**The Enlightenment Effect on Government**

The Enlightenment caused people to question all aspects of life. This new passion and view on life was catching on fast. People began to question everything in an effort to have a better understanding of all things in life. While Isaac Newton questioned the natural laws that regulated nature, others became motivated to question society and those who governed it, which produced political philosophers.

The intellectuals of the Enlightenment were called by a French term, philosophes. These people were not all French and not always by the definition philosophers but instead they were people such as professors, statesmen, political scientist, and social reformers. Most of these people came from nobility or the middle class. The main purpose of the Enlightenment philosophes was to change the world.

Some of the key political ideas of this time came from Montesquieu and Rousseau.

Montesquieu distinguished three basic types of governments: republics which are good for small states and are based on citizen involvement, monarchy which is good for mid-sized states and are grounded in the ruling class's adherence to law, and despotism for large empires who use fear to inspire obedience.

Rousseau believed that people adopted laws and governors to protect their property but instead had become enslaved by government. His idea was that a society should govern itself through means of a social contract. This meant that a society would follow what was best for all people because he believed what was best for all was bet for an individual. This would also prevent a parliament from forming in order to create laws.

He also believed that education should encourage children to follow natural instincts since much of what he knew was from life experiences.

These new political ideas created a new political age. With people starting to think for themselves, question their society, and follow the lead of the philosophes the European monarchs had to be aware of what was going on and be open to the idea of change if they were to continue their rule.

In most of the countries in Europe monarchs did make adjustments and people would begin to have more natural rights. One of these was equality. When equality is mentioned at this time it does not imply that women always have the same rights as men. Monarchs were being held to the same laws that they expected their subjects to follow. Monarchs were allowing religious tolerance, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, the right to assemble, the right to hold property, and other rights that people did not previously have. In addition some monarchs gave up some of their power in order to reform government and create a new body of legislation.

The center of the enlightenment took place in Paris, France. Some of the monarchs in Europe adopted the ideas of Enlightenment because they genuinely cared for the people. In France, it took a revolution in order for the monarch to be changed and give more freedom to the people.

Please answer the following questions after you do the reading:

1. What does “philosophes” mean?  
2. Who were these people?  
3. What was their main purpose?  
4. List the three types of governments that Montesquieu discussed and what size country was best for each. Explain why each of these governments was perfect for the size of the groups they controlled.   
5. What was Rousseau’s view on education?   
6. How did the Enlightenment change the way monarchs approached their rule?   
7. How did the idea of equality apply to women?   
8. What new rights were monarchs now allowing?