Liberty, Equality, Dictatorship? The Role of Revolution in Shaping Modern Europe

Course Content

Contemporary Europe is often seen as the bastion of liberal values and the home of modern democracy. This is undoubtedly true in part, as progressive European history testifies, with citizens across the continent bravely engaged in hard fought revolutions time and time again, to win the cherished promise of freedom.

Yet this perspective often overlooks the complex role that revolution has played in shaping the modern continent, sometimes with distinctly illiberal results. Indeed, from this perspective, Europe’s claim to be the originator of modern totalitarianism is as great as its more noble ambitions. And nowhere is this more evident than in the case of the three great European revolutions: the French Revolution of 1789; the European wide Revolutions of 1848; and the Russian Revolutions of 1917.

This course will examine the origins and nature of these revolutions, exploring the key issues and events which sparked revolt and considering how far they were ‘inevitable’.

The key roles played by leading individuals in shaping the revolutions will also be considered, including Louis XVI, Robespierre, Napoleon, Metternich, Nicholas II and Lenin.

Finally, we will consider the legacy of all three revolutions, both individually and collectively, and discover how they helped shape the destiny of contemporary Europe.

Throughout the course students will be encouraged to engage in group analysis of a range of source materials, both primary and secondary, and will be expected to play an active role in weekly class discussions.
BRITISH AND EUROPEAN STUDIES

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Topic Outline

What is Europe?
▪ A Map History. Ideology & Terminology.

The French Revolution
▪ The Republic of Virtue: The Jacobin takeover. The rise and fall of the Terror in France.

The Revolutions of 1848
▪ The European Spring? Napoleon's legacy. Metternich's Europe. The origins and nature of revolt
▪ The Conservative Reaction: The revolutionary collapse. The birth of state-centred nationalism

The Russian Revolution
▪ Crimea: The Price of War? The Reign of Tsar Nicholas II. The origins and nature of the Russian Revolution
▪ October Days: The Bolshevik takeover. Lenin’s rule and the problem of succession

Concluding Thoughts
▪ The role of revolution in Europe and its longer-term legacies

Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course students should be able:
▪ to critically use and evaluate a range of relevant historical evidence both primary and secondary
▪ identify the key features of each revolution both individually and comparatively
▪ discuss and debate the longer term impact of revolution on Europe