

History of Modern Revolution - 101

In *The Medium is the Massage*, Marshall McLuhan states that we live in a Global Village, a simultaneous happening where time and space has vanished.

Since 9/11 this fact has struck home harder than ever before. The privileged developed world is under attack. They are not at the gates of Marie Antoinette's castle or villa of the Czar. The majority oppressed will not be dragging each of us off individually to be hung, shot or beheaded. Instead, their violent, idealistic representatives will continue to terrorize our society until the economic disparity between the have and have-not countries is minimized.

This global community we live in means that the world is more closely connected than ever before. Nomadic herders in remote areas of the planet can view world events on CNN or the Internet at the same time as anyone else in the cities of the developed world.

History has proven that when the masses in their majority are aroused, little can stop them.

French Revolution Nutshell

King Louis XV and King Louis XVI along with their court and a small privileged class all led extremely extravagant lives. They spent lots of the government's money on luxuries even though the government had some financial problems. In the late 18th Century due to technology, horse drawn farm equipment, etcetera, the peasant population increased dramatically. This growth in population increased the demand for more land. Land was being divided into smaller and smaller sections to cope with this problem. Eventually some sections of land were not even enough for a tenant farm peasant to support his family.

The wars in America left France in huge debt. To try and pay this debt, the nobility increased the feudal dues for the peasants. The peasants' hardships increased greatly which further increased their resentment towards the nobility. Poor harvests in 1787 and 1788 led to a food shortage. The peasants could barely (if at all) feed themselves let alone pay taxes. The peasants started to threaten violence if their situation wasn't improved.

There was an increased competition from British textile manufacturers. This left many people without jobs, which meant a huge increase in unemployment.

Inefficient methods of government led to major financial difficulties. The Nobility paid no tax so revenue had to be raised in a different way. The French government had to borrow heavily which

just increased the debt. The government continued to spend far more than it received in taxes.

Eventually the government went completely bankrupt. This immediately led to the French Revolution.

Russian Revolution Nutshell

The causes of the 1905 revolution in Russia can be traced back as far as 1861. The Tsars who ruled in Russia were firm autocrats in an era where the nearby Europe was transforming to liberalism and republicanism. The influence of these groups, as well as internal problems and foreign policy were all causes of the revolution.

In the 19th century, Russia was very much a Medieval society, and this is especially highlighted by the fact that Serfdom still existed. The Serfs were little more than slaves of the Tsars and had no rights. Alexander II was the first to recognize this and in 1861 he granted Emancipation to the Serfs. He felt it "better to abolish Serfdom from above than to wait for the Serfs to liberate themselves from below." Although with hindsight it can be said that this action caused more problems than it solved, it was a major step in dragging Russia forward from Medievalism. This granting of limited freedom to the Serfs led to growing unrest as they called for further rights, and so it can be said it was a long term cause of the revolution.

Alexander also set up limited local authorities known as Zemstva. The main action of these groups was to draw up reports on agricultural conditions. This led to greater awareness and a liberal class of Intelligencia was set up. They opposed the autocracy and later became known as 'the Kadets'. The opposition of the Kadets to the Tsar was also a long term cause of Revolution.

During Alexander's reign extremist opposition to the autocracy also fermented. The Narodniks attempted to rally the peasants against the Tsar, but failed because of class differences. However, the Narodniks were to progress despite this initial failure and they became very influential in the 20th century in the form of the Bolsheviks.

Alexander III did not agree with his father's reforms and when he came to power in 1881, he set about suppressing the peasants and all opposition to the Tsars. His Rustication policy forced Russian culture on the 50 million non-Russians in the empire. The Jews also suffered greatly under his reign. Pogroms were organized attacks on the Jews which forced many to emigrate. Censorship was also increased and the freedom of universities was reduced. Alexander's mistakes lay in the fact that the people had had a taste of freedom under his father, and now he was taking it away again. Revolution was impending.

Opposition to the Tsars continued to grow during Alexander III's reign. The Social Revolutionaries rallied the support of the peasants. They hoped that if they killed the Tsar, the whole system would topple. The Marxists concentrated on the workers in the cities. The growth of socialism marked the arrival of leaders such as Lenin and Trotsky. The Kadets also continued to grow. All that was now needed for a revolution was a spark to light the fire and bring all opposing groups together.

This occurred under the reign of the last Tsar, Nicholas II. A strict autocrat, he told those who hoped for local governments in the form of Dumas that they were "carried away by senseless dreams". His German Tsarina, Alexandra, was disliked by the people, as was their mutual devotion to the actions of the suspicious monk Rasputin. Growing opposition and urban and rural unrest was commonplace.

When war with Japan was impending, Nicholas saw it as an opportunity to rally loyalty to the empire once more. However his major error was that he underestimated the strength of the Japanese. Describing them as "little yellow monkeys", he believed his fleets would crush them. However, the Japanese defeated the Russians and destroyed all her fleets, even the Baltic fleet who made a last attempt to save face for Russia. The defeat in this war and the expense it incurred were direct causes of the revolution that occurred just a few weeks later. A general strike in Russia occurred in 1905, with both urban and rural workers protesting together. Father Gapon led a group of workers to the Winter Palace with a petition for reforms for the Tsar. The protest was a peaceful one and the workers carried portraits and candles for the Tsar. However, the guards shot at the people, killing one thousand and injuring thousands more. This action completely alienated the people and their loyalty to the Tsar was no more. It was "the political activation of the masses". This massacre was the spark that started the 1905 revolution.

Although the outcome of the revolution saw the settings up of the Duma, these were controlled to reign as an autocrat. However this revolution was an indication of the power of the people and it can be said that it was a dress rehearsal for the February and October Revolutions of 1917.

CNN News Me

McLuhan's Global village means that both impoverished Afghans and Columbian villagers are brought commercial images of the decadence of our world. Impoverished workers of our New-World slave economy return from the sweat shop factories where they are paid pennies a day, barely enough to survive, sit down in front of a community television to be bombarded with

images of we the privileged other class who use, wear and play with the products they make. We are the new "aristocracy" in a global community. We live in a period more decadent and gluttonous than that of the Kings of France and the Czars of Russia. We in the privileged world living the high life, eating cheap tropical fruit, cocoa and coffee at the expense and health of impoverished pickers in Columbia and Guiana; wearing shoes and clothing made by starving children; using hardware made for our simple silly entertainment, all serves to further culturally alienate the poor.

Is it any wonder that a larger and larger majority of our fellow human beings are standing up and showing through violence, that they are not going to stand for their children and themselves living a subsistence life while we consume more and pollute more than we ever have in history?

The killing of the aristocracy and Czar's family, the beheading of Marie Antoinette, her husband and their family and friends were the results of bloody revolutions for sure. Are we so surprised that impoverished peoples of the world are using whatever reasons they choose to justify the killing of members of the smaller global capitalist consumer communities, the NEW aristocracy?

The disparity between members of our privileged, consumer society and our fellow economically oppressed human beings is greater than any other time in history. We can fortify America and continue to bomb and kill others or we can abort our gratuitous consumer lifestyle - otherwise we can expect the revolution. Stand by for further Madrid Rail, London Tube, Twin Towers style bombings at the very least.

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Addendum 2011

The street protests / Occupy movement is a tiny flicker of the roaring flame of disgruntled Revolution that is yet to come – in the USA, Greece, Spain, Italy, Ireland and yes eventually to Canada.

BTW - How many wall street CEO/CFOs were chucked in jail? None! Several were given jobs by Obama to try to figure out how to clean up the mess they created illegally – and many were given bonuses from bailout money for doing it.