

Revolutionary movements

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



Revolutionary movements, in its most enlightened form, have a common objective in being able to change the prevailing system of governance and politics to the effect that social ills and progress can be achieved. For Europe, its monarchies have been the perennial object of revolutionary movements. From the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, Europe began its global expansion but this development has also raised the issue of political, social and economic reform that challenged its traditional powers.

Considering the various revolutionary movements that developed in the period, all of them started out as reformists (Winks & Kaiser 44).

The bid for supremacy among Europe monarchies for dominance in the region as the New World burdened its citizenry and weakened governance. Monarchical governments are traditionally resistant to change understandably because as a political system whose power relies on being able maintain the status quo and its dominance (54). This was the setting for the development of more active actions against the existing governments of Europe. The failure of the monarchy to govern well and to alleviate social conditions was a common theme. The colonies were among the firsts to voice out their protests and began to bid for independence against restrictive political and economic policies. Thomas Paine was among the most influential individuals in the movement.

The publication of his work *Common Sense* questioned not only the legitimacy of the monarchy but its moral basis as well. He believed that the English government “ never in a proper condition of doing justice to others, while we continue under the influence of some leading partiality” (Paine par 2). He cites that monarchical system of government that dominates the

Western world is intrinsically flawed in its regard for itself, its hereditary succession that encourages inept rulers and its need for policy of limiting independence of its territories. Paine called for the rule of law rather the rule of monarchs criticizing the arbitrary treatment of laws to support the will of the kings (par.

12). However, the sentiment for the issue did effect any movement in Europe to abolish monarchies but rather called for greater responsibility among monarchs. The English Bill of Rights of 1689, called for greater role of parliament in governance to curb the excesses of its monarchs. The bill was largely a reaction to the reign of King James II who, “ by the assistance of divers evil counsellors, judges and ministers employed by him, did endeavour to subvert and extirpate the Protestant religion and the laws and liberties of this kingdom” (“ English Bill of Rights 1689” par. 2). In this view, the monarchy is not anymore absolute but held accountable by morally and socially.

If it fails to do so, then its subjects have the right to question it through Parliament (Winks & Kaiser 133). The revolutionary movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth century culminated in the 1789 French Revolution that sent shockwaves among all European governments. The French First Republic which lasted from 1789 to 1799 ushered in the beginning of republican governments in the continent (142-146). Together with the new republic, the French National Assembly published Declaration of the Rights of Man that justified the revolution as a “ declaration the

natural, unalienable, and sacred rights of man" (" Declaration of the Rights of Man - 1789" par. 1).

These events highlighted the initial rights of individuals and the power of social action. It effectively showed the vulnerability of government if society becomes moved enough to take action against it. At the same time, it proved that the traditional powers in Europe were not omniscient and thusly encouraged similar movements in the rest of continental Europe (Winks & Kaiser 160-166). The last years of the century were years saw more revolutionary actions that significantly fragmented political power in West which became the setting of the rise of political and military leaders such as Napoleon Bonaparte.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the dominance of the traditional powers in region has deteriorated so much that Napoleon was able to gain ground in realizing his dream of the creating the French Empire. In conclusion, the revolutionary movements of the seventeenth and eighteenth century were centered on reforms and establish the accountability of government to society. The movements criticized the monarchical system of government that encouraged incompetence in leadership and relied solely on hereditary succession in determining its leadership. The support for actual action against rulers developed gradually from questioning the validity and ascendancy of rulers to the establishment of personal accountability of rulers. Direct action developed form the continued unresponsiveness to reforms and the escalating social crises.

These events effectively changes the landscape of power in the West, weakening the regard for its traditional powers and setting the stage for the rise of social and military powers that became dominant in the next century.