

AGE OF REVOLUTIONS

In the last 25 years of the 18th Century there were three Political revolutions – In America, in France and in Ireland.

Sources of Discontent;

- European Countries were ruled by Monarchies, helped by Nobles, who were the major landowners.
- Monarchs believed in the **Divine Right of Kings**. They believed that they had **Absolute Power** – to make Laws, to raise taxes, without consulting anybody.
- England had a Limited Monarchy. Here the King had to consult Parliament, which passed laws. Even here however only a tiny number of people were entitled to vote at election time. So most people had no one representing them in Parliament.

The Age of Enlightenment;

This term refers to a time in the 18th Century when many thinkers believed that the Power of Reason could be used to solve most problems. For example **John Locke**, an Englishman said that if a Government is not doing its job well then the people have a Right to rebel against that Govt.

In France, writers such as, **Rousseau, Voltaire and Montesquieu** took up this idea and spread it in Europe.

In America, **Thomas Paine** spread the ideas of all of these writers in his book called “**The Rights of Man**”.

THE AMERICAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE.

By 1750, English settlers in America had established 13 **Colonies**. These were, in order of their founding;

1. Virginia.
2. Massachusetts.
3. New Hampshire.
4. Maryland.
5. Connecticut.
6. Rhode Island.
7. Delaware.
8. North Carolina.
9. South Carolina.
10. New Jersey.
11. New York.
12. Pennsylvania.
13. Georgia.

These were ruled by Great Britain, but each Colony elected its own Assembly and had its own Governor who represented the King.

Causes of the American Revolution;

- ❑ **The Navigation Acts** – Laws passed in London, which said that all Goods entering or leaving the Colonies had to be carried by English Ships. Sugar, Tobacco and Cotton produced in the Colonies could only be sold to Britain. This led to massive smuggling by the Americans and made the British very unpopular.
- ❑ **The Seven Years War 1756 – 1763.** – The British and the Colonists combined to defeat the French and gave the British control of Canada. The British then taxed the Colonies to pay for the cost of the War.
- ❑ **The Stamp Act** – One of the taxes imposed to pay for the War. Newspapers, Wills, Licences and all Legal documents were taxed. There were riots in the Colonies and it led to the Phrase “No Taxation without Representation”.
- ❑ **The Townshend Acts** – This was the term given to taxes imposed from London on imported Goods such as glass paper and tea. The Colonists tarred and feathered the officials who were sent to collect it.
- ❑ **The Boston Massacre** – In 1770, the British Army fired upon a crowd including women and children who were protesting at the taxes.
- ❑ **The Boston Tea Party** - In December 1773, Colonists disguised as Native Indians boarded ships and threw 342 crates of tea into Boston Harbour as a form of protest. In response, the London Govt. closed the Port of Boston and imposed Martial law.
- ❑ **The Battles of Lexington and Concord** – In April 1775, the British commander heard that the Colonists were storing guns. He sent 800 troops to the villages of Lexington and Concord to confiscate the weapons. At Lexington, they killed 8 and wounded 10 Colonists. Next, they moved on to Concord. Having been warned of their approach by Paul Revere the Colonists hid the guns and ambushed the British when they were returning to Boston. 273 British troops were killed or wounded. The War of Independence had begun.

In May 1775, the 13 Colonies met in Philadelphia at the **First Continental Congress**, where the Colonies decided to stop operating as separate entities and to co-operate together. They set up an army and appointed George Washington to lead it.

George Washington 1732 – 1799;

Born in Wakefield, Virginia in 1732, Washington joins the British Army at the outbreak of the Seven Years war in 1756. In 1758, he leads an attack on the French and defeats them. After the war, he retires to his home at Mount Vernon. In 1773 after the Boston Tea Party he calls for all the Colonies to work together to protect their interests. He attends the Continental Congress and is appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Colonial Army. In 1778, the British take Philadelphia and defeat Washington. He retreats with his troops to Valley Forge where he wins their adoration by sleeping rough for the whole winter with them. By the spring 1779, the army has been re-organised, ready to die, not just for the cause, but also for Washington himself. He attacks the British at Saratoga and inflicts a heavy defeat on them. Waiting patiently for the decisive battle, in 1781 he completely surrounds the British at Yorktown,

Virginia. General Cornwallis the British Commander surrenders, the war is over. In 1787, Washington is elected first President of the United States. Elected for a second term in 1792, he refuses a third term in 1796. He dies in 1799.

Reasons for the American Victory over Great Britain:

- ❑ The colonists were fighting for a cause they passionately believed in and they were led by Generals of the highest calibre, such as Washington.
- ❑ The British were fighting a war thousands of miles from home, their soldiers had to be equipped and provisioned from London.
- ❑ The colonists were helped by armies from France and volunteers from other parts of Europe, such as Prussia.

Results of the American Revolution:

- ❑ The U.S.A. was established.
- ❑ It was the first time a State was established on the basis that power belonged to the People, not a Royal Family.
- ❑ It inspired the People of France to challenge their King and led to the French Revolution in 1789.
- ❑ In Ireland, a Volunteer Movement grew up which won greater freedom for the Irish Parliament from the British Govt.

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION 1789 – 1795;

France had an Absolute Monarch, King **Louis XVI**. There was no Parliament and Louis had the power of life and death over his subjects. His wife, **Marie-Antoinette**, an Austrian, was not liked as she displayed too much wealth at the Palace of Versailles. The system was known as **The Ancien Regieme**.

Causes of the French Revolution;

- ❑ **The Absolute Power of the King.**
- ❑ **The Privileges of the Nobles and the Clergy** – they paid no tax but lived in great wealth.
- ❑ **The ideas of writers such as, Rousseau, Voltaire and Montesque** – they criticised the system of Govt and said the King should share power with a Parliament.
- ❑ **France’s massive debt** – France had sent armies to fight on the side of the Colonies against the British in the American War of Independence. To pay for this Louis had borrowed huge sums of money and the country was unable to find a way to repay the money. The nobles and the clergy refused to help by paying taxes.
- ❑ **The Meeting of The Estates General** in May 1789 – Called by Louis to find a solution to the Debt Problem, this was made up of three Estates – The Clergy, The Nobles and The Third Estate {The Middle Classes}. They spent the first six weeks arguing about a voting system. Finally, in June 1789 the Third Estate said that unless the Clergy and the Nobles joined them they would proceed with the National Business alone. The next day they were locked out of the room where the Estates General met. The Third Estate moved to the Tennis Court to hold their meeting where they took an oath {Tennis Court Oath} to stay together until France had a Constitution. The King ordered the Clergy and the Nobles to join them and the Estates General became known as the **National Assembly**.

The Revolution Begins;

On July 14, 1789, a rumour spread through Paris that the King was sending Troops to the City to control the people. To protect themselves the people attacked the **Bastille Prison**, looking for weapons. The mob took possession of the prison and killed everyone inside. “This is a Revolt”! Louis said when he heard the news. “No Sire, this is a Revolution,” replied the messenger. Similar attacks on the homes of the Clergy and the Nobles now took place all over France. The new National Assembly was forced to take action to calm the mobs. They quickly issued the following decisions;

- The Privileges of the Clergy and Nobles were abolished.
- All people were equal before the law.
- All people have Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.

On the night of 5/6, October 1789 a crowd marched to Versailles and forced the King and the Royal family to move to Paris. The National Assembly spent the next two

years drawing up a Constitution for France and bringing the Catholic Church under State control. In 1791, all was ready. The new Constitution gave the National Assembly the power to make laws, though in certain cases the King could **Veto** them. Shocked at the loss of his powers King Louis XVI decided to escape to Austria to form an army to destroy the Revolution. On the night of June 20, 1791, the Royal Family fled Paris. However, after just 24 hours they were captured at the border town of Varennes and forced to return to Paris. For Louis the decision to flee was expensive, as he had now lost the trust of the People of France.

In the election of 1791, a **Legislative Assembly** replaced the National Assembly whose members wanted to overthrow the King. In April 1792, the Assembly declared war on Austria. At first, the war went very badly and by August, the Austrian Army was at the Gates of Paris. In a stupid move, the Austrians sent a message to the people that they would be slaughtered if the Royal Family were harmed. Enraged that foreigners should order them about, the mob attacked the **Tuileries Palace**, where the Royal Family was living and slaughtered 600 members of the Royal Guard. The Royal Family fled to the Legislative Assembly who arrested and imprisoned them. A massive crowd then marched out of the city to face the Austrians and pushed them back. In September, France declared itself a Republic and changed the name of the Assembly to **the Convention**.

In January 1793, the King was put on trial and found guilty of Treason. He was executed by Guillotine on Jan 21. Ten months later his wife Queen Marie-Antoinette met the same fate.

Robespierre and the Reign of Terror;

After the execution of the King, Britain, Holland and Spain declared war on France. To organise the country a **Committee of Public Safety** was set up. **Maximillian Robespierre** was its President. The Committee decided that violence and terror were necessary to discipline the people and to protect the Revolution. They invoked a number of measures.

- ❑ **The Law of Suspects** – To punish anyone, believed to be an enemy of the Revolution. In 12 months, 18,500 people were executed under this measure.
- ❑ **The Law of Maximum** – To control food prices in France, anyone profiting from food shortages through high prices was executed.
- ❑ **Rebellions crushed** – This was done with great cruelty; in Lyons, alone 30,000 people were executed.
- ❑ **Mass Enlistment to the Army** – This produced a million soldiers and turned the war in France's favour.

With the threat to the Revolution removed by victory in the war. There was no longer any need for the Reign of Terror. However, Robespierre insisted that not only should it continue but also that it should be increased. It was clear that he was out of control. He was arrested and executed 24 hours later. The Revolution was over.

Results of the French Revolution;

- The ideas of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity spread to other countries and people began to demand more freedom and independence from their Kings.
- The power of the Nobility was broken and the power of the Middle Classes began.
- The Metric system of Weights and Measures was introduced
- The belief in the Devine Right of Kings died.
- France offered to export its Revolution to other countries and to give troops to any people who wished to overthrow repressive Governments. This was an offer, which some people in Ireland had great interest in.

THE 1798 REBELLION IN IRELAND.

In the 18th Century, Ireland was ruled by a Parliament in Dublin, which was under the control of the Parliament in London. Even though they made up just 15% of the population, only Anglican Protestants could be members of the Dublin Parliament.

Causes of the 1798 Rebellion;

- ❑ The power of the Anglican Protestants.
- ❑ Catholic and Presbyterian discontent – Neither group was allowed to sit in Parliament.
- ❑ Influence of the French Revolution.
- ❑ Poverty in the countryside.

Theobald Wolf Tone and the United Irishmen;

Born into an Anglican family in 1763, Wolf Tone trained as a lawyer in Trinity College. He was interested in the ideas of the French Revolution. Presbyterians in Belfast who were also interested in these same ideas invited Wolf Tone to a meeting in 1791. **Samuel Neilson** and **Henry Joy Mc Cracken** along with Wolf Tone set up **The Society of the United Irishman**. Its aims were –

- ❑ To allow Irish Parliament to pass laws for Ireland.
- ❑ That Catholics and Presbyterians should be allowed fair representation in Parliament.
- ❑ To repeal the Navigation Acts which restricted Irish Trade?

The start of the war between Britain and France changed everything for Wolf Tone and the United Irishmen. The British Government suspected the United Irishmen of planning a French invasion of Ireland and began a policy of repression. The Society was banned and Tone had to go to America. The Society of United Irishmen became a secret society and it began to plan for a rebellion and the setting up of an Irish Republic.

In 1796, Wolf Tone went to France to persuade the Govt. there to support him with ships and weapons. In December 1796 46 ships and 14,000 soldiers left for Ireland. The expedition was a disaster however as the French did not even come ashore but returned to France with Wolf Tone in despair.

The 1798 Rising;

Shocked by what an escape they had just had, the British Govt. granted itself extra powers.

- ❑ **The Arms Act** – Made it illegal to import guns.
- ❑ **The Insurrection Act** – Made it punishable by death to administer secret oaths.
- ❑ **Militia Units** – Headed by Protestants were set up to fight any possible future invasion.

In the summer of 1797, an army entered Ulster and laid waste to the Province, seizing over 6,000 weapons. Two leaders of the United Irishmen were captured and hanged. However, despite all of this, in the summer of 1798 rebellion broke out in three locations.

- 1) **In Dublin** – small risings which were easily put down.
- 2) **In Wexford** – Fr. John Murphy of Boulavogue led a peasant army. They captured the towns of Enniscorthy and Wexford but alienated many by slaughtering innocent Protestants as they progressed. They made their final stand at Vinegar Hill outside Enniscorthy, where they were defeated and their leaders executed.
- 3) **In Mayo** – The French sent another force under General Humbert, which landed at Killalla in Co. Mayo. They marched to Castlebar where they defeated a British Army. This incident is known as “The Races of Castlebar” because the British fled from the field of battle so quickly. However when they faced a larger British force at Ballinamuc they were defeated and the leaders arrested.

During this time Wolf Tone was still in France, he persuaded the French to send more troops to help those already landed. These landed in Donegal in October 1798. However, Tone was almost immediately taken prisoner he was found guilty of treason and sentenced to hang. He demanded that he be treated as an Officer in the French Army and should be executed by firing squad. His request was refused and he died in prison after slitting his own throat.

The rebellion was over; it had been defeated for four reasons;

- ❑ **Poor Organisation.**
- ❑ **Stronger British forces.**
- ❑ **Excellent British spy network.**
- ❑ **Not enough French help.**

The results of the 1798 Rebellion;

- ❑ 30,000 people died.
- ❑ Caused deep divisions between Catholics and Protestants.
- ❑ **The Act of Union 1801** – Abolished the Irish Parliament and Ireland was ruled directly from London.
- ❑ Wolf Tone is regarded as “The Father of Irish Republicanism”. He inspired later Revolutionaries including the 1916 rising and modern Sinn Féin.