

## Revolution

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It occurs to me that revolutions come and go, none lasting for as long as the instigators had hoped. Pondering this, and in casual conversation with a local political force, I was told that my problem was that I was an idealist and that ideals lead to revolution. I'm sure that he meant the comment to be less as an insult than as a hope that I might abandon my ideals and join the team: the team supporting his party, his candidate, his agenda, and his own political future. Instead, in my naiveté, I took it as a compliment.

And yet, the thought – that of ideals and the role they play in our lives – stayed with me, rattling around in the back of my brain like a loose bolt that needed to be tightened. And slowly, through no conscious effort of my own, it did so. The loose parts that set the stage for revolution came together first, and were quickly followed by a theory of how the bolt became loose in the first place. The theory, speculation at first, was quickly validated by history.

Revolution has a recipe. As with any good recipe, substitutes for any of the specific ingredients may occur, creating variations of the dish. Hence one hot spice can often be replaced with another. White sugar can be replaced with corn sugar or malt sugar. The flavors can change, but the outcome remains the same.

And so it is with the recipe for revolution. It starts with unhappiness. The unhappiness can arise in a competing upper class or with the people. In our own history, it arose from the people and was quickly adopted by the local and quite unofficial aristocracy. The role of the latter is essential to successful revolution; someone needs to pay the bills.

What is consistent is that the unhappiness is not being addressed by the existing form of government. Those in power are not responsive to those in need. Even when the unhappiness arises from a competing upper class, not being heard by the existing ruling class can foment unhappiness.

The unhappiness stimulates the thinkers. These are often the philosophers who sit to the side and postulate what a better world might look like. The philosophers often identify the ideals, but the ideals are often, but not always, reactionary to the source of the unhappiness.

Along with the new philosophy and new ideals, is the erosion of hope that the existing government will be capable of making the necessary corrections and removing the unhappiness.

With ideals then stewing in the mixture of unhappiness and hopelessness, the most belligerent of the future revolutionaries spread both the unhappiness and the ideals amongst the others. At the same time, the hopelessness is replaced with the hope that these new leaders can bring change. This step is very important because, in many cases, the masses don't feel that they have the power to change things. The 'it is what it is' attitude of acceptance must be broken or the revolution will fail.

As both the unhappiness and the hope associated with the new ideals are spread, change occurs. Some revolutions are bloodless. Most are not. The method is not as important as is the removal of those in power and their replacement with those who espouse the new ideals.

Continuing the recipe metaphor, it is time now to set the new society aside and let it cool. The new ideals, the new leadership, the new form of government has been installed and, according to the philosophers, the future will be wonderful. The unhappiness has ended, or will end as soon as the new government takes action in response to the needs that drove the revolution in the first place.

As the revolution and the revolutionaries cool, however, responsiveness begins to fade. More importantly, very slowly over extended periods of time, the ideals are subjugated to such forces as expediency, efficiency, and the new personal agendas of the new members of the ruling class. Getting something done becomes more important than getting something done that is also in accord with the new ideals. The replacement is natural. It is often hard to maintain an ideal when quick and easy actions can be both responsive and soothing to the desires of those governed. Ideal-based solutions and actions are most often much more difficult.

As time goes on, unhappiness once again begins to wend its way through the minds of those governed. Philosophers question the old philosophy and the old ideals, and so the cycle resets and begins again.

If it were possible to maintain ideals beyond the revolution itself, to change the leadership without abandoning the principles, to keep the ideals and abandon expediency, perhaps we might avoid the next revolution.