

THE IMPACT OF JOHN LOCKE'S POLITICAL THOUGHT ON THE REVOLUTIONS IN THE WEST

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Abstract

This paper goal is to examine and present the influence of Locke's political and social views on the emergence of French and American political thoughts and institutions, and how his ideas still illuminate future political and social developments. The research methods to be used are the descriptive and evaluative methods. The answer to the question is to be found in Locke's thought based on a humanism which emphasizes natural rights to life, liberty, and property. Besides, he introduced what come to be known as constitutional government as the most desirable form for well-organized and harmonious society. The principle of comparison will be used as a research principle. This paper will contribute towards consistent ways and means of enhancing the smooth functioning of a developed and stable society.

Keywords: Social Contract Theory, Natural Rights, Sovereignty of the Community, Constitutional Government

Introduction

Human beings have agreed to live together as a group and there was interrelation among them which is called society. Without individual members there can be no actually existing society. Moreover human society is continually undergoing change. Due to changing social conditions, human's views and thought also change and then new views, new thoughts, new ideas, and new ideals arise. These changing social conditions are never at a standstill. If old thoughts and old views no longer work well and there is a need to build new forms of social structure there arise new social thoughts. So, these new social thought arise when the institutions, traditions and customs of the past no longer work well, and have to be replaced by new adjustments, new values which result in new customs and institutions of the society.

But in every community there will be those who see the need for change and come up with novel ideas on the one hand and on the other there will be those who wish to preserve the status quo and resist change. It is at such times when a society has reached the cross-roads, that and it can no longer adequately provide the necessities of life equally and fairly that outstanding thinkers with new ideas that give hope to the majority make an impact on the future historical course of a given society. That John Locke was such a figure will be discussed and clarified in this research paper.

John Locke (1632-1704) was one of the most influential political philosophers of the modern period and some of his views apply today as much as they did in his time. Besides initiating the vigorous tradition known as British empiricism, Locke's influence reached far beyond the limits of the traditional ideas of philosophy. He introduced new social, political, and ethical ideas and theories that were to impact not only future political theories but also important historical events in his books *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and *Two Treatises on Government*.

In human society, all beings desire equality, rights, freedom, peace and safety in life though they may be unable to form these thought clearly or realize how to achieve them. These thought and ideas are clarified by Locke's Social Contract Theory. According to him, this social contract theory is seen as being not between government and the governed but between free men and is the corollary of the law of nature. He used terms such as the Law of Nature under which all human beings are equal and have Natural Rights such as the rights to life, liberty and property.

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Locke's Social Contract Theory involves the necessity of majority rule and each individual surrenders part of his freedom to the community for his security. Thus, the minority must be bound by the will of the majority and if it is necessary, force can also be used which is based on. According to this Social Contract, an individual comes under the Rule of Law the rule of the majority. These views had great influence on future generations.

How John Locke's thought influenced the beliefs of Western philosophers is presented by David Stewart and H. Gene Blocker in their book *The Fundamentals of Philosophy* as follows:

John Locke (1632-1704) is an extremely important social philosopher, whose views directly and greatly influenced the Declaration of Independence of the United States, the Bill of Rights, and the Constitution. Much of Jefferson's language in the Declaration of Independence was taken directly from Locke, especially the important sentence concerning life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness: (although Jefferson deliberately substituted "happiness" for Locke's term "property"). As Jefferson wrote later, it was not his intention in drafting the Declaration of Independence to invent new views, but to make clear the general position of philosophers such as Locke, Hume, and Rousseau to the general populace.¹

Some ideas of Locke's theory permeated the theories of Montesquieu (1689-1755), Voltaire (1694-1778) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). Their thoughts were related with Locke's theory in some way or another. The ideas can be found in their thoughts that support or reject or else modify Locke's ideas. The common factor is that they all criticized and challenged the existing social, political situations and laws because all of the rights and opportunities were seized and enjoyed by the monarch and upper levels of society while most of the ordinary people were under their control suffering and deprived of their rights while carrying an unfair share of the burdens of society.

Furthermore, the political thought of the French philosophers encouraged the French people toward the goal of revolution. It is true political thought alone cannot bring about revolution. But, the social, political, and economic circumstances had worsened in that period of the state. The widespread corruption set off the revolution. The political theory that declared equality, liberty and, fraternity lit the fuse that aroused the fury of French people who had been tormented for years and this exploded as the French Revolution. New ideas and new ways of thinking are apt to lie dormant when the time is not yet ripe. But once time, space and circumstances come together ideas and theories explode into action. For the long-suffering French, the ideas of Locke transmitted in one form or another through Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau were turned into action.

In the same way in America, the colonists who had been exploited by the British Government revolted when stimulated by the new ideas. The British Parliament when faced with financial crises imposed different kinds of taxes such as the Navigation Act, the Stamp Act, and import taxes, etc. Thus, there arose many conflicts between the British government and the American colonies. At last the violent conflicts brought about revolution. In fact, there was no specific political theory which forced that revolution. The political ideas appeared in the form of pamphlets, addresses from platforms and stages, newspaper discussions, and resolutions. But, the subject matters in their presentations and addresses were the famous political views and mottoes of Locke, Voltaire, Rousseau and other famous political ideas of that period in the West. In Gettell's *History of Political Thought*, it says:

¹David Stewart & H. Gene Blocker. (1987). *The Fundamentals of Philosophy*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company. p. 472.

The political ideas of the colonists were drawn mainly from the historical precedents of the seventeenth century in England, and from the theory developed by the revolutionary party at that time. The doctrines of natural right, social contract, popular sovereignty, and the right of revolution, as worked out by Milton, Sydney, Harrington, and Locke, were frequently quoted.¹

The revolutions in America and in France, gave rise to numerous important governmental documents. In America, the Declaration of Independence, the Resolutions of the Colonial Assemblies and the Continental Congresses, the State Constitutions, the Articles of Confederation, and the Federal Constitution emerged to play important roles in the development of social and political rights and privileges.

In France, a Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizen was drawn up in 1789. The first written constitution of France was issued in 1791. As a result, the absolute power vested in the sovereign people resulted, in practice.²

Gettell's *History of Political Thought*, states how Locke's view of inalienable natural rights came to be realized as follows:

In so far as these contained a statement of individual liberties, they followed the English tradition that came down through Magna Carta, the Petition of Right, the Bill of Rights, the Habeas Corpus Act, and the like, with added emphasis derived from the theory of Locke concerning inalienable natural rights. The Declaration of Independence was accepted as the classic statement of civil liberty and the right of revolution.³

By studying the above documents, it is easily seen that Locke's political theories impacted on the social, political and ethical conceptions of western societies and states, and his thought created dramatic changes in their historical development. The influence of Locke's political thought on later thinkers and related historical events can be seen by analyzing the political theories that led to the French Revolution and the theory of Constitutional Democracy and government in America.

John Locke's Influence on Other Thinkers

John Locke's political theory is essentially moderate and practical. It aimed to establish governmental channels by which popular consent could make itself effective and individual liberty could be safeguarded. How Locke's ideas had a wide impact is given in Gettell's *History of Political Thought* as follows:

..... French Huguenots and the Dutch adopted many of his doctrines. Montesquieu made Locke's separation of powers the main idea in his work. Locke's theories were developed by Rousseau into an even more daring form of social contract and were pushed to their logical limits in the French Revolution. In America the authors of the Declaration of Independence and of the American Constitution drew largely upon Locke's ideas. Locke reflected more faithfully than any thinker before him the forces that were making for enlightenment. He represented the modern spirit of independence, of criticism, of individualism, and of democracy, that had sought utterance in

¹ Raymond G. Gettell. (1924). *History of Political Thought*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. p. 295.

² Ibid., p. 305.

³ Ibid., p. 299.

the religious Reformation and in the political revolution of the seventeenth century, and that reached its climax in the intellectual, political, and economic revolutions of the eighteenth century. No philosopher was more important in impressing his thought on the minds and institutions of men.¹

This clearly shows the influence of Locke not only on French and American philosophers but also on other European thoughts and historical events.

From the origin of Locke's humanitarian conception of human rights under the law of nature led to phenomenal changes in the social and political spheres in some way or another either for or against. There were new versions and revisions but they had all arisen from Locke's political views. A closer study of Locke and Voltaire, Locke and Montesquieu, Locke and Rousseau and Locke and Jefferson will clarify this point.

John Locke and Rousseau Voltaire (1694-1778)

Voltaire (1694-1778) was a French writer and philosopher, whose most notable work, was his novella entitled *Candide* (1759) in which he states; it is up to us to cultivate our own garden, meaning that government can no longer be trusted to do so. He had spent three years in England, was intimate with Viscount Bolingbroke (1678-1751), and had studied the writings of Bacon, Newton, and Locke. He was very much influenced by Newton's efforts to explain the behaviour of physical objects in terms of general mathematical rules and by Locke's theory of learning that stressed the role of environment and experience. Voltaire introduced French readers to the benefits of religious toleration, a comparatively free press, the rule of law and constitutional government in his *Letters Concerning the English Nation* (1733).²

Voltaire did not contribute any significantly new ideas of his own but he propagated these new ideas through plays, novels, biographies, historical works, pamphlets, open letters and critical reviews. His writings reached a wide reading public in Western Europe. He was very eager to popularize English ideas in France. Voltaire attacked superstition and domination by the Church.

Although Voltaire praised Locke's ideas, he did not accept Locke's doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty as appropriate for France nor did he affirm Locke's social contract theory of the origins of the state. But he accepted Locke's theory of natural rights for human beings. He extended Locke's theory of freedom and argued for freedom of the press, freedom of elections, and freedom of parliaments, and demanded political rights for the middle class who was growing successful in industry and trade. He preferred a benevolent and enlightened monarchy but since kings could not be trusted to govern well, he considered the republican form of government, the best.

Voltaire, like Locke, taught that all human beings have equal natural rights of liberty, property and the rights of protection of the laws. He had no intention to prepare human beings for a revolution but he expected reforms to be carried out by the rulers themselves.³ But in this actual events did not meet his expectations for the French Revolution which took place was brutal and terrifying, sweeping along the innocent with the guilty.

John Locke and Baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755)

In the eighteenth century, Baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755) was a great reader of literature and of history, and was in thorough sympathy with the intellectual movement of his times. Montesquieu aimed to explain the nature and the workings of political institutions in

¹ Raymond G. Gettell. (1924). *History of Political Thought*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. p. 227.

²W. M. Spellman. (2008). *A Short History of Western Political Thought*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. p. 88.

³Raymond G. Gettell. (1924). *History of Political Thought*. p. 251.

general. He had travelled and studied the institutions of other countries. He spent two years in England and praised the English constitutional system for enhancing individual freedoms without sacrificing order and prosperity. There he came into contact with the leading politicians including Locke and was much impressed by the English conception of liberty and the English system of government. Montesquieu analyzed all political institutions from a relative point of view and he argued that culture, climate, customs and beliefs must be taken into account the form of civil society that “best agrees with the humor and disposition of the people in whose favour it is established.”¹

Montesquieu adopted Locke’s thought but he elaborated it. He endeavored to discover the principles underlying all forms of government. He classified three main types of governments as despotism, monarchies, and republics.

Locke’s ideas made a lasting impression on Montesquieu who wanted to safeguard people’s liberty and freedom. The chief interest of Montesquieu was to set forth a form of government that would best safeguard political liberty. He believed that liberty was possible only if government had limited power and that there must be separation of the executive, legislative, and judicial powers of government. Each power must be exercised by a separate organ and a system of checks and balances in order to guard against tyranny. The separation of executive and legislative power was especially important for Montesquieu. But it was an idea that he got from Locke and expanded it.

The political movements at the close of the eighteenth century were based upon a development of Locke’s theory of natural rights, social contract, and revolution, which found expression in the writings of Rousseau.²

John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was a Genevan philosopher and writer who greatly influenced the French Revolution. Rousseau introduced revolutionary ideas into the mainstream of western political thought. His view of the state was quiet different from the absolutism of Hobbes or the moderate constitutionalism of Locke. Rousseau’s thought was more dogmatic than Hobbes and more popular and powerful than Locke and his work exerted a tremendous influence at that time.

Rousseau was familiar with history and the writings of earlier political philosophers and many of his ideas were drawn from Samuel Pufendorf (1632-1694) who attempted to reconcile the absolute theory of sovereignty of Hobbes and the limited ethical sovereignty of Grotius, Locke and Montesquieu. Rousseau also accepted the Social Contract Theory. Like Locke, Rousseau accepted that only the social contract that creates political society need be decided by unanimous consent and all subsequent decisions require only a majority.³

Rousseau viewed people in their natural state as essentially good and the state of nature as a period of idyllic happiness unlike Hobbes. According to Rousseau, the will of each individual was combined into general will. The general will emerged in the common interest of all members of the community. Rousseau believed that sovereignty was always vested in the whole people and that law must be the direct expression of their general will. Like Locke, Rousseau agreed that sovereignty is vested in the people and a government’s power must be limited.

Rousseau desired to extend equal rights to the peasants and labourers, as well as to the middle class. He attacked the beliefs of the intellectual that progress would result from

¹ W. M. Spellman. (2008). *A Short History of Western Political Thought*. p. 90.

² Raymond G. Gettell. (1924). *History of Political Thought*. pp. 251-252.

³ Brian R. Nelson. (2009). *Western Political Thought*. New Delhi: Saurabh Printers Pvt. Ltd. p. 241.

enlightenment. He did not approve of an artificial civilization based upon human achievement in the arts and sciences. His ideals aimed at direct democracy and equality, and a radical reconstruction of the social and political order, which led logically to the Revolution.

Rousseau's thought was based upon the conception of a pre-political state of nature, in which human beings were equal, self-sufficient, and contented. He regarded human beings in the state of nature as a "Noble Savage". According to him, human conduct was not based on reason but on emotions of self-interest and pity. He was of the view that evils arose in the society with the progress of civilization. The division of labour that followed the development of the arts and the rise of private property he held created distinctions between rich and poor that broke down the happy natural condition of mankind and necessitated the establishment of civil society. Rousseau was more inclined than Hobbes or Locke to picture the state of nature as an actual historical condition.

Locke had held that the rational powers of natural man had enabled him to create social and political organization. But reason for Rousseau, was the outgrowth of the artificial life of people in organized society. The "Noble Savage" was Rousseau's ideal. The state was an evil, made necessary by the rise of inequalities among people.¹

Both Hobbes and Locke influenced Rousseau's ideas about social contract theory but his theory was a combination of the method of Hobbes and the conclusions of Locke. Rousseau had held that a human society is a collective being with a will of its own that is different from the sum of the wills of its individual members and that citizens should be entirely subordinate to this general will. Yet each person in the state had an inalienable share of sovereignty of the whole for he or she, gained back under the protection of the state the rights that had given up. Rousseau's political philosophy also had enormous influence, on future thinkers.

The mainspring of Rousseau idea of democracy was the forcible imposition of the general will whereas the mainspring of Locke's model is the protection and preservation of individual freedom. So there was a difference between the two. Rousseau's theory of the general will rejected the more realistic and conservative ideals of Locke such as the preservation of private property; he also did not accept the need for constraining institutions such as the checks and balances advocated by Montesquieu.

According to Rousseau, the will of each individual was merged into a general will. The general will corresponded to the common interest of all members of the community, as contrasted with particular interests. It was normally arrived at by asking each member to vote for what they believed to be the common good and accepting the view of the majority. Thus while the authority established was absolute, following Hobbes, individuals still possessed equal rights, following Locke. Rousseau believed that there could be no conflict between authority vested in the people as a whole and their liberty as individuals. This may be theoretically possible but hard to put into practice.

The idea and spirit of Rousseau led to governmental changes in that period. His doctrines of popular sovereignty had been popular. Many of his principles were applied in the political experiments of the French Revolution and were expressed in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizen in 1789. His doctrine held that the individual must surrender all his natural rights to the general will to establish a popular sovereignty. On the basis of his doctrine such as liberty, equality, and popular sovereignty the French people had been able to draw the idea of a bill of individual rights from the American model. Both the doctrine of Rousseau and the practices of seventeenth century England had an impact on France that led to the Revolution in 1789. Thus

¹Raymond G. Gettell. (1924). *History of Political Thought*. p. 257.

from the time of the French Revolution, revolution became an inevitable force of social and political change.¹

John Locke and Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826)

Today no politician would dare to argue for inequality whatever their convictions maybe. All would agree that equality, liberty and fraternity are the essential elements of a just society. But in the time of Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) it was a novel and inspiring ideal that had its origins in the political theorizing of John Locke and others. Hence Thomas Jefferson had written to George Washington in 1784 that the constitutional basis of the United States of America was “the natural equality of man”²

The idea that there are certain natural and inalienable rights including “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,”³ that belong to all men and to all men equally was enshrined in the US Declaration of Independence. The three principle rights named by Locke – life, liberty and property – were echoed in Thomas Jefferson’s draft of the US Declaration of Independence though he substituted “the pursuit of happiness” in place of Locke’s “property”.⁴

Thomas Jefferson also accepted Locke’s view regarding the freedom of an individual in the free exercise of faith. Jefferson made little original contribution to political theory. His ideas were drawn largely from Locke, liberalized somewhat by the influence of Thomas Paine (1737-1809). His chief work was to give the ideas of these men a form suitable to American conditions. Jefferson believed in human equality, natural rights and the establishment of government by social contract to protect individual liberty, and the right of revolution in case of misgovernment.

The Impact of John Locke’s Political Thought on the American Revolution

Between 1776 and 1783 the colonial revolt against British rule took place in North America. For fifty years before the American Revolution there had been constant political controversy between the American colonists and the representatives of the British government in the colonies. These disputes were local and personal, dealing with the extension of the franchise, the importation of prisoners, the issue of paper money, and taxation.

George III (1760-1820) had ambitions to reestablish the power of the monarch. Hence the reestablishment of royal power became closely bound up with the maintenance of authority over the colonies. But, the conflict began with an attempt to enforce the Navigation Acts. Besides, there had been issues concerning court orders about suspected goods. They were viewed by the colonists as an unwarranted extension of the powers of the British parliament.

The real conflict arose over the efforts of England to tax the colonists a portion of the expenditure required for the maintenance of troops in Canada. The passing of the Stamp Act (1765) led to the claim in the colonies that taxation without representation was tyranny. The colonists held that their assemblies alone could charge internal taxes. Thus, there had been bitter differences of opinion over the nature of the British Empire. While the Stamp Act was replaced by taxes on colonial imports, these also were opposed, and were met by colonial agreements to boycott English goods. The sending of troops to America to enforce British policy led to violence, to more repressive legislation and to war. That war led to the independence and unification of the colonies. State governments were set up and a Continental Congress was assembled. Every political idea that appeared in England was promptly transported to the colonies and put to work. The social

¹Raymond G. Gettell. (1924). *History of Political Thought*. p. 260.

²Ben Dupre´. (2010). *50 Political Ideas*. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 12.

³Ibid., p. 12.

⁴Ibid., p. 17.

contract doctrine would occupy a large place in colonial thought. Moreover it was natural that colonial conditions and experiences should give their opinion in favour of Locke's ideas over Hobbes's ideas. The colonists did not vest in a certain person or body of person but in the fundamental law of the body politic about sovereignty.¹

Political Theories of the American Revolution

The political theories of the American Revolution are not to be found in any systematic treatise. It appeared in the form of pamphlets, addresses from platforms and stages, newspaper discussions, resolutions, and constitutions. Its upholders were not disinterested political philosophers, but promoters of a revolutionary program. In the early part of the struggle the argument of the colonists was mainly constitutional, dealing with the legal relation of the colonies to the home government. Their arguments based upon the more general theory of natural rights and social contracts were prominent. Others claimed that the social contract itself had been broken and the state of nature restored. The American people were therefore justified in establishing a new body politic.

In American constitutional arguments, the colonists claimed that they had their own assemblies and they could hold the same position in the colonies that parliament did in Great Britain. The constitutional arguments that appeared were based upon the abstract doctrine of natural rights. They included the usual belief in an original state of nature in which men are free and equal, the establishment of political society by voluntary agreement for the purpose of promoting general welfare, the possession of rights with which the government must not interfere, the ultimate sovereignty of the people and the right of revolution in case of misgovernment. Since men are born free and equal, no authority could claim their allegiance except by voluntary agreement. Hence government rested upon the consent of the governed. American theory was inclined to view a sovereign people over a large area as a collection of groups rather than a collection of individuals. Governmental powers were the agents of the people and were accountable to them for their conduct. If they abused their power upon the natural rights of the people, they should be removed. Revolution was a duty as well as a right for those who loved freedom. The best statement of the natural rights theory of the colonists was made in the Declaration of Independence.²

American Documents and Constitutions

The period of the revolution in America and in France gave rise to numerous important governmental documents in which the current political philosophy was embedded. Views on natural rights and republicanism emphasizes the community instead of one person, and constitutionalism that is the idea that there are definable limits on the rightful power of a government over its citizens became part of the American Constitution.

John Locke said that the absolute rights of people was the basis of all fair and just governments. The authority from the government comes from the consent of the governed people to use their authority to secure and guarantee their natural rights to life, liberty and estate. Life without government is unstable because without government there is no authority to say what the law of nature demands. Since not everyone will follow the laws of nature, everyone is insecure about their rights as a person. So there is a need for government- to protect a person's life and liberty.

¹Raymond G. Gettell. (1924). *History of Political Thought*. pp. 292-293.

²Ibid., pp. 294-295.

The constitution was planned to provide for a limited government so political power would not be abused. Great care and thought were given in writing the Constitution so that it would not be a threat to freedom. The best idea they had was to separate the power into three separate branches Legislative, Executive and Judicial. Each branch has power over the other two branches in some way. This system is called checks and balances and is used as a barrier to avoid abuses of power. The constitution was written partly because of what happened during colonial and revolutionary experiences. The American people wanted liberty, self-government, equality, individualism, diversity and unity. Natural rights, republicanism and constitutionalism are all the products of liberty, self-government, equality, individualism, diversity and unity. And the seeds of these concepts are to be found in John Locke's political views.

In America, the Declaration of Independence, the Resolutions of the Colonial Assemblies and the Continental Congresses, the State Constitutions, the Articles of Confederation, and the Federal Constitution were most important, in so far as these contained a statement of individual liberties which had come down in English tradition that came down through Magna Carta, the Petition of Right, the Bill of Rights, the Habeas Corpus Act, and the like, with added emphasis derived from the theory of Locke concerning inalienable natural rights.¹

Locke has had a great influence upon the constitutional structure of all Western liberal democracies. The Declaration of Independence not only speaks the language of natural rights, but implicitly conveys the idea that George III had violated the terms of the social contract. Furthermore, Locke's economic and social theories have by now become an American ideology. His emphasis upon the importance of private property, the Protestant work ethic and individual rights have been profoundly influential in this country. The impact of Locke's structural analysis upon American constitutional theory has been enormous.²

The Impact of John Locke's Political Thought on the French Revolution

The French and American Revolutions were different in many ways but arguably in the same tradition, stemming from the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the measured arguments of Locke and Montesquieu and the skepticism and anti-clericalism of Voltaire and Diderot.³

In the eighteenth century, France was feudalistic in its social organization and autocratic in government. In that period class distinction was very different. There had been extreme social relations between the upper and lower classes. In France, the total population was twenty-five millions and a quarter million were nobles and clergy men. They owned half of the lands which were taken from the peasants as taxes and feudal payments. At that time, a small middle class, the bourgeoisie, was becoming prosperous. But, like most people they possessed no social and political privileges. The government was a centralized and despotic system. The middle and lower classes were at the mercy of the king and his officials. There was no representative parliament to serve as a check upon the royal power, and the judiciary was controlled by the higher nobility.

Unnecessary wars and wasteful life at the court had exhausted the treasury and created a heavy debt. Loans had been made under unfavourable conditions, and taxes were heavy and there was no fair distribution among the people. The collection of taxes was raised. The chief interest of the officials was the exploitation of the people. Land values were low and the farmers had suffered bad weather. There had been dissatisfaction between the people and the king, Louis XIV. It was at that time, that the political philosophies of freedom of the press, freedom of elections, and freedom of parliaments incited the angry French people to revolution. The middle class, the bourgeoisie

¹Raymond G. Gettell. (1924). *History of Political Thought*. pp. 299.

²Brian R. Nelson. (2009). *Western Political Thought*. p. 212.

³Kieron O'Hara. (2010). *The Enlightenment*. England: Oneworld Publications. p. 113.

demanded political rights and they led the people toward revolution with the slogan, “Equality, Liberty and Fraternity”.¹ That revolution was the consequence of the English Puritan Revolution which had broken out as the result of a power struggle between king and parliament.

French political philosophers saw in the American Revolution a practical application of current doctrine. They declared the formation of a national assembly representing the general will of the French people. In 1790, the National Assembly of France declared that the French nation would give up wars and would never use force against the liberty of any people. In 1793, a project for a Declaration of the Law of Nations appeared and it contained advanced ideas of international justice and represented the idealistic spirit of the early French Revolution.²

Political Theories of the French Revolution

In France, the philosophy of the revolution appeared mainly in the form of political pamphlets. The calling of the Estates-General and the reform of feudal abuses and of legal procedure were chiefly discussed. Book-sellers’ shops were crowded, reading rooms were opened, and political clubs, after the English fashion, were set up. The overflow of pamphlets in Paris was so great that the price of printing was doubled, several thousand appearing in the last months of 1788 alone.

The main features of the system of government which they desired to establish were generally agreed upon. The king should remain, but his legislative powers should be shared by the nation as represented in a general assembly. The executive power of the king was to be exercised through ministers. Local assemblies were to be established in the provinces, with large administrative powers.

The political thought of the reformers was well represented by Abbe Sieyes (1748-1836). He attacked the special privileges of the nobility and the clergy. He held that the third estate, which composed the greater part of the population and did all the useful work of the nation, should be given its fair share of political power. Following the political philosophy of Rousseau, Sieyes believed that the state was composed of individuals who voluntarily combined their separate wills to form a general will. But unlike Rousseau, he held that in a large state the general will might be expressed by representatives who were active for the people as a whole.

The theory of a written constitution was worked out by the Marquis de Condorcet (1743-1794). He was familiar with American practice and believed thoroughly in the expression of national will, through a constitutional convention, in the form of a written document. He held that through the application of rational philosophy a perfect system of government and a perfect guarantee of natural liberty could be achieved. He believed that a declaration of rights should be included in the constitution.³

French Documents and Constitutions

The French Revolution also produced a remarkable series of documents and constitutions. Before the meetings of the Estates-General, Lafayette, Sieyes, Condorcet, and Mirabeau drafted and published a model of the Declaration of Rights. Like the American, many French leaders believed that a statement of their political philosophy should form a part of their fundamental law.

However, a Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizen was drawn up in 1789 and made a part of the constitutions that appeared in the following years. The French declaration followed closely the American Bill of Rights. It also tended to emphasize equality more than

¹ W. M. Spellman. (2008). *A Short History of Western Political Thought*. p. 98.

² Raymond G. Gettell. (1924). *History of Political Thought*. p. 294.

³ Raymond G. Gettell. (1924). *History of Political Thought*. pp. 302-304.

liberty. As a result, the absolute power vested in the sovereign people was put to practice. The first written constitution for France was issued in 1791. It followed Rousseau in locating sovereignty in the people and Montesquieu in setting up a system of checks and balances and Sieyes in delegating the exercise of sovereign power to representatives and in providing for a complex method of constitutional amendment.¹

Conclusion

The theorist of the Revolution of 1688, England was none other than John Locke. His chief political work was a philosophic defense of the parliamentary party. Locke's statements of humanity such as "all men are equal and possess equal natural right under the Law of Nature; all human beings have the right to life; liberty, and property; and people are the original owners of sovereignty", etc. are the basic principles of today's Humanitarianism and they may be called the dawn of today's updated government systems.

Locke used the word, "people's sovereignty or sovereignty of parliament" but Rousseau called it "General Will". Montesquieu created a system of separation of power, and check and balance in order to safeguard the people's liberty. That synthesis of political ideas or a political gene was carried out through the revolutions of England, America, and France. After those revolutions, constitutional governmental systems were established in different forms such as pure constitutional government system (today's presidential government system), combined monarchy and constitutional government system (constitutional monarchy), etc. not only in America, France, England and other European countries but also in the countries of the East. The traditional system of absolute monarchy was eliminated to be replaced by dictatorships.

Since the nineteenth century Europe was occupied with revolutions and wars. Their general aim was to create national states with modern established constitutional governments following the success the American Revolution. In the twentieth century, as a beginning the popular uprising for constitutional government appeared in Italy, Spain, and Portugal, etc. Thus, nationality and constitutional democracy became popular in European countries. A liberal party in each state designed a written document as in the American system. In their documents, there were guarantees of individual rights and some provision for mass representative assembly. There were many versions and there was also controversy over the position of the monarch for his role in a modern constitution, especially with regard to distribution of power.

However, the parliamentary governmental system begun in England supported by Locke's theory had spread throughout the East and West. Today, it may be said that there is no government without a constitution. Chester C. Maxey, in his, *Political Philosophies* commented on how Locke's thought had influenced world politics as follows:

John Locke, Not alone in political thought, but in economics, education, theology, and metaphysical philosophy did the luminous (brilliant) intellect of this seventeenth-century doctor of medicine pencil out lines of thought that multitudes were destined to follow.²

Quite as influential as the doctrine of natural rights, though possibly less unique, was Locke's concept of constitutional government based on the consent of the governed and implemented by majority rule.³

¹ Raymond G. Gettell. (1924). *History of Political Thought*, pp. 304-306.

² Chester C. Maxey. (1961). *Political Philosophies*. New York: The Macmillan Company. p. 246.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

Political thinkers and practical statesmen both were profoundly impressed. Following the trail broken by Locke, Montesquieu evolved the famous tripartite theory of governmental functions; and following both Locke and Montesquieu, the designers of American governmental structures – local, state, and national – gave us the threefold system of organization which has had more to do with the peculiar and esoteric developments of American government and politics than any other factor save possibly our federal plan. And whatever the future order of society may be, we are assured that there will be more liberty and security for the individual than could have been the case had not the western mind for two long centuries been deeply impregnated with the political philosophy of John Locke.¹

Locke's political influence was great but he also influenced religious and social affairs. On the basis of his outlook, Adam Smith, David Ricardo and Karl Marx extended their own views respectively. By observing those subjects, it may be acknowledged Locke was a well-rounded wise man of the world.

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¹ Chester C. Maxey. (1961). *Political Philosophies*. New York: The Macmillan Company. p. 263.