- Figures like Olympe de Gouges, who wrote the "Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the female Citizen", demanded gender equality.
- Their activism planted the seeds of feminist thought in Europe.
- The Revolution highlighted issues of gender inequality and inspired later women's movements.

3) Economic Consequences:

a) Redistribution of Land:

- Church and noble lands were confiscated and sold to reduce state debt and fund the Revolution.
- This allowed the bourgeoisie and peasants to acquire land, increasing their wealth and social influence.
- It stimulated economic mobility and laid foundations for a more market-oriented society.

b) Financial Reforms:

- Modern taxation systems were introduced, reducing feudal dues and obligations.

- These reforms caused inflation and economic instability.
- In the long term, they strengthened the state's economy, encouraged commerce, and allowed new forms of entrepreneurship.

c) Encouragement of Capitalism:

- These revolution abolished restrictive guilds and feudal barriers, promoting free trade and commerce.
- Facilitated the growth of a capitalist economy.
- The economic environment became more dynamic, favouring innovation and entrepreneurship.

4) Cultural and Intellectual Consequences:

a) Secularization:

- The Revolution reduced the power of the Catholic Church, which had been deeply entwined with French politics and society.
- Civil liberties and freedom of thought were emphasized.
 - The state increasingly took over roles previously dominated by religion, like education and administration, promoting secular governance.

b) Spread of Revolutionary Ideas:

The revolutionary ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity inspired global movements:

- Haitian Revolution (1791 - 1804):
Slaves successfully rebelled against colonial rule.
- Latin American Independence movements:
Leaders like Simon Bolivar were influenced by French revolutionary ideals.

The Revolution demonstrated that oppressed peoples could challenge existing hierarchies.

c) Nationalism:

The French people began to identify themselves as citizens of the nation, not as subjects of a king.

- This national consciousness strengthened unity and loyalty to the state.
- It inspired nationalist movements across Europe, laying the groundwork for future nation-states.

5) International Consequences:

a) Wars and Geopolitics:

France's revolutionary and later Napoleonic armies fought against multiple European coalitions (1792 - 1802).

- There were spread revolutionary ideas across the continent.
- Countries that France conquered were exposed to new laws, merit-based governance, and abolition of feudal privileges.

b) Change in European Monarchies:

- European rulers introduced modern reforms to avoid uprisings at home.
- The Revolution accelerated the decline of feudalism in Europe.
- Also paved the way for constitutionalism, where monarchs shared power with representative bodies, shaping modern Europe's political landscape.

Conclusion:

The French Revolution was caused by social inequality, economic crises, and political mismanagement. It abolished the monarchy, ended feudal privileges, and promoted legal and social equality. New ideas like liberty, nationalism, and secularism spread across France and Europe. Economically, it redistributed land and encouraged commerce. Overall, it transformed France and inspired modern democratic and social movements worldwide.