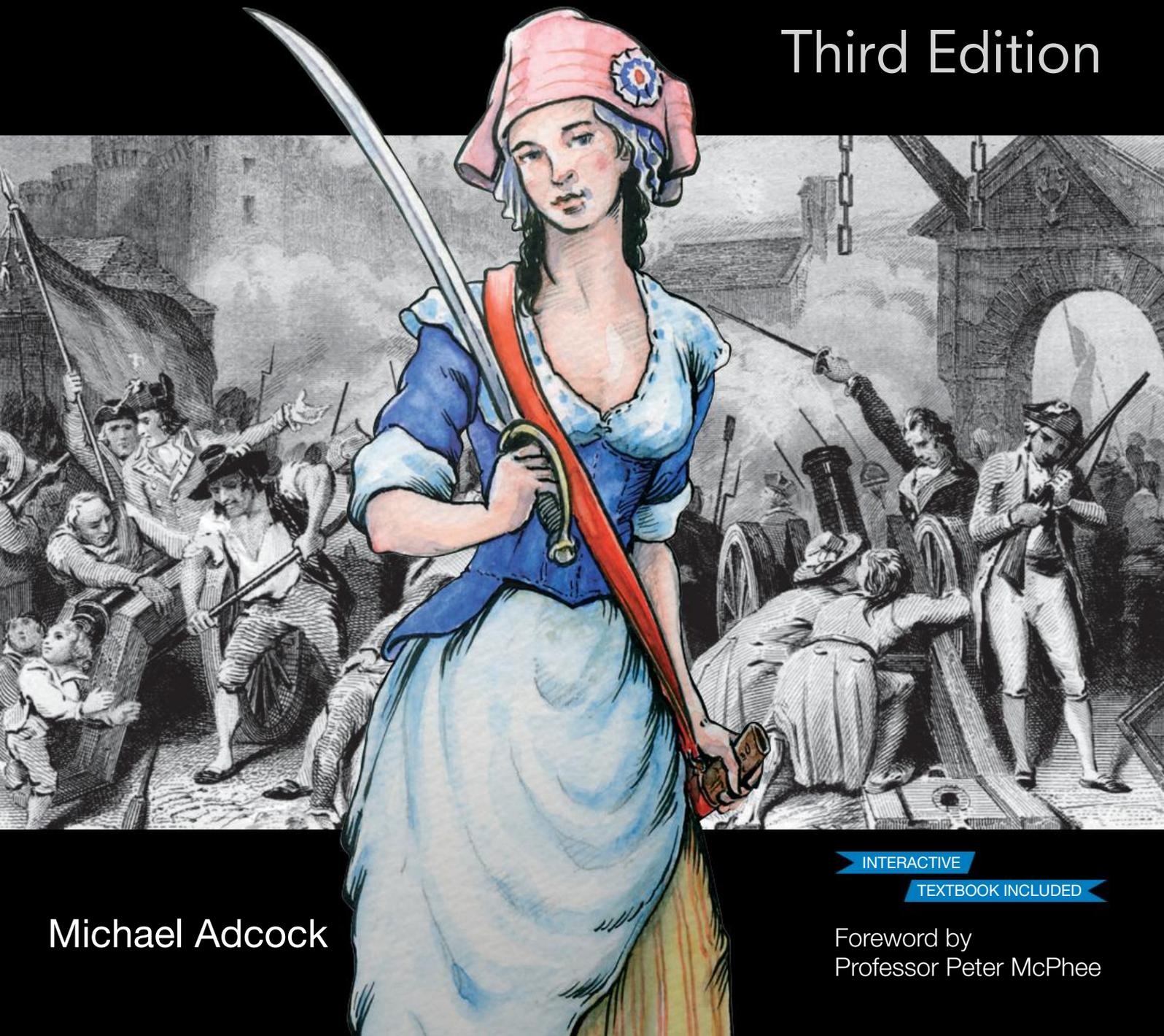


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Analysing the French Revolution

Third Edition



Michael Adcock

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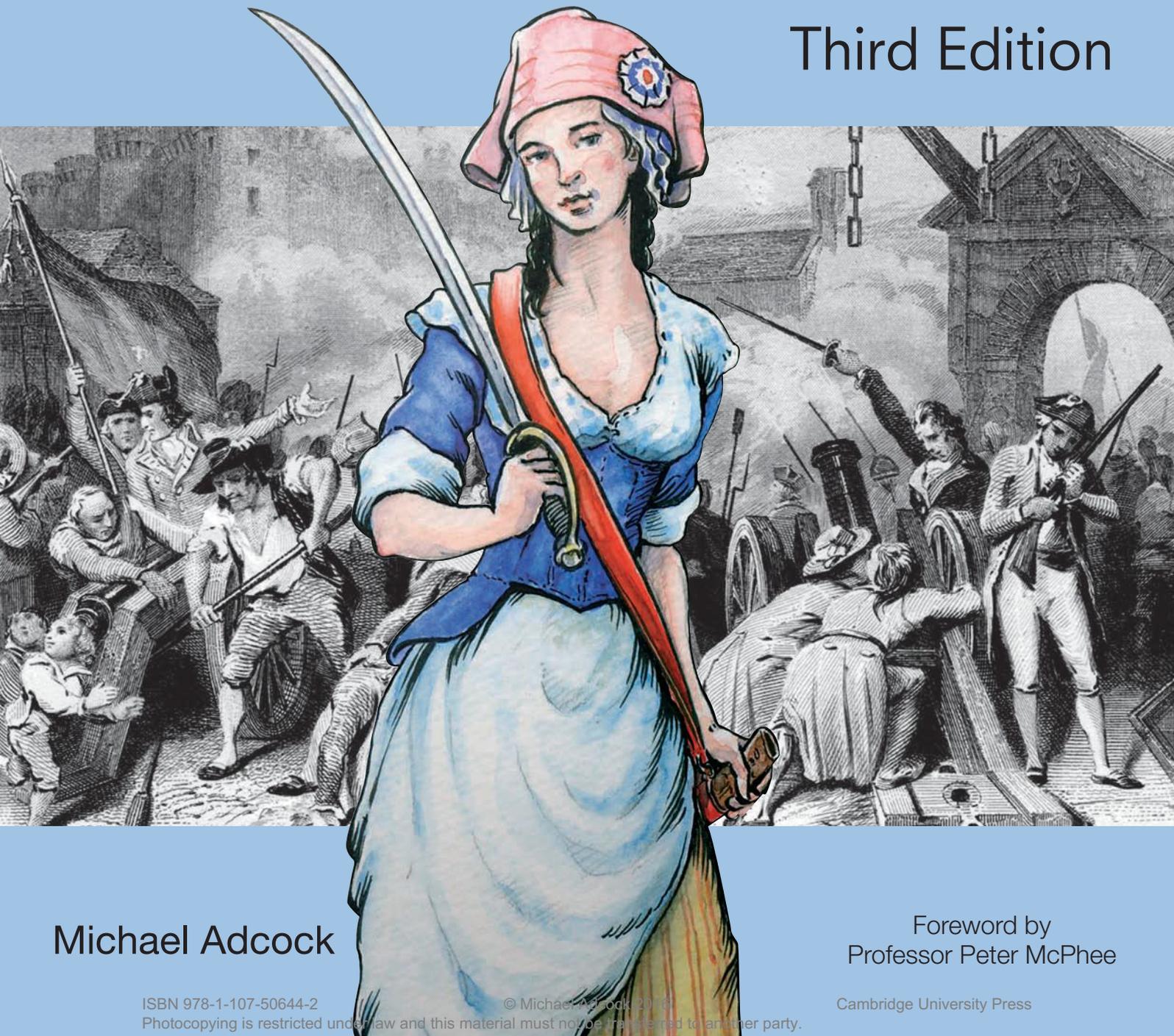
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Foreword by
Professor Peter McPhee

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Analysing the French Revolution

Third Edition



Michael Adcock

Foreword by
Professor Peter McPhee

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Table of contents

part one AOS 1

Causes of revolution:
The development of
significant ideas,
events, individuals and
popular movements
in France, 1774 to
October 1789

2

<i>About the author</i>	vii
<i>Foreword by Professor Peter McPhee, AM</i>	x
<i>French Revolutionary governments at a glance</i>	xi
<i>How to use this textbook</i>	xii
Summary of key events, 1774 to October 1789	4
1 The political order in France before the revolution	6
1.1 What were the elements that made up the King's authority?	8
1.2 Limits to the King's power	10
1.3 The contradictions and inefficiencies of the monarchy	10
1.4 The importance of public perceptions of the King	11
1.5 Significant individual: King Louis XVI	14
2 The social order in France before the revolution	19
2.1 The corporate society and privilege	21
2.2 The culture of deference: Respect for your 'betters'	21
2.3 The three estates	22
3 Significant ideas: The influence of the Enlightenment	32
3.1 Historians' points of view: Did the Enlightenment help create a revolutionary situation in France?	34
3.2 The main strands of Enlightenment thought	35
3.3 Varied political beliefs	37
3.4 Analysing the impact of the Enlightenment	43
4 New popular movements and significant ideas before the revolution	47
4.1 What were the growing expectations of the bourgeoisie in the Third Estate?	49
4.2 Historians debate the role of the bourgeoisie	51
4.3 Other social forces: The challenge from the liberal nobility	52
5 How France's financial crisis became a political crisis, 1774–1789	55
5.1 The making of a crisis: The nation's financial problem	57
5.2 Significant individual: Queen Marie-Antoinette	59
5.3 The old regime tries to reform itself	60
5.4 The financial crisis becomes a political crisis	63
5.5 Consulting the nation: The Books of Grievances (<i>Cahiers de doléances</i>)	67
5.6 Significant individual: Phillipe, Duc d'Orleans	73

part two

AOS 2

Consequences of
revolution: Significant
ideas, events, individuals
and popular movements
in France, October 1789
to 1795

108

6	How the political crisis became a revolution, 1789	76
6.1	The hopes and grievances of working people, 1788–89	78
6.2	Conflict over the Estates-General	82
6.3	Significant individual: Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès	84
6.4	Paris in a ferment: The tense days of July 1789	88
6.5	The capture of the Bastille	91
7	The revolutionary events of 1789	96
7.1	How was the revolution consolidated in 1789?	98
7.2	Events: The peasant revolt, July and August 1789	98
7.3	Events: The Night of Patriotic Delirium, 4 August 1789	100
7.4	Events: The Women's March to Versailles, October 1789	102
	Summary of key events, October 1789 to November 1795	109
8	The role of significant individuals, 1789–1791	112
8.1	What role do leaders play in a revolution?	114
8.2	Significant individual: The Marquis de Lafayette	114
8.3	The roles of other leaders in the French Revolution	121
8.4	Significant individual: Camille Desmoulins	121
8.5	Significant individual: Comte de Mirabeau	122
8.6	Significant individual: Jean-Sylvain Bailly	123
9	The development of significant revolutionary ideas, 1789–1791	126
9.1	Ideas: The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen	128
9.2	The principles of the men and women of 1789	129
9.3	Key concepts of the Declaration	130
10	The role of popular movements, 1789–1791	134
10.1	What is meant by a revolutionary 'movement'?	136
10.2	The formation of a revolutionary movement in France	136
10.3	Do leaders control the revolutionary movement?	136
10.4	How did the revolutionary movement express its ideas?	139
11	Creating a new society, 1789–1791	144
11.1	The historians' debate about the creation of a new society in France	146
11.2	The key principles of reform: Reason and equality	147
11.3	The rationalisation of administration	151
11.4	The creation of a fair and accessible judicial system	151
11.5	Did the revolution improve life for most people?	153
12	Sources of disunity in the revolution, 1789–1791	156
12.1	The administrative reorganisation of the Catholic Church	158
12.2	The Civil Constitution of the Clergy, August 1789 to July 1790	159
12.3	The opposition from the clergy, October and November 1790	159
12.4	The making of France's Constitution, 1789–91	161
12.5	The revolution divided against itself, 1790–91	163
12.6	Significant individual: Lafayette suffers from the tensions within the revolutionary movement	170
12.7	Significant individual: The King accepts the Constitution, September 1791	171
13	The revolutionary events of 1792	175
13.1	How did foreign powers put pressure on the revolution in August 1791?	177
13.2	New leaders, new challenges: The Legislative Assembly, 1 October 1791	177

13.3	Dangerous solutions: The option of international war	179
13.4	The experience of war radicalises the revolution	181
13.5	Significant individual: A new leader and organiser: Georges-Jacques Danton	188
14	Creating the new society, 1792–1794	193
14.1	The new political team: The National Convention	195
14.2	Creating the new society: The blueprint	197
14.3	The new society: The structures of everyday life	199
14.4	The new citizen: The republic of virtue	200
15	The new society: Challenges and responses, 1792–1794	202
15.1	The financial challenge: The crisis in revolutionary finances	204
15.2	The military challenge: International war	205
15.3	The economic challenge: The food crisis	207
15.4	The military crisis: Civil war	207
15.5	The political challenge: The Federalist revolt	209
15.6	The psychological challenge: Assassinations in Paris	210
15.7	Responses: ‘Revolutionary government’ and Terror	212
15.8	The Great Terror	221
16	Significant individuals: The role of Maximilien de Robespierre, 1792–1794	229
16.1	Significant individual: A leader in a time of crisis: Maximilien de Robespierre	231
16.2	Robespierre’s qualities as a leader	232
16.3	Robespierre’s relationship with the revolutionary movement	233
16.4	The ‘professional revolutionary’	237
16.5	The political use of paranoia	237
16.6	The role of other leaders in the revolution, 1792–94	239
16.7	Significant individual: Georges-Jacques Danton	239
16.8	Significant individual: Jean-Paul Marat	240
17	Popular movements: The role of the <i>sans-culottes</i> in the French Revolution, 1792–1795	243
17.1	Who were the <i>sans-culottes</i> ?	245
17.2	The Jacobins and the <i>sans-culottes</i>	246
17.3	Who were <i>les enragés</i> ?	250
18	Popular movements: The role of women in the French Revolution, 1789–1794	253
18.1	The contribution of women and their involvement in revolutionary activity	256
18.2	The historical debate: Why did women participate in the revolution?	257
18.3	Rediscovering the many political roles of women	259
18.4	Significant individual: Olympe de Gouges and the rights of women	260
18.5	Significant individual: Women’s activist Anne-Pauline Léon	263
18.6	Significant individual: Women’s activist Claire Lacombe	264
18.7	The repression of revolutionary women	267
19	The final settlement: The conservative republic of 1795	271
19.1	The fall of the Jacobin government in Thermidor, July 1794	273
19.2	Significant individual: The overthrow of Robespierre in Thermidor	274
19.3	The representation of Robespierre over time	275

part three

The revolution in
retrospect

290

19.4	The Thermidorian reaction	276
19.5	Significant individual: Boissy d'Anglas	280
19.6	The Constitution of 1795: A return to moderation	281

20 Historical interpretations **291**

20.1	How to write about historical interpretations	292
20.2	Comparing different views of the French Revolution	294

Glossary	302
Index	306

Available on Cambridge GO:

A teacher's guide to the historical interpretations of the French Revolution
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About the author

Dr Michael Adcock is the Head of History and Humanities at Melbourne Grammar School. He is also a lecturer, author and tour guide who specialises in the social and cultural history of France. He regularly presents illustrated lectures for the History Teachers' Association of Victoria, Modern History Seminars (Sydney) and the National Gallery of Victoria. His published works focus on the history of the French Revolution, and include a recent work on the Enlightenment. He is also the tour leader for Academy Travel (Sydney), and conducts residential study tours in French history in Paris.



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– Michael Adcock

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Foreword

What a fine student text this is! Michael Adcock has produced a treasure trove of insights into revolutionary France while also providing a lucid, logical narrative for students. He has succeeded in capturing the heroism and the horrors, the ideals and the sacrifices of this extraordinary, fascinating period.

The French Revolution of 1789–99 was one of the great turning points of modern history. The Bourbon regime, based on absolute monarchy and ‘corporate’ privileges for the church and nobility, and the feudal system, gave way to a new society based on constitutional government, popular sovereignty and equality of status between citizens and religions. This had repercussions across Europe and around the world. But the cost was enormous: before the revolution was stabilised, hundreds of thousands of men and women had died in external wars and civil war, and many more had had their spiritual and occupational lives destroyed.

Had these sacrifices been in vain? After all the upheavals and loss of life by the time of the Constitution of 1795, had the objectives of the revolution been achieved, or had power simply shifted from the King and his noble elite to a new elite of wealthy commoners? In what ways had life been transformed for the mass of French people? Michael suggests important ways in which politics and society would never be the same again.

Michael did his own PhD research on the relationship of art and society in France. He has a profound knowledge of French visual representation, from great paintings to cartoons, and a capacity to tease out what they have to tell us about politics and society. His passion for the visual record of the past shines through. This is a richly illustrated book, with many lesser-known and fascinating images. They are complemented by several superbly executed maps. Students will benefit immensely from them, as they will from the practical guides to study, further reading and key dates.

Students are indeed fortunate to have access to such an expert and thoughtful text, written and designed with their learning uppermost in mind. The French Revolution was a complex, highly charged period, but Michael makes it accessible to us, while evoking its passion and its status as one of the great revolutions of history.

*Professor Peter McPhee AM
The University of Melbourne*



French Revolutionary governments at a glance

Legislature	Executive	Key features	Key events
<p>The National Constituent Assembly (June 1789 to September 1791) A single-house parliament</p>	<p>Executive government by Louis XVI and his ministers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitutional monarchy • Constitution of 1791 drafted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responds to peasant revolt, Great Fear, August Decrees (August 1789) • Writes Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen (August 1789) • Achieves total reorganisation of France, 1789–90 • Writes Civil Constitution of Clergy, 1790 • Deals with flight to Varennes crisis, 1791 • Champ de Mars Massacre, July 1791 • King accepts Constitution, September 1791
<p>The Legislative Assembly (October 1791 to September 1792) A single-house parliament</p>	<p>Executive government by Louis XVI and his ministers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitutional monarchy • Constitution of 1791 still in place • All new men due to Robespierre's self-denying ordinance • A brief but very significant parliament 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passes harsh laws against émigré nobles and refractory priests • Radical group led by Brissot urges declaration of war on Austria, April 1792 • Louis uses suspensive veto to block punitive laws • First <i>sans-culottes</i> invasion of Tuileries, 20 June 1792 • Decree of Country in Danger, July 1792 • Overthrow of monarchy, 10 August 1792
<p>The National Convention (September 1792 to October 1795) A single-house parliament</p>	<p>Committee of Public Safety (April 1793 to October 1795)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A republic based on France's most democratic ever constitution (Constitution of 1793) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Severe military defeat (Longwy, Verdun) • September Massacres, 1792 • Proclamation of Republic, September 1792 • Execution of Louis XVI, January 1793 • War of First Coalition • Establishment of Terror: Representatives on Mission, Revolutionary Tribunal • Thermidor – fall of Robespierre and Jacobins, July 1794 • The White Terror, Thermidorian reaction
<p>The Directory (October 1795 to November 1799) A two-house parliament: • Council of 500 • Council of Elders</p>	<p>The Directors A strong executive arm</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A conservative republic, based on restricting political participation to men of age and property 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitution of the Year III (1795) approved, September 1795 • Napoleon Bonaparte crushes royalist uprising of Vendémiaire • Directory established, November 1795



How to use this textbook

STRUCTURE

This textbook is broken into three **Parts**. Parts 1 & 2 align with Area of Study 1 & 2 in the VCE History: Revolutions Study Design. Part 3 includes a chapter on the **Historical interpretations** of the revolution.

French Revolutionary governments at a glance is a summary table to help you revise for assessments or to guide you as you work through the book.

Part openers give a broad **Overview** of the chapters to come.

Chapter openers also include an **overview**, as well as **key issues** and **flow of chapter** features.

part two AOS 2

Consequences of revolution: Significant ideas, events, individuals and popular movements in France, October 1789 to 1795

“The making of France was based on a belief in the common identity of French citizens whatever their social or geographic origin. This was a fundamental change in the relationship between the state, its provinces and the clergy in every aspect of public life – administration, the judiciary, the armed forces, the Church, policing – traditions of corporate rights, appointment and hierarchy gave way to civil equality, accountability, and elections within national structures.”

— PETER MCPHER, 2002

OVERVIEW

The common image of the French Revolution as a time of violent crowd action, Terror and the use of the guillotine as an instrument of death often largely obscures the relatively peaceful but revolutionary changes that took place in the years, and how very constructive it proved to be. The first French Revolution was essentially a middle class project. Politically the aim was to create a constitutional monarchy with the King in charge of government but responsible to a parliament. Crucially the aim was to define the basic rights to be enjoyed by all people, including especially before the law, the taxation and the workplace. Administratively, the aim was to reorganise all the government, church and legal structures of France, creating every the possible, sufficient structures of the old regime. Between 1789 and 1795, all of these aims were successfully achieved, ensuring not only a new society, but also the very foundations of the modern France we know today.

There were further revolutionary reforms in 1793, notably the present revolution in the countryside (July and August) and the dramatic march of the crowd to Versailles to force the royal family to return to Paris (October 5, 1789). The 1793 reforms were revolutionary and many practices introduced in the fields of Governance were reinforced by bold changes that nobody had imagined previously.

Over relations between several governmental institutions. The reform of the Catholic Church, though much needed and generally well implemented, caused resistance from a majority of the clergy.

creating the first major controversy of the revolution. The bitter struggle between government and people reached off a final train of events, in which the King attempted to flee France but was caught, brought back and subjected to the anger of the popular movement. While the National Assembly worked hard to save the constitutional monarchy – and hence the monarch – the popular movement pressed could stand upon the Champ de Mars (November 17, 1793), and it was clear that the revolution was not over and, indeed, that it would go on to cause far more serious conflict.

The second critical event of the French Revolution began on 20 August 1793, when the revolutionary crowd stormed the King's palace. The most important aspect of this second period was the revolutionary war, which was a number of powerful European countries, such as Austria, Prussia and later Britain and Spain.

The 'new emergency' had two important effects. First, it radicalised the revolutionary movement, causing the more extreme (violent) working-class movements (during the period) to force its way towards to win the war and ensure food supplies. Second, it pushed the new assembly, the National Convention, into introducing 'revolutionary government', an experimental constitution with strong powers to deal with the emergency situation.

The Terror was the final stage of empowerment and execution, approved by the government itself, to deal with enemies of the revolution. It claimed 300,000 victims. The use of Terror in distributing fear was a rational way of that high principle of personal liberty based on the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. It also expanded from being a measure against the enemies of the revolution to being on which all members of other political groups within the ruling class regularly made use of members of the Jacobin and Cordeliers clubs. This would, finally, create a momentum to end the Terror, which would result in the arrest of Danton and the overthrow of the Jacobins. By 1795, France would enter the a third constitution, creating a more moderate republic known as the Directory.

The chapters in Part Two are designed to help students understand the consequences of the revolutionaries of 1789.

SUMMARY OF KEY EVENTS, OCTOBER 1789 TO NOVEMBER 1795

1789	5-6 October: The October Days – King, royal family, Paris Assembly move to Paris.
1789	17 November: Nationalisation of church property.
1789	15 January: Institution of department system (split from existing regional departments).
1789	26 February: Federalisation of France into 83 administrative departments.
1789	21 May: Creation of the marriage 'contract' of Paris.
1789	16 June: Assembly of voting and other electoral restrictions.
1789	12 July: The Old Constitution of the Clergy is dissolved.
1789	14 July: Lafayette's Flight from Follies.
1789	August: Separation of property of religious institutions.
1789	4-6 September: Assembly assumes control of national treasury and abolishes the courts of old regime.
1789	22 November: Assembly abolishes the monarchy and proclaims the rights of man and citizen.
1790	January: Creation of a set of the clergy.
1790	March: Abolition of guilds and corporations.
1790	13 April: The Pope renounces the Old Constitution of the Clergy.

The **Summary of key events** gives you a detailed timeline for your reference.

Analysis activities explore key primary and secondary historical sources. These sources can be visual or text-based, to help develop your understanding of the revolution as well as your skills as an historian.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 4: READING A PRIMARY RESOURCE

Voltaire defended the idea of utility

Voltaire's 'On Commerce' (New Letters on England, 1752)

In France, anyone is a merchant who wants to be, and whoever arrives in Paris with money to spend – no one can stop him from doing so, a man of my standing, and only because a business man, and the business man is often better people avoid charge of the politician that he is a fraud enough to think that he will be more useful to a nation, a well-provided customer who knows exactly at what value the goods he has and what price he should give him while always the profit of a man in some manner a merchant or a business man who watches his country, draws orders from his efforts to benefit it, and contribute to the well-being of the state. From Voltaire, Letters on England, Paris, in Current Sources, 1984, pp. 51–2.

1. How does Voltaire defend the practice of utility in the text?

2. How does he regard the utility and how he might avoid it?

3. Why does Voltaire feel that merchants should be regarded as being more important than they currently are?

FLASHPOINT!

A bourgeois reconsiders the structure of society

Historian Robert Galois discovered one episode supporting that such was the aristocracy and did they that questioning right to their own society. The benefits required during one of the regular business processes of eighteenth-century France, when the order of society was made visible in the structure of the great parades of the town's groups.

Source 4.7 The painting shows a typical town procession in the city of Paris, comparing a number of different corporations, or groups, with their own symbols.

1.5 SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL

King Louis XVI (1754–1795)

Louis-Auguste, the future Louis XVI, was born in 1754. In 1765, the death of both his father and his two brothers left him next in line to the throne. A suitable bride for the Dauphin at 16 years of age, he was married to Marie-Antoinette of Austria in a glamorous marriage to confirm political relations between the previously warring nations, France and Austria in 1770. However, it is likely that he was not particularly interested in the political aspects of the marriage.

Louis was criticised by revolutionaries for failing to handle the crisis of the French monarchy in 1789. However, it is likely that he was not particularly interested in the political aspects of the marriage.

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A MATTER OF FACT

Louis was fascinated by all aspects of science, including a wonderful machine designed by a certain Mr. Wattell to create comets at will. However, every time the King even helpfully responded to a man he had to back away and flee.

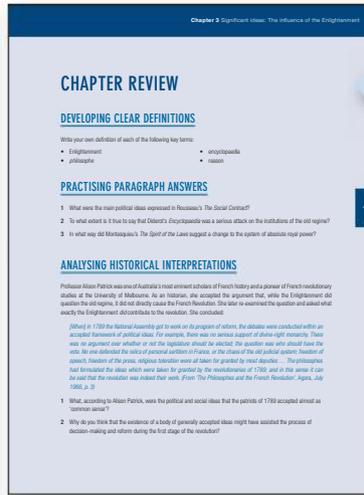
Significant individual boxes are biographies that help you examine key personalities in the revolution.

Flashpoint! boxes consider key revolutionary events in depth, which can be long-term causes or short-term triggers of revolution.

A matter of fact boxes highlight interesting information to enrich your learning.



Talking portraits depict the diverse revolutionary experiences of people who are usually voiceless in the standard pages of history.



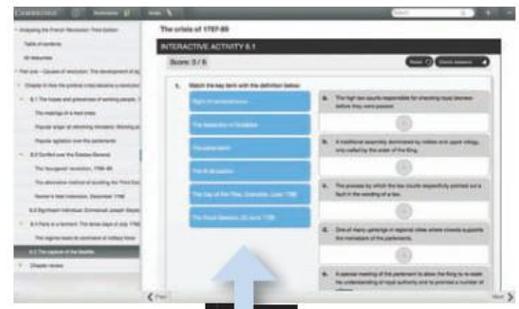
Chapter review activities include a combination of tasks designed to help consolidate your learning:

- **Developing clear definitions** encourages you to define key terms from the chapter in your own words
- **Practising paragraph answers** are exam-style writing tasks
- **Analysing historical interpretations** are source-based analyses of passages from works by noted historians in the field
- **Practice essay questions** help you prepare for internal and end-of-year assessments
- **Reading more deeply** offers suggested further reading for extra research and is broken into Easy, Moderate and Challenging categories. The latter is annotated to explain why it might be of use as extra research.



Widgets are interactive tools designed to help enhance your digital learning experience.

Further information on Significant individuals is available in pop-up box format on key players in the revolution.



Interactive activities (e.g. drag and drop questions) assist recall of facts and understanding of concepts.

Further digital resources are available in the **Interactive Textbook** and on **Cambridge GO**:

- **PDF Textbook** – downloadable, includes note taking and search functions
- **Downloadable worksheets** – in Word format available for all activities
- **Links to history** – provide weblinks to URLs
- **Chapter 21** – A teacher's guide to the historical interpretations of the French Revolution
- **Appendix: Practice examination questions** – a chapter of extra valuable revision activities relating specifically to sources used in the textbook
- **The abolition of slavery** – an essay relating to content in Chapter 9
- **Pronunciation** – audio files appear at the start of a chapter, and cover any new difficult terms to be introduced
- **Reading more deeply** – additional annotations for all Easy and Moderate sources
- **Expanded glossary** – further information for the dedicated scholar
- **Film analysis of *Ridicule* (1996)** – relating to content in Chapter 4
- **Annotated map printable activity worksheet** – of key revolutionary sites in Paris







Causes of revolution: The development of significant ideas, events, individuals and popular movements in France, 1774 to October 1789

“

Popular violence was a continuing theme in French history well before 1789. In that year, though, it acquired a new importance. The action of the Parisian mob and of countless peasants and inhabitants of small towns all of the country made possible a real and unprecedented disruption of old continuities. Without this popular revolution, the Constituent [Assembly] would have had no power.

– J.M. ROBERTS, 1997

”

OVERVIEW

On 14 July each year, the French celebrate their official national holiday, Bastille Day, commemorating the momentous day in 1789 when the Parisian crowd captured a royal fortress that was being used as a prison in the heart of Paris. This victory of the crowd was certainly a turning point in French history because it firmly established that the King would have to come to terms with demands for a constitution and a parliament.

Two hundred years later, in 1989, the French nation had to decide how it would celebrate the bicentenary of these events. But what was being celebrated? The capture of the Bastille was itself a violent uprising that resulted in 98 tragic deaths among the people and seven brutal and unnecessary murders of royal soldiers. This revolution, like many others, would involve violence, destruction and, most disturbingly, the use of **Terror** and the guillotine. Many a French citizen who has sung the national anthem, ‘La Marseillaise’, has paused to wonder at the violent, bloody images it contains. In France, the celebration of the bicentenary became a virtual battlefield over the issue of how a violent revolution should be celebrated. Despite these concerns, there could be no doubt that the French Revolution had created the foundations for the modern state of France we know today.

Terror the deliberate use of violence by government to discourage and to repress its enemies

Yet when Louis XVI was crowned King of France in June 1775, the political system of which he was head had already lasted for centuries and showed no signs of a fatal weakness that might cause such a collapse. Although the French monarchy had suffered a number of crises in previous years – such as the civil war (or Fronde) in 1648 – none of these crises had caused the system to collapse. Historians therefore feel that there must be something special about the years 1763–89 that can explain the sudden crisis of 1787–89.

Historians have put forward different theories about the causes of revolution. Before developing our own explanation as to why the **old regime** collapsed, we must understand these theories. To gain a complete picture, we will need to analyse and evaluate a range of historical evidence to construct a coherent argument about the crisis of the old regime and to demonstrate awareness of this historical debate.

old regime French society before the revolution

Serious crises rarely have just one cause. They are usually created by an interlocking set of problems. We must examine a broad spectrum of problems and ask why the regime failed to respond appropriately to social change, as well as why the traditional political and social order could not respond to new political and social forces. We must also explain why people lost confidence in the existing order and why they began to doubt its **legitimacy**.

legitimacy sense of rightness

Revolutions are not caused solely by pressures from below: there can also be rifts (divisions) within the ruling class that weaken its capacity to meet the revolutionary challenge. We must therefore recognise that the French Revolution began as a ‘crisis at the top’, although it quickly moved to involve other social classes. The first stage of the revolution is often referred to, rather loosely, as ‘the aristocratic revolt’, and much of the resistance to the King initially came from people who were already in positions of power within the system of the old regime.

The chapters in Part One are designed to help you understand how a revolutionary situation developed in France between 1774 and October 1789.

SUMMARY OF KEY EVENTS, 1774 TO OCTOBER 1789

1774	10 May: After death of his father Louis XV, 19-year-old Louis-Auguste becomes King of France.
1775	11 June: Louis XVI is officially crowned King of France and Navarre in Reims Cathedral in a lavish ceremony.
1776	France commits substantial financial and military aid to American colonialists in their revolutionary war for independence against the British, putting enormous financial strain on the French economy.
1781	19 February: Director-General of Finances, Jacques Necker, presents his financial report to King Louis XVI. 19 May: Necker resigns his position as Minister of Finance. 25 May: Joly de Fleury is appointed Minister of Finance.
1782	July: The King imposes a third additional tax for the period 1783–86.
1783	3 September: France signs the Treaty of Versailles, ending the conflict with Britain over the American colonies. France is left with high accumulated debts from the conflict. 3 November: Calonne is appointed Controller-General (Minister of Finances).
1785	August: The scandal of the Diamond Necklace Affair tarnishes the reputation of Queen Marie-Antoinette. Necker publishes his views on the need for financial reform.
1786	20 August: Calonne proposes financial reforms to the King.
1787	22 February: The King convenes the Assembly of Notables to discuss fiscal reform. 8 April: The King dismisses reforming finance minister Calonne and appoints Brienne in his place. 25 May: The King closes the Assembly of Notables. August: The law courts (<i>parlements</i>) of Paris and Bordeaux rebel against the King's authority and are exiled. 19 November: The King exerts authority upon the law courts in the 'royal session'.
1788	3 May: The Paris <i>parlement</i> states that the King has a duty to submit new laws to the <i>parlements</i> and that new taxes can only be imposed by agreement with the nation, as represented by the Estates-General. 8 May: The King tries to disempower the <i>parlements</i> by redefining their role and powers. June–July: The first phase of the revolution is often referred to as the 'aristocratic' or noble revolt, referring to the fact that resistance came from the nobles in the Assembly of Notables and the <i>parlements</i> . Note, however, that even at this early stage resistance was coming from other social groups, such as the urban crowds that supported the <i>parlements</i> . These law courts defy the King; town populations demonstrate in favour of the judges. 8 August: The King calls a meeting of Estates-General for May 1789. 16 August: The royal treasury suspends payments, a virtual equivalent of bankruptcy. 24 August: Finance Minister Brienne resigns; the more popular Necker is recalled.

1788

25 September: The King reopens the *parlements*. The Paris *parlement* demands that the Estates-General meet and vote by order.

October–December: The Assembly of Notables meets again to discuss the organisation of the Estates-General.

27 December: Concession of doubling of the number of deputies for the Third Estate.

1789

24 January: Formal call for Estates-General to meet.

February: Publication of Sieyès' *What is the Third Estate?*

February–May: Election of deputies to the Estates-General at Versailles. Drafting of Books of Grievances.

27–28 April: Crowds attack and destroy Réveillon factory. Class conflict?

5 May: Opening of the Estates-General. King maintains traditional honorific distinctions between orders.

6 May: Controversy over voting by order or by head. The Third Estate demands voting by head.

20–22 May: Clergy and nobility accept the principle of equality in taxation.

13 June: Some parish priests join the Third Estate.

17 June: The second stage of the revolution is often loosely described as the bourgeois revolt, referring to the fact that the deputies of the Third Estate now stepped forward and claimed a new constitutional role for themselves. Note, however, that other social groups, such as liberal nobles and liberal priests, also supported them. The Third Estate announces that it virtually is the nation and declares itself to be a national assembly.

20 June: The Third Estate retreats to a commercial tennis court and swears not to disband until there is a constitution.

23 June: The National Assembly defies the royal order to return to discussion by order.

25 June: A deputation of nobles joins the Third Estate.

27 June: The three orders unite.

30 June: The King orders troops to Paris.

2–10 July: Despite popular protests against the troops' presence, the King refuses to withdraw them.

11–13 July: Increasing agitation in Paris. The King dismisses Necker. The third stage of the revolution is often called the revolt of the urban working classes – Desmoulins exhorts the people to arm themselves.

14 July: The capture of the Bastille.

16 July: The King capitulates – the troops are withdrawn and Necker is recalled.

22 July: The crowd brutally murders royal officials Foulon and Berthier.

Late July: The peasant revolt – the gradual escalation of rumour and fear in country areas – leads to rural rebellions ('the Great Fear').

4–11 August: The National Assembly initially abolishes feudalism outright, then qualifies the reform ('August Decrees').

26 August: Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen.

September: The Assembly votes to give the King suspensive veto and not to have a two-house parliament.

5–6 October: The October Days – the King, the royal family and then the Assembly move to Paris.



The political order in France before the revolution

“

These institutions were not formed by chance, and time cannot change them. To abolish them, the whole French constitution would have to be overturned.

– A STATEMENT BY THE PARIS *PARLEMENT* IN A PROTEST TO THE KING, 1776

”

OVERVIEW

A revolution's main aim is to overthrow one political system and to create a new one. The nature of the existing regime in France before 1789 provides clues to the causes of the revolution. What problems and pressures were affecting France's royal government in the eighteenth century? Why was it unwilling or unable to make changes that might have saved it?

absolute monarchy

a political system in which the monarch rules personally, without being accountable to an elected parliament

In France, the political system was an **absolute monarchy**, in which the King ruled with almost complete personal authority, unaccountable to a parliament. The French monarchy had been formed progressively during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but it formed into a powerful regime during the reign of Louis XIV (1643–1715), known as 'the Sun King'.

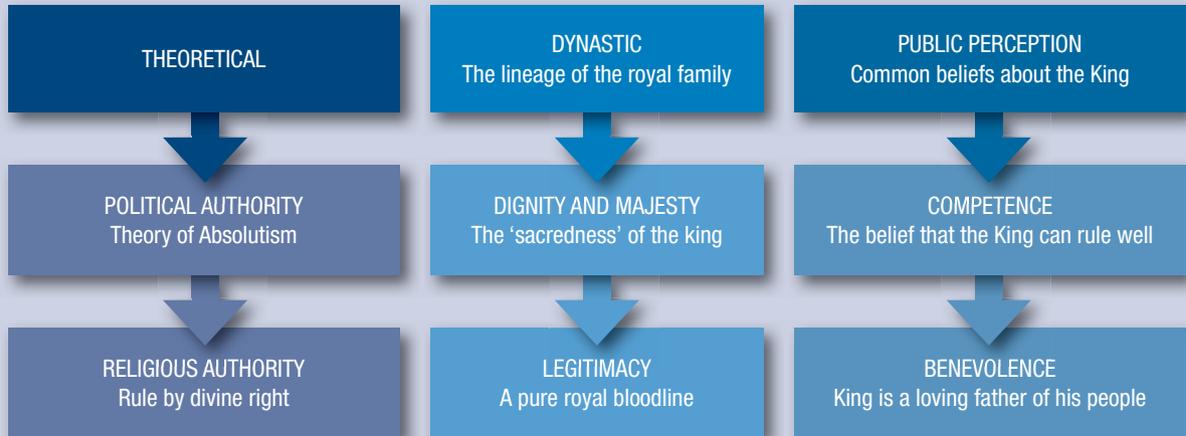
Although the power of the monarchy decreased during the period of the Regency and the reign of Louis XV, this alone does not explain the sudden crisis and complete collapse of this regime in 1787–89. The King's authority was still considerable because it was made up of a number of interwoven elements of power.

KEY ISSUES

- What were the elements that made up the King's authority?
- What were the limits to the King's power?
- What were the contradictions and inefficiencies of the absolute monarchy?
- What was the importance of public perceptions of the King?

FLOW OF CHAPTER

THE 'STRANDS' OF ROYAL AUTHORITY



Source 1.0 *Mythological portrait of the family of Louis XIV*, Jean Nocret, 1670



1.1 What were the elements that made up the King's authority?

The political theory of absolute monarchy

The most important aspect of power is the theoretical basis of authority. This is a set of understandings about the King as an absolute ruler. These understandings were defined by the powerful Louis XIV during his long personal reign (1661–1715).

His spokesman, the French bishop Jacques Bossuet, stated:

In the exercise of lawful authority the king is, and ought to be, absolute; that is so far absolute that there is no legal authority which can delay or resist him.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 1.1: READING A PRIMARY RESOURCE

An image of royal power



Source 1.1 This official portrait shows King Louis XVI in the coronation robes he wore in 1775. The emphasis on the single figure of the King reminds us that absolute monarchy was a form of personal rule by one monarch, which could not be questioned by any representative body. In Louis XIV's *Reflections Upon the Role of a King*, he had stated, 'The Nation is not embodied in France, it resides entirely in the person of the King.'

- 1 How does this painting remind people of the enormous personal power of the King in an absolute monarchy?
- 2 What 'messages' is the King trying to communicate to you, the viewer, by his pose, his expression and the symbols he holds?
- 3 How do some of the objects in the painting symbolise the King's royal powers?

France did not have a written constitution. The definition of royal power was contained partly in assorted documents – such as *The Fundamental Laws of the Kingdom* – and, more simply, in accepted practices. By these documents and understandings, the King had the power to pass laws, appoint ministers, declare war and peace, impose taxes and control the nation's currency.

The theory of rule by divine right

The political theory of absolute monarchy was reinforced by religious belief: the French king received his power directly from God and was considered infallible. He ruled by 'divine right'.

Bossuet stated that:

the King in his palace is the image of God in his heaven, who sets the whole of nature in motion.

To criticise the King was to criticise God. The divine nature of the King was displayed in traditional ceremonies in which he cured the sick by touching them.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 1.2: ANALYSIS OF A PRIMARY RESOURCE

The Speech of M de Lamoignon on Royal Authority, 19 November 1787

These principles, universally recognised by the Nation to be true, prove that sovereign [absolute] power in the kingdom belongs to the King alone. That he has only to account to God alone for the exercise of his supreme power. That the bond uniting the King and the Nation can never be dissolved. That mutual interests and duties between the King and his subjects assure the perpetuity of this union. That the Nation's interests require that the rights of its ruler should not be altered. That the King is the sovereign head of the Nation and is one with the Nation. Finally, that the legislative power resides in the person of the King, independently, and cannot be divided. (Quoted in Paul Beik, The French Revolution: Selected Documents, 1970)

- 1 How does this document explain the principle of 'rule by divine right'?
- 2 How does this document explain the relationship between the King and the subjects who form 'the Nation'?
- 3 Does the writer believe that the King's legislative role (his power to make laws) can be shared with anybody else?

The King exercised complete control of the executive functions of government, such as declaring war and making peace. He gave direct orders to his cabinet of ministers in the **Council of State**. Since the King could replace ministers at will, few dared to reveal problems or suggest unpopular policies. The King's personal authority controlled provincial France by a network of royal **governors** (*intendants*), chosen by him to apply his policies in their area. The King's understanding of the state of the nation was only as good as the reports he received from these ministers and governors.

Focus questions

- 1 Why was the King's authority a very personal, indeed almost absolute, form of rule?
- 2 In what way did the Catholic Church confirm and strengthen the power of the King?

Council of State the King's cabinet of ministers

governors otherwise known as *intendants*; chosen by the King to apply his policies in provincial France



1.2 Limits to the King's power

absolute power gave the King ultimate control

arbitrary power or **despotism** by which a King ruled badly, without respect for existing laws

The French distinguished between **absolute power**, which gave the King ultimate control, and **arbitrary power** or **despotism**, by which a King ruled badly without respect for existing laws. He was expected to obey the nation's traditions and laws. In reality, he ruled beside provincial assemblies and other special groups enjoying their own traditional powers.

Historian William Doyle states that, while none of these groups actually challenged royal authority between 1614 and 1789, they certainly placed some constraints on royal power. The most significant were the highest law courts in the system of justice.

FLASHPOINT!

The high law courts challenge royal authority, 1771–74

highest courts of appeal otherwise known as *parlements*; these 13 high courts checked and registered royal laws

remonstrance a memo from the law courts to the King, pointing out a problem in the wording of a law

In France, the **highest courts of appeal** were called *parlements* (not to be confused with the English word 'parliament'). These 13 high law courts checked and registered royal laws. This process ensured that all courts had received and cross-checked copies of the laws. It was never intended as a check upon the King's powers. The courts had the power to make a **remonstrance**, a private memo informing the King that registration had been delayed because they had identified some technical problem in the wording of the law. During the reign of Louis XV, many judges decided that they should act to challenge the power of the King and began to use the *remonstrance* to express political opposition to the monarchy.

The flashpoint occurred in the 1750s and 1760s when the *parlements* actually prevented Louis XV from increasing taxes and from creating other law courts. In the provinces, the *parlements* resisted the King's governors. By 1770, the King had crushed this opposition: he ordered his chancellor, Maupeou, to strip the courts of many of their powers, to dismiss half of the judges and to create new law courts. From 1771 until 1774, the flashpoint seemed to be over. In 1774, however, the new king, Louis XVI, tried to win over the *parlements* by restoring them. Although they cautiously did not resume opposition to royal policy, they would cause further problems at the time of the monarchy's greatest crisis.

1.3 The contradictions and inefficiencies of the monarchy

To understand the discontent in France in the 1780s, we must understand the institutions of the old regime and how people suffered from their inefficiencies, inequalities and contradictions. William Doyle's detailed description of the structures of the old regime makes it clear that it was not one system of government but rather a number of overlapping systems, many of them competing with each other. Administratively, the old regime was an untidy jumble of administration, justice, local taxes and religious institutions. No person enjoyed the same treatment as everybody else in administrative, religious or legal matters: it depended entirely upon where a person lived and which set of systems was in force there.

1.4 The importance of public perceptions of the King

The King's absolute political authority was supplemented by **public perceptions** of his role. Common perceptions of power have to be created. Cultural historian Peter Burke has shown recently that Louis XIV not only forged the structures of monarchical power, but also created a convincing machinery of publicity for that power. He created the 'little academy', which, like a modern public image consultancy, was responsible for creating a coherent set of **representations** of the King. It created a large, unified collection of paintings, statues, medallions and literary works to glorify the all-powerful 'Sun King'. Once culture had been adapted to the use of power, later kings – such as Louis XV and Louis XVI – would never fail to use it.

public perceptions commonly accepted beliefs

representations large, unified collection of paintings, statues, medallions and literary works

Public belief in the King's competence

Although ordinary people rarely glimpsed the King's residence, **Versailles**, or the workings of royal government, there was nonetheless a common assumption that the King was capable of ruling competently. This assumption was reinforced by the production of large oil paintings and engravings showing the King at work, directing the affairs of the nation. The King could thus rely on some public faith in his abilities; however, should there be a serious crisis that became public knowledge, his credibility would be seriously weakened.

Versailles the palace that housed French kings from 1682, when Louis XIV moved the royal seat of power from Paris, to early in the revolution in 1789. By then, Versailles had become a symbol of all that was wrong with the old regime.



Source 1.2 In this image, the official royal artist shows the activity of the King's 'little academy' in producing images of the monarch. The figures are symbolic rather than realistic, and notice in the background the large printing press on which hundreds of copies of engravings could be made.



Source 1.3 Monsiau, *Louis XVI Traces the Course of La Pérouse*, 1785. In this painting, the King's official artist shows Louis XVI carrying out the duties of kingship, directing and controlling the government's activities in matters such as exploration of new lands.

Public belief in the royal dynasty

dynasty a sequence of monarchs going back hundreds of years

Compared with modern rulers, who often have no previous family history of power, the monarchs of the old regime enjoyed the prestige of belonging to a **dynasty**. Each decade of its rule reinforces the weight of continuity and tradition, so that successive monarchs are strengthened by added dynastic prestige. In the case of Louis XVI, the Bourbon dynasty dated back to 1589, when Henry IV ascended the throne.

Source 1.4 *The Presentation of the Portrait of Marie-Antoinette to the Dauphin, the Future Louis XVI*, 1769. French kings used engravings, such as this one, to show that they were a part of both a royal family and a long dynasty stretching back many years. Here, King Louis XV (seated) holds the hand of his grandson, the future Louis XVI, while they look at a portrait of his intended bride, Marie-Antoinette of Austria. The portraits on the walls depict previous members of the Bourbon dynasty.



A MATTER OF FACT

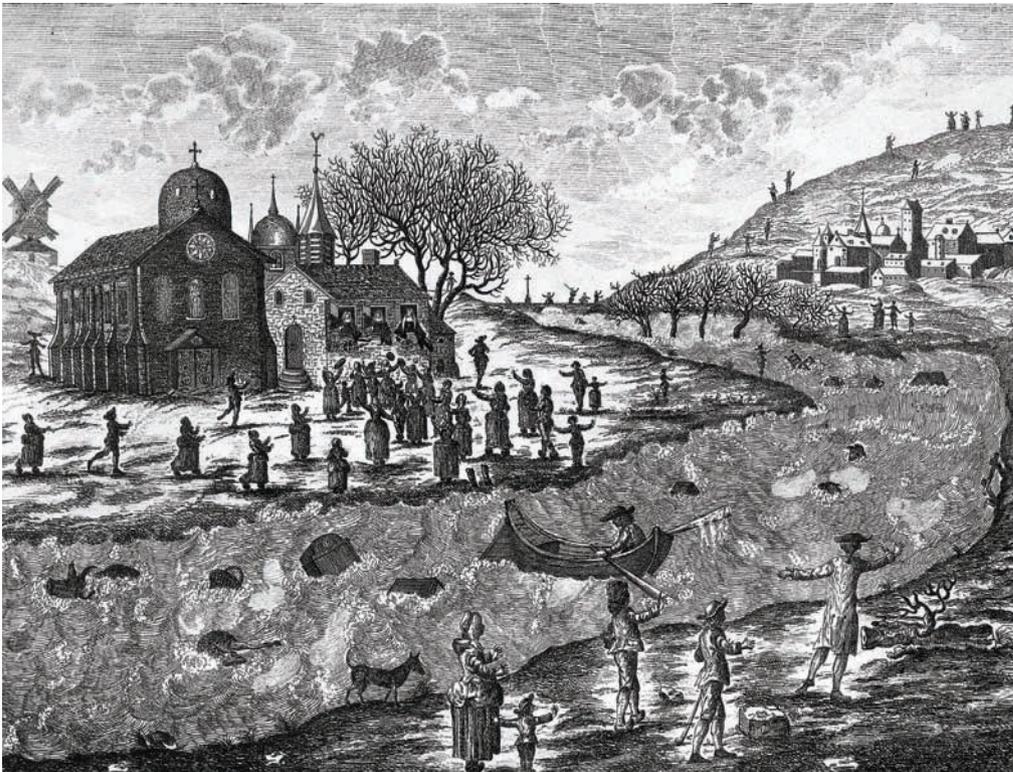
Louis XVI first 'met' his intended bride, Marie-Antoinette of Austria, in 1769, when he was 15 years of age ... simply by being shown a portrait of her, sent from the Austrian court. When they did marry, in 1770, Marie-Antoinette had to go through a ceremony of stripping off all the clothing that her family had provided, stepping naked – through a specially constructed cabin – across the French border and then putting on a new set of clothes provided by Louis XVI.

Public belief in benevolence

The belief in royal legitimacy and competence was reinforced by a third belief: that the King was 'father' and protector of his people. Traditionally, people could go directly to their ruler to seek assistance in cases of misfortune or injustice. The King enjoyed the patriarchal authority of a father over his family, and was assumed to protect his subjects' welfare. He therefore drew upon a certain amount of trust. However, if that sense of trust should be destroyed for any reason, public feeling could turn very strongly against him.

Focus questions

- 1 What were the three main beliefs and expectations that the French people held of their King?
- 2 How did the King ensure that these beliefs, and public confidence, were maintained?



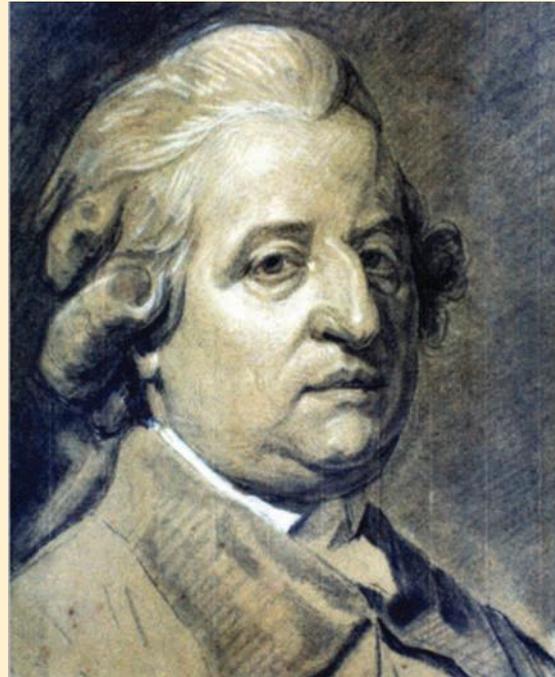
Source 1.5 *An Event that Happened in the Reign of Louis XVI, Called the Doer of Good Deeds, 1784.* The King's responsibility to be a benevolent, caring ruler is shown in this print, which shows him visiting a flooded area of France to help the victims of a natural disaster.

1.5 SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL

King Louis XVI (1754–1793)

Louis-Auguste, the future Louis XVI, was born in 1754. In 1765, the death of both his father and his two brothers left him next in line to the throne, a position known as the 'Dauphin'. At 16 years of age, he was married to Marie-Antoinette of Austria in a diplomatic marriage to confirm peaceful relations between the previously warring enemies, France and Austria. In 1775, he was crowned King of France.

Louis was criticised by revolutionaries and mocked by some historians for failing to handle the crisis of the French monarchy in the 1780s. However, it is likely that he misunderstood the power of the forces that were building up in late eighteenth-century France. He had great difficulty understanding the idea of limitations on his absolute power, lacked the strength to handle the political factions at the royal court, and when revolutionary events began to unfold, he was indecisive and failed to make decisions at crucial points. His fatal mistake was to try to resist and then escape the Revolution by fleeing France (June 1791), which led to his trial (December 1792) and his execution (January 1793).



Source 1.6 These two portraits show the face of a man who would soon be destroyed by the wave of revolution that swept France in the 1780s. The painting at left shows Louis XVI at the height of his power in 1776, while the painting at right shows the face of a devastated man in 1793, now reduced to the name Citizen Capet, in prison and awaiting his execution at the guillotine.

A MATTER OF FACT

Louis was fascinated by all aspects of science, including a wonderful machine designed by a certain Dr Guillotin to execute criminals in a swift, humane way. The King even helpfully suggested a way to make the blade sharper and more efficient ...

SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL

The France of Louis XVI in 1774

Shortly after the death of Louis XV on 10 May 1774, Louis-Auguste, finding himself suddenly a king at the age of 19, announced that he was to be known simply by the name of Louis. Shortly afterwards, he wrote a request to the former royal adviser, the Comte de Maurepas, stating:

I am only twenty years of age. I do not think that I have acquired all the knowledge that is needed. It is this that leads me to beg you to be so kind as to help me with your advice and understanding.

He then asked Maurepas to come out of his exile at his estate and come to Versailles to serve him. We will never know how much training Louis XV gave him in the art of kingship: Louis-Auguste never attended the Council of Ministers, but he does appear to have had some understanding of state matters.

Louis inherited a kingdom that, in appearance at least, enjoyed a clearly defined territory, an imposing royal court at Versailles, and a clear political system based on absolute personal rule. Within these firm structures, however, were powerful new forces of change – new political ideas, social tensions and conflicts, and economic hardships – that he would have to understand and deal with. In some cases, he even agreed with the new ideas that were changing the way his people thought about the world around them.

This much must have been obvious to Louis on 11 June 1775, when he was crowned King of France and Navarre in Reims Cathedral. If we look at Louis XVI's portrait in coronation robes (Source 1.1), the symbols of power seem



Source 1.7 Louis XVI's coronation in 1775, in Notre-Dame de Reims (Our Lady of Reims) Cathedral



unchanged, as was the ceremony, with its mystic application of holy oil dating back to the fifth century. But if the ceremony was exactly the same, the times were not. For example, his treasurer, Turgot, cautiously advised him not to have too expensive a coronation in times of economic hardship. This was sensible advice, but Louis ignored it.

Louis XVI must surely have surveyed the France that he had inherited. Politically, the monarchy was still theoretically absolute, although the King's actions were limited by both Christian conscience and traditional 'fundamental' laws guaranteeing the rights of traditional bodies. In addition, it was really the royal government – the King and his Council of State – that wielded absolute power, further expressed through the system of royal governors. The closure of the *parlements* by his predecessor, however, was a sign not of royal authority but of its weaknesses. Louis XV had simply left him a serious political problem to solve.

parlements the highest courts of appeal in France

Economically, the main question facing the French nation was the issue of free trade, especially in the crucial matter of the grains from which bread was made. In the first year of Louis's reign, the return to free trade in grain provoked violent protests known as 'flour wars', in which even the palace of Versailles was threatened by an angry crowd. Later, the continuing food shortages and price rises may not directly have caused the revolution, but they certainly put his ordinary working people under more pressure and made them more volatile.

Militarily, France faced the task of building a powerful new navy capable of regaining colonial possessions. Louis accordingly gave strong support to the program, and also showed intense interest in the explorations of men such as La Pérouse. The construction of an expensive major port at Cherbourg also signalled France's new ambitions. Specifically, France had recently lost vast landholdings in America, and now looked eagerly for new colonial possessions. French planners could see that the greatest opportunities for trade would be in the rich sugar-producing islands of the Caribbean and English-speaking societies in the Atlantic region. It was urgent to embrace these opportunities: since the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763, France had carried a massive debt of 2.324 billion French pounds, and the payment of interest instalments alone was consuming 60 per cent of the state budget.

Diplomatically, French policy would soon turn towards support for the rebellious 13 American colonies as they fought for their independence from Britain. The justification was that if a major new nation was to emerge in North America, France would be well repaid by lucrative trading contracts. But for historian Simon Schama, this policy specifically would ultimately cause the fall of the Bourbon monarchy.

In legal matters, France was still a corporate society, in which a number of special groups – clergy, nobles and even some towns – enjoyed special rights that were confirmed in law. But Louis was aware of new ideas suggesting that privilege was wrong, and that laws should apply universally to all subjects. Even people who held privileges were losing faith in them.

In religious matters, the Catholic Church was still the sole religion of the state, but educated public opinion was tending towards greater toleration of other faiths. Although Louis owed his allegiance to the church that confirmed his rule by divine right, even he would later grant tolerance to Protestants.

Intellectually, France had begun to change under the influence of the Enlightenment *philosophes*, who taught educated people to criticise political and religious authority. In contrast to early Bourbon kings, Louis XVI would have to deal with the birth of public opinion, whereby intelligent and capable people showed a keen interest in matters of state, especially the national budget.

philosophes the writers, or critical thinkers, who highlighted reason

In short, Louis XVI had indeed inherited the France that his predecessors had created but, like Louis XV, he would have to deal with quite new challenges to monarchical rule.



The story so far

By the 1780s, the French King remained powerful and had several forms of authority. Absolute monarchy drew on a number of different strands of power, ranging from a political theory and religious authority to common perceptions of the King's legitimacy, competence and benevolence. Its weakness was that only some of these understandings were documented. If, at some stage, the opponents of absolute royal authority were to question the origins and limits of power, then the system might be weakened.

CHAPTER REVIEW

DEVELOPING CLEAR DEFINITIONS

Write your own definition of each of the following key terms:

- absolutism
- rule by divine right
- despotism
- benevolence
- 'fabrication' of the King's image

PRACTISING PARAGRAPH ANSWERS

- 1 What was the Council of State (Council of Ministers)? How was it different from a modern government? Why did the position of ministers mean it was almost impossible for them to make unpopular recommendations to the King?
- 2 How did the common belief in the King's competence add to his authority? How did the King make use of forms of culture, such as large paintings, to strengthen this belief in his competence?
- 3 What did French people understand by their belief in the King's 'benevolence'? How did this 'paternal' image reinforce his royal authority?

ANALYSING HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

In his book *The Myth of Absolutism*, historian Nicholas Henshall reminds us that the theory of absolutism was a respectable political theory, that the King had responsibilities as well as rights, and that he could not ignore the opinions of other political bodies, such as the provincial assemblies. Henshall argues that we should not look at absolute monarchy through the eyes of nineteenth-century liberal thinkers, who hated this earlier form of political authority:



In the last days of the [old regime], French kings did act despotically, in search of shortcuts to desirable reforms for which no consent was forthcoming. But no Frenchman equated despotism with his constitution. Until quite late in 1789 the old constitution was what most wanted. Despotism was seen as its negation.

- 1 According to Henshall, the eighteenth-century system of 'absolute monarchy' made sense to contemporary people and was not as bad as the 'absolutism' that historians condemned in the nineteenth century. How does Henshall see the differences between the two?
- 2 If the absolute monarchy was not an intrinsically bad system, why did people start to use the word 'despotism' in 1789?

PRACTICE ESSAY QUESTION

'While the French monarchy was strengthened by a number of forms of power, these same strengths were also potential weaknesses that might prevent the regime from responding effectively to a crisis.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?

READING MORE DEEPLY

Easy

Peter Burke, 'The Fabrication of Louis XIV', *History Today*, February 1992, pp. 24–30.

Moderate

Nicholas Henshall, 'The Myth of Absolutism', *History Today*, June 1992, pp. 40–7.

Peter McPhee, *The French Revolution, 1789–1799*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, Chapter 1, 'France in the 1780s'.

Challenging

William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989, Chapter 1.

This chapter provides a very detailed description of France in the eighteenth century, and is more suited to advanced readers.

2



The social order in France before the revolution

“ *Eighteenth-century France was a society of corporations, in which privilege was integral to social hierarchy, wealth and individual identity. That is, people were members of social orders born of a medieval conception of a world where people had duties to pray, to fight or to work.* ”

– PETER MCPHEE, 2002

OVERVIEW

Revolutions change governments and also the social systems in which people live. They redefine how social groups are named and change the social values by which people live. Most importantly, revolutions cause changes in the way people *feel* about themselves and their relationship with other citizens.

To properly understand the changes in France between 1789 and 1795, we must first understand the social system of eighteenth-century France. This society differed from ours in many important ways. For example, there was no expectation of equal rights for everybody, regardless of wealth: people were unequal, because different groups in society enjoyed their own **privileges**. People accepted these inequalities because they were confirmed by law and strengthened by tradition.

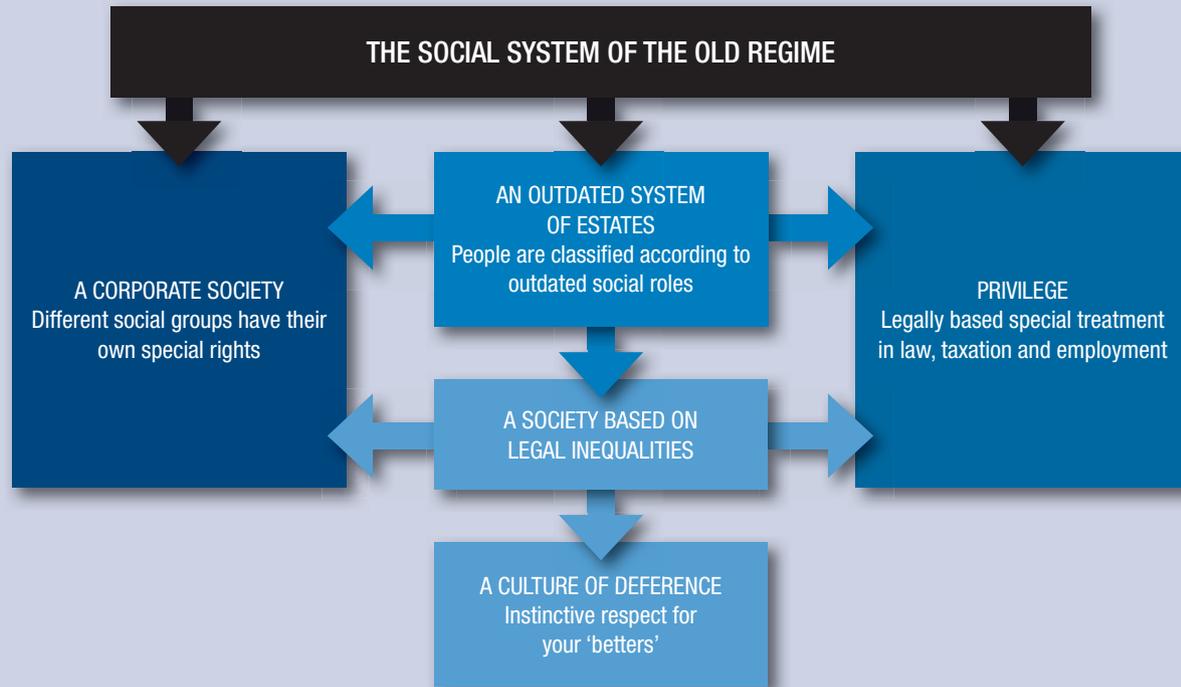
privileges special rights in matters of law and taxation

KEY ISSUES

- What was the ‘corporate society’ and what was privilege?
- What was the culture of deference, or respect for your ‘betters’?
- What were the Three Estates or ‘orders’?



FLOW OF CHAPTER



Source 2.0 *Peasant Family in an Interior*, Louis Le Nain, c. 1643

2.1 The corporate society and privilege

First, France of the old regime was a **corporate society** – that is, made up of a number of powerful groups, each enjoying its own special customs, laws and privileges. As citizens of a modern democratic state, we expect that the laws of our nation will apply equally to everybody – rich and poor; however, people in pre-revolutionary France accepted that inequality between them was right and natural.

corporate society
a society made up of a number of powerful groups, each enjoying its own special customs, laws and privileges

Privilege – special rights for some social groups

The key concept of this society was privilege – literally, a private set of laws or a ‘special deal’ worked out between the King and a certain group. Privileges could be **honorific**, such as the noble’s right to wear a sword in public. Usually, however, privileges entitled the owner to significant special treatment. Some were **legal concessions**: nobles and priests were tried by special law courts made up of their own kind. The most significant concessions were **fiscal concessions**: certain groups – nobles, clergy and rich bourgeois in towns – had negotiated with the French King to pay relatively little tax in proportion to their wealth.

honorific a certain type of privilege – for example, the noble’s right to wear a sword in public

legal concessions
privileges relating to the law

fiscal concessions
privileges relating to taxes

Nobody enjoyed equality of treatment in professional, legal or financial matters: your rights depended on the group to which you belonged and what privileges it had. Our modern concept of equality of all citizens did not exist: it would take a revolution to eliminate these privileges.

2.2 The culture of deference: Respect for your ‘betters’

Second, this unequal corporate society was complemented by a culture of deference. This was not a legal but a social and psychological quality: people accepted that the rich and the powerful were superior, and instinctively paid respect to the privileged by changing the way they spoke and behaved in their presence.



Source 2.1 *The Landlord’s Visit*, 1750. This engraving illustrates the social and psychological aspects of a ‘culture of deference’. Here, members of a farming family are being visited by their noble landlord. Apart from paying their rent, they show respect by their modest behaviour, including restrained gestures and downcast eyes.



estate (French: *état*) In the old regime, this was a system of social classification by function: the clergy's role was to pray (First Estate), the nobility's role was to fight (Second Estate) and the commoners' role was to grow food and provide soldiers for armies (Third Estate). Note that each estate was not just one social class, because it contained people ranging from the very poor to the very wealthy.

French society was still structured upon an old-fashioned system of social classification known as the '**estate**' (*état*). Today, we usually use the word 'class', meaning people enjoying much the same wealth, education and way of life. The 'estate' was a much larger category, based upon a definition of what role people were supposed to fulfil in society, according to a set of categories that had made sense in the Middle Ages, but were quite outdated by the 1780s.

Focus questions

- 1 What was privilege and what forms did it take?
- 2 What was the culture of deference and how might it have affected people in their everyday lives?

2.3 The three estates

peasants these were members of the Third Estate who lived and worked in the country, engaged in agricultural work. Some were wealthy and some moderately well-to-do, but many were poor sharecroppers who did not own enough land to make a living, and had to rent it from their local lord

artisans workers who were trained and skilled in some trade, such as barrel-making or glass-making, and who worked in small workshops in cities, towns and villages

In theory, France had three 'estates'. The First Estate included all the clergy from wealthy bishops and archbishops down to humble priests. In the traditional social plan that had existed since the Middle Ages, the task of the clergy was to pray and to keep the kingdom free of evil influences. The Second Estate was made up of the nobility, ranging from the most powerful nobles to impoverished minor nobles. Their traditional role was to fight for the king and to maintain sufficient equipment and soldiers to contribute a contingent to the nation's army in times of war. The Third Estate was defined negatively as everybody who did not belong to the first two estates. In medieval society, this meant primarily the **peasants**, whose task was to produce food for the remainder of society.

The supporting role of the Third Estate is shown vividly in Source 2.2, showing the three estates as three representative figures: the Third Estate (represented by the peasant in the centre) existed to 'carry' the First and Second Estates.

In the years since this social system had been defined, the Third Estate had expanded to include the majority of the population: the vast number of people – **artisans** (skilled workers), shopkeepers, merchants, owners of land, lawyers, doctors, financiers, even some industrialists – who enjoyed far more wealth, education and influence than the earlier peasants had.

Modern readers often confuse these estates, assuming that the First and Second were 'the rich', while the Third Estate was 'the poor'. In fact, *each* estate included an enormous range of wealth, from the very poor to the very wealthy.



Source 2.2 *Allegorical Engraving Showing the Three Orders* c. 1789. This image depicts the three estates, or main groups, in French society by means of three representative figures.

	FIRST ESTATE: THE CLERGY 169 500 clergy: 0.6% of population
	SECOND ESTATE: THE NOBLES 125 000 nobles: 0.4% of population
Third Estate – bourgeoisie (1 million)	THIRD ESTATE: THE COMMONERS approximately 24–26 million people: approximately 90% of population
Third Estate – artisan workers (2 million)	
Third Estate – landowning farmers and tenant farmers (5 million)	
Third Estate – sharecropping farmers (11 million)	
Third Estate – day labourers (5 million)	
Third Estate – serfs (1 million)	

Source: Adapted and updated from J.M. Thompson, *The French Revolution*, 1964, p. 83.

Source 2.3 This diagram shows the different groups in French society in 1789 and their relative numerical importance. While these figures are approximate, they do indicate the extreme minority of the two privileged estates and the overwhelming majority of the Third Estate.



The two privileged estates

My name is Charles Gaspard de Vintimille du Luc, a member of one of France's great noble families. As Archbishop of Paris, my vocation is to defend the Catholic faith and to protect the French nation from evil.



Source 2.4

The First Estate: The Clergy

lower clergy parish priests and assistants, who earned only £750 yearly

tithe a tax of between 8 and 10 per cent of people's income, or of the value of their crops and livestock, paid to the local Catholic priest

don gratuit the contribution of the Catholic Church to the French state. The church had the privilege of calculating how much it would pay on each occasion.

The First Estate, the clergy, numbered only 0.6 per cent of the population, yet the Catholic Church owned about 10 per cent of the land in France. The church hierarchy constituted a small, privileged group of about 1000 high clergy, such as bishops and archbishops – all of them noble. It was almost impossible for a commoner to enter this hierarchy. They were fabulously wealthy: an archbishop might earn £450 000 yearly. The **lower clergy** included about 40 000 parish priests (*curés*) and another 18 000 assistants (*vicaires*); these humble priests earned only £750 yearly.

The church was wealthy, enjoying a special right to apply the **tithe**, a tax of between 8 and 10 per cent of people's income, or of the value of their crops and livestock. Every peasant in France paid this tax. The church was also completely exempt from the royal taxes, paying only a voluntary donation (**don gratuit**) of 1 per cent of its income – about £3 million per year. Little of this wealth went to the parish priest, who could have used it to help the sick and the poor in his care.

The nobility

The Second Estate, the nobility, numbered only 0.4 per cent of the population, but had enormous wealth, owned 30 per cent of the land and controlled most of the important public positions. They too enjoyed tax exemptions, although they still paid certain taxes. They dominated the highest administrative posts in government and the church: in the army, navy and diplomatic **corps**, all senior officers were aristocrats who could demonstrate a lineage going back for generations.

The nobility included the older 'nobility of the sword' (*noblesse d'épée*) and the more recent 'nobility of the robe' (*noblesse de robe*). The nobles of the sword (the 'old nobility' or 'upper nobility') were families who traced their ancestry back centuries to some military achievement.

corps an organisation of military personnel

noblesse d'épée older 'nobility of the sword'

noblesse de robe more recent 'nobility of the robe'

My name is Alexandre Charles Emmanuel de Crussol-Florensac. I have loyally served Louis's brother, the Count of Artois, since 1773. When this portrait was created, I was at the height of my official career – notice I am wearing the blue sash of the prestigious Order of the Holy Spirit – but in just two years the revolution would sweep my world away. After 1789, I fought on the side of the royalist counter-revolutionaries.



Source 2.5

The Second Estate: Nobility of the Sword



My name is Pierre Cardin Le Bret. I have risen through the royal administration of Louis XIV to become Counsellor to the King's Great Council then, in 1690, became President of the High Court of Aix, which gave me a title of a noble of the robe. I was able to pay extra to have my noble title become hereditary, and I was proud to be followed in my position by my son, Cardin le Bret, who also became president of the same *parlement*.



Source 2.6

The Second Estate: Nobility of the Robe

Focus questions

- 1 What were the two 'privileged estates'?
- 2 What aspects of these two estates might have attracted criticism and resentment?

The nobility of the robe was a more recent nobility of high civil servants, created only from the seventeenth century onwards. The King allowed wealthy bourgeois to buy positions in the royal bureaucracy that carried a noble title.

The Third Estate

The Third Estate was the largest and most complicated group of social classes. It included the great majority of the population, ranging from the poor, peasants, urban workers, artisans, shopkeepers, middle-class professionals, bourgeois landowners and financiers to people who were virtually the millionaires of their age. Of a total population of 28 million people, some 22 million lived in the countryside. The remaining six million lived in towns and cities; most of these belonged to the working classes.

The bourgeoisie

My name is Master Jean-Baptiste Dupré. I was born in Paris in 1747, trained in the law, became a notary and secured a position as Counsellor to His Majesty the King. My greatest ambition is to rise further in the royal administration and to buy a position that carries with it the title of nobility of the robe.



Source 2.7

The Third Estate: Bourgeoisie

The towns were home to a wealthy group – about 2.75 million people – who owned substantial property, did not earn a living by working with their hands and possessed education and culture. Some were nobles or priests, but most were rich members of the Third Estate referred to as the **bourgeoisie** (meaning the whole social group) or as a **bourgeois** (meaning the individual members). The two million bourgeois comprised about 10 per cent of the population, living mainly in the capital, Paris, and in large cities such as Lyon, Marseille, Bordeaux and Toulouse, as well as smaller market towns.

bourgeoisie people of the third estate who lived in towns, owned property and engaged in trade, industry or the professions

bourgeois the individual members of the bourgeoisie

The bourgeoisie make their fortune

Many bourgeois families had made their fortune in the commercial and industrial expansion of the eighteenth century, often starting in small businesses such as shops. By the 1780s, most of France's commercial capital, and much of its industry, was in bourgeois hands, although certain industries – such as metallurgy – also involved some nobles. The ports, in particular, were the centres of this



merchant bourgeoisie. As soon as a bourgeois family had consolidated its fortune, it began to move away from its commercial origins and to invest its money in other forms of wealth.

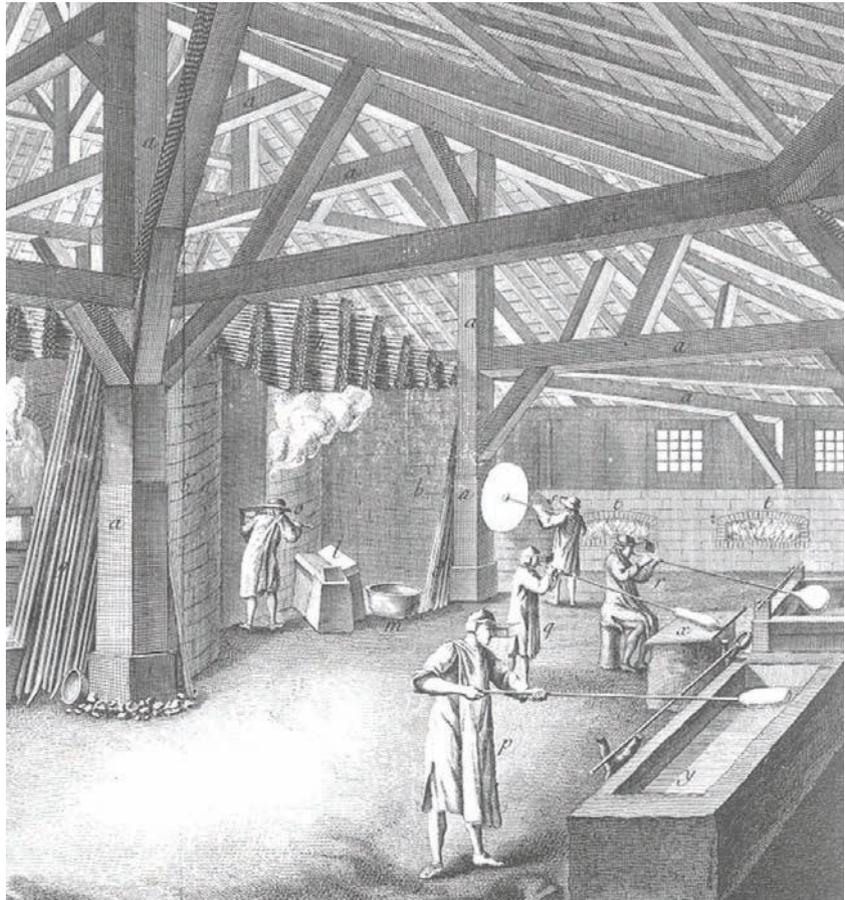
Was there an industrial, or capitalist, bourgeoisie in France? These bourgeois lived before the development of large-scale industry in France, so most were not 'capitalists' in the modern sense of running large factories. The French economy remained one of small workshops, although it had begun to develop some larger factories, such as the iron works of Le Creusot.

vivre noblement living off investments like a noble

venal public office the legal purchase of public office, often with a noble title attached, by wealthy and ambitious bourgeois who wanted to rise into the Second Estate

The greatest aim of the bourgeois was to become noble. Their main activity was investment in land and in finance, allowing them to become *rentiers*, living completely from investments like a noble (**vivre noblement**). In the liberal professions, the successful bourgeois could hope to purchase **venal public office**, a position in the royal administration costing from £50 000 to £500 000. During the eighteenth century, some 5000–7000 bourgeois entered the nobility of the robe. By the 1780s, merchants, industrialists and bankers were in a bidding frenzy for these positions, increasing prices and dashing the hopes of many ambitious bourgeois.

My name is Jacques Ménétra. I am a member of the Third Estate, and I am a highly skilled master glassmaker. Although I am a common man, I am proud that I am able to read. I even own a copy of Rousseau's *The Social Contract*, which is my favourite book. I can also write, and I am one of just a few artisans who can write my own journal of my life. I am a good Christian, but I hate the lazy, privileged upper clergy of the Catholic Church.



Source 2.8

The Third Estate: Artisans



ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 2.1: IMAGE DOCUMENT STUDY

The feudal system



Source 2.10 This coloured engraving by Jacques Lagniet shows the contrast between the rich noble lord on the left and the poor peasant on the right. The left-hand caption reads: 'The noble is the spider and the peasant is the fly'. Over the huge bag of wheat being paid is the caption: 'The more the Devil has, the more he wants'. Above the hungry peasant, the caption reads: 'This poor man brings him everything, wheat, fruit, money; this fat lord is seated, ready to receive everything, and does not show any kindness or mercy to him'.

Focus questions

- 1 Which social groups were included in the Third Estate?
- 2 Why do you think this old, medieval category, applying to peasants, had ceased to be appropriate by the eighteenth century?

A MATTER OF FACT

While peasants struggled to grow enough food to survive, the royal family at Versailles was sitting down to 11-course feasts. On the other hand, Marie-Antoinette's infamous comment about hungry workers ('Let them eat cake then!') was never actually said by her: this line was taken from an imaginary character in an earlier play. Indeed, Marie-Antoinette showed extreme sympathy for the poor, and had to be taught to control her generosity; she often gave her purse of gold coins to any beggar.

CHAPTER REVIEW

DEVELOPING CLEAR DEFINITIONS

Write your own definition of each of the following key terms:

- corporate society
- legal privilege
- culture of deference
- Second Estate
- honorific privilege
- fiscal (tax) privilege
- First Estate
- Third Estate

PRACTISING PARAGRAPH ANSWERS

- 1 In what ways was the old regime a 'corporate society'? How does this sort of society differ from a modern democracy?
- 2 If land was the most basic form of wealth in the old regime, why was the distribution of land ownership in France bound to create serious tensions?
- 3 Would it be true to say that, in the old regime, the two privileged estates represented 'the rich' and the Third Estate represented 'the poor'?

PRACTICE ESSAY QUESTION

'Although people tend to accept the social system in which they live, the old regime in France contained inequalities which, sooner or later, had to cause conflict.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?

READING MORE DEEPLY

Easy

George Rudé, *The French Revolution*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1988, Chapter 1, 'Why was there a Revolution in France?'

Moderate

Peter McPhee, *The French Revolution, 1789–1799*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, Chapter 1, 'France in the 1780s'.

Challenging

William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989, Chapter 1, 'France Under Louis XVI'.

Doyle's opening chapter provides a more detailed survey of France under the old regime.



Significant ideas: The influence of the Enlightenment

“

The writers of the Enlightenment ... were clearly not responsible for the revolutionary situation that developed in 1789 but they did dictate the terms in which educated people thought about society.

– NORMAN HAMPSON, 1975

”

OVERVIEW

Historian Norman Hampson argues that grievances only become revolution when radical ideas are present. These ideas make people aware of and vocal about their grievances, and suggest how society could be improved by reform (slow, peaceful change) or by revolution (sudden, violent change).

Enlightenment a Europe-wide intellectual movement in the eighteenth century that criticised absolute monarchy and despotism, and attacked organised religion and its tendency to intolerance

In France, the evidence for the power of radical ideas seems strong. Throughout the eighteenth century, the **Enlightenment** thinkers criticised the absolute monarchy, the Catholic Church and the nobility. For many thinkers – then and now – this concentrated criticism of the old regime really caused its final crisis.

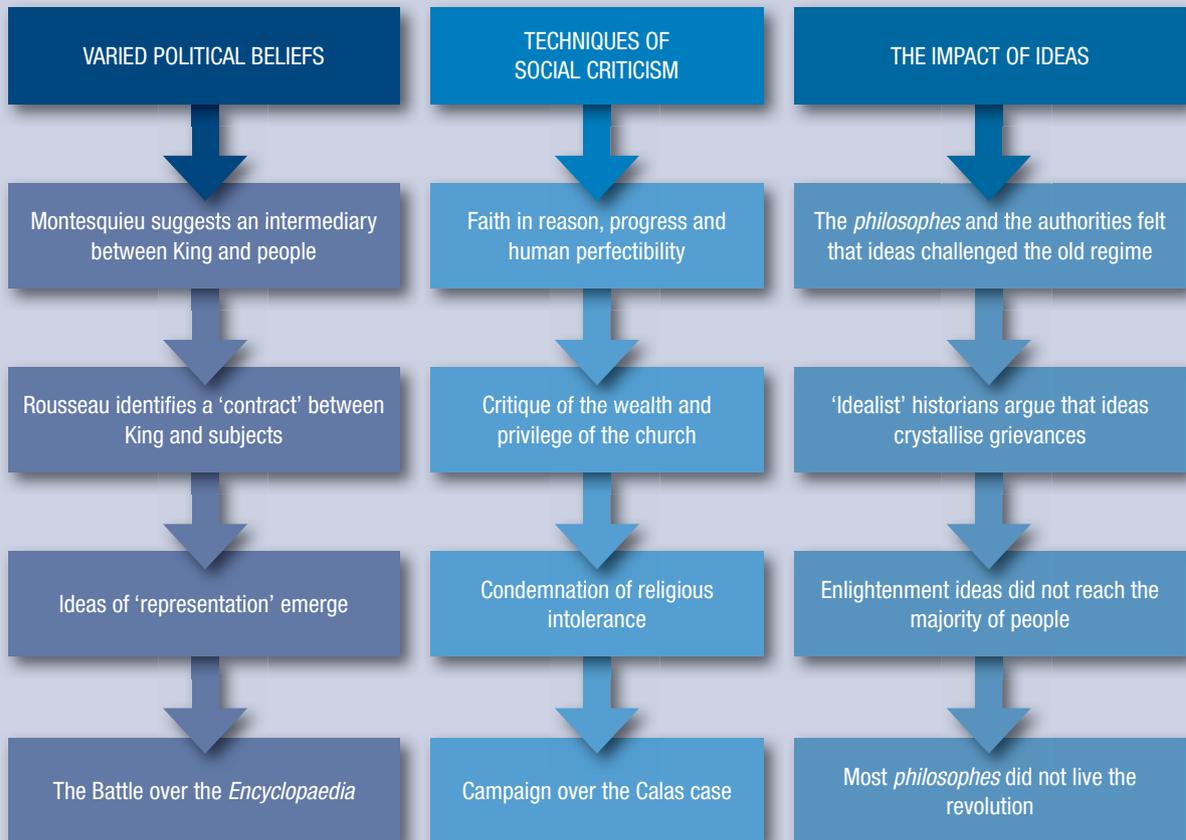
Still, there are weaknesses in this theory of ideas. Enlightenment ideas, though critical of the old regime, never joined into one theory, and usually suggested reform rather than revolution. This chapter explores what these Enlightenment ideas were and how much influence they really had in causing revolution.

KEY ISSUES

- Did the Enlightenment help to create a revolutionary situation in France?
- What were the varied political beliefs of this movement?
- What were the main ideas of Enlightenment thought?
- What was the impact of the Enlightenment?

FLOW OF CHAPTER

THE ENLIGHTENMENT IN FRANCE



3.1 Historians' points of view: Did the Enlightenment help create a revolutionary situation in France?

Traditionally, the most popular explanation for the revolution was that it was caused by changes in public thinking created by the intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment. This was a Europe-wide movement, powerfully expressed in the works of French writers such as Montesquieu, Voltaire, Diderot, Condorcet and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Their ideas were varied, but generally emphasised using science, progress and reason to create a more humane world.

philosophie the system of ideas, emphasising science, progress and reason to create a more humane world, practised during the Enlightenment

These writers referred to their system of ideas based on reason as **philosophie**, and became known as *philosophes*. We leave this latter word in French because it does not translate meaningfully as 'philosopher'; more accurately, the *philosophes* were 'critical thinkers'. They saw themselves as 'anti-philosophers' because they rejected the abstract systems of thought of earlier philosophers, preferring to use reason to solve the practical problems facing humans. They thought it possible to use human reason and science to examine contemporary society, identify its injustices and inequalities, and suggest a more enlightened way of organising human life.

Traditionally, historians believed that the *philosophes*, in criticising the old regime, somehow 'caused' the French Revolution. The evidence is suggestive: from the 1720s onwards, these thinkers criticised the old regime, which became unstable in the 1780s and collapsed in 1789. Could this be the main cause of the monarchy's crisis?

This idea dates back to the Enlightenment itself. The *philosophes* themselves believed their ideas were powerful. Denis Diderot claimed that their attack on the Catholic Church's authority seriously weakened the old regime. The *philosophes*' many enemies also blamed the critical spirit of the Enlightenment for destroying authority. English writer Edmund Burke believed that the *philosophes* undermined the monarchy and caused the revolution. Finally, the revolutionaries of 1789 later claimed to have been inspired by Enlightenment ideas, apparently confirming Diderot's belief in the **subversive** power of ideas.

subversive designed to overthrow a government or other institution

Very few of the *philosophes* were still alive by the 1780s, but their ideas were adopted by later revolutionaries to justify their reforms.

Historians like Hampson believe that the Enlightenment was the main cause of the revolution: the authority of Louis XIV was based on a certain unquestionability, which was steadily weakened during the eighteenth century, allowing people to question the political and social structures of the old regime. We must consider this argument seriously. There were material problems in the 1780s – bad harvests, rapidly rising prices of staple foods such as bread and increasing poverty and unemployment – but these had occurred previously without causing revolution. What was new in 1789? For Hampson, the new element was the intellectual **ferment**, the sense of growing criticism and dissatisfaction and opposition to the existing government.

ferment stir up somebody or something

For Hampson, the new element was the intellectual **ferment**, the sense of growing criticism and dissatisfaction and opposition to the existing government.



3.2 The main strands of Enlightenment thought

Teaching techniques of social criticism

The really radical effect of the Enlightenment was not its political agenda, but the creation of a general questioning spirit; a 'toolkit of ideas' that was turned critically on contemporary society. It taught people that nothing should be unquestionable. It taught them *how* to question. To contemporaries, this perspective was breathtakingly bold.

The role of women in the Enlightenment

The Enlightenment was much more than the famous books we still study today. It was an exciting conversation between educated and thoughtful people across Europe. Women took a leading role in guiding this conversation. The main place for this discussion was the 'salon', meaning a formal social gathering in the home of a wealthy noble or bourgeois woman. One of the greatest 'intellectual hostesses' was Madame Marie-Thérèse Geoffrin (1699–1777), who opened her salon in 1750 and dominated Parisian intellectual circles for nearly 30 years. Even more than the printing press, these refined conversations were the main way Enlightenment ideas spread and inspired brilliant minds across Europe.



Source 3.1 This painting shows an important site where Enlightenment discussion took place: a 'salon', or social gathering in the home of a wealthy noble or bourgeois woman, such as Madame Geoffrin.



Teaching faith in progress and human perfectibility

The second liberating effect of the Enlightenment was to give people the optimism and confidence to believe that human society could be improved. Thoughtful people sincerely believed they could improve society by using reason, science and humanity to prevent human suffering and misery.

Criticism of the wealth and privilege of the church

The closest thing the *philosophes* had to a common criticism of their society concerned the Catholic Church. They attacked the church's inequalities, especially the upper clergy's extreme wealth and laziness. Less justifiably, they criticised the allegedly idle lives of the regular clergy. This was unfair to the poor parish priests and the many monks and nuns who fulfilled valuable social roles, such as providing charity for the poor. The *philosophes* also attacked the idea of original sin, claiming that

humanity could not be affected by Adam and Eve's sin. They believed that people were not born evil, but rather become good or evil, depending on how they were treated. In addition, they rejected **religious orthodoxy**: the idea that one religion can be declared 'right' and all other religions 'wrong'. They condemned religious intolerance, and particularly criticised the fact that Protestants and Jews were not allowed to register their births with the Catholic Church, and so could not be employed by the state.

Occasionally, the *philosophes* took up causes more directly – as, for example, when Voltaire defended the cause of Jean Calas, a Protestant who had been wrongfully executed in 1762 for the alleged murder of his suicidal son. Voltaire secured posthumous justice for Calas in 1765, creating great public sympathy for the impoverished family and increased awareness of both the religious intolerance and injustice of the old regime.

religious orthodoxy the idea that one religion can be declared 'right' and all other religions 'wrong'

Focus questions

- 1 Although the *philosophes* did not aim to overthrow the old regime, they taught three beliefs that would have radical effects. What were the key strands of Enlightenment thought?
- 2 Why would Voltaire's victory in the Calas case have shaken public confidence in the old regime?

Source 3.2 This English print shows the cruel death of the Protestant Jean Calas, who was 'broke on the wheel' (tortured to death) for allegedly murdering his son. Voltaire proved that this was a tragic case of pure religious intolerance.



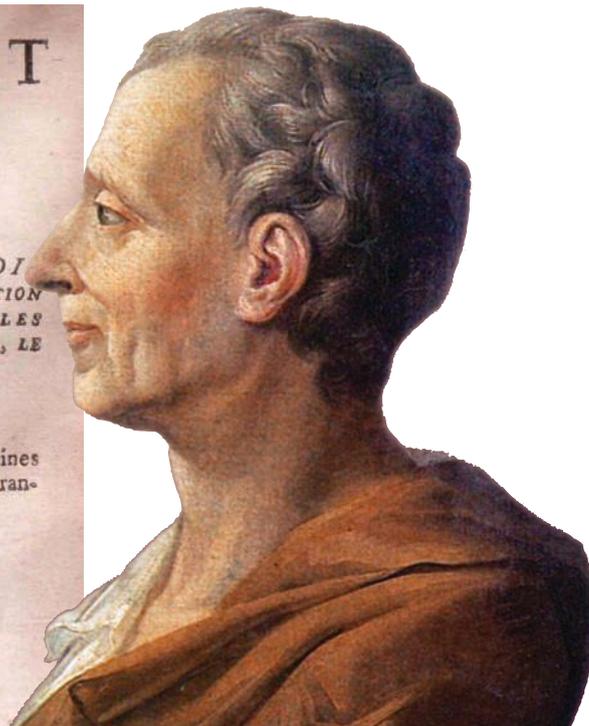
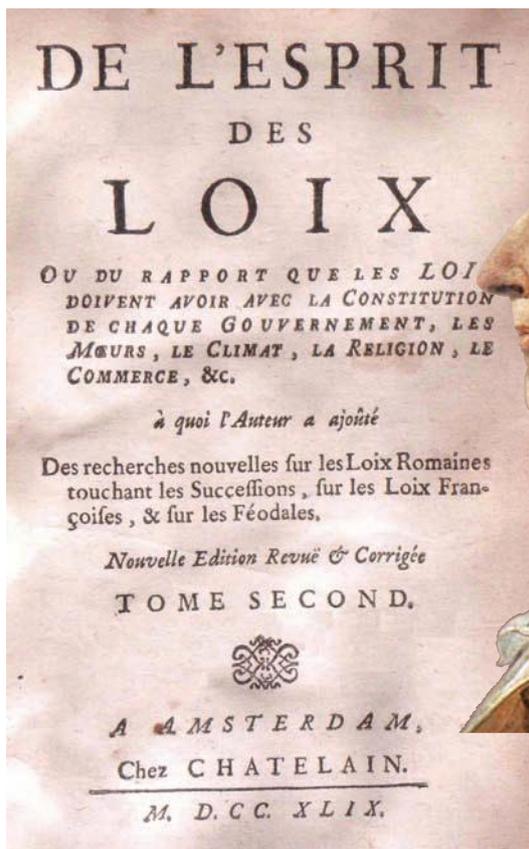
3.3 Varied political beliefs

The *philosophes* never shared a united political ideology. Most were not primarily political thinkers. They cannot have conspired towards a political revolution because they agreed on almost nothing. They attacked divine monarchy, calling it tyranny, but did not all suggest even a constitutional monarchy or a republic. Many accepted 'enlightened despotism', in which the all-powerful King is advised by intelligent people – preferably the *philosophes* themselves. Voltaire advised Frederick II of Prussia, hoping to make him an 'enlightened' monarch.



Source 3.3 This engraving reminds us that Enlightenment thought was not a matter of university-style discussion, but relied on informal sociability.

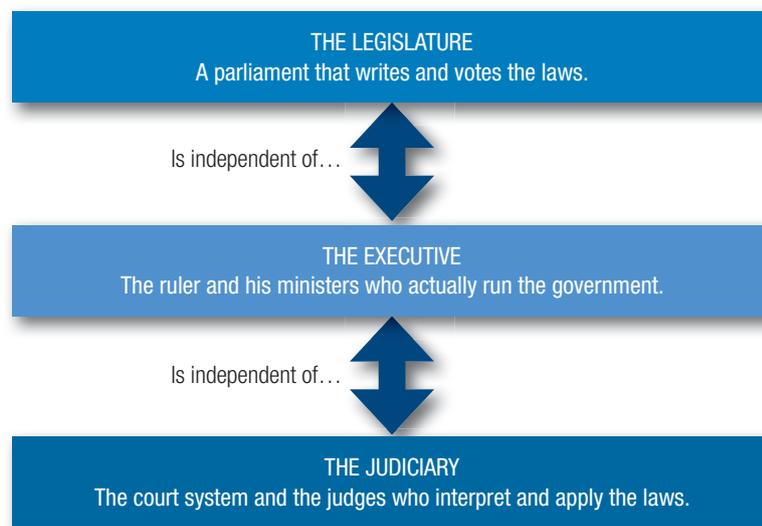
New political ideas: Montesquieu



Source 3.4 Montesquieu, a member of the *parlement* and one of the most important supporters of political principles such as the separation of powers, with his most important work of political theory, *The Spirit of the Laws*.



Montesquieu, a member of one of France's great noble families, suggested in *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748) that France should have a constitution and that civil liberties should be guaranteed to ensure that everybody had personal security. He insisted that, if a monarchy's power was not controlled by a set of good laws, it would quickly become 'despotic'. He demanded that people be guaranteed freedom to think as they wished, to speak and to meet freely in assembly. He also demanded an end to slavery. He explained the central principle that the three arms of government – the legislature (parliament), the executive (ministerial government) and the judiciary (the legal system) – should be totally separate and independent of each other. It was especially important that the legal system be free of any influence by the ruler, so that the king could not simply instruct the judges to find a person guilty. This would ensure that the laws were applied equally and fairly. Montesquieu believed that, in a free and democratic republic, people would put the government's interests ahead of their own because they would be able to see that the regime brought them liberty.



Praising England, criticising France: Voltaire

Voltaire taught his contemporaries to think independently and critically about the society in which they lived. He had learned from hard experience the truth of his own saying, 'It is very dangerous to be right when those in power are wrong'. Due to being too bold, he had suffered imprisonment in Paris and had then gone to live in England from 1726 until 1729. There, he admired England's parliament and its obvious respect for literary and scientific thinkers. He realised that he did not have to criticise France directly: he just had to praise England for its liberties, and his readers would understand that France did not have the same qualities. Voltaire had learnt 'unspoken criticism', or criticism by implication.

For example, in Letter 9, 'On Government', he never mentions France when he praises England's fairer taxation system:

A man is by no means exempt from paying certain taxes here just because he is a noble or because he is a priest ... When [a tax bill] is confirmed by the Lords and approved by the King, then everybody pays. Everyone gives, not according to his rank (which is absurd) but according to his income ... The tax always remains the same, although income from land has risen, so nobody is downtrodden and nobody complains. (Cited from Leonard Tancock (trans.), Voltaire, Letters on England, 1884, p. 50).

His readers clearly understood the contrast with France, where the nobles and clergy did enjoy exemption from some taxes, and paid relatively little in proportion to their great wealth.

Voltaire made his contemporaries think; he caused them to question what they accepted as normal. For example, they would have enjoyed sitting in a comfortable mansion, drinking tea and coffee and enjoying elegant conversation, as we see in Charpentier's painting *The Cup of Hot Chocolate* (Source 3.5). Voltaire, however, asked, 'But where does the sugar come from?' He answered it in a story called *Candide*, in which the young hero travels the world and sees much misery and injustice. He visits a colony where slaves are used to harvest sugar, and is shocked to see a poor man who had been punished by having his hand and foot cut off for some minor crime. Through his central character, Candide, Voltaire warns his contemporaries that it is at this inhumane price that they have sugar in their coffee in Paris. This is the beginning of the kind of critical thought about exploitation that still concerns us today – for example, when we buy clothing and check that it has not been made by modern slave labour.



Source 3.5 Above: wealthy Parisians enjoying elegant conversation and cups of hot chocolate. Few of them would have thought to ask where their sugar came from. Right: By contrast, Moreau's illustration shows the moment when Voltaire's hero, Candide, visits a sugar plantation and observes the extreme treatment of slaves.



A theorist of popular sovereignty: Rousseau

Another important thinker was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose book *The Social Contract* (1762) explained the key idea that there is a 'contract' (agreement) between a ruler and his people: they

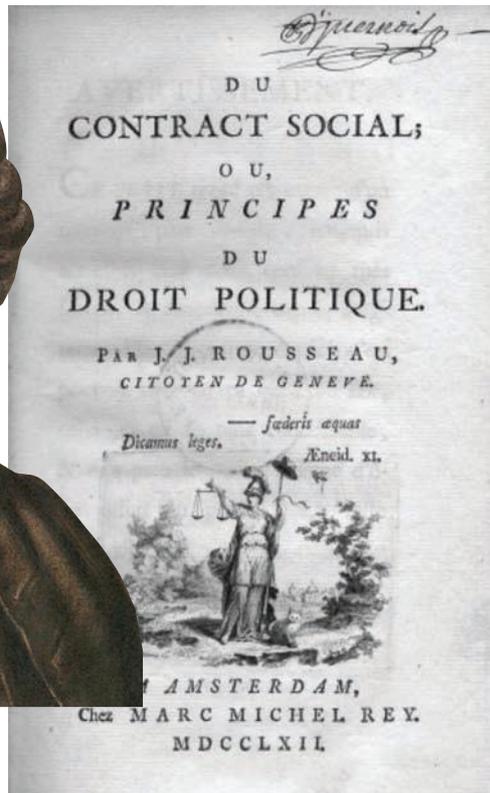
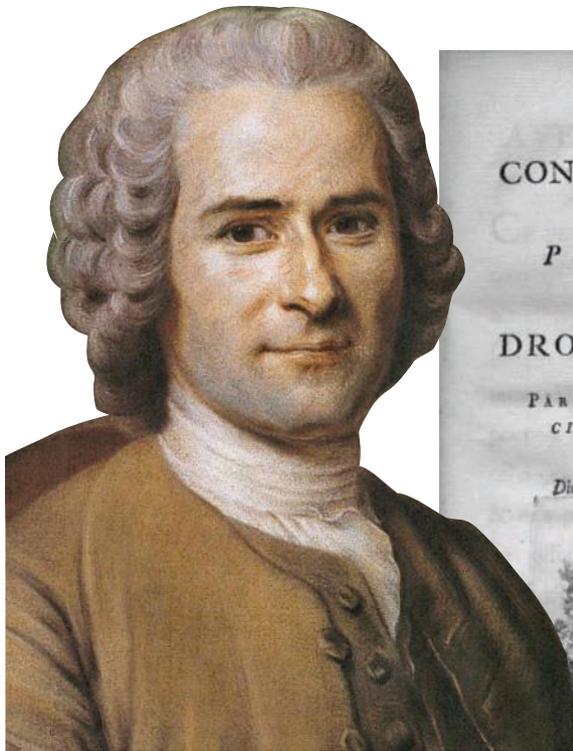


Focus questions

- 1 What were some of the key political theories of the *philosophes*?
- 2 Why is it not possible to say that the *philosophes* formed an early political group or revolutionary conspiracy?

have a duty to obey him, but he has a duty to look after their welfare. Once this mutual agreement is broken, the obligation of people to their ruler ceases. A king is not put on his throne by God; instead, real sovereignty – the source of all political power – comes from below, from the whole mass of citizens, and they are the ones who should make the laws. It is proper for the king to lead the executive part of government, but only the people can make good and meaningful laws through representative bodies such as parliaments. He wrote:

What, then, is the government? An intermediary body established between the subjects and the sovereign for their mutual communication, a body charged with the execution of the laws and the maintenance of freedom, both civil and political.



Source 3.6 Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his book *The Social Contract*, which would become the 'bible' of the French Revolution after 1789

The key idea of representation: Diderot and d'Holbach

representation the political idea that people cannot be expected to obey laws for which they have not voted

The most important Enlightenment political idea was **representation**. Simply put, this means that people cannot be expected to obey laws for which they have not voted. For example, European kings could simply order new taxes to pay for a war, and nobody ever had a chance to vote for this. In the 1760s and 1770s, however, the American colonists opposed the mighty superpower of Great Britain on the principle of 'No taxation without representation', and won their case. The French thinkers quickly adopted this idea, and wrote passionately about the need to have a representative body – a parliament – that could vote on new taxes.

Source 3.7 Denis Diderot, one of the most brilliant and varied minds of the Enlightenment with *The Encyclopaedia*.



ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 3.1: READING A PRIMARY RESOURCE

An article on politics from Diderot's *Encyclopaedia*

D'Holbach, *Representatives*, c.1751–1772

*REPRESENTATIVES: The representatives of a nation are elected citizens ... who are charged by society to speak in its name, to state its interests, to prevent oppression and to join in the process of governing. In a despotic state, the head of government is everything, the nation is nothing. The will of just one man becomes the law, and society is not represented. This is the form of government in Asia, whose people, subjected for centuries to traditional slavery, have not invented any way to influence the enormous power that constantly crushes them. In an absolute monarchy, the king either has the right to be the sole representative of the nation by the consent of his people, or by taking this right against their will. The king then speaks for all his people; the laws he makes are supposed to reflect the will of the entire people whom he represents. The French nation used to be represented by the Assembly of the Estates-General of the kingdom, composed of clergy and nobility, to whom the Third Estate was later added, so that it could represent the common people. This national assembly has not met since the year 1628. (Adapted from Stephen Gendzier's translation of Denis Diderot, *The Encyclopaedia. Selections*, 1967, pp. 214–15)*

- 1 In the form of an encyclopaedia entry, comments such as this can be presented as 'general knowledge', referring to political theory in the most general terms. How might this technique have helped the *philosophes* to make some of their more dangerous criticisms?
- 2 How does d'Holbach define a despotic state? Why does he choose to give an example drawn from Asia?
- 3 Why is d'Holbach's 'factual' statement about the last meeting of the Estates-General actually a serious criticism of the French monarchy?

FLASHPOINT!**The battle over the *Encyclopaedia*, 1752–59**

Why did the royal government prove to be unable or unwilling to respond to new ideas? The old regime struggled to deal with critical viewpoints. Many were summed up in the great collective work known as *The Encyclopaedia* (published 1751–72). The editors, Diderot and d'Alembert, used the format of the encyclopaedia to bring together 71 818 articles containing unprecedented information on such things as industries and trades.

seditions involving rebellion against a government or other authority

Historian Frank Kafker reminds us that they also published **seditions** articles criticising absolute monarchy, mocking the Catholic religion and proposing the separation of church and state, although the various writers did not completely agree on these points. Some emphasised that merchants were useful, productive citizens who deserved to hold political power; other articles, such as 'Tragic bourgeois', blamed wealthy bourgeois for wasting their money purchasing nobility.

There is a general sympathy for the condition of working people, but little sense yet of democracy for all citizens. Never before, argues Kafker, had one encyclopaedia suggested so many political, economic and religious reforms, and 'helped undermine the church and the monarchy and thus unintentionally prepared the way for the French Revolution'.

The King and the church clearly saw the threat to authority. They responded first by censoring the work, then ordering publication to cease for some months in 1752. By 1757, official interference was so severe that d'Alembert resigned as editor. In 1759, the government banned publication altogether. The work was nonetheless very popular, selling 4000 copies in the first edition and 20000 in later editions.



**A R R E S T
DU CONSEIL D'ÉTAT
DU ROI,**

Qui révoque les Lettres de privilège obtenues pour le Livre intitulé: *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des Sciences, Arts & Métiers*, par une Société de gens de Lettres.

Du 8 Mars 1759.

Extrait des Registres du Conseil d'État.

LE ROI ayant accordé le 21 janvier 1746, des Lettres de privilège pour un ouvrage qui devoit être imprimé sous le titre d'*Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des Sciences, Arts & Métiers*, par une Société de gens de Lettres, les auteurs dudit Dictionnaire en auroient fait paroître les deux premiers volumes, dont Sa Majesté auroit ordonné la suppression par son arrêt du 7 février 1752, pour les caufes contenues audit arrêt; mais en considération de l'utilité dont l'ouvrage pouvoit

Focus questions

- 1 How could a simple encyclopaedia be transformed into an instrument of political criticism of the old regime?
- 2 Why is d'Holbach's 'innocent' definition of the word 'representatives' actually an attack on the old regime?

Source 3.8 This document of 8 March 1759 explains that the King had come to feel that the authors were abusing their privilege to write scandalous and dangerous ideas, so the publication is to be stopped.

3.4 Analysing the impact of the Enlightenment

Did the *philosophes* suggest revolution or just reform?

Revisionist historian William Doyle questioned whether, even if the *philosophes* had not written anything, the French Revolution might not have happened anyway. The Revisionists argue that the *philosophes* were not revolutionary – indeed, they were often quite conservative – and very few of their ideas suggested the massive changes made later during the revolution. Revisionist historian Timothy Blanning believes that the Enlightenment did not oppose the old regime itself, only its abuses. Moreover, by the 1780s, many leading *philosophes* were dead, and those who remained were safely integrated into the old regime.

Revisionist historians those who ‘revised’ the standard Marxist interpretation, arguing that the revolution was not a class struggle between bourgeois and noble, but a political revolution over constitutional principles

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 3.2: READING A PRIMARY RESOURCE

A royal official evaluates the Enlightenment

An extract from the private journal of the Marquis d’Argenson:

A philosophical wind is blowing towards us from England, a plea for free, anti-monarchical rule; it streams into people’s heads and everyone realises how popular opinion conditions existence. Perhaps this new regime is already established in the general mind, to be put into practice at the very first opportunity, and the revolution might break out more peaceably than we imagine. All social orders share common discontent, a riot could become a revolt, and the revolt total revolution. (From Peter Vansittart, Voices of the French Revolution, 1989, p. 38)

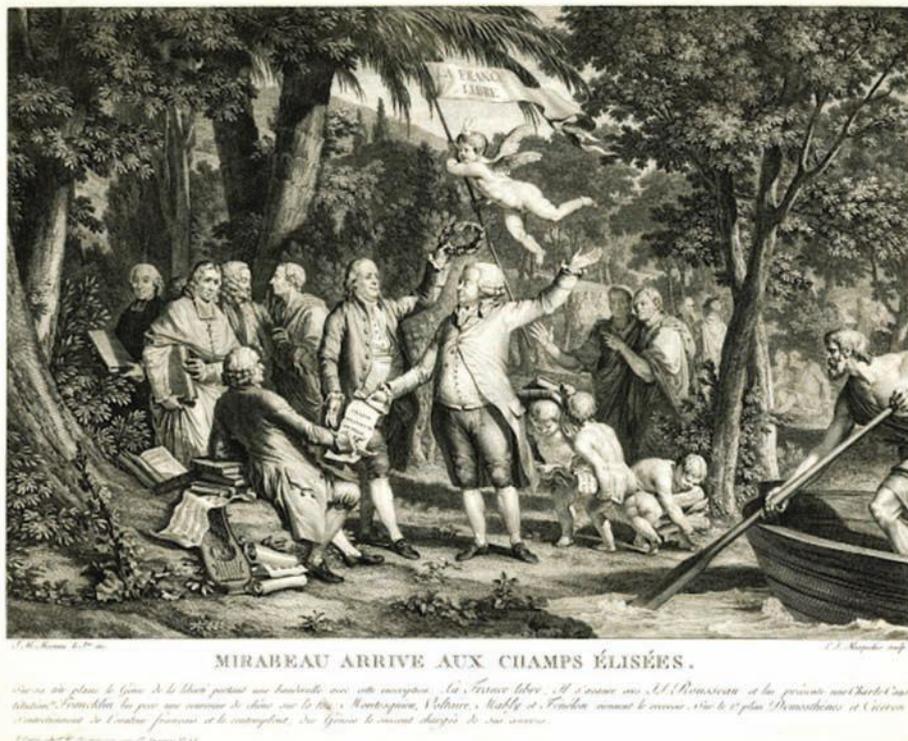
- 1 In terms of the debate about the importance of the Enlightenment, how does this royal official evaluate the power of radical ideas?
- 2 How does he see the situation in France in the decades before the revolution?

Did Enlightenment ideas reach all types of people?

Finally, we cannot assume that ideas, however powerful, spread throughout society to everybody. The readers of the *philosophes* were a small, fashionable social elite of nobles and bourgeois. Few Enlightenment ideas reached the vast majority of peasants in the countryside, who still managed to formulate radical thoughts and undertake revolutionary action without ever having read a word written by the *philosophes*. Clearly, ideas can contribute to a revolutionary mentality, but a revolutionary mentality can also develop where radical ideas have not spread.



ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 3.3: READING A PRIMARY RESOURCE



Source 3.9 *Mirabeau Admires Thinkers of the Enlightenment* (Benjamin Franklin, Montesquieu, Rousseau and Fénelon), c. 1789. This political image was published in France in the 1780s. The caption on the flag reads 'France is free'.

- 1 What is the image in Source 3.9 suggesting about the role of ideas in forming revolutionary leaders and helping to create a revolutionary situation?
- 2 Using an historical dictionary, try to find out why the seventeenth-century French writer Fénelon is included among these important figures of the Enlightenment.
- 3 Why was the American *philosophe* and statesman Benjamin Franklin included in this lineup of important people?
- 4 To what extent did the ideas of the European Enlightenment and the American Revolution really contribute to the French Revolution?

The story so far

The intellectual movement of the Enlightenment began in the 1720s and reached its peak by the 1770s. Many of the main *philosophes* were dead by the 1780s. The men and women of 1789 had, however, read the great Enlightenment works and had learned how to think critically about their own society. They had also gained the confidence and optimism to believe that it was possible to create a better world, and that human reason would allow them to do so. The writers of the Enlightenment had criticised the old regime, but had not suggested its overthrow. Their suggestions were mainly about reform rather than revolution. When those in a later generation conceived ideas of revolutionary change, however, they would refer to Enlightenment ideas for authority and guidance.

CHAPTER REVIEW

DEVELOPING CLEAR DEFINITIONS

Write your own definition of each of the following key terms:

- Enlightenment
- *philosophe*
- encyclopaedia
- reason

PRACTISING PARAGRAPH ANSWERS

- 1 What were the main political ideas expressed in Rousseau's *The Social Contract*?
- 2 To what extent is it true to say that Diderot's *Encyclopaedia* was a serious attack on the institutions of the old regime?
- 3 In what way did Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* suggest a change to the system of absolute royal power?

ANALYSING HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Professor Alison Patrick was one of Australia's most eminent scholars of French history and a pioneer of French revolutionary studies at the University of Melbourne. As an historian, she accepted the argument that, while the Enlightenment did question the old regime, it did not directly cause the French Revolution. She later re-examined the question and asked what exactly the Enlightenment *did* contribute to the revolution. She concluded:

[When] in 1789 the National Assembly got to work on its program of reform, the debates were conducted within an accepted framework of political ideas. For example, there was no serious support of divine-right monarchy. There was no argument over whether or not the legislature should be elected; the question was who should have the vote. No one defended the relics of personal serfdom in France, or the chaos of the old judicial system; freedom of speech, freedom of the press, religious toleration were all taken for granted by most deputies ... The philosophes had formulated the ideas which were taken for granted by the revolutionaries of 1789; and in this sense it can be said that the revolution was indeed their work. (From 'The Philosophes and the French Revolution', Agora, July 1966, p. 3)

- 1 What, according to Alison Patrick, were the political and social ideas that the patriots of 1789 accepted almost as 'common sense'?
- 2 Why do you think that the existence of a body of generally accepted ideas might have assisted the process of decision-making and reform during the first stage of the revolution?

PRACTICE ESSAY QUESTION

Describe the nature of the Enlightenment's criticism of the old regime and evaluate the degree to which these criticisms might have caused the crisis of 1789.

READING MORE DEEPLY

Easy

Maurice Cranston, 'Ideas and Ideologies', *History Today*, May 1989, pp. 10–14.

Moderate

William Doyle, 'Enlightened Opinion', *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989.

Challenging

Roger Bienvenu, 'The Enlightenment', Samuel Scott and Barry Rothaus, *Historical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, vol. 1, pp. 358–62.

Although written for university students, this is a very condensed and comprehensive study of the whole Enlightenment project.



Source 3.10 *Expérience aérostatique faite Versailles le 19 Sept. 1783, 1783*



New popular movements and significant ideas before the revolution

“ *[The bourgeoisie] were more attentive, better educated, better equipped ... to face up to the unexpected. They were everywhere: at Versailles and in Paris, but also in new municipalities and militias, members of corresponding societies, editors of newspapers ... The Revolution was bourgeois inasmuch as the bourgeois gained the greatest advantages from it.*

– JEAN-PIERRE HIRSCH, 1995

”

OVERVIEW

The Enlightenment’s radical ideas taught educated people to think critically about the society around them. These ideas affected the way people saw the old regime, but they alone could not have caused a revolution. In this chapter, we will examine other social forces, and ask whether there were some social classes that actively aimed to change French politics and society.

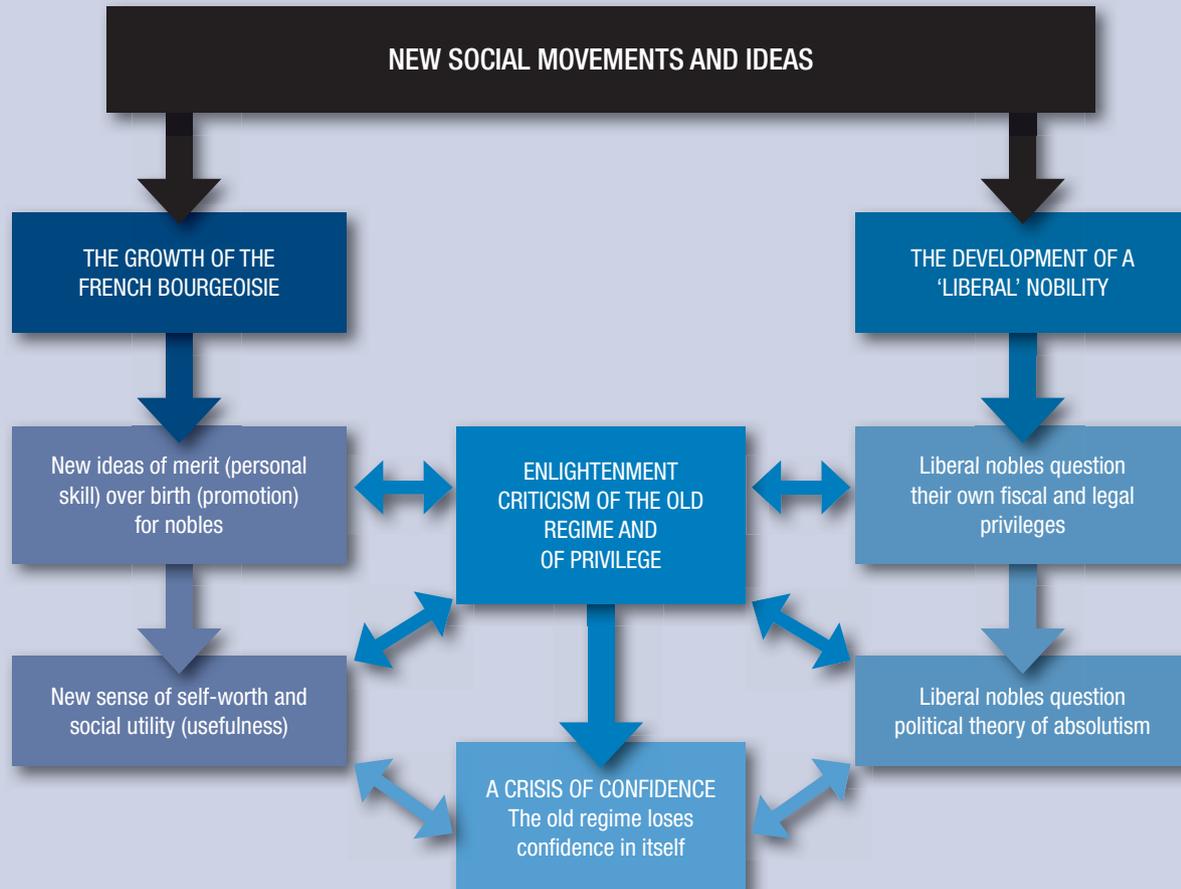
In eighteenth-century France, the most ambitious – and most frustrated – social group was the bourgeoisie. The bourgeois felt that they could not play a role in the political life of the nation matching their talents and skills. New social movements and ideas were not, however, limited to the bourgeois: there were *also* powerful social forces of criticism among the two privileged orders, especially the ‘liberal’ nobles and clergy, who believed that French society needed reform.

KEY ISSUES

- What were the growing expectations of the bourgeoisie in the Third Estate?
- How do historians debate the role of the bourgeoisie?
- What was the challenge from the liberal nobility?



FLOW OF CHAPTER



4.1 What were the growing expectations of the bourgeoisie in the Third Estate?

While many historians agree that ideas are very powerful, they would say that ideas alone cannot cause a revolution. Ideas have to link up with social forces. The most powerful are the rising, but unsatisfied, expectations of certain classes in society.

One of the classes in the Third Estate was the bourgeoisie. During the eighteenth century, members of the bourgeoisie realised they were not playing a role in national life that matched their talents and abilities, and they formed radical ideas expressing a new sense of self-worth, social utility and ambition.

Dangerous ideas of utility and merit

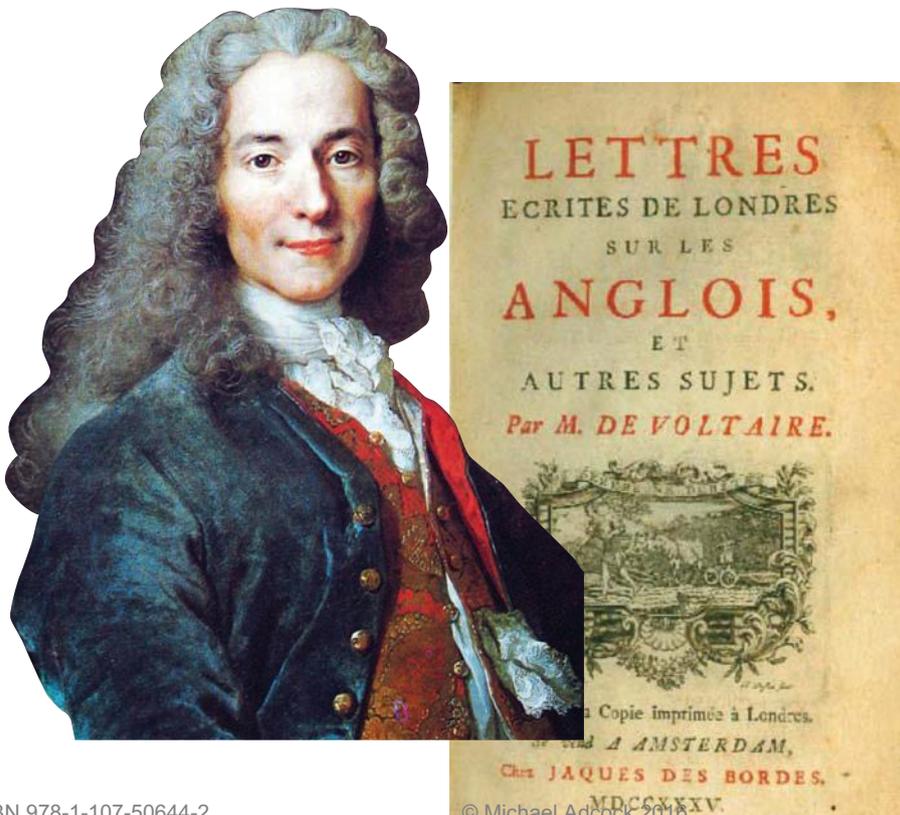
Their most important belief was that a person's social importance should not depend upon their **birth** (noble or common), but upon their **utility** (usefulness, in terms of productive labour) and **merit** (their combination of personal abilities). This dangerous new idea rejected the prestige of noble birth, which allowed aristocrats to dominate high positions in the government, church and army, often without suitable qualifications or skills.

This emphasis on social usefulness and personal merit, and the appreciation of the productive power of the Third Estate, can be traced to *philosophes* such as Voltaire, who argued for the dignity and importance of the most productive members of society. In his letter 'On Commerce' (in *Letters on England*), he praised the English gentry, who were allowed to engage in productive activity, such as trade, without losing their gentility.

birth an individual's status as either commoner or nobility, determined at birth

utility usefulness, in terms of productive labour

merit combination of an individual's personal abilities



Source 4.1 Voltaire as a young man with his *Letters on England*



ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 4.1: READING A PRIMARY RESOURCE

Voltaire defends the idea of utility

Voltaire's 'On Commerce' from *Letters on England*, 1733

In France, anyone is a marquis who wants to be, and whoever arrives in Paris with money to spend ... can say 'a man like me, a man of my standing', and loftily despise a business man, and the business man so often hears people speak disparagingly of his profession that he is foolish enough to blush. Yet I wonder which is more useful to a nation, a well-powdered nobleman who knows exactly at what minute the king goes to bed, and who gives himself grand airs while playing the part of a slave in some minister's antechamber, or a business man who enriches his country, issues orders from his office to Surat or Cairo, and contributes to the well-being of the world. (From Voltaire, Letters on England, trans. by Leonard Tancock, 1984, pp. 51–2)

- 1 How does Voltaire undermine the prestige of noble title and rank?
- 2 How does he suggest that nobles are now leading almost useless lives?
- 3 Why does Voltaire feel that merchants should be regarded as being far more important than they currently are?

FLASHPOINT!

A bourgeois reconsiders the structure of society

Historian Robert Darnton discovered one episode suggesting that people read the *philosophes* and did apply their questioning spirit to their own society. The episode occurred during one of the regular town processions of eighteenth-century France, when the order of society was made visible in the structure of the great parade of all the town's groups.

Source 4.2 This painting shows a typical town procession in the city of Lille; comprising a number of different corporations, or groups, with their own special rights.



In 1768, a bourgeois of Montpellier was watching his town's procession – a sort of 'blueprint of society' – and deciding that it was all outdated. The unidentified writer was perhaps a middling bourgeois – a doctor, lawyer or administrator. He concluded that the traditional hierarchy of the Three Estates needed to be changed. The First Estate should be abolished, because the clergy was not important in his region. The nobility, who in Montpellier were mainly nobility of the robe, could move up to the First Estate. The **most useful class** – the magistrates, lawyers, doctors, landowners, merchants and traders (his own class) – would form the Second Estate, the 'Bourgeois' Estate. Then, significantly, he snobbishly put working people such as artisans in the working Third Estate. He did not specifically mention any *philosophe*, because he didn't need to: we can hear Voltaire's voice behind his. The 'bourgeois of Montpellier' did not, as far as we know, become a great revolutionary leader, but if an educated man could question age-old social structures like this, presumably many other educated people could too. His mental replanning of society was one clear sign of the development of a social group's identity and worth.

most useful class the magistrates, lawyers, doctors, landowners, merchants and traders formed the Second Estate, the 'Bourgeois' Estate

Focus questions

- 1 What did eighteenth-century people mean by words such as 'utility' and 'merit'?
- 2 Why would these concepts have been both new and radical in the society of the old regime?

4.2 Historians debate the role of the bourgeoisie

The Marxist theory of a revolutionary bourgeoisie

The great **Marxist historians** Georges Lefebvre, Albert Soboul and George Rudé argued that the French Revolution was a milestone in the development of human society. According to Karl Marx, the next stage of history was when kings and nobles were challenged by a new, ambitious bourgeoisie, and by the new system of capitalist production. In the French Revolution, these historians believed, a capitalist bourgeoisie, frustrated by its exclusion from all the highest positions of power in the institutions of France, challenged the old feudal system. The Marxists also believed that Enlightenment ideas – the critique of noble privilege and of useless clergy, and their emphasis upon utility and merit – were the ideology of this new capitalist class.

Marxist historians expert writers of Marxist history who were inspired by the theories of Karl Marx

Revisionist historians 'revise' the Marxist explanation

This Marxist explanation dominated French Revolution studies for many decades, but has since been challenged. The Marxist idea of an *inevitable* 'pattern' has been challenged in theory by the Revisionist idea of **historical accident**. Revisionist historian George Taylor argued that the revolution happened simply by chance, and that there was no long-term causes that made it inevitable. William Doyle also emphasised the 'accidental', meaning something that simply happened, without any underlying pattern or set of causes: the revolution was a routine political crisis that simply got out of hand. The French Revolution did not have to happen; King Louis XVI just failed to prevent it from happening.

historical accident the Revisionist idea that historical events happen simply by chance and that there are no long-term causes that make them inevitable

The Revisionist historians have also challenged the idea of a revolutionary capitalist class. The supporters of both the *philosophes* and the patriot movement of the 1780s included people from all orders of society: liberal nobles, reform-minded priests and, of course, many bourgeois.



Focus questions

- 1 Why did Marxist historians like to think that the French Revolution was driven by a capitalist bourgeoisie?
- 2 How have Revisionist historians proved that the French bourgeoisie who took part in the revolution cannot be called a 'capitalist' class?

Society did not fall into a neat class confrontation of bourgeois against noble, but rather into an ideological division between those who believed in reform and those who did not. The revolution arguably began at the top of society, not among a 'revolutionary bourgeoisie'. When members of the bourgeoisie became involved in the patriot movement and the revolution, some 86 per cent were middle-class professionals, mostly lawyers and civil servants, rather than from rich, 'capitalist' bourgeois backgrounds, such as the wealthy merchants of the south-west of France. Many of the bourgeois who did resemble 'capitalists' – merchants, big financiers and factory-owners – were actually the most hostile to both Enlightenment and revolutionary ideas.

4.3 Other social forces: The challenge from the liberal nobility

The bourgeoisie were aware of and articulate about their social value, and were challenging the restrictions imposed upon them by the old regime. Many of the revolution's leaders were bourgeois, so naturally many of the revolution's achievements – such as the principle of merit and the sale of land – most benefited that group. However, members of the privileged orders also questioned the political and social system.

According to historian Daniel Wick, historians such as Lefebvre forget that liberal nobles were also important in the pre-revolutionary and first revolutionary period, because Marxists prefer to emphasise the role of the allegedly revolutionary bourgeoisie. Wick argues that the number and influence of liberal nobles – Condorcet, Lafayette, Liancourt, Talleyrand and Mirabeau – were considerable. For France, the theme of 'a loss of confidence in the regime' must be extended to people *within* the system: the old regime was, in effect, losing confidence in itself.

A second source of opposition was the **aristocratic salons**, where nobles who were concerned about the state of the nation gathered around a hostess sympathetic to their opinions. It was publicised in the **altruistic** actions of some young nobles, such as the young Marquis de Lafayette going to America to help the colonists in their fight for liberty from Britain. Opposition also occurred when **traditional tensions within the nobility** – such as the ill-feeling between the court nobles and the provincial nobles – mixed with new political attitudes, such as public concern about the royal court's wastefulness. Opposition was strengthened when prominent figures, such as the Comte de Mirabeau from a high noble family, supported liberal ideas.

Later, liberal nobles moved from salon discussion to another form of upper-class sociability, the club, forming groups such as the Society of Thirty (later the Breton Club), which met in Paris from November 1788 until May 1789. Noble high society was itself a place of real power, above the institutional structures of royal government.

aristocratic salons

intellectual gatherings of high society in private mansions

altruistic unselfish in relation to others

traditional tensions within the nobility one example is the ill-feeling

between the court nobles and the provincial nobles

The story so far

By the 1780s, radical ideas and criticisms of the old regime had linked up with new social movements, notably the increasing confidence and ambition of the bourgeoisie and the growing doubt of some members of the privileged orders. It is true that not all bourgeois, and certainly not all nobles, supported radical thought, but a substantial number did, and this would give the radical ideas real power. Even so, the criticism of the old regime might have remained simply a critique without the experience of a major crisis that would sharpen the debate and make the need for reform seem urgent.

CHAPTER REVIEW

DEVELOPING CLEAR DEFINITIONS

Write your own definition of each of the following key terms:

- bourgeoisie
- utility
- merit
- liberal nobles

PRACTISING PARAGRAPH ANSWERS

What did eighteenth-century people mean by the idea of 'utility'? Why was this idea automatically a critique of the privileged orders and a defence of the Third Estate?

ANALYSING HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

The great Marxist historian Albert Soboul wrote in 1970 that he still regarded the French Revolution as the great bourgeois revolution:

The revolution of 1789–1794 marked the appearance of modern bourgeois and capitalist society in the history of France. Its most significant aspect was its achievement of national unity for the country by its destruction of still-existing elements of the seignorial regime and the 'feudal' privileged orders ... The fact that the French Revolution ended finally in the establishment of a liberal democracy adds another dimension to its historical significance. From the point of view of these two achievements ... it deserves to be considered the classic model of a bourgeois revolution. (Cited in Ralph Greenlaw (ed.), The Social Origins of the French Revolution, 1975, p. 17)



- 1 In terms of participants, is it true to say that the 'patriot' movement was made up purely of bourgeois who wanted to overthrow the nobility?
- 2 In terms of aims, is it true to say that the 'patriot' movement aimed only to solve problems that affected the bourgeoisie?
- 3 What does Soboul understand by a 'bourgeois' revolution?
- 4 Why would an historian like Soboul be anxious to prove that the French Revolution confirmed Karl Marx's theory of the 'stages' of the development of human society?

READING MORE DEEPLY

Easy

Andrew Matthews, *Revolution and Reaction. Europe 1789–1849*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 32–3.

Moderate

Albert Soboul, *The French Revolution, 1787–1799: From the Storming of the Bastille to Napoleon*, Vintage, New York, 1975, pp. 43–54.

Challenging

Colin Jones, 'Bourgeois Revolution Revivified: 1789 and Social Change', in Gary Kates (ed.), *The French Revolution. Recent Debates and New Controversies*, Routledge, London, 1998.

This chapter is intended for university students, but provides an excellent introduction to new trends in historical interpretation.



How France's financial crisis became a political crisis, 1774–1789

“

The French Revolution of 1789 was the product of medium-term political and financial crises within the state and the destabilising efforts to resolve them.

– NIGEL ASTON, 2004

”

OVERVIEW

The crisis that shook the French monarchy in 1774–89 developed quickly through three distinct stages. The first was a financial crisis caused by over-spending, heavy borrowing and, inevitably, heavy interest repayments. The only ways to deal with such crises are to borrow more money or increase taxes. When both methods proved difficult, the monarchy was in trouble. The second stage was a fiscal crisis of the taxation system, because the need to raise new taxes highlighted the inefficiency and unfairness of France's tax system.

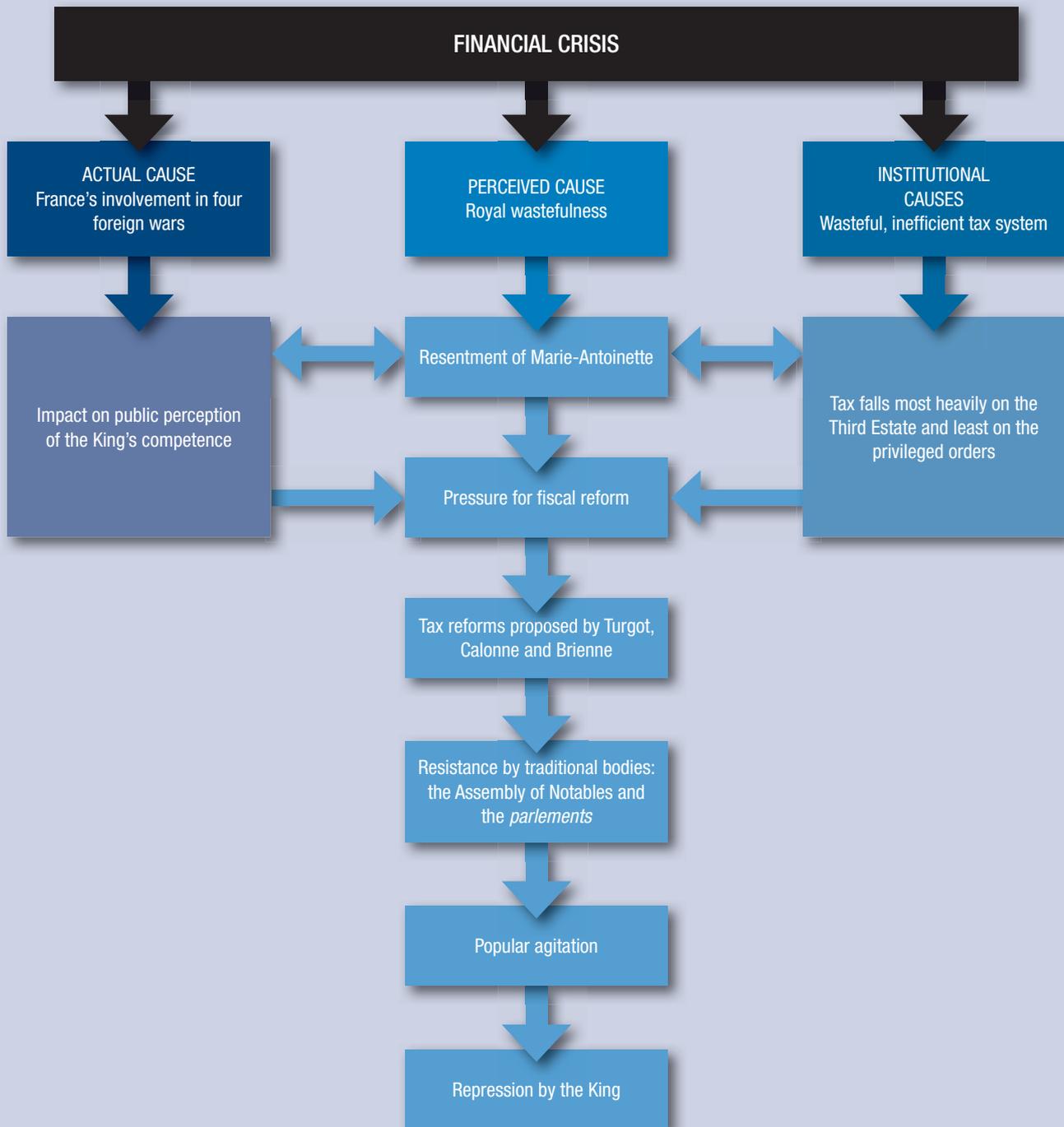
This debate about tax was also a political crisis, questioning the King's right to impose taxes without consulting some representative body. Since France did not have a parliament, the King had to consider consulting other bodies – the Assembly of Notables, the high law courts (*parlements*) or the Estates-General – each of which was problematic. In this chapter, we will analyse how and why one financial problem threw the whole monarchy into crisis.

KEY ISSUES

- What was the cause of the nation's financial problems?
- Did the old regime try to reform itself?
- How did the financial crisis become a political crisis?
- What did the Books of Grievances show?



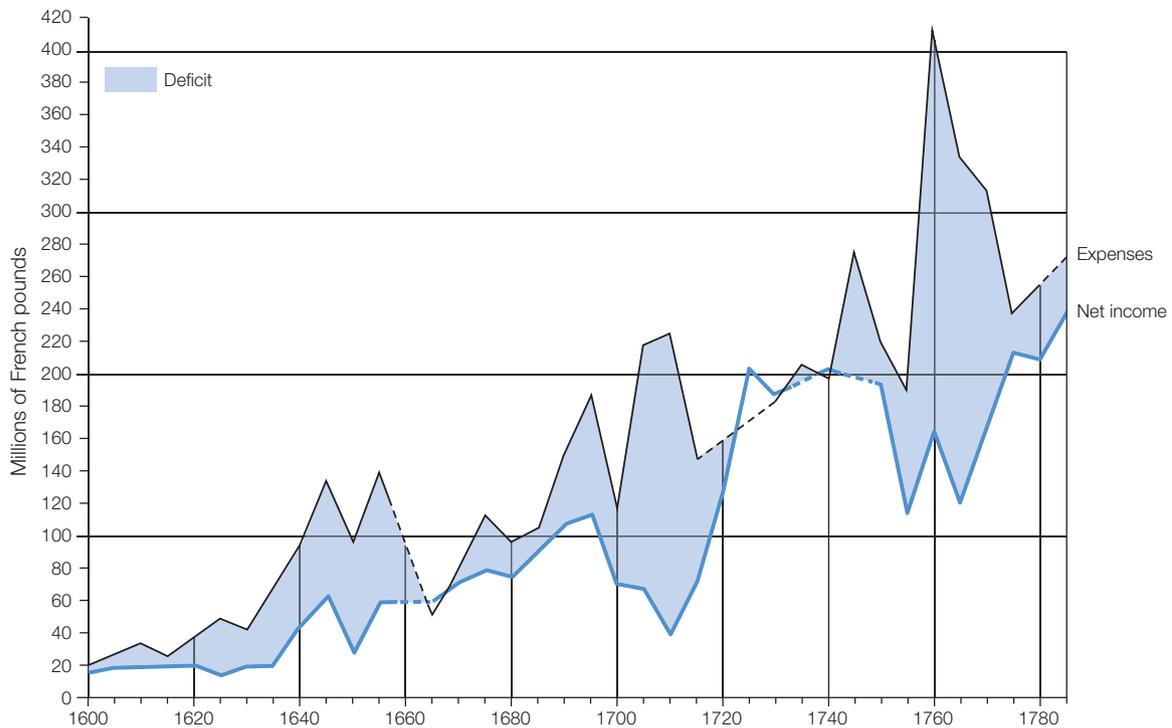
FLOW OF CHAPTER



5.1 The making of a crisis: The nation's financial problem

The traditional story of the financial crisis of the monarchy began on 20 August 1786, when the Minister of Finance, Calonne, informed Louis XVI that France's financial situation was serious. The most important cause was the four wars France had waged between 1733 and 1783, costing a total of £4000 million (old French pounds or *livres*). France had borrowed £1250 million since 1776 and now had an annual deficit of £112 million on total revenue of £475 million.

When a nation has a large debt, financiers are hesitant to lend it more money. The possibility of raising indirect taxes on food and goods was not available, nor was the option of increasing direct taxes on the Third Estate. Thus bankruptcy was inevitable unless the tax system was totally reformed. The financial crisis became a fiscal crisis, and the system of revenue and expenditure itself was questioned.



Source: Adapted from A. Guery, 'Les finances de la monarchie française sous l'Ancien Régime', 1978.

Source 5.1 This graph charts the course of France's financial disaster. From 1620 onwards, France's spending (black line) was usually well above its income (blue line), creating a deficit (blue shading) that spiked dramatically in the 1770s at the time of the American War of Independence.



The perception of royal wastefulness

People believed that this financial crisis was caused by mismanagement (which could be solved by appointing the right Minister of Finance) and by excessive expenditure (which could be solved by exercising control over royal spending). Public opinion wrongly blamed the crisis on the lavish expenditure of the court because of wild rumours about the luxurious tastes of Marie-Antoinette (referred to metaphorically as Madame Deficit).

Source 5.2 The queen was the *perceived* cause of the debt: by the 1780s, the usual 'signs' of royal authority were not working the way they were meant to. When this portrait was exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1787, somebody pinned a note on it saying, 'Here is the deficit!'



Focus questions

- 1 What effect would a financial crisis have on the public's perception that the King was competent to rule?
- 2 Why would rumours about the Queen's wastefulness be so damaging when they were not in fact true?

In reality, the royal court only spent about 6 per cent of France's budget. These rumours were exaggerated by jealous nobles who had lost the Queen's favour and who paid writers to produce scandal-sheets about her expensive gifts to favourites.

5.2 SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL

Queen Marie-Antoinette (1755–1793)

Marie-Antoinette is one of the most famous, but also one of the most misunderstood, figures of the French Revolution. Born in 1755, the daughter of Austrian Emperor Francis I and Maria-Theresa of Austria, she was married at age 15 to Louis-Auguste (the future Louis XVI) of France in 1770. This was not a marriage of love: she was used to consolidate a peace treaty between France and Austria.



Source 5.3 These two images tell the story of Marie-Antoinette's life. The delicate pastel drawing of the beautiful young woman (left) was painted by Joseph Ducreux in Vienna in 1769, and sent to Versailles the year before her marriage to Louis. She knew barely anything about the country of which she would soon be queen. The second painting, showing an aged, worn woman, was painted by Alexander Kucharsky when he visited her in the Temple Prison in 1793. Shortly after this was painted, she was executed at the guillotine.

It is true that, as Queen after 1774, Marie-Antoinette spent lavishly on clothing and jewellery, to the extent that her mother warned her not to be so extravagant. When this characteristic became linked with public concern about the national debt in the 1780s, it made her deeply unpopular. Yet she was also the victim of unfair rumours: the infamous Diamond Necklace Affair (1785–86) created the impression that she had ordered some scandalously expensive jewellery, whereas she was the completely innocent victim of a confidence trickster. It is true that she led a sheltered life in the palace, and had little understanding of France or its people.



A MATTER OF FACT

Marie-Antoinette certainly enjoyed extravagant hairstyles. Her hairdresser delighted her by creating elaborate hair-dos that sometimes rose more than a metre above her head. The most famous of these showed the hair arranged into the waves of the ocean, with a model of a French battleship on top.

5.3 The old regime tries to reform itself

During the 1770s and 1780s, people believed that the nation was in financial crisis but would not, or could not, achieve the reforms necessary to resolve it. To what degree was the old regime able to respond to pressures for change? Could it reform itself?

A warning voice not heeded: Turgot (1774 to May 1776)

France's financial crisis need not have occurred. Jacques Turgot, a brilliant economist who supported free trade, was Controller General of Finances from 1774 to 1776. He proved that the national debt could be reduced, and bankruptcy avoided, by introducing strict economies in royal spending, such as reducing the expensive pensions the King distributed. His motto was 'No new taxes, no new loans, no bankruptcy'. By 1776, the budget was strong enough to convince Dutch bankers to again lend money to France. Turgot also hoped to introduce a single tax on land to replace indirect taxes, and to avoid costly involvement in the American War of Independence. However, his Six Edicts (1776) angered the privileged classes by suggesting abolition of the labour tax and other dues, provoking them to conspire against him at Versailles and secure his dismissal before he could achieve further reforms. Turgot courageously warned the King about the war: 'The first shot will drive the State to bankruptcy'. He was right, but he was dismissed.



Source 5.4 This portrait is a representation of Turgot, the Finance Minister who correctly warned the King that participating in the American war of Independence would ruin France.

A clever appearance of fiscal reform: Necker (October 1776 to May 1781)

When Jacques Necker was appointed Director of the Treasury, the nation's finances urgently needed reform. He knew people had rejected the cutbacks recommended by Turgot. He also avoided new taxes, believing that existing taxes were enough, if collected properly; and he thought **tax farming** was wasteful.

tax farming the collection of royal taxes by individuals on behalf of the government

Necker juggled the accounts to suggest financial recovery, but he borrowed £520 million to finance the American war, listing the heavy interest payments as 'normal spending'. When his enemies criticised him, he published his 'Financial Summary for the King', misleadingly suggesting that France had fought the American war, paid no new taxes and still had £10 million credit over expenditure.



Source 5.5 *Left:* Jacques Necker achieved a reputation as a financial wizard. *Right:* The caption reads, 'Great Necker, your wise prudence makes our hearts glad. You have brought abundance back to us, under the good pleasure of Louis.' His **Compte Rendu** is shown open nearby.

Compte Rendu Jacques Necker's 'National Account', which cleverly hid the true nature of France's crippling national debt, thus delaying by five years the inevitable process of trying to resolve it by reform of taxation

Calonne's attempt at reform (November 1783 to 1787)

When Necker's successor, Charles-Alexandre Calonne, became Controller-General in 1783, France had made peace with Britain and calculated the total cost of its involvement in the American War of Independence: a staggering £1066 million. Calonne still did not limit the royal court's spending, believing that visible spending generated public confidence; however, people were no longer dazzled by royal pomp and ceremony, instead seeing it as the cause of France's financial problems.



tax farmers private tax collectors

Focus questions

- 1 What was the actual cause of the massive national debt that caused France's bankruptcy?
- 2 What factors prevented Finance Ministers from making the reforms that might have saved the monarchy from bankruptcy?

Calonne presented a 'Plan for the Improvement of the Finances' to Louis XVI (1786), recommending the replacement of multiple income taxes – which the nobles and clergy largely avoided paying – by one uniform land tax, varying according to income and paid by everybody without exception. He saw that it was wasteful for private tax collectors (**tax farmers**) to collect indirect taxes for the government. He suggested that the local assemblies in each province could better calculate tax liability and collect it, estimating that this streamlined tax system would produce £35 million more. To encourage economic activity, he would abolish the internal tax barriers and external tariffs. To bring in some revenue to keep the state going in the short term, he wanted a new series of loans.

Calonne hesitated to ask the uncooperative *parlements* for approval, and was uncertain how the traditional representative assembly, the Estates-General, would vote. Instead, he appealed for guidance to another traditional council, the Assembly of Notables, an advisory body sometimes convened by the King.



Source 5.6 Finance Minister Charles-Alexandre Calonne

**taxation by representation**

taxes that have been discussed and approved by the elected representatives of the people who are going to have to pay these taxes

Focus questions

- 1 How did the Assembly of Notables respond to plans for new and more equal taxes?
- 2 Why did the failure of the appeal to the Assembly of Notables cause an even greater loss of public confidence in the monarchy?

that nobody should have the privilege of not paying tax. Few voted to keep their privileges. They supported Calonne's proposal that a representative assembly allocate and collect tax, accepting the principle of **taxation by representation**. They objected, however, that Calonne's land tax would fall heavily on them, and suggested other models. When the Notables blocked Calonne, Louis dismissed him (April 1788).

This meeting was crucial to the development of a revolutionary situation, not because it found a solution but because it transformed the nation's finances from a state matter into a question of public opinion. The meetings were closed, but this created feverish speculation; to satisfy public curiosity, information was leaked, revealing how serious France's financial problems were. With the meeting deadlocked, Calonne used the new tactic of appealing to public opinion, publishing a pamphlet requesting public support and condemning the nobles for their selfish opposition.

Attempted reform by Brienne

The new Finance Minister, Lomenie de Brienne, made a final attempt at financial reform, retrying Calonne's idea of provincial assemblies calculating and collecting taxes, but modifying the plan to satisfy the notables. They were now more militant, demanding a permanent committee to audit royal spending. The King refused. The Assembly of Notables refused to approve any new taxes, arguing that the only body able to authorise taxes was the Estates-General. Brienne realised that he must close the Assembly of Notables before it caused more concern.

The damage was done: the monarchy seemed unable to handle the nation's finances and people were fully aware of the serious problem. Reformers demanded the principle of **no taxation without representation**: the King could not impose taxes

without approval by representatives such as the Estates-General. To continue his financial reforms, but not call the Estates-General, Brienne had to present new laws to the *parlements*. How were they likely to react?

Such resistance to royal authority was dangerous even in closed meetings, but this challenge was being made publicly. The educated and influential people of the salons who discussed national affairs were unanimous that the *parlement* should resist. The political activists of the clubs printed a paper-storm of pamphlets. The Parisians formed crowds outside the *parlement*.

Source 5.8 Lomenie de Brienne, the Finance Minister who had the difficult task of putting a modified version of Calonne's original plan to the hostile *parlements*

**no taxation without representation**

the King could not impose taxes without approval by representatives such as the Estates-General

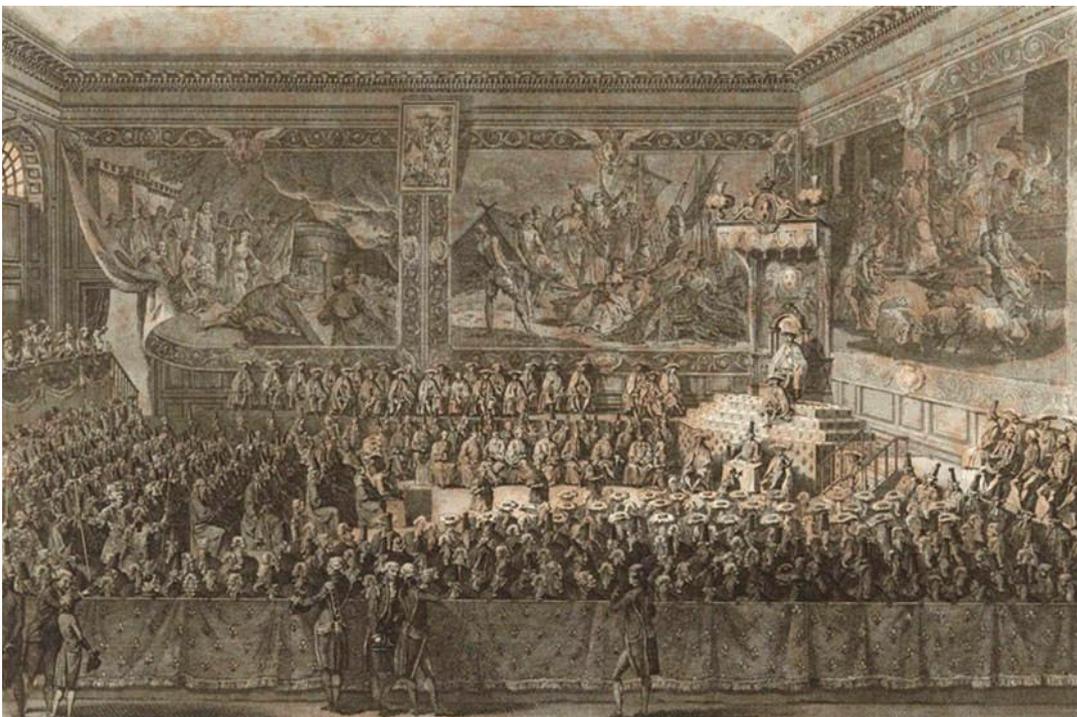
FLASHPOINT!**The King's new battle with the *parlements*, July 1787**

Brienne's struggle with the *parlements* began in July 1787. He presented a law for a stamp duty to the Paris *parlement*. It refused to register it, stating that it would pass no laws until it saw the royal accounts. The King stated, correctly, that it had no authority to do so and ordered that the law be registered. The *parlement* retaliated by taking the serious step of disobeying the royal command, stating that it had no authority to sanction **perpetual taxes** and that only the Estates-General could approve new taxes.

perpetual taxes taxes occurring over and over

The King feared this new public opinion, ordering the *parlement* to Versailles, where he could demand registration of the laws. When the *parlement* met in Paris the following day to discuss what it would do, enormous crowds gathered around the Palace of Justice to express their support. The situation was explosive: the King ordered the *parlement* to quit Paris and to retire to Troyes. He ordered the police to close political clubs, repress illegal pamphlets, stop gatherings at the Palace of Justice and keep the streets clear at night.

These authoritarian measures worked, giving Brienne time to negotiate with the *parlement*. He offered to abandon the stamp tax and the provincial collection if the *parlements* approved reform to existing laws. They could examine the royal accounts. He called a Royal Session of the *parlement* for November 1787 in which the King would sit, but would not order the *parlement* to register the laws. Brienne hoped to pre-arrange agreement to his new laws before the meeting started.

The disaster of the royal session, 17 November 1787

Source 5.9 This image depicts a special meeting of the Paris *parlement*, similar to the one in which Brienne came very close to passing the reforms that might have saved the old regime.



Brienne began with acceptable reforms: tough economies for the royal household, collection of taxes by royal officials and savings in the royal administration and the armed forces. The state would borrow another £420 million between 1788 and 1792, solving its financial crisis. He created majority support for reform, although the *parlementaires* still demanded the calling of the Estates-General.

Brienne was close to victory when the King, misunderstanding the situation, ordered the *parlement* to register the laws. The *parlement*, stunned, registered the laws, but after the King's departure it cancelled them all.

The monarchy's retreat into authoritarianism

Louis returned to authoritarian measures, using his power of arbitrary arrest to exile three judges, and forbidding the other members of *parlement* to sit. The *parlement* declared the arbitrary arrest unjust. The King ordered their denunciation deleted. The Paris *parlement* bombarded the monarchy with remonstrances, which were published. The provincial *parlements* made many objections, refusing to register any laws whatsoever. The King accused the magistrates of exceeding their power, and they accused him of despotism.

In this struggle, the judges made a leap in political thought: they redefined the nation, especially 'the right of the Nation freely to grant subsidies (taxes) through the organ of the Estates-General, regularly **convoked** and composed' (taxation with representation, via a parliament). The King ordered the arrest of the two men who had drafted it; they hid in the *parlement*, which met overnight to protect them. The King ordered troops to surround the Palace of Justice and arrest the two culprits, who were taken to provincial prisons.

The King removed the *parlements'* power of registration and remonstrance, and gave it to special plenary courts, dominated by high notables loyal to him. He then ordered all *parlements* to close indefinitely.

The explosion of popular resistance, May and June 1788

The response across France was initially subdued, but increased during May 1788, developing into a wave of protest by June. Many *parlements* reconvened, defying the royal order. The judges were now popular heroes: when the *parlement* of Bordeaux returned from exile, the whole town erupted into a massive celebration, welcoming it with fireworks and vast crowds. In Pau, the crowd smashed open the locked doors of the *parlement* and reinstated their magistrates. In Rennes, the crowd took over the town, forcing the local authorities to flee for two months. In Grenoble, the people also took over the town, bombarding the royal troops with tiles from the rooftops.

One other development was particularly dangerous: in places, army officers revealed that their troops hesitated to fire on the crowds. What would happen when the regime could no longer command armed force?

Brienne, judging that the situation was uncontrollable, distracted public attention by announcing that he would call the Estates-General. Then, in August 1788, the French nation slid suddenly into bankruptcy and the treasury suspended all payments. Brienne was obliged to call the Estates-General for 1 May 1789.

convoked called together for a large formal meeting

Focus questions

- 1 Why did the *parlements* resist Brienne's tax reforms?
- 2 Why did the popular movement in Paris and other cities turn out to defend the *parlements* with such violence?

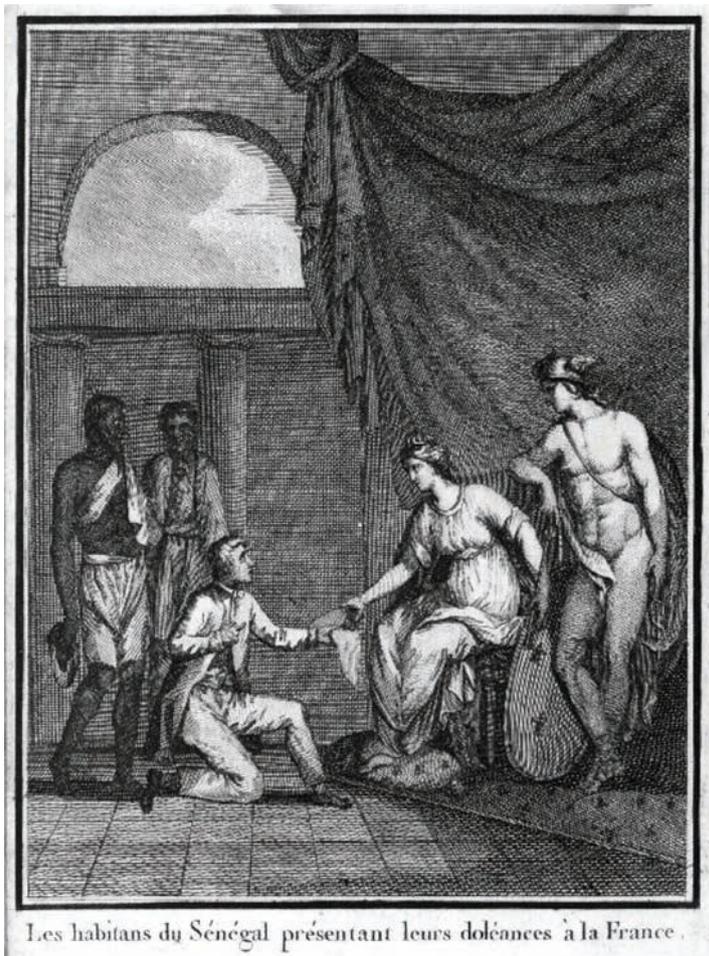
5.5 Consulting the nation: The Books of Grievances (*Cahiers de doléances*)

The calling of the Estates-General required the election of deputies and the drafting of Books of Grievances to be presented at Versailles. These were not demands but respectful statements of concerns to the King, who would respond as he wished. The meeting was purely advisory and lacked the authority of a truly representative body.

The most important aspect of these preparations was the process whereby nearly everybody in France participated in writing the **Books of Grievances**, in which each of the three orders stated concerns and suggested solutions. These documents are important because they reveal the rising or unmet class expectations of the French people. The process of requesting advice arguably created new expectations among all social groups, especially the working classes.

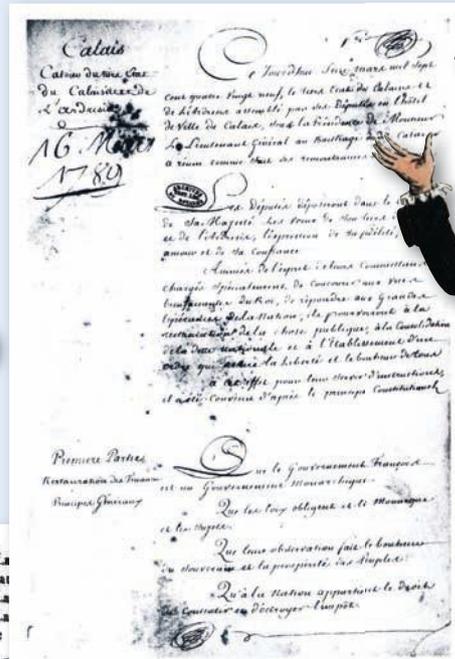
The importance of these documents lies not in the result but in the *process* by which they were created. Who wrote them and whose grievances did they represent? Do they give a true picture of the grievances of the French nation in 1789, or just of the people who controlled the writing of the books?

Books of Grievances (French: *Cahiers de doléances*) lists of concerns drawn up by local meetings of the Three Estates across France before the meeting of the Estates-General (May 1789)

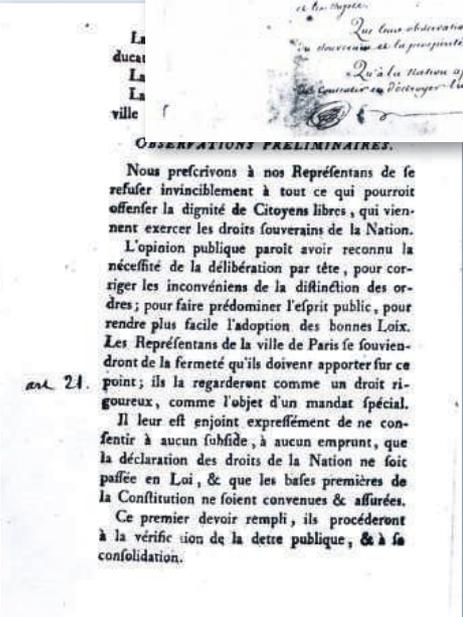


Source 5.10 This engraving represents the idea of the Books of Grievances as respectful subjects humbly making their problems known to France, represented by the seated woman.

1 Local drafts in many small communities

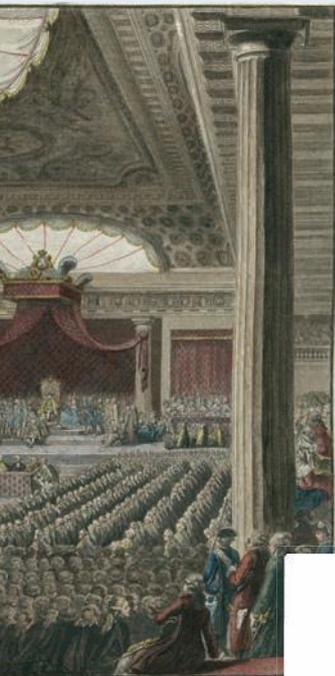


2 Drafts in towns

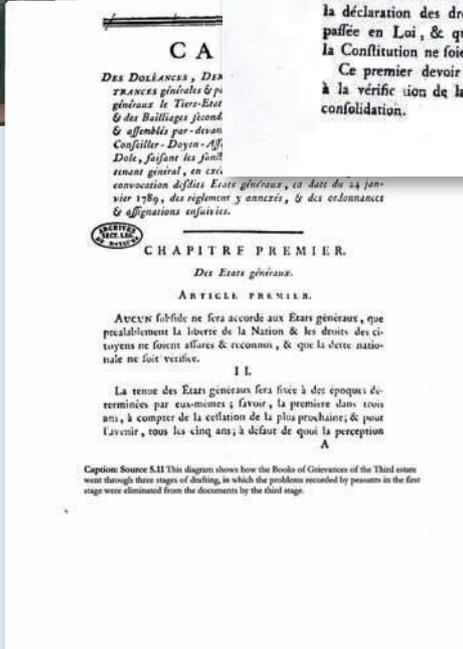


THE THIRD ESTATE
(THE COMMONERS)

A multi-stage drafting of their Book of Grievances



3 Drafts in large cities



Caption: Source 5.11 This diagram shows how the Books of Grievances of the Third estate went through three stages of drafting, in which the problems recorded by peasants in the first stage were eliminated from the documents by the third stage.



The process of drafting certainly *appeared* to be open and fair. The books were composed by meetings elected by nearly universal (male) **suffrage**. Meetings of the clergy were open to all members of the Catholic clergy. Meetings of the nobility were open to all nobles over the age of 25 years who had acquired or transmissible nobility. Meetings of the Third Estate were open to all people of common birth who were French, over 25 years of age and who paid some tax. Only the poor were excluded.

For the nobles, the process was a simple one-stage affair: they went to the local town, elected the deputies and wrote their list of grievances. Generally, they did not elect minor court nobility or liberal nobles.

The clergy completed a relatively simple two-stage process: initial meetings were held in religious chapters and orders, then delegates were sent to the local town, where they held a second meeting to choose the representatives for Versailles. When the high clergy controlled the process, they wrote a conservative document defending the privileges of the church. When village priests controlled the process, the document contained more liberal suggestions.

The Third Estate: A multi-stage process gives dominance to educated people

The real problem arose with the Third Estate, which was larger and included an illiterate majority (the peasants) who relied on local bourgeois to write the documents for them. The drafting of the

dossiers sets of papers containing information

Third Estate **dossiers** extended to two, three or even four stages, during which certain grievances got filtered out. Initial meetings in thousands of French villages produced preliminary dossiers, focusing on the local, material peasant grievances, such as feudal dues. But these preliminary dossiers went to a second meeting, where a selection of delegates was made, and all the local grievances were summarised into one dossier. Not a single peasant or artisan got beyond this first stage of selection of representatives.

Then delegates met in the local town, where the books were merged into one document and deputies to Versailles were elected. Here, an educated middle class usually dominated proceedings and altered the information, eliminating local peasant grievances about the feudal system and focusing on national issues such as the nation's finances. The final 'general *cahiers*' (grievances) were not a representation of the Third Estate as a whole, but of the political concerns of educated and wealthy bourgeois. These *cahiers*, therefore, represented town over country, bourgeois over peasant, and property owner over the poor. Millions of peasants had stated their grievances to Louis, but he would never hear them.

The *cahiers* of the Third Estate eliminate the material grievances of peasants

Most peasants, being illiterate, had to express their concerns to the local lawyer or even the lord himself. There was miscommunication, resulting first from misunderstanding and second from powerful local figures silencing complaints. Historian Annie Moulin describes local officials who 'interpreted, perhaps even concealed, the real intentions of those tongue-tied and illiterate peasants who voiced their grievances'.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 5.1: READING A PRIMARY RESOURCE

The Book of Grievances of the Third Estate of the city of Paris

We order our representatives to firmly refuse anything that might offend the dignity of free citizens, who are coming to exercise the sovereign rights of the nation.

Public opinion appears to have recognised the necessity of voting by head, to correct the problems caused by the distinctions between the orders, to allow public spirit to triumph, to better enable the adoption of good laws.

[The representatives] are specifically asked to not agree to any tax until the declaration of the rights of the nation is made into law, and that the first principles of the constitution are agreed and guaranteed.

All power comes from the nation, and may only be exercised for its wellbeing.

The general will makes the law; the public force ensures that it is put into action.

The nation alone can vote a tax; it has the right to determine its size, to limit its duration, to decide its distribution, to determine its use, to demand to see accounts and to have them published.

Every citizen has a right to be admitted to all employments, professions and honours.

The judicial power must be carried out in France in the name of the King, by courts made up of individuals who are absolutely independent of any executive influence.

(Translated from the French by Michael Adcock)

- 1 Why is the first instruction in this document a challenge to the old culture of deference in France?
- 2 Why do these deputies believe voting by head rather than by order is necessary?
- 3 According to these deputies, where does sovereignty (political authority and power) come from?
- 4 What did these deputies understand by the term 'the general will'?
- 5 How do these deputies intend to control taxation and to ensure that it is fair?
- 6 How do these deputies try to ensure that, in future, it will be personal merit rather than noble birth that will secure employment?
- 7 How have the writings of Montesquieu influenced the deputies' thoughts about the legal system (or judiciary)?

In Pouillenay, for example, the first book – which was dictated by the peasants themselves – described material grievances, including abuses by the local lord. The second – written by an educated person familiar with broader national issues of political and financial reforms – eliminated these peasant grievances and their damning criticism of the lord. There is also direct evidence of intimidation. The grievances of Frenelle-la-Grande were pre-written for the peasants by an educated person; these peasants, however, rejected the false book of grievances and wrote their own.

In general, the *cahiers* of the three orders agreed most on political and administrative reform.





Political reform: The attack on absolute royal power

There was broad agreement that the King's absolute legislative power should be modified. Laws should be made by a national representative assembly that met regularly. The King should participate in this law-making, and should be the head of executive government. In Dourdan, for example, clergy, nobles and the Third Estate agreed that the legislative power should reside collectively in the hands of the King and the nation. They called for the Estates-General to meet regularly.

Administrative reform

People agreed that centralised administration was inefficient and that it was better handled by regular meetings of provincial assemblies. They would supervise tax-collecting in their areas, as

venal public office the legal purchase of public office, often with a noble title attached, by wealthy and ambitious bourgeois who wanted to rise into the Second Estate

well as the spending of revenue on important local projects such as roads and bridges. Such bodies already existed in the form of provincial estates. There was also general agreement that France should abolish the **venal public office**. France had some 50 000 such public servants, who were accountable to no one. The *cahiers* recommended that public servants be paid by the government and be accountable to the public.

Legal and judicial reform

inviolability that which is unable to be breached or broken

lettres de cachet letters or orders signed by the King of France and closed with the royal seal

There was general agreement on legal and judicial reform. People wanted a uniform, efficient and fair judicial system, involving a streamlining of the many existing courts. They also demanded that the law act with more humanity and with more respect for the rights of the accused. Some demanded basic 'rights', which could mean the **inviolability** of the person, the inviolability of property and even freedom of speech. The demand for the abolition of **lettres de cachet** was unanimous.

Fiscal reform (the reform of taxation)

There was strong agreement on taxation. The Third Estate was crushed by the taxation burden, while the two privileged orders, whose members commanded massive wealth, paid relatively little tax. These lawyers and bureaucrats knew that once people stopped paying taxes, it would be difficult to make them resume, so they insisted that everybody continue paying taxes until fairer ones were designed. They also insisted that the only legal taxes were those voted by the whole nation and for a specific period of time. Taxes must be renegotiated and renewed at the end of their term. Finally, as prudent administrators, they knew that they must control the source of money *and* its destination: they demanded national control of spending. They must control the raising of any new government loans and all other forms of expenditure, including the gifts and grants the King distributed.

corvée under the old regime, a labour tax paid by working people

gabelle during the old regime, a tax on salt, an item crucial to working people for preserving food and for the care of farm animals

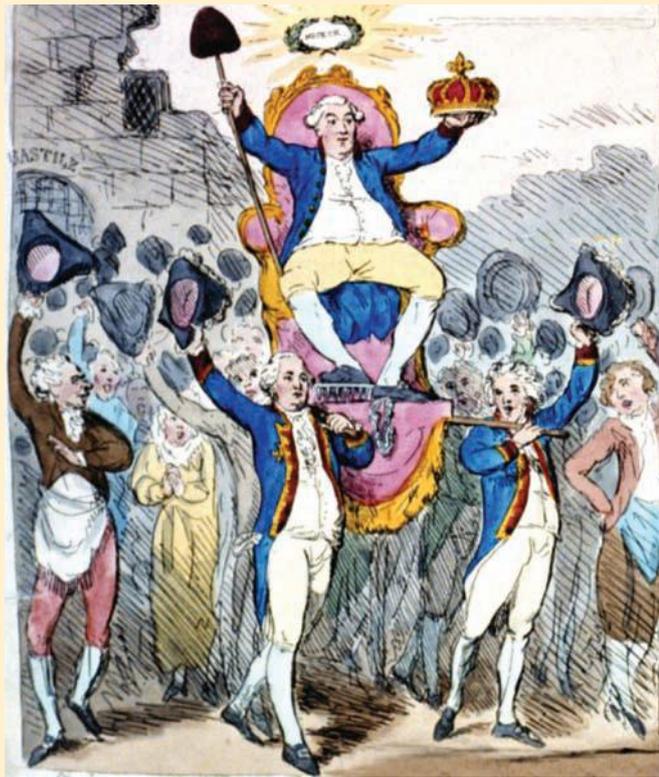
There was less agreement about who should pay taxes and in what proportion. Everybody agreed on removing taxes such as the labour tax (**corvée**), which obliged peasants to work mending local roads. There was agreement on the abolition of the internal tax barriers and the salt tax (**gabelle**). These tax barriers divided whole regions of France; others surrounded the large cities. Paris was surrounded by a set of walls, and all goods – including food – had to pass through taxation gates.

5.6 SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL

Philippe, Duc d'Orléans (1747–1793)

Philippe, Duc d'Orléans was a member of the royal family who had lost favour with Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette. When refused an appointment as admiral, he turned against the monarchy. His example proves that early revolutionary leaders often came from the upper ranks of society, not from the lower ranks. He joined the Society of Thirty, which suggested a constitutional monarchy like that of England. These 'constitutionalists' used their money to encourage writers to produce pamphlets on political reform, among them the Abbé Sieyès. He had a group of supporters known as the Orleans faction, and there was some talk in Paris that he might have had the personal ambition of overthrowing Louis XVI and taking the throne in a constitutional monarchy himself.

His second contribution was to open up his buildings of the Palais-Royal to radical speakers, who were then free of police interference, because the police were not allowed to enter a royal property. Much of the 'patriot' agitation occurred here, culminating in Desmoulin's call to arms on 12 July 1789. Philippe later caused a scandal at the opening of the Estates-General when he broke ranks with the nobles and tried to march with the Third Estate (May 1789). This symbolic act gave the impression that even the powerful no longer agreed with the monarchy.



Source 5.12 Philippe rapidly became a hero of the patriot movement, as we see in the image representing the Duc d'Orléans (right) and the Marquis de Lafayette (left) carrying Necker on high.

The nobility more 'revolutionary' than the bourgeoisie?

Recent research by historians Chartier and Taylor dramatically changed our understanding of these Books of Grievances. The Third Estate *did not* write the most 'revolutionary' books; the privileged orders *did not* solely protect their own interests. Of 270 noble deputies, one-third were liberals who demanded reforms in common with those of the Third Estate. The demand for a constitution before any further taxes appeared in 57 per cent of Third Estate books, but in 64 per cent of noble books.



The story so far

By the time the Books of Grievances had been completed, early in 1789, France's fiscal crisis was public knowledge, and so was the fact that the government had tried to reform itself but failed. Finally, millions of people had experienced the process of writing plans for reform. Although these were just respectful suggestions, not revolutionary demands, people still expected some response to their suggestions. Otherwise, the disappointment would itself become a revolutionary factor.

CHAPTER REVIEW

DEVELOPING CLEAR DEFINITIONS

Write your own definition of each of the following key terms:

- Assembly of Notables
- taxation by representation
- Books of Grievances

PRACTISING PARAGRAPH ANSWERS

- 1 Explain why the process of drafting up the Books of Grievances of the Third Estate in three stages almost always had the effect of filtering out the local grievances of ordinary working people. Why would this tend to create new and serious grievances among working people?
- 2 Explain why the issue of voting in the Estates-General – by order or by head – was crucial to the outcome of the debate on the reform of taxation.

ANALYSING HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Historian Jocelyn Hunt evaluates the crisis of 1789 in these terms:

Thus the privileged classes both prevented the Crown from solving its financial problems and escalated [worsened] these problems into a full-scale revolution. On the other hand, the vocal and belligerent response of the prosperous and educated members of the Third Estate, and the pro-reform attitudes of some of the nobles are also significant factors. Nobles had resisted the king in every century of French history, without the far-reaching repercussions experienced in the 1780s and 1790s. (From The French Revolution, 1998, p. 6)

- 1 How exactly did the privileged orders prevent the old regime from solving its financial problems?
- 2 Apart from the privileged orders, who else helped to drive the fiscal crisis into a political crisis?
- 3 If nobles had resisted the King before, why did this act of resistance turn into rebellion and then full revolution?

PRACTICE ESSAY QUESTION

'The Books of Grievances were not intended to cause the revolution, but the demands they made were nonetheless revolutionary in their thinking and their implications.' To what extent do you agree with this evaluation of the Books of Grievances?

READING MORE DEEPLY

Easy

Peter Burley, 'A Bankrupt Regime', *History Today*, January 1984, pp. 36–42.

Moderate

Peter McPhee, *The French Revolution, 1789–1799*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, Chapter 3, 'The Revolution of 1789'.

Challenging

Alfred Cobban, 'The *Parlements* of France in the Eighteenth Century', *Aspects of the French Revolution*, Paladin, London, 1968.

A university-level explanation of the resistance of the *parlements* to royal authority.



How the political crisis became a revolution, 1789

“

[The Bastille] resolved the impasse between the Court and the National Assembly, but it did so at a price. From now on, the Parisian crowd would haunt the battlements of bourgeois Revolution, reminding deputies that, in revolutions, the bullet is as important as the ballot.

– GWYNNE LEWIS, 1993

”

OVERVIEW

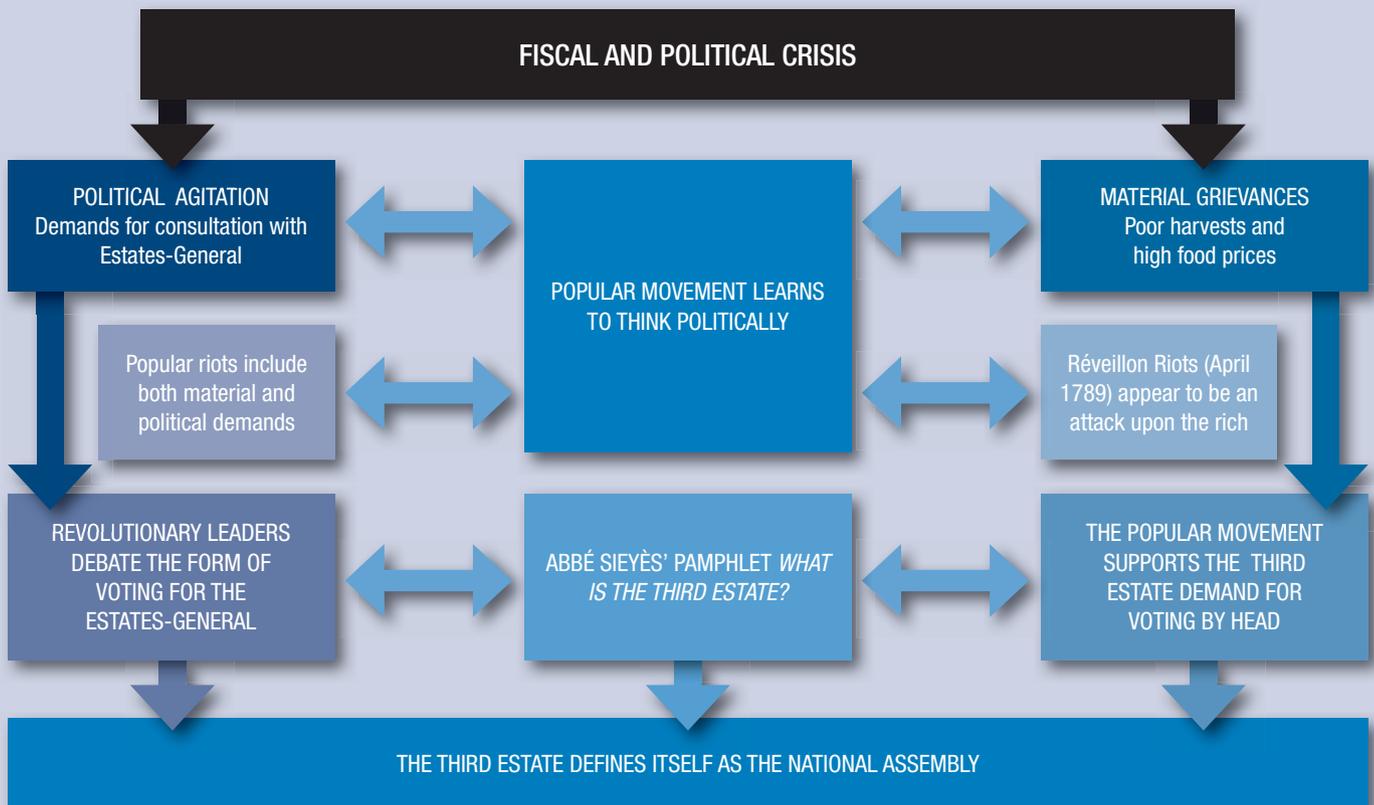
The French monarchy's tragedy was that every attempt to resolve its crisis only worsened the situation. The meeting of the Estates-General in May 1789 triggered a new and specifically political crisis. Any debate over taxation would set the Third Estate against the two privileged estates; the method of voting would be crucial.

By now, radical ideas were developing rapidly: as the Estates-General deadlocked over the issue of voting by order or voting by head, intellectual leaders used revolutionary pamphlets to publicise radical new ideas. Among hundreds of pamphlets, one in particular proposed that since the Third Estate was virtually all of the nation, its deputies were really representatives of France. The representatives of the Third Estate, supported finally by some liberal clergy and nobles, finally took the momentous step of declaring themselves the 'national' assembly.

KEY ISSUES

- What were the hopes and grievances of working people in the 1780s?
- Why was there conflict over the Estates-General in May 1789?
- Why was Paris in a ferment in July 1789?
- What effect did the capture of the Bastille have on the development of the revolution?

FLOW OF CHAPTER



Source 6.0 Death of de Flesselles, mayor of Paris, portrayed by Pierre-Gabriel Berthault (after Jean-Louis Prieur), Jean-Louis Prieur, 1789

6.1 The hopes and grievances of working people, 1788–89

The calling of the Estates-General and the drafting of Books of Grievances were intended to resolve France's fiscal and political crisis; instead, they worsened it. Historian Alexis de Tocqueville argues that the most dangerous time for a regime is not the centuries when it controls its people, but the moment when it attempts reform. The calling of the Estates-General created a surge of optimism.

This process of raising people's hopes can be dangerous even in stable, prosperous times. But France in the 1780s was not prosperous. Evidence for this comes from the English economist Arthur Young, who travelled through France observing conditions in the countryside. He asked a peasant woman what she thought the Estates-General might do. She replied that she did not know exactly, but whatever it did, it should be an improvement because things could not be any worse. This shows that when people do not know what to expect, they tend to expect everything.



Source 6.1 This symbolic picture shows three figures, representing the three estates, setting out together for Versailles in a cooperative spirit.

The makings of a food crisis

The difficulties under which working people laboured suddenly worsened. On 13 July 1788, a savage storm devastated the ripe crops in the Paris Basin region. The resulting shortage of grain sent the price of bread climbing. In the year to July 1789, the price of bread increased steadily to the highest



Source 6.2 This painting by Debucourt represents Les Halles marketplace in Paris in about 1791. This was the type of place where the success of the revolution would be decided: the 'politics of food' was the main driving force of the popular revolutionary movement.

level in Louis XIV's reign. The typical family of urban workers usually spent 30–50 per cent of their income on bread; a poor peasant family spent more. Now, the same families were spending 65–90 per cent of income on this basic food. If bread prices rose further, starvation threatened.

The rural depression affected the urban industrial economy: demand for consumer goods, and hence industrial activity, fell by 50 per cent. The effects were most strongly felt in Paris and large industrial towns such as Rouen, Lyon and Nîmes. In Lyon, for example, there were 30 000 unemployed silk workers.

Popular anger at reforming ministers: Working people associate their grievances with national policy

During the winter of 1788–89, working people linked their material problems with current political issues. Hungry workers understood that reforming ministers had removed price controls on grain, causing price increases. Unemployed urban workers now understood that ministers had removed restrictions on the import of manufactured goods from Britain, reducing sales of French products. The result of this new association of grievances is evident in the scene depicted in Girardet's *Attack on a Guardhouse on the Pont Neuf, August 9, 1788* (Source 6.3).

Focus questions

- 1 Why was the positive idea of 'consulting the nation' in the Books of Grievances likely to create even greater problems?
- 2 In what sense can it be said that working people in France in the 1780s learned to 'think politically' about their traditional problems?



They demanded the recall of Necker, who now became associated in the popular mind with the **pragmatism** and determination of the reform-minded Third Estate. Both his recall in August 1788 and any later dismissal would hold enormous significance for working people. This was the final stage of the 'birth of public opinion': workers understood that government decisions would affect their lives directly.

pragmatism a practical way of thinking about things



Source 6.3 During the popular disturbances of 1788–89, the crowd attacked the customs houses around Paris, then attacked symbols of authority, such as this police station. Here, the crowd burns dummies of Calonne and the other reformers.

Popular agitation over the *parlements*

The second element to this explosive situation was the involvement of urban workers in the escalating battle between the King and the *parlements*. Workers saw no division between national affairs and their own material concerns. When the many *parlements* closed, thousands of minor officials and clerical workers were unemployed, and they led the crowds that demanded the return of the *parlements*.

Necker immediately ordered the return of the Paris *parlement* in September 1788. This did not calm the situation: rioting and bloodshed continued and the Paris judges themselves forbade further disorder. In October, all the provincial

martyred when someone is killed for refusing to deny a strong belief

parlements were reopened. In provincial cities, large crowds welcomed the magistrates back, comparing them with the **martyred** senators of ancient Rome.





Source 6.4 This engraving is a representation of the popular enthusiasm of working people for the judges of the *parlements*, who they saw as heroes standing up to royal despotism.

FLASHPOINT!

The Réveillon Riots, April 1789

In April 1789, a new incident terrified Parisians because it suggested the beginning of a 'class conflict' between rich and poor. The victim was the owner of the Réveillon wallpaper factory, who actually paid his workers well. He innocently commented that bread prices should be reduced so that poor workers could afford food. In the highly charged atmosphere, this was misinterpreted as suggesting that *wages* should be brought down. Angry crowds entirely destroyed his house and factory on 27 April 1789. The French Guards fired on the crowd, killing 25 people, exaggerated by rumour to 300.

Was this an urban crowd responding to the political principles of 1789, or were the people expressing the economic and social grievances of labourer against capitalist? Both. Their slogans contained *both* political comments in favour of Necker and the Third Estate and slogans such as 'Down with the rich', clear evidence that the poorer elements of society were motivated by economic grievances. This sense of class conflict is confirmed by the way the **propertied classes** behaved, because the leaders of the revolution formed a militia of responsible citizens to be ready to stop the crowd if it again threatened private property.

propertied classes those who own property

6.2 Conflict over the Estates-General

The 'bourgeois' revolution, 1788–89

The calling of the Estates-General was seen as the solution to the nation's financial crisis, yet its convocation only complicated the political crisis. Clearly, the organisation of the Estates-General would influence who controlled it. At the last meeting (in 1614), the three orders had met in three roughly equal groups, meaning that the two privileged minority orders were over-represented compared with the large Third Estate. Worse, they voted by order, so everything discussed was decided by three votes – one for each estate. If this system was used in 1789, the First and Second Estates would always out-vote the Third, making every decision a victory for privilege.

The alternative method of doubling the Third Estate

There was, however, another voting model: the provincial assembly, which had been established in many provinces in 1778–87. To recognise the size of the Third Estate, its numbers were doubled. Voting was by head, not by order. The radical provincial assembly of Vizille now suggested that this system of voting should be used at the Estates-General. The reforming minister, Brienne, approved this suggestion, but he fell from power before he could go further. Nonetheless, this important alternative method of voting was better suited to eighteenth-century society.

Radical writers churned out pamphlets recommending the precedent of the provincial assembly of Dauphiné. Nobles still demanded voting by order. The judges of the *parlements*, too, pronounced in favour of the old system. They misjudged public opinion: their recent popularity as champions of the people evaporated immediately. The pamphleteers raged that voting by order was a deliberate



Source 6.5 This image is a later representation of the meeting of the Estates-General, painted in 1839 by the historical artist Auguste Couder.

plot by the privileged orders to keep the Third Estate under control. Anybody who spoke in favour of the old system was self-evidently part of the plot. Outside the privileged orders, public opinion agreed that voting should be by head and the Third Estate should have double the number of deputies.

Necker's fatal indecision, December 1788

The debate raged from September until December 1788, when Necker finally made half a decision. He doubled the Third Estate, but tried to please the privileged estates by refusing voting by head. He weakly suggested that the Estates-General might decide what to do when it met, and said he hoped it would agree to deliberate in common. He gave each estate the hope of a successful outcome, but also created a serious issue to be resolved.

Observers in December 1788 were surprised at how much the political atmosphere had changed. The original political and constitutional debate was still there: enlightened people still opposed despotism and absolute royal power, and still wanted royal power moderated by a parliamentary body. They still believed in taxation with representation. To these was now added a social challenge. The wealthy Third Estate deputies dominated the political discussion. The poorer members of the Third Estate discovered their physical power on the streets of Paris. The attack upon the King's absolute power revealed hidden resentments against the privileged position of the first two estates. Members of the Third Estate now realised that they were no longer struggling with one enemy, but with three.

This debate was suddenly transformed by an intellectual leader whose single revolutionary idea propelled discussion forward. We must examine the significance of such individuals and revolutionary publications, because in a developing revolutionary situation, a writer's publications usually sum up and express people's grievances. One pamphlet hit the revolutionary scene in January 1789 like a bombshell. The Abbé Sieyès' *What is the Third Estate?* lashed out at the privileged orders and questioned how genuine they had been in making concessions. It claimed that the Third Estate was so numerically and economically important that it was not just a large part of the nation, but it virtually *was* the nation.

Until then, the Third Estate was defined negatively: its members were 'commoners', identified because they were *not* noble or privileged. Sieyès reversed centuries of social perception: the Third Estate represented the substance of the nation and the *privileged orders* were defined negatively because they serve no useful purpose. He followed this idea to its logical conclusion: there was therefore no point in meeting as estates as all. The Third Estate should constitute itself independently as an assembly of the nation – in effect, a parliament.

What were the motives and ideas driving this revolutionary leader? Sieyès represented the capable, talented commoner who rose as far as possible by his merit, then hit the 'ceiling' created by his common birth. Ordained in 1773, he rose to become Chancellor of the Diocese of Chartres, but went no further. He was no democrat: he was frosty and ill at ease with his social inferiors and with women. Nor was he a great speaker: his voice was soft and his manner restrained. By 1788, he had concluded that the King could never overcome the selfish interests of the anti-reform nobles. He published two pamphlets, unsuccessfully, then prepared to emigrate to America. However, his third pamphlet guaranteed his revolutionary career.

Focus questions

- 1 Why was the question of the method of voting in the Estates-General of such crucial importance by 1789?
- 2 How did people want to change the system of voting so that it was better suited to the France of 1789?



ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 6.1: READING A PRIMARY RESOURCE

The revolutionary leader and a revolutionary idea

Abbé Sieyès, *What is the Third Estate?* January 1789:

The plan of this document is quite simple. We have three questions to ask ourselves:

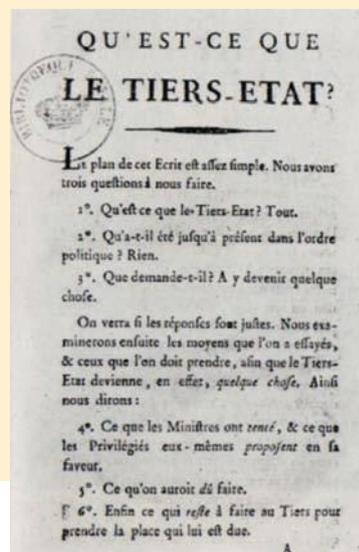
- 1 *What is the third Estate? Everything.*
- 2 *What has it been up until now in the political order? Nothing.*
- 3 *What does it demand? To be something.*

We shall see whether these responses are correct. [...] Who then would dare say that the Third Estate does not contain everything that is necessary to form a complete nation? The Third estate is [like] a strong, healthy man whose arms are still in chains. If we took away the privileged order, the nation would not be reduced, but made stronger. This, what is the Third [Estate]? Everything, but an everything that is limited and repressed. What would it be without the privileged order? Everything, but an everything [that would be] free and flourishing. Nothing can work without it, everything would go infinitely better without the other [orders]. The Third [estate] thus includes everything that constitutes the nation; and everything that is not of the Third [Estate] cannot consider itself as being of the nation. What is the Third estate? Everything.

- 1 The great revolutionary leader has the skill of reducing complicated debates to short, sharp, memorable phrases. Why is Sieyès' introduction so effective?
- 2 Why was it so radical, in 1789, to state that the Third Estate was a nation, instead of saying that it was part of a nation?
- 3 Why does Sieyès place such value on the Third Estate?
- 4 Why do you think Sieyès refers to the two privileged estates as one ('the privileged order')?
- 5 To what extent has Sieyès based his argument on the Enlightenment idea of social usefulness and merit?
- 6 According to Sieyès, which two important principles would support the triumph of the Third Estate?

6.3 SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL

Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès (1748–1836)



Source 6.6 Left: This engraving shows the young Abbé Sieyès. His anger at the old regime would produce one of the most powerful and influential pamphlets of the revolution (right).

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 6.2: READING A PRIMARY RESOURCE

A triumphant image of the Third Estate

The Abbé Sieyès' new definition of the nature and significance of the Third Estate became an essential part of revolutionary images produced during the remainder of 1789. His ideas are evident in images like *The Awakening of the Third Estate* (Source 6.7). The caption, written in the vigorous but slightly incorrect style of everyday speech, states: 'My goodness, it was about time that I woke up, for the oppression of my chains was giving me a terrible nightmare.' The background, showing the decapitation of de Launay, governor of the Bastille, and the demolition of the Bastille, proves that this image was drawn after July 1789.



Source 6.7 *The Awakening of the Third Estate*, c. July 1789 (anonymous). This image represents the Third Estate 'waking up' to its own importance and throwing off its 'chains' and the domination of the two privileged estates.

- 1 What did the artist mean by suggesting that the Third Estate had been 'asleep'?
- 2 If the Third Estate was now 'waking up' (that is, becoming properly aware of something), what had it finally understood about its own importance and strength?
- 3 How does the detail of the breaking of the chains create a reference to Sieyès' pamphlet?
- 4 How does this image provide a new version of earlier images showing the two privileged estates riding or standing on the Third Estate?

FLASHPOINT!**The Tennis Court Oath, June 1789**

When the Estates-General met on 5 May 1789, the meeting still reflected the hierarchies of the old regime. Necker strongly advised the King not to emphasise differences between the estates, but Louis foolishly ignored this. The deputies' different costumes certainly emphasised their differences: the nobles and the clergy looked splendid, while the members of the Third Estate wore plain black. The members of the privileged orders were allowed to enter through the main doorway, while the members of the Third Estate entered through a side door, like servants. Although the writers of the *cahiers* had demanded that they be treated without humiliating distinctions, the King chose to reinforce these honorific differences.

The voting system was still undecided. Necker conceded that the representation of the Third Estate be doubled, but this concession would be useless if the estates continued to meet and vote separately: the Third Estate would still only be one against two. The King and Royal Council still insisted that the estates meet separately and ordered them to write their own agendas.

The Third Estate insisted upon meeting in common. It invited the other estates to join it in common assembly, indicating that if they did not, the Third Estate would create a national assembly (10 June). It elected Bailly, the Mayor of Paris, as president, to signal that it would create the new body. Members of the clergy joined the Third Estate (13–16 June). The Third Estate then voted by a vast majority (491 to 89) to call itself the National Assembly (17 June). In formally declaring themselves a parliament, the deputies of the Third Estate and their supporters had brought the 'constitutional revolution' to fruition, and had thus precipitated the beginning of the French Revolution, accomplishing the radical transition from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy. The National Assembly stated that, if it were dismissed, all existing taxes would be illegal. It also decreed that once the constitution had been formed, the nation would take on the national debt, thus removing finance from the King.

On 20 June, the deputies of the new assembly were locked out of their chamber. This seemed to be a plot. They marched out of the Palace of Versailles to the one public building big enough to hold them all, a commercial tennis court. It was there that the deputies swore the Tennis Court Oath. Led by Bailly, who stood on a makeshift platform, they swore to remain until the nation was given a constitution. Meanwhile, the First Estate had met and the clergy decided, by a narrow majority, to join the new assembly. A few days later, two archbishops led some 150 clergy into the Assembly.

Although Sieyès suggested a national assembly in January, and although the deputies at Versailles had already formalised this plan some days before, this momentous act of defiance was the start of a 'constitutional' revolution. It stung the King into action. Necker encouraged the King to compromise: call a royal sitting of the estates and tell them that they would meet in common to discuss all things relating to the nation as a whole, and meet separately to discuss the things that affected them as an estate only. But by 20 June it was too late, and Louis, pushed by different groups of competing advisers at court, took the worst course possible. He ordered the estates to attend a royal session and then had the meeting hall surrounded by armed troops. It seemed another form of the old *lit de justice*. He declared the National Assembly's decrees void and commanded that the Estates-General continue to meet, debating partly in common and partly by estate. He said that there would be some reforms, but that the social structure of the regime would remain.

When news got out, together with rumours that the King intended to dismiss Necker, crowds of people walked to Versailles and surrounded the meeting hall. The deputies refused to leave the hall, confident now of their numbers: they now had 830 members inside and a large and protective crowd outside.

lit de justice a formal process by which the King ordered the *parlement* to convene, and then used royal authority to command them to register a decree

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 6.3: READING A PRIMARY RESOURCE

The new democracy: Who was included?

Source 6.8 *Right:* A modern photograph of the tennis court at Versailles as it appears today. *Below:* A representation of the Tennis Court Oath painted by Jacques-Louis David a year later. *Bottom:* Text and signatures of the Tennis Court Oath.



- 1 What is the event being shown in the centre image and what was its significance?
- 2 Although this scene seems chaotic, the artist has arranged it very carefully to suggest that all these deputies were strongly unified by the same goal. How has he shown this unity?
- 3 What sorts of people were represented in this first National Assembly?
- 4 Which social groups are not represented in this gathering of representatives?

**ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 6.4: READING A PRIMARY RESOURCE****The new democracy: Who was excluded?**

Abbé Sieyès, *What is the Third Estate?*, January 1789:

There cannot be, in any form, a freedom or a right without limits. In every country, the law has defined certain characteristics, without which cannot be a voter or be eligible [that is, to hold political office]. Thus, for example, the law must define an age below which one is unable to represent one's fellow citizens. Thus women everywhere are, for better or for worse, excluded from this sort of activity. It is absolute that a tramp, a beggar, cannot be given the people's political confidence. Would a servant and anybody under the control of a master, a foreigner without naturalisation be allowed to join the representatives of the nation? Political liberties therefore have limits, just like civic liberties.

- 1 Sieyès easily accepts that there will be some people who will not be given a vote in the new democracy. Is this principle still accepted in modern democracies?
- 2 According to Sieyès, which five categories of people cannot be given the vote?
- 3 What reasons or justifications does he give for these exclusions?

6.4 Paris in a ferment: The tense days of July 1789

By July 1789, Paris was in a ferment and any spark could have ignited the situation. The King prepared for military intervention, ordering four regiments to Paris (26 June), then four more (1 July), bringing the troops in Paris to an intimidating 20 000. Most were foreign **mercenaries**, who would be reliable in the case of civil disturbance. Mirabeau demanded that the troops be withdrawn, but the King refused, saying that they were necessary to 'keep order' (8 July).

mercenaries professional soldiers who are paid to fight

The second important element in this volatile situation was the radical bourgeoisie, who challenged royal authority. They understood that the popular agitation helped their cause, but feared that it could grow into crowd violence against people of property. They were treading a fine line between the political revolution they wanted and an all-out social revolution of the sort they had seen so frighteningly in the recent Réveillon riots.

The Parisian crowd was spoiling for a fight. When it heard that 10 soldiers who had refused to fire on a crowd were going to a provincial prison, a crowd of 4000 broke into the prison and freed them. The people were learning how powerful they were, as well as how incapable the authorities were of stopping them.

Louis dismissed Necker and replaced him with the authoritarian Breteuil (11 July). The news hit Paris on 12 July, a Sunday when nobody was at work. There were large gatherings at the public gardens of the Palais-Royal, where a young journalist, Camille Desmoulins, encouraged the people to arm themselves. Here was a direct link between the radical bourgeoisie and the people of Paris: this articulate and educated young bourgeois directly instructed working people to rebel. Workers did not necessarily need the direction of educated bourgeois radicals to know what to do. It had been a year since the storms had destroyed crops across France, and bread prices had reached their highest

level ever. It was at this point of supreme crisis – a matter of life and death for working people – that they supported Necker, who favoured control of grain production, as well as government subsidies for bread in times of crisis. When they learnt that Necker had been dismissed, they angrily armed themselves. By evening, armed crowds were roaming the streets, setting fire to the customs houses and tearing down the tax wall.

While Danton and Desmoulins, along with other radical journalists, were stirring up the people, other bourgeois leaders were becoming alarmed. The Committee of Electors, which had first met to elect the deputies of the Third Estate at Versailles, still met in the Paris Town Hall. This provisional government aimed to prevent the revolutionary situation from getting out of hand. It feared conspiracy by privileged Versailles nobles. It also distrusted the thousands of poor, unemployed people streaming into Paris from the countryside and equipping themselves with weapons stolen from the royal armouries. In response, these 'electors' formed the **National Guard**, made up of reliable bourgeois citizens to protect private property if this so-called 'rabble' got out of hand.

This tension between propertied bourgeois and the revolutionary crowd is the most basic division within the French Revolution. On the one hand, bourgeois radicals were stirring up 'the people' and giving them weapons, but at the same time responsible citizens were creating a **militia** of property owners in order to protect private property. Historians correctly call this a 'bourgeois' revolution, because it never intended to allow a massive **democratisation** of politics or a socialistic attack on property.

National Guard a force made up of reliable bourgeois citizens to protect private property

militia a fighting force made up of non-professional soldiers

democratisation the process of opening up politics to ordinary people who had previously not been able to participate in the political life of the nation



By 13 July, the crowd understood that it needed to prepare for battle and search for food and weapons. The people moved methodically through Paris. At the Abbey of Saint Lazare, they found enormous stocks of grain, and concluded that the grain crisis had been created artificially by the rich hoarding food.

Source 6.9 This painting by Jean-François Bellier shows the citizen de Naudeville proudly dressed in his new uniform of the National Guard.



The regime loses its command of military force

If it is true that a ruler's authority is based on their command of armed force, then the warning signs became clear in a strange incident just before the capture of the Bastille. According to historian Peter Vansittart, one aristocrat said grimly:

The defection of the Army was not one of the causes of the Revolution, it was the Revolution itself.

On 14 July, some 30 000 people attacked Les Invalides, a military hospital. The commander of the regiment, camping nearby, doubted whether his troops would obey the order to fire on the crowd. The crowd looted the hospital and seized a battery of 12 cannon and 40 000 muskets, and dragged them to the town hall.

Focus questions

- 1 How do we know that the bourgeois leaders of the revolution both needed the violent action of the crowd and also feared it?
- 2 Why did the episode at Les Invalides suggest that the old regime might be in serious trouble by 1789?



Source 6.10 This painting is a representation of the Parisian crowd's first attack on 14 July, when it raided the military hospital of Les Invalides.

Were the soldiers sympathetic to the Third Estate? Historian Timothy Blanning argues that the crisis in the army was caused by unpopular reforms. Many liberal nobles who participated in the revolution – Lafayette, Lauzun and the Lameth brothers – began their activism as critics of royal military policies. In 1787, they sabotaged reforms and by 1788–89 were themselves unwilling to order their troops to defend the King.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 6.5: READING A PRIMARY RESOURCE

Warning signs from the army

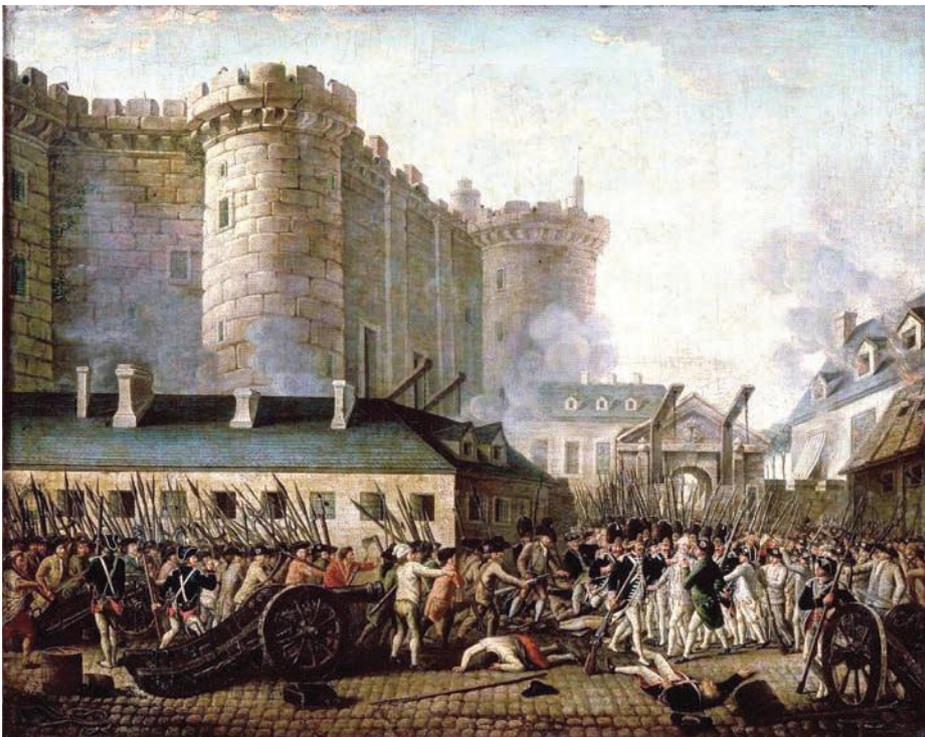
A report on the state of the King's army in France:

*The **tumult** caused by the Royal Sitzings [of the Estates-General] has produced a very great agitation amongst the people. The French Guards at Paris, amounting to 4000 men, have refused to obey the King's orders, and declared themselves to be SOLDIERS OF THE NATION. The DUC DE CHATELET, their colonel, went to Versailles and assured the King that he could not answer for his safety, if he continued to enforce the royal orders. (Adapted from Peter Vansittart, Voices of the French Revolution, 1989, p. 95)*

tumult noisy commotion

- 1 According to this English reporter, what events have done the most to stir up popular anger in Paris?
- 2 What did the troops mean when they took on the name of 'Soldiers of the Nation'? To whom were they giving their loyalty?
- 3 Why would the training and expertise of these French Guards prove to be crucial to the revolutionaries once fighting broke out?
- 4 How might these first incidents of disloyalty in the army have affected the King's decision about whether to try to use military force to restore his authority?

6.5 The capture of the Bastille



Source 6.11 This oil painting is a representation of the moment when the crowd captured the Bastille and arrested its commander, de Launay.



The next target was the royal prison of the Bastille, rumoured to hold a supply of 250 barrels of gunpowder and shot. A large crowd gathered in front of the prison. It was an emotive symbol because it was a royal fortress, as unshakeable as royal authority itself, and because it was an instrument of repression, with cannon positioned to fire upon the working-class suburb of Saint-Antoine.

The crowd attempted first to negotiate the surrender of gunpowder and the withdrawal of the cannon from the towers. When that failed, participants broke into the inner courtyard. While negotiations continued, the prison's guards fired, killing 98 people. The crowd was reinforced by about 60 French Guards, commanded by a Sergeant Hulin, defecting from the royal regiment. They showed the crowd how to move, load and position four cannon to destroy the prison doors. Knowing that defeat was inevitable, the governor of the Bastille, de Launay, surrendered.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 6.6: READING A PRIMARY RESOURCE

The psychological impact of a revolution

Studies of revolutions often concentrate on the great political and social changes that occur. It is easy to forget the more personal experience of revolution – the ‘psychological’ aspect of the experience. Revolutions usually create a strong feeling of liberation, often expressed in a holiday-like atmosphere. An English observer, Edward Rigby, noted this outpouring of joy:

A private letter from an English citizen, describing the events he had witnessed in Paris to his family at home:

1789: The Fall of the Bastille, 14 July 1789

*[We] saw a flag, some large keys, and a paper elevated on a pole above the crowd, on which was inscribed ‘The Bastille has been captured and the doors are open.’ The intelligence of this extraordinary event, thus communicated, produced an impression on the crowd really indescribable. A sudden burst of the most frantic joy instantaneously took place; every possible mode, in which the most rapturous feelings of joy could be expressed, were everywhere exhibited. Shouts and shrieks, leaping and embracing, laughter and tears, every sound and every gesture, including what even approached nervous affection, manifested ... such an instantaneous and unanimous emotion of extreme gladness as I should suppose was never before experienced by human beings. (Quoted in Leonard Cowie, *The French Revolution*, 1988, p. 55)*

- 1 What might have been the origin of the ‘flag’ and the ‘large keys’ being carried triumphantly through the streets?
- 2 Although Rigby notes the outpouring of joy among ordinary people, he does not explain its actual reason. What might the capture of the Bastille have meant to the working people of the suburb?
- 3 In this surge of public emotion, what surprises Rigby most of all?

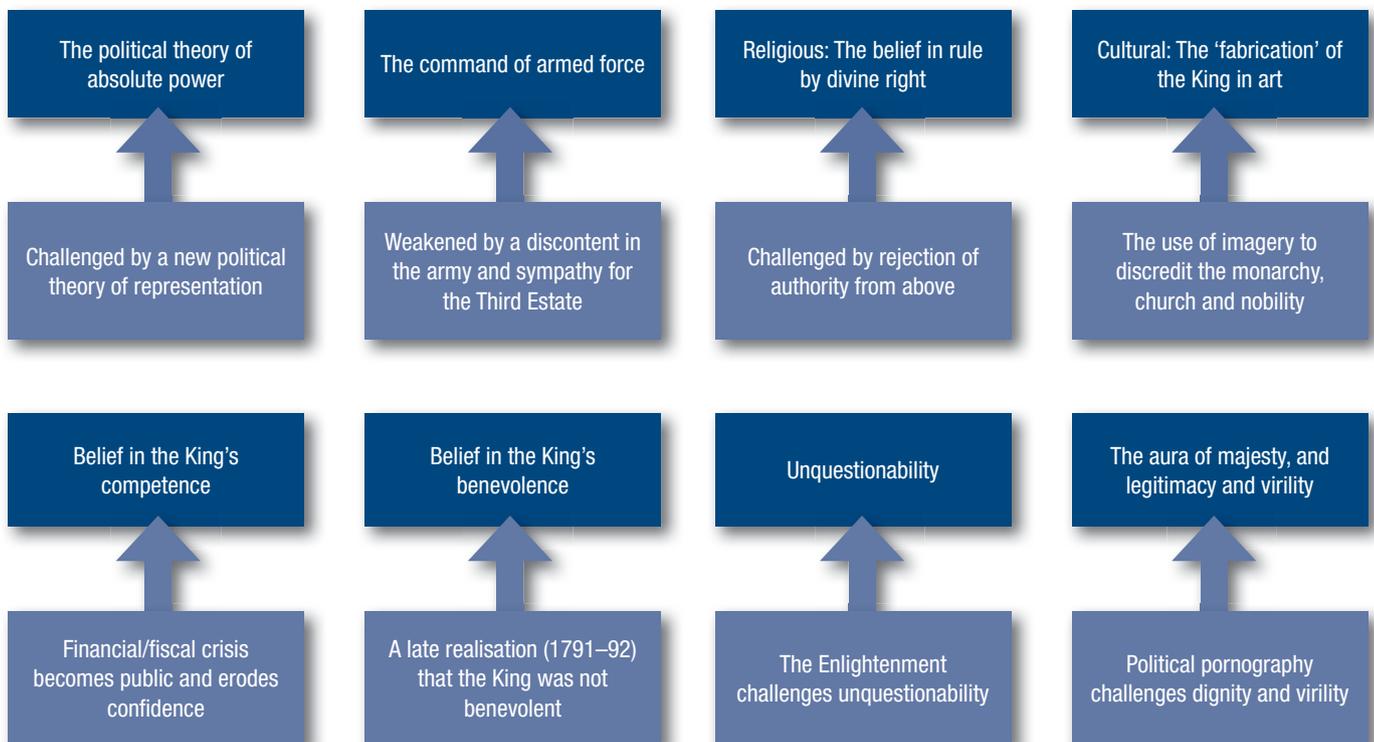
A MATTER OF FACT

The ‘Victors of the Bastille’ hoped to free hundreds of victims of royal despotism from the dungeons of the Bastille. In reality, they found only seven prisoners, one of whom was quite mad (he believed he was God). Another was a suspected assassin and four were forgers. The royal government had, just before the Revolution, discussed the idea of demolishing the almost useless prison and replacing it with a public square!

The story so far

By the time the Bastille fell, the French monarchy had suffered not one but a series of crises, which had interacted to create its downfall. Recalling that royal authority was made up of several 'strands of power', we can see that each one of these elements had been weakened by some aspect of this crisis.

THE STRANDS OF POWER: REVIEWING THE CRISIS OF ROYAL POWER TO 1789





CHAPTER REVIEW

DEVELOPING CLEAR DEFINITIONS

Write your own definition of each of the following key terms:

- voting by order
- voting by head
- the doubling of the Third
- the Tennis Court Oath

PRACTISING PARAGRAPH ANSWERS

- 1 What was the content of the Tennis Court Oath, and what was its significance to the development of the revolution?
- 2 What was now meant by the terms 'constitution' and 'national assembly'?
- 3 For what reason could one single estate claim that it could represent the whole nation?
- 4 Using three or four main points, explain the strategic and symbolic importance of the capture of the Bastille to the development of the revolution.
- 5 Why should the events of May and June 1789 be known as a 'bourgeois' revolution? How did the Third Estate redefine itself during this time?

ANALYSING HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Historian Gwynne Lewis offers this interpretation of the events of 1789:

The fourteenth of July supplied the [death blow] to absolute monarchy in France. Its significance, however, goes far deeper than this. It provoked, or rather it strengthened, a whole series of mini-revolutions throughout France, as a result of which effective power, administrative and police, passed, in a very messy way, from the supporters of the [old regime] to the 'patriots of 1789' ... However, the corridors of revolutionary power were frequented ... by the propertied and educated classes, amongst whom one could find a good sprinkling of liberal nobles and clerics. Central to an understanding of the French Revolution ... is the fact that those deputies ... were as frightened of the millions of poor, hungry and unemployed [people] as they were of the king. Indeed, if the defence of property and 'law and order' were to be the central issues, as they rapidly became, they needed Louis XVI far more than they needed the propertyless masses. (The French Revolution: Rethinking the Debate, 1993, p. 26)

- 1 According to Lewis, what was the first and most obvious effect of the capture of the Bastille?
- 2 What sorts of people came to power in 1789?
- 3 The revolutionaries of 1789 certainly had good reason to fear counter-revolution from the King and the nobles. According to Lewis, who else did they have reason to fear?

- 4 The slogans stated that the revolution was about liberty and equality. According to Lewis, what were two other major themes of the revolution?
- 5 From what you know of the events of 1789, is it correct to say that the French Revolution included a struggle between a 'bourgeois' revolution and a popular revolution?
- 6 Although bourgeois deputies might have feared the popular revolutionary movement, they also knew that they could not survive without its support. Why was this so?

PRACTICE ESSAY QUESTION

'In the dramatic events of 1789, the most important advances were made in the way people thought about the political system, rather than in the revolutionary action of the crowd, which merely confirmed political developments.' To what extent do you agree with this evaluation of 1789?

READING MORE DEEPLY

Easy

Christopher Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, Penguin, London, 1982, Chapter 1, 'The Day of the Tennis Court Oath' and Chapter 2, 'The Day of the Vainqueurs de la Bastille'.

Moderate

Peter McPhee, *The French Revolution, 1789–1799*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, Chapter 3, 'The Revolution of 1789'.

Challenging

Colin Jones, 'Bourgeois Revolution Revivified: 1789 and Social Change', in Gary Kates (ed.), *The French Revolution: Recent Debates and New Controversies*, Routledge, London, 1998.

Jones' chapter is for university use, but it states the important recent trend in historical thinking, which is to acknowledge the role of the revolutionary bourgeoisie without relying on a Marxist interpretation.



The revolutionary events of 1789

“

The October Days represented the first and hardly the last occasion when direct Parisian intervention decisively affected national politics ... Most significant, Parisians had begun to learn the lessons of insurrectionary politics.

– D.M.G. SUTHERLAND, 1985

”

OVERVIEW

the Great Fear a serious rural rebellion that forced the Assembly to abolish some of the feudal system

feudalism medieval political and economic system

August Decrees abolished some of the feudal system and were later modified to ensure that peasants could buy their way out of their feudal payments

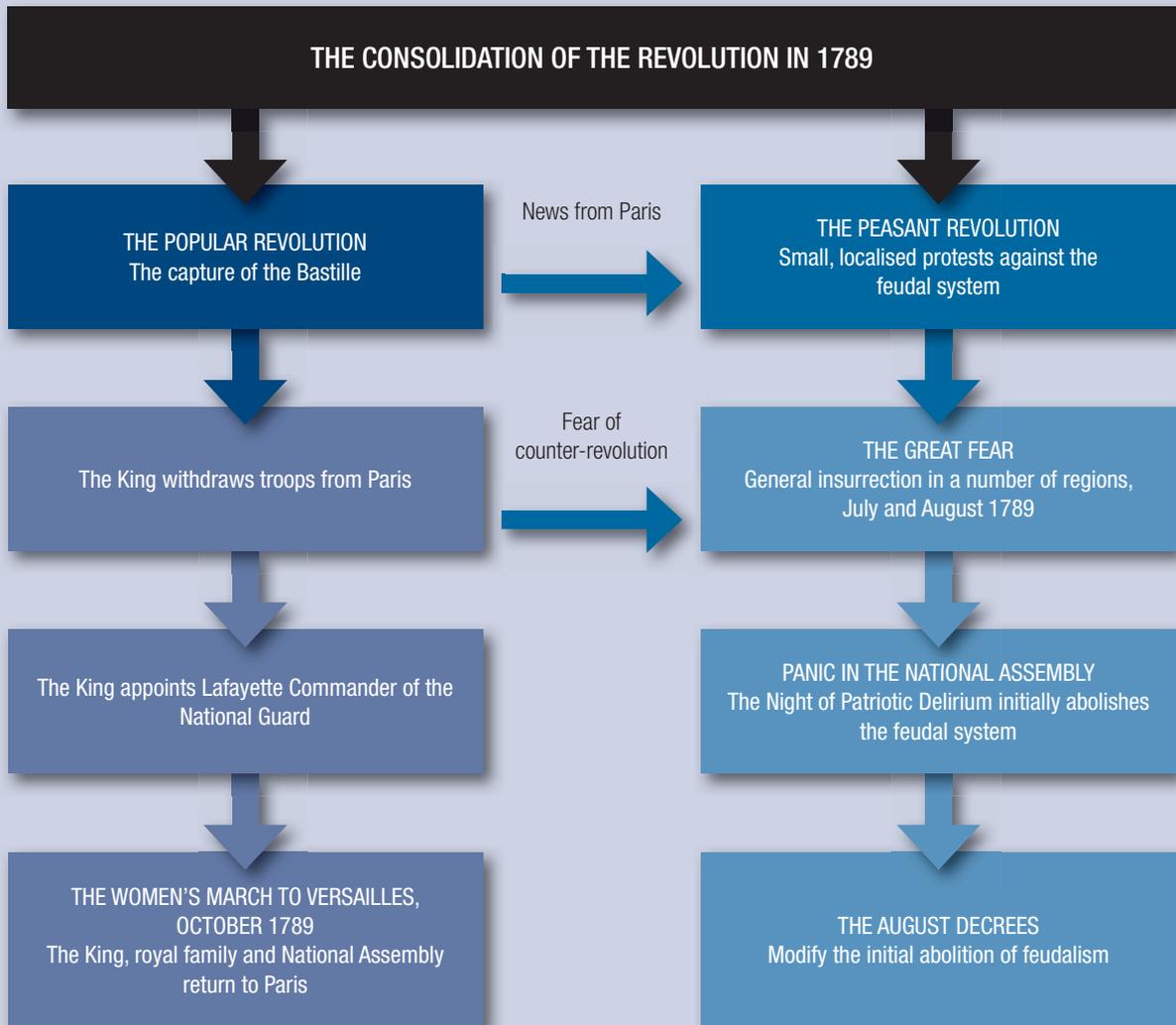
The creation of a national assembly demonstrated that the deputies could create a parliament, while the capture of the Bastille showed that the Parisian crowd could defend that assembly against royal retaliation. This did not mean that the revolution was necessarily safe. Patriots doubted that the King would remain loyal to the revolution. In October 1789, a revolutionary crowd marched to Versailles to insist that the King and the royal family come back to Paris, under the revolutionaries' direct control.

That year also showed that a revolution reflects the aims and ideals of the people guiding it. Most deputies were urban middle class, having little idea of peasant grievances. In July and August 1789, peasants across France expressed their grievances in the rural rebellion of the **Great Fear**. This serious rebellion forced the Assembly to abolish some of the **feudal** system in the **August Decrees**; later, this declaration was modified to ensure that peasants could buy their way out of their feudal payments.

KEY ISSUES

- How was the revolution consolidated in 1789?
- What caused the peasant revolt in July and August 1789?
- What was the significance of the Women's March to Versailles in October 1789?

FLOW OF CHAPTER





7.1 How was the revolution consolidated in 1789?

The significance of the capture of the Bastille was both symbolic and strategic: the crowd had never before captured a royal military fortress. The popular movement was crucial to the success of the revolution because it forced the King to remove the troops surrounding Paris (16 July) and to admit that he had lost the most basic form of authority, the command of armed force. The deputies acclaimed his goodness and wisdom as the father of the people. The King's brother, the Comte d'Artois, fled France, indicating that the revolution had succeeded. Louis announced the recall of Necker, confirmed the withdrawal of troops, agreed to the nomination of Bailly as the Mayor of Paris and confirmed Lafayette as the head of the National Guard (17 July 1789).

There were now 15 000 armed and triumphant revolutionaries in Paris. The Parisian crowd felt its collective power and savoured the new experience of being able to punish the powerful. The popular movement was crucial to this success: it was powerful, and could not be controlled or repressed. However, responsible middle-class people feared uncontrolled violence, and viewed the crowd with suspicion.

7.2 Events: The peasant revolt, July and August 1789

revolt of the nobles

Assembly of Notables

revolt of the bourgeoisie

Tennis Court Oath

revolt of the popular movement

capture of the Bastille

municipal revolution

after the Parisian revolution (July 1789), revolutionaries in the provincial cities overthrew royal officials and created elected governments

jacquerie

the peasants' long tradition of riot, which was usually general and indiscriminate, but short-lived

According to historian Georges Lefebvre, the revolution had by now developed through a number of stages, from a **revolt of the nobles** (Assembly of Notables) to a **revolt of the bourgeoisie** (Tennis Court Oath) then to a **revolt of the popular movement** (capture of the Bastille). The fourth stage was the peasant revolution in the countryside.

News of the Parisian revolution spread to the provincial cities, where revolutionaries also took over government (the **municipal revolution**), and to the countryside. The peasant rebellion sprang from the long-term anger about the weight of feudal dues. The disastrous harvest of 1788 also affected peasant families even more cruelly than it did urban working families.

Late in 1788, peasants began small, local protests about bread prices. In early 1789, they protested against hunting rights, feudal dues, tithes and royal taxes. Peasants had a long tradition of riot (**jacquerie**), which was usually general and indiscriminate, but short-lived. Whole villages, led by their local officials, went systematically to each castle and broke into the strong-rooms containing feudal contracts, which they burnt. The raids were not violent unless the landowner resisted: across France, only four landowners were killed. It was clear that some peasants had learnt to think and express themselves politically.

Focus questions

- 1 Name two ways in which the Paris revolution spread out into regional France.
- 2 Why would a revolt of the mass of the peasantry represent a serious attack on the established order?



Source 7.1 This engraving depicts a peasant attack on a lord's castle. The peasant bands targeted the strong-rooms where feudal documents were kept.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 7.1: READING A PRIMARY RESOURCE

Peasants act on their grievances

*I learnt that approximately 300 brigands [robbers] from all the lands ... of Mme the Marquise de Longaunay have stolen the titles and rents and allowances of [the estate], and demolished her dovecotes: they then gave her a receipt for the theft signed 'The Nation'. The same men, four days ago, entered a castle of the Prince of Monaco ... to steal the titles from there also; not finding them, they unleashed their fury on the furniture in the castle and reduced it to dust. (Quoted in Philip Dwyer and Peter McPhee (eds), *The French Revolution and Napoleon*, 2002, p. 23)*

- 1 What exactly were the documents these 'robbers' were trying to destroy?
- 2 Why would the peasants destroy something harmless like a dovecote (a cage for doves)?
- 3 Is there any evidence in this document that these peasants have learnt some of the new political language of the revolution?

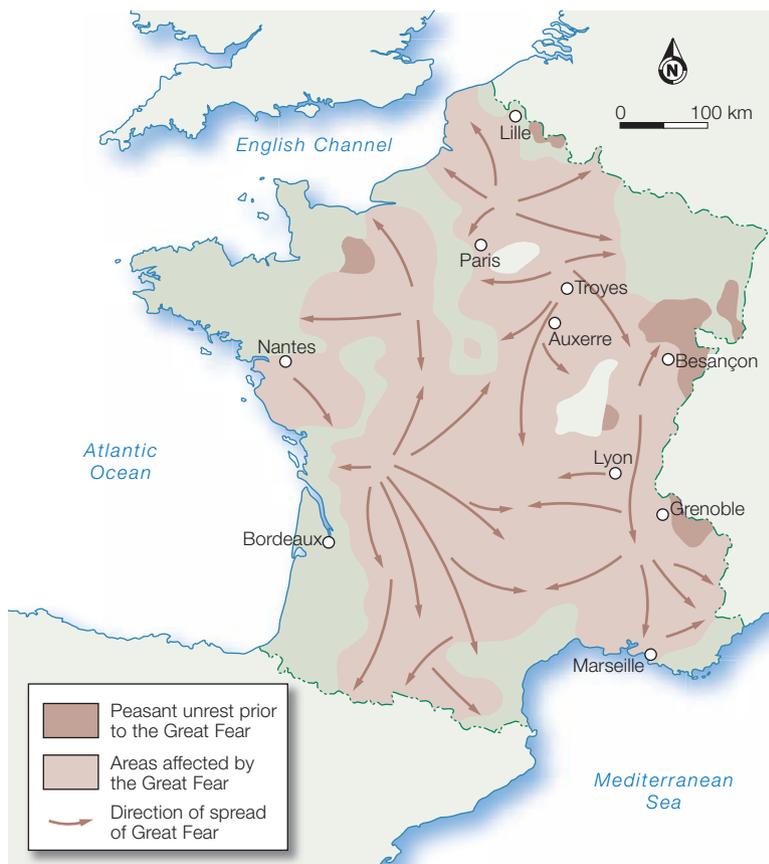
By July 1789, peasants were hearing Parisian rumours that the Versailles nobles would crush the revolution and punish the rebellious villages. In this panicky world of verbal rumour, the story spread that noble landowners had hired criminals to burn the peasants' crops to starve and punish them. In reality, the landowners – noble and bourgeois – fearfully watched the peasant revolt. Gradually,



rumours spread of suspicious strangers on local roads; fires from distant castles were misinterpreted as crops burning. The new wave of rioting (20 July–6 August) was limited to six regions, leaving whole provinces unaffected. Nonetheless, reports flooded into Paris, giving the impression of a massive **insurrection** threatening the collapse of order and authority and a possible seizure of all property by peasants.

insurrection rebellion against the government

How would the Assembly react to this attack on property? The bourgeois deputies were themselves large landowners, and so defended property rights. A small group of radicals did, however, question the feudal system itself.

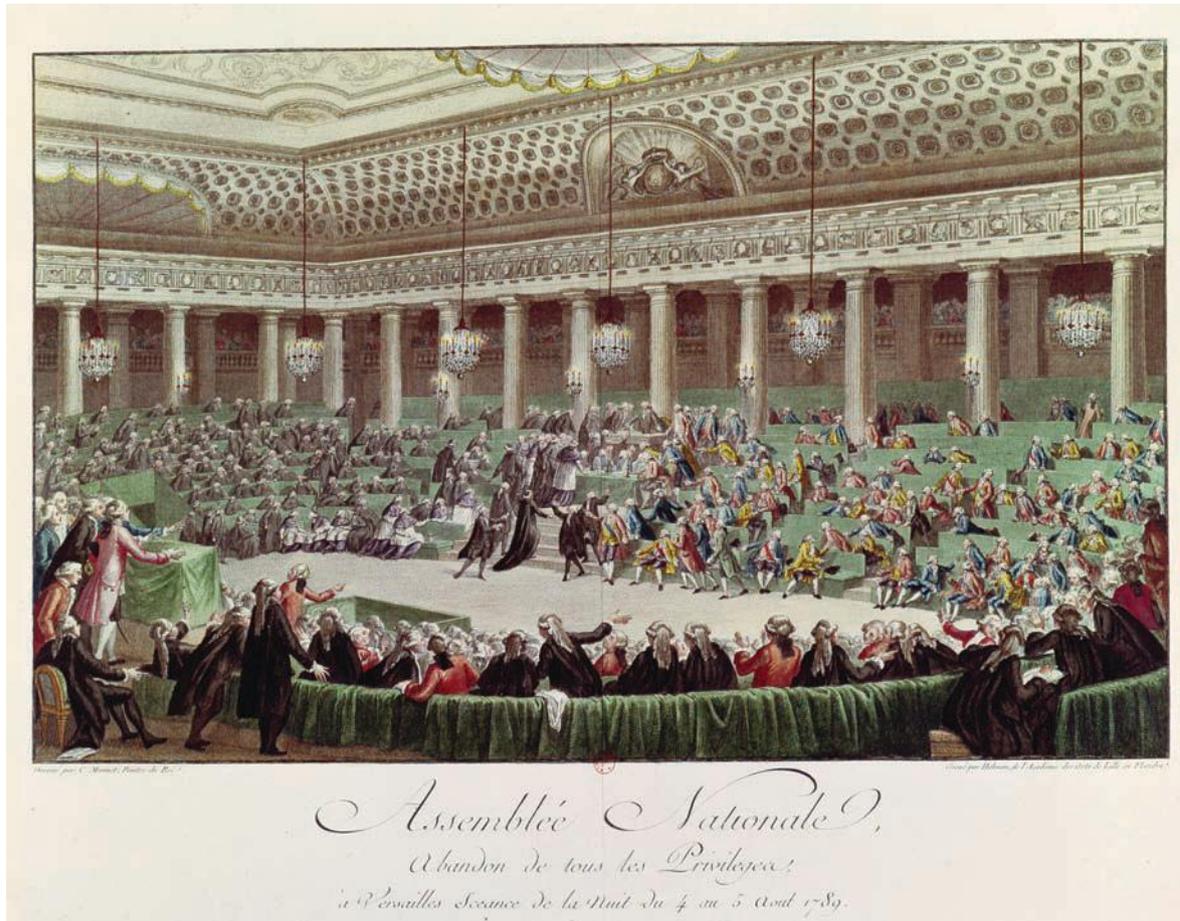


Source 7.2 This map shows how rumours, like most other information, travelled by verbal transmission in country areas. Despite the physical difficulties of communication, these rumours spread very quickly.

7.3 Events: The Night of Patriotic Delirium, 4 August 1789

Breton Club a group of deputies from the region of Brittany, who recommended, then demanded, that the National Assembly abolish feudal dues on peasants

The incoming reports terrified the Assembly. On 4 August 1789, it debated the peasant rebellion. Because communications were slow, reports from distant communities were still arriving when the actual disturbances had ended. The Assembly had previously debated the abolition of privilege, but the ‘patriots’ lost. Now about 100 deputies, possibly the **Breton Club**, appealed to the conscience of the privileged orders. They asked that the Assembly recognise peasant grievances and remove crushing feudal dues.



Source 7.3 This engraving is an imagined representation of the events of 4–5 August 1789 in the National Assembly.

The debate that followed was chaotic and emotional. Some nobles surrendered their own privileges. In the delirious atmosphere, they composed the stirring introduction to the August Decrees, abolishing feudalism completely. The retrospective minutes of that chaotic meeting stated that they had abolished privilege, established equal responsibility for taxation, abolished venal offices and provided for the abolition or the negotiated end of feudal dues.

Documents: The August Decrees

Between 5 and 11 August, the deputies reconsidered their proclamation. Financially, they could not abolish feudalism completely, nor could they simply cancel traditional dues. They explained that they meant they were abolishing feudal dues on people only. Feudal dues on land were property, which was sacred. Peasants had to buy out of their dues by paying a lump sum amount in compensation to the landowner – between 20 and 25 times the amount of the usual annual payment. Most peasants could never do this. They saw the trick, and simply stopped paying dues.

Focus questions

- 1 Why did the National Assembly make the panicky decision to 'abolish the feudal system'?
- 2 Why and how did the deputies modify their hasty decision?

7.4 Events: The Women's March to Versailles, October 1789

The Women's March to Versailles was a crucial strategic moment in the French Revolution. While safe at Versailles, Louis could still order troops to close the Assembly. The Assembly could not force the King to come to Paris without using popular action. Until now, women had been mainly concerned with subsistence (having enough food to keep a family alive), but now this expanded to politics. To secure the Revolution, bread prices must fall, and this could only occur if Louis were forced back to Paris.

By September 1789, the price of bread was rising again, causing popular disturbances in Paris and throughout France. The newly formed National Guard, created to protect property, prevented angry crowds from attacking shops, especially bakeries. The King recovered some of his defiance. He ordered the loyal Flanders Regiment to Versailles and, once protected by reliable troops, challenged the principles of the revolution. He rejected the August Decrees (18 September) and questioned the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (4 October). There were rumours of a feast for his bodyguard and the Flanders Regiment, where he refused to toast the revolution. His officers threw the revolutionary **cockade** (a bundle of ribbons in the revolutionary colours of blue, white and red) on the floor and trampled it. People concluded that the aristocrats were planning retaliation.

cockade a bundle of ribbons in the revolutionary colours of blue, white and red, to be worn on a coat or hat to show that you were a 'patriot'



Source 7.4 This engraving is a representation of the Women's March to Versailles on 5–6 October 1789. The artist correctly shows that some members of the crowd were men dressed as women.



On 5 October, working women gathered in the markets, then invaded the town hall. Deciding that the only way to stop an aristocratic attack was to bring the King back to Paris, they harnessed cannon and marched to Versailles.

On arrival, the 7000 marchers invaded the National Assembly. Would their demands be political issues or material concerns? They demanded both that the price of bread be reduced and that the officers who had trampled the cockade be punished. The deputies were powerless. The demonstrators were militant working women and the threats they shouted at the deputies were full of obscenities, sexual taunts and death threats. Later, the women invaded the King's chambers and the royal guards opened fire; in the chaos, the King and Queen were nearly killed. Lafayette arrived with his National Guard, but barely controlled this popular revolution: it was more by chance that the King was saved, because he ducked down a secret passageway seconds before the angry demonstrators burst into his room.

Source 7.5 This is a representation of the violence and chaos in the palace of Versailles when the market women invaded the building.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 7.2: READING A PRIMARY RESOURCE

The violent action of women at Versailles

Mrs Henry Swinburne wrote from Versailles to her husband in England:

We have had dreadful doings. On the 6th, at night, a set of wretches forced themselves into the chateau, screaming, 'The head of the Queen! Down with the Queen! Louis will no longer be King! We want the Duke of Orleans – that one will give us bread!' Monsieur Durepaire, one of the Royal Bodyguard, defended the Queen's door and was killed. Others took his place and were thrown down. 'Save the Queen' was the cry of the Royal Bodyguard. Madame Thibaud awoke the Queen, who threw a coverlet of the bed over her and ran into the King's room, and shortly after she was gone, her door was burst open. The King ran and fetched his son, and all together they awaited the event. They owed their rescue to M de La Fayette and the French Guard. He insisted on the King taking up residence in Paris, without which he could not promise him safety. (Adapted from the original document in Leonard Cowie, The French Revolution, 1987, p. 62)

- 1 What evidence is there that the lives of the royal family were in danger?
- 2 What seemed to be the main grievance driving these women to this action?
- 3 What evidence is there that, once again, Lafayette was not certain that he could control this situation – even with his troops present?



The following day, the crowd accompanied the royal family back to Paris. The market women triumphantly carried sacks of flour from the royal cellars, chanting that they had brought back the royal family, or ‘the baker, the baker’s wife and the baker’s boy’. Strategically, they had consolidated the revolution. The Assembly also moved to Paris, so both the King and the ‘revolutionary government’ were now located in the capital. Both were now controlled by a third force: the Parisian crowd.

The story so far

By late 1789, the revolution had clearly won, and both the King and the National Assembly were forced to return to Paris. It was also clear that the popular movement could, and would, take action on its own, both in the cities and in the countryside. The rural popular movement proved that it could cause widespread rebellion and threaten the security of all landowning people, bourgeois and noble alike. Despite these violent episodes, the revolution was relatively stable and was ready to define its main principles and then reorganise France based on those ideals.

CHAPTER REVIEW

DEVELOPING CLEAR DEFINITIONS

Write your own definition of each of the following key terms:

- the Great Fear
- the August Decrees
- the March to Versailles

PRACTISING PARAGRAPH ANSWERS

- 1 Using four or five main points, explain how the revolution was consolidated (firmly established) between July and October 1789.
- 2 Using three or four main points, explain why the revolutionary crowd, although dangerous, was absolutely necessary to the final victory of the revolution in 1789.

ANALYSING HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

In 1989, Marxist historian George Rudé wrote:

By this second intervention of the people of Paris the gains of the July revolution – both ‘popular’ and ‘bourgeois’ – were consolidated. [The constitutional monarchists] had only survived because, under the pressing compulsion of events, they had been willing to make common cause with the people who, though having aims and grievances of their own, shared their fears and suspicions of the aristocracy. In this sense, the revolution of 1789 resulted from an alliance that would leave its mark on the whole course of the revolution in France. Yet the alliance of the bourgeoisie and the people was by no means unchequered ... [Once] the insurrection had served its purpose, the Assembly was persuaded to take measures to curb the revolutionary energies of the Parisian [working people] by imposing martial law, the death penalty for rebellion and a censorship on the radical press ... For, having won its victory over ‘privilege’ and ‘despotism’, the bourgeoisie wanted peace and quiet in order to proceed with its task of giving France a constitution. (The French Revolution: Rethinking the Debate, 1993, p. 26)

- 1 Why, according to Rudé, did the crowd action of October 1789 ‘consolidate’ (establish) the July revolution?
- 2 Why would the bourgeois deputies of the Assembly have felt that they could not do without the support of the popular movement?
- 3 How do we know that, although the deputies were willing to use the popular movement, they also feared it as a force?

105

PRACTICE ESSAY QUESTION

‘The capture of the Bastille (14 July 1789) was only the first step in the revolution. The consolidation of the revolution was really achieved in the remaining months of 1789.’ Discuss.

READING MORE DEEPLY

Easy

Peter Jones, ‘The Peasants’ Revolt’, *History Today*, May 1989, pp. 15–19.

Moderate

Christopher Hibbert, *The Days of the French Revolution*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1982, Chapter 3, ‘The Day of the Market Women’.

Challenging

William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989, pp. 112–23.

Doyle provides a detailed academic analysis of the causes and effects of this revolutionary episode.





Consequences of revolution: Significant ideas, events, individuals and popular movements in France, October 1789 to 1795

“

The remaking of France was based on a belief in the common identity of French citizens whatever their social or geographic origin. This was a fundamental change in the relationship between the state, its provinces and the citizenry. In every aspect of public life – administration, the judiciary, the armed forces, the Church, policing – traditions of corporate rights, appointment and hierarchy gave way to civil equality, accountability, and elections within national structures.

– PETER MCPHEE, 2002

”

OVERVIEW

The common image of the French Revolution as a time of violent crowd action, Terror and the use of the guillotine is so powerful that we often forget how relatively peaceful the revolution was for its first few years, and how very constructive it proved to be. The first French Revolution was essentially a three-part project. Politically, the aim was to create a constitutional monarchy, with the King in charge of government but responsible to a parliament. Civically, the aim was to define the basic rights to be enjoyed by all people, including equality before the law, for taxation and in the workplace. Administratively, the aim was to reorganise all the government, church and legal structures of France, clearing away the jumbled, inefficient structures of the old regime. Between 1789 and 1791, all of these aims were successfully achieved, creating not only a new society, but also the very foundations of the modern France we know today.

There were further revolutionary events in 1789, notably the peasant rebellion in the countryside (July and August) and the dramatic march of the crowd to Versailles to force the royal family to return to Paris (October). By 1790, reform was well underway, and many problems mentioned in the Books of Grievances were remedied by bold changes that nobody had suggested previously.

One reform, however, caused unexpected resistance. The reform of the Catholic Church, though much needed and generally well implemented, caused resistance from a majority of the clergy,

creating the first major controversy of the revolution. The bitter struggle between government and priests touched off a fateful train of events, in which the King attempted to flee France but was caught, brought back and subjected to the anger of the popular movement. While the National Assembly worked hard to save the constitutional monarchy – and hence the monarch – the popular movement protested, until fired upon in the Champ de Mars Massacre. By late 1791, it was clear that the revolution was not over and, indeed, that it would go on to cause far more serious conflict.

The second – radical – stage of the French Revolution began on 10 August 1792, when the revolutionary crowd invaded the King's palace. The most important aspect of this second period was France's involvement in a war with a number of powerful European countries, such as Austria, Prussia and later Britain and Spain.

This 'war emergency' had two important effects. First, it radicalised the revolutionary movement, causing the *sans-culottes* (militant working-class members forming the crowd) to insist on strong measures to win the war and assure food supplies. Second, it pushed the new assembly, the National Convention, into introducing 'revolutionary government', or special committees with strong powers to deal with the emergency situation.

The Terror was the legal use of imprisonment and execution, approved by the government itself, to deal with enemies of the revolution. It claimed 30 000 victims. The use of Terror is disturbing because it destroyed many of the legal principles of personal liberty stated in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. It also expanded from being a measure against the enemies of the revolution to being an attack on nearly all other political groups other than the ruling Montagnards, made up of members of the Jacobin and Cordeliers clubs. This would, finally, create a movement to end the Terror, which would result in the events of Thermidor and the overthrow of the Jacobins. By 1795, France would settle for a third constitution, creating a more moderate republic known as the Directory.

The chapters in Part Two are designed to help students understand the consequences of the revolutionary events of 1789.

SUMMARY OF KEY EVENTS, OCTOBER 1789 TO NOVEMBER 1795

1789	<p>5–6 October: The October Days – King, royal family then Assembly move to Paris.</p> <p>27 November: Nationalisation of church property.</p>
1790	<p>13 February: Abolition of religious orders apart from teaching and medical services.</p> <p>26 February: Rationalisation of France into 83 administrative departments.</p> <p>21 May: Creation of the municipal 'sections' of Paris.</p> <p>19 June: Abolition of nobility and all other honorific distinctions.</p> <p>12 July: The Civil Constitution of the Clergy is decreed.</p> <p>14 July: Lafayette's Festival of Federation.</p> <p>August: Reorganisation of judiciary; abolition of <i>parlements</i>.</p> <p>4–6 September: Assembly assumes control of national treasury and abolishes law courts of old regime.</p> <p>27 November: Assembly demands that priests swear oath of loyalty to Civil Constitution of Clergy.</p>
1791	<p>January: Checking of oath of the clergy.</p> <p>March: Abolition of guilds and corporations.</p> <p>13 April: The Pope condemns the Civil Constitution of the Clergy.</p>

1791

- 18 April:** The crowd violently prevents the royal family from leaving Paris for Saint-Cloud.
- 14 June:** The Le Chapelier law restricts working-class organisation, including strikes.
- 20–21 June:** The flight of the royal family to Varennes.
- 25 June:** Royal family returns to Paris, but the Assembly only suspends the King.
- 16 July:** The King is reinstated.
- 17 July:** Petition, demonstration and massacre on the Champ de Mars.
- 25 July:** European nations form a coalition against revolutionary France.
- 14 August:** Rebellion of slaves in the French colony of Saint-Domingue.
- 27 August:** Declaration of Pillnitz.
- 13–14 September:** The King approves the Constitution (1791) and swears loyalty to the nation. The first parliament, the National Constituent Assembly, is dissolved.
- 1 October:** Meeting of the second parliament, the Legislative Assembly.
- 20 October:** Brissot first suggests revolutionary war.
- November:** The Assembly orders emigrated nobles to return or lose their property.
- 25 November:** The Assembly decrees Committees of Surveillance.
- 29 November:** The Assembly renews order to refractory priests to take the oath of loyalty.

1792

- 25 January:** France makes an ultimatum to Austria.
- 20 April:** France declares war on Austria.
- 25 April:** First use of the guillotine.
- 27 May:** The Assembly passes new law against refractory priests.
- 13 June:** The Brissotin ministry is dismissed. Prussia declares war on France.
- 20 June:** The first revolutionary upheaval: the *sans-culottes* invade the Tuileries Palace and humiliate the King.
- 11 July:** Decree of the Country in Danger.
- 25 July:** The Brunswick Manifesto.
- 30 July:** Federal troops (volunteers from Marseille) arrive in Paris.
- 3 August:** The radical Paris 'sections' demand that the King be dethroned.
- 10 August:** The second revolutionary upheaval – the crowd invades the Tuileries and overthrows the monarchy.
- 17 August:** The Extraordinary Tribunal is established.
- 19 August:** Lafayette defects. Prussian troops cross the border into France.
- 2 September:** Prussians capture Verdun, the last fortress before Paris.
- 2–6 September:** Panic in Paris – 'September Massacres' of prisoners.
- 21 September:** The third parliament, the National Convention, meets.
- 22 September:** The Republic is proclaimed.
- 3–26 December:** The King is brought to trial, interrogated and makes his defence.

1793

- 7–18 January:** Condemnation of the King, passing of death sentence and vote against reprieve.
- 20 January:** First political assassination – Le Pelletier.
- 21 January:** Execution of the King.
- 1 February:** France declares war on Great Britain and the Dutch Republic.
- 24 February:** Assembly decrees conscription of an army of 300 000 men.

1793

- 25–27 February:** Food shortages and food riots in Paris.
- 10 March:** Creation of the Revolutionary Tribunal.
- 11 March:** Rebellion in the Vendée region begins.
- 21 March:** Creation of revolutionary committees.
- 6 April:** Creation of Committee of Public Safety.
- 13–24 April:** Unsuccessful attempt by Girondins to try Marat.
- 29 April:** Federalist rebellion in Marseille.
- 4 May:** Convention decrees the Maximum on food prices.
- 20 May:** Appointment of the Commission of Twelve.
- 31 May:** Popular uprising in Paris against the Girondins.
- 2 June:** Popular pressure leads to the purge of Girondins from the Convention.
- 24 June:** The ‘Jacobin’ Constitution of 1793 is accepted by the Convention.
- 10 July:** Danton quits the Committee of Public Safety.
- 13 July:** Second political assassination – the death of Marat.
- 26 July:** The Economic Terror – the death penalty is introduced for hoarding.
- 27 July:** Robespierre accepts membership of the Committee of Public Safety.
- 23 August:** Decree of mass levy of troops.
- 5 September:** The Convention bows to popular pressure to introduce government by Terror.
- 8 September:** The Battle of Hondschoote – a turning point for the French war effort.
- 17 September:** The Law of Suspects facilitates arrest on almost any pretext.
- 29 September:** The Maximum is made general.
- 10 October:** Declaration of ‘revolutionary government’ (government by emergency measures).
- 24–31 October:** Trial of the Girondins, culminating in their execution.
- 4 December:** Formal decree of revolutionary government.

1794

- 4 February:** Successful rebellion in Saint-Domingue forces Convention to abolish slavery.
- 13–24 March:** Arrest and execution of the left-wing radical Hébertists.
- 27 March:** Disbanding of revolutionary armies.
- 5 April:** Trial and execution of Danton and Desmoulins.
- 8 June:** Festival of the Supreme Being.
- 5 July:** Introduction of wage controls in Paris.
- 27–28 July:** Fall of Robespierre and close associates (9–10 Thermidor, in the new dating).

1795

- March:** Trial of Jacobins such as Billaud-Varenne.
- 1–2 April:** The rebellion of Germinal.
- 20–23 May:** The rebellion of Prairial.
- 22 August:** Constitution of 1795.
- 5 October:** Rebellion of Vendémiaire.
- 26 October:** The Convention closes down.
- 2 November:** The Directory is established.



The role of significant individuals, 1789–1791

“ *In times of anarchy one may seem a despot in order to be a saviour.*

– THE COMTE DE MIRABEAU

”

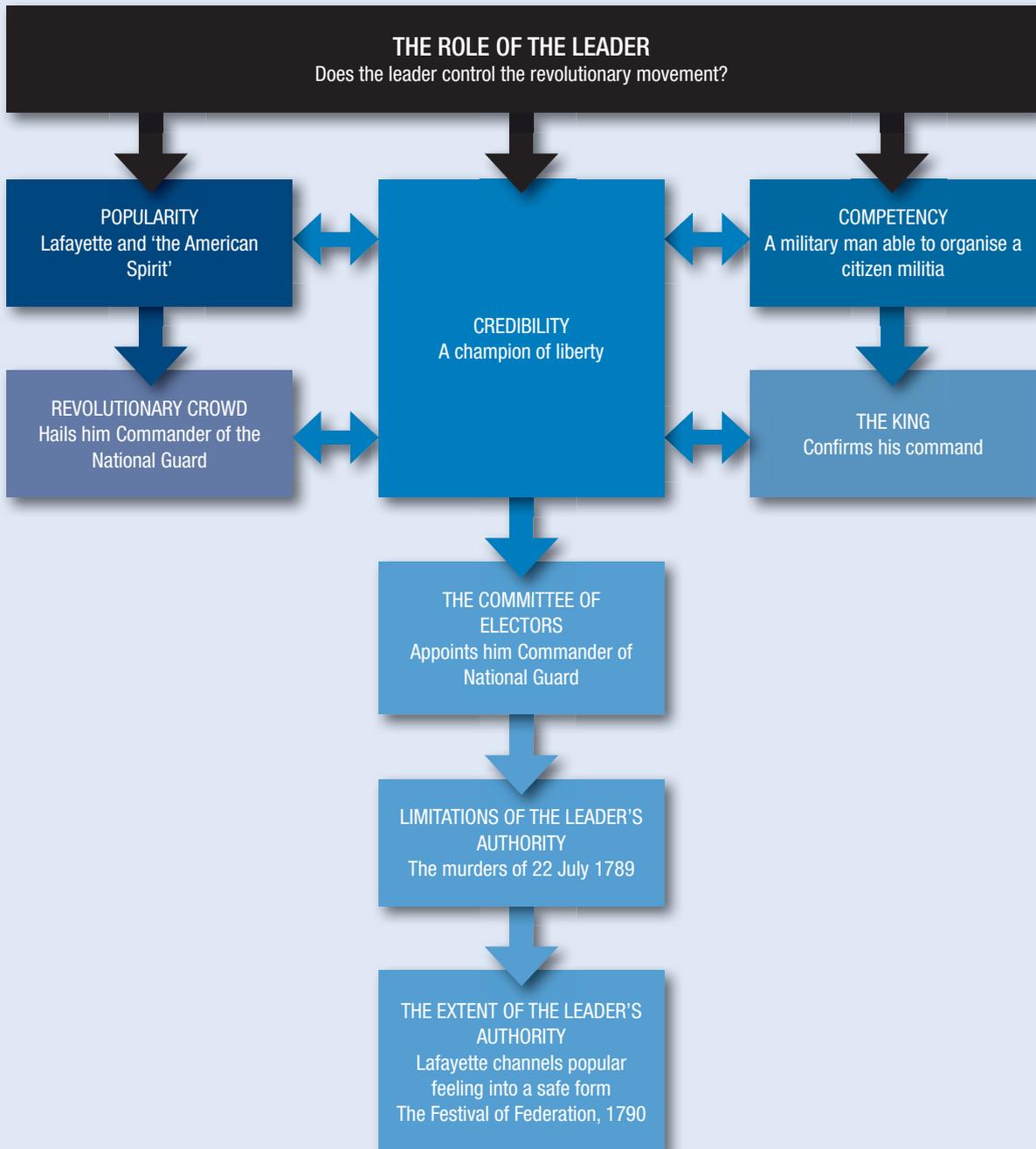
OVERVIEW

The popular movement was powerful and radical, and did not depend on encouragement from leaders. Some leaders, such as the Marquis de Lafayette, spent more time trying to channel the energies of the popular movement than they did encouraging it. The relationship between leader and movement is subtle, and can best be studied through the experience of one of the most successful leaders of the first French Revolution.

KEY ISSUES

- What role do leaders play in a revolution?
- What role did the Marquis de Lafayette play in consolidating the revolution?
- What was the significance of other leaders in the revolution?

FLOW OF CHAPTER



8.1 What role do leaders play in a revolution?

It is important to understand the role and significance of individuals in guiding and shaping the revolution. Historians create career profiles of key revolutionary leaders to analyse how exactly they contributed to the development or consolidation of the revolution.

We should also consider sources of tension and division as well as of unity. The key word ‘tensions’ reminds us that the revolution was not a single event or process, but rather a turbulent combination of a number of different currents that created instability. The term ‘the French Revolution’ is therefore misleading: it was a number of revolutions, and its ‘leaders’ were often trying to work between these events.

8.2 SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL The Marquis de Lafayette (1757–1834)

The Marquis de Lafayette was long seen as a dashing and romantic, but minor, figure in the first stage of the revolution; his enemies called him ‘General Goldilocks’ to mock his youthful good looks. On closer examination, he emerges as an important leader who perfectly illustrates the main tensions within the revolution.

First, the timespan of his influence is clearly defined: he returned from America in 1785 and was therefore in Paris during the intellectual ferment that preceded the events of 1789. By July 1789, he was the most important leader of the first stage of the revolution because of his strategic power, influence and popularity.

Lafayette’s career intersects neatly with other critical aspects of France in the 1780s: the power of pornography and scandal, the influence of key documents and the use of public spectacle to orchestrate and to channel volatile popular emotion. Lafayette’s popularity also inspired many visual representations of this revolutionary hero. His later fall from power in 1792 was rapid, and he was imprisoned for the next five years.

As a liberal noble, Lafayette was a revolutionary leader who was not from the Third Estate. Like Sieyès, he proves that the revolution was not solely the expression of an ambitious but frustrated bourgeoisie. His career demonstrates that a leader comes to power by being able to offer specific skills in a given moment of the revolution. He owed his importance to two mechanisms of control: the institutional control exerted through the National Guard and the popular control exerted over the Parisian crowd by the charisma of a hero.

The basis of Lafayette’s popularity: The ‘American Spirit’

American spirit a wave of public sympathy for the American struggle, which was expressed in popular plays, novels and paintings

Lafayette’s charisma derived from his involvement in the American War of Independence. To understand his popularity, we need to understand the importance of the **American spirit** in the 1780s. The American Revolution was a precedent, because it had demonstrated that enlightened thought could indeed challenge royal power and could successfully make political and social changes.

The final victory of the Americans over Britain proved that royal power could be resisted, and that it was possible to create a republic in the modern world. Lafayette



Source 8.1 This painting by Michel Garnier shows how the American War of Independence captured the popular imagination in the 1780s. Here, an idealistic young French officer leaves his family and fiancée to go and fight for liberty in the colonies.

cleverly publicised his role in the American War of Independence and returned to France with the reputation of a genuine freedom fighter in a successful, and apparently quite peaceful, revolution. Lafayette belonged to an eminent family of the upper nobility from the Auvergne, but was a liberally minded noble who was passionately committed to reform. He associated his name with Liberty, saying that he:

cherished Liberty with the conviction of a geometer, the passion of a lover and the enthusiasm of religion
(J.M. Thompson, *Leaders of the French Revolution*, 1963, p. 24).

After meeting Benjamin Franklin in Paris in 1776, Lafayette resigned his captaincy in the French army. He went to America, defying the authority of his family and his King's instructions. Lafayette outshone other volunteer foreign officers: he was younger, more capable and more committed. Of America, he wrote enthusiastically:

A sweet equality prevails here universally. The richest man and the poorest are on a level ...



Source 8.2 This image shows Lafayette with General George Washington at the battle of Valley Forge in the American War of Independence.

He impressed George Washington by his idealism and willingness to serve without pay. Lafayette helped the colonial army at Valley Forge, where he became friends with Washington. If Lafayette had originally been given a command because of his aristocratic rank, he quickly demonstrated his real merit in the field: he expertly commanded American forces at major battles such as Brandywine, Newport and Yorktown.

Lafayette returned to Paris in 1785, proudly referring to the revolution as his own achievement. He boasted:

My great affair is settled; America is sure of her independence; humanity has gained its cause; and liberty will never be without a refuge.

He assumed the hero's place among the liberal circles of the Paris of the 1780s, mixing with reformers such as Condorcet, planning a model slave plantation with Rochefoucauld and helping Thomas Jefferson arrange commercial treaties between America and France. The King forgave his disobedience, but cautioned him against stating liberal opinions in Paris. He became an unofficial ambassador for America, and for a generalised mood of criticism and reformism called 'the American spirit', a set of liberal or 'patriot' reformist ideas that included an admiration for the colonists' struggle and their creation of a new society.

Lafayette's special contribution: The National Guard

The most important aspect of political leaders is the way in which they offer some special leadership skill that is vitally needed at a given point. Lafayette was a genuinely popular hero of the American Revolution and believed that he could use this to guide – although not control – the powerful popular

movement. This role is evident in his creation of the National Guard, intended both to defend the revolution against the noble counter-revolution and to defend citizens' private property against the crowd.

The Paris Committee of Electors created this citizen militia just before the capture of the Bastille. This bourgeois militia was respectable because it derived from the American model of entrusting law and order to citizens who had a stake in society. As an expression of the civic spirit of the citizenry, the militia possessed greater political virtue than the King's foreign mercenary army. Initially called 'patriot patrols', this militia was a spontaneous response to the popular disorder of 12–13 July 1789. Its members believed in protecting property because they supported John Locke's political theories suggesting that only the ownership of property made one an independent citizen. These responsible citizens believed that popular crowd action meant disorder and a threat to property. The savage and unprovoked Réveillon Riots (23 April 1789) originally created this fear, and the events at the Bastille – when the crowd executed de Launay – confirmed it.

The National Guard became a restricted institution. Citizens had to satisfy a property qualification to gain admission, and had to be able to afford an expensive weapon and uniform. Lafayette was appointed Commander of the National Guard on 15 July 1789 by acclamation of the crowd assembled at the Hotel de Ville. A stickler for legality, he insisted that the crowd's choice be confirmed officially by the electors of the districts of Paris. He felt himself truly confirmed when the King approved his appointment.

This moment of transformation from the hero of America to the master of Paris reveals how uneasily he was juggling the three forces: the power of the crowd, the representative authority of the electors and the royal authority of the King.



Source 8.3 A dashing young Lafayette



Focus questions

- 1 Why did the aristocratic Marquis de Lafayette enjoy the confidence of the revolutionary crowd?
- 2 What did Lafayette have to offer the bourgeois citizens who were concerned about the maintenance of law and order?

What was Lafayette's relationship with the popular movement?

Lafayette offered a special combination of leadership qualities that exactly met the needs of the moment. As a man of action, he had demonstrated his commitment to Liberty. As a thinker, he had established strong links with the 'patriot' cause. But there were two more features that were important. As a military man, he could actually organise an effective militia, yet as a popular hero he would not appear to be an oppressor.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 8.1: READING A PRIMARY RESOURCE

Lafayette, commander of the National Guard, writing a letter to his mistress, 1789

This private letter by Lafayette is very revealing, because it shows that he was proud of his reputation with, and influence over, the Parisian revolutionary crowd. The document starts with Lafayette boasting about his role, but he then suddenly becomes more realistic and admits that he does not have complete control over them, as he learnt in the murders of 22 July 1789. This document perfectly sums up the dilemma of most leaders during the French Revolution.

The people can only be controlled by me. Forty thousand people gather, the excitement reaches fever pitch, I appear, and one word from me disperses them. I have already saved the lives of six persons who were about to be hanged in various parts of the city, but these furious, intoxicated people will not always listen to me. I rule in Paris over an enraged people manipulated by appalling plotters; on the other hand they have suffered a thousand injustices of which they have good reason to complain.

- 1 Using this document only, explain how Lafayette describes his control over the crowd. Does he claim that he has complete control over the Parisian crowd?
- 2 Using this document and your own knowledge, explain why Lafayette's statement is in fact a quite accurate description of the role of a revolutionary leader.

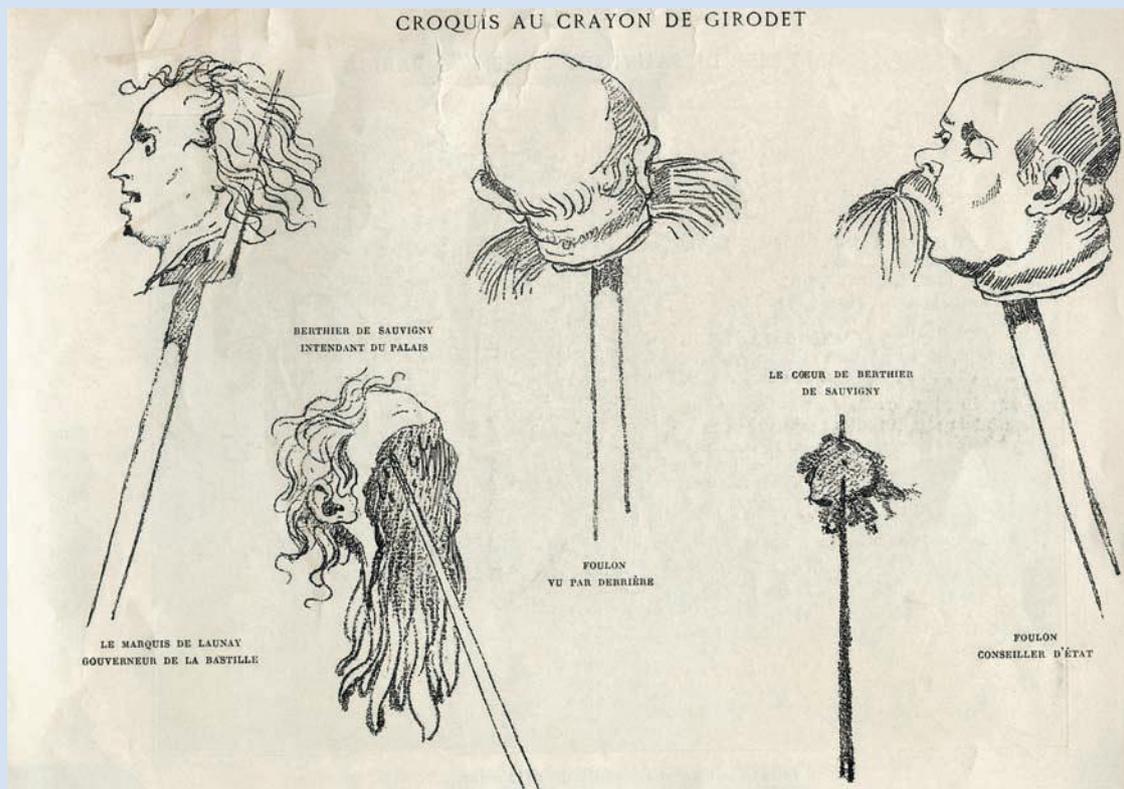


Source 8.4 This engraving depicts Lafayette as commander of the National Guard.

FLASHPOINT!**Lafayette feels the limits of his power, 22 July 1789**

Lafayette's power was limited, and he often galloped around Paris stopping violent incidents, such as the brutal murders of royal officials on 22 July. The crowd caught Bertier de Sauvigny, the Intendant of Paris, who they blamed for food shortages, and his father-in-law, Foulon, a minister after Necker's dismissal. The crowd accused them, without evidence, of plotting to starve the working people of the city. They were taken to the town hall for punishment. Lafayette temporarily calmed the crowd, but when he tried to order the removal of Foulon, the crowd erupted. Lafayette then felt the limits of his hero status. He stood there, shouting himself hoarse trying to restrain the crowd. When Foulon foolishly applauded Lafayette's plea for a legal trial, the crowd overpowered the guards and executed both prisoners. Their heads were cut off, Berthier's face was slashed to ribbons with a bayonet and Foulon's mouth was filled with hay and dung.

Thus there were two different sorts of revolutions happening in Paris in 1789 – a legalistic middle-class revolution and a more violent popular movement – and Lafayette's role as a leader was to try to juggle them successfully.



Source 8.5 This drawing by the artist Girodet shows the head of de Launay on a pike (left), the head of Bertier de Sauvigny with the face slashed (second left) and two views of the head of Foulon, with the mouth stuffed with dung and hay.

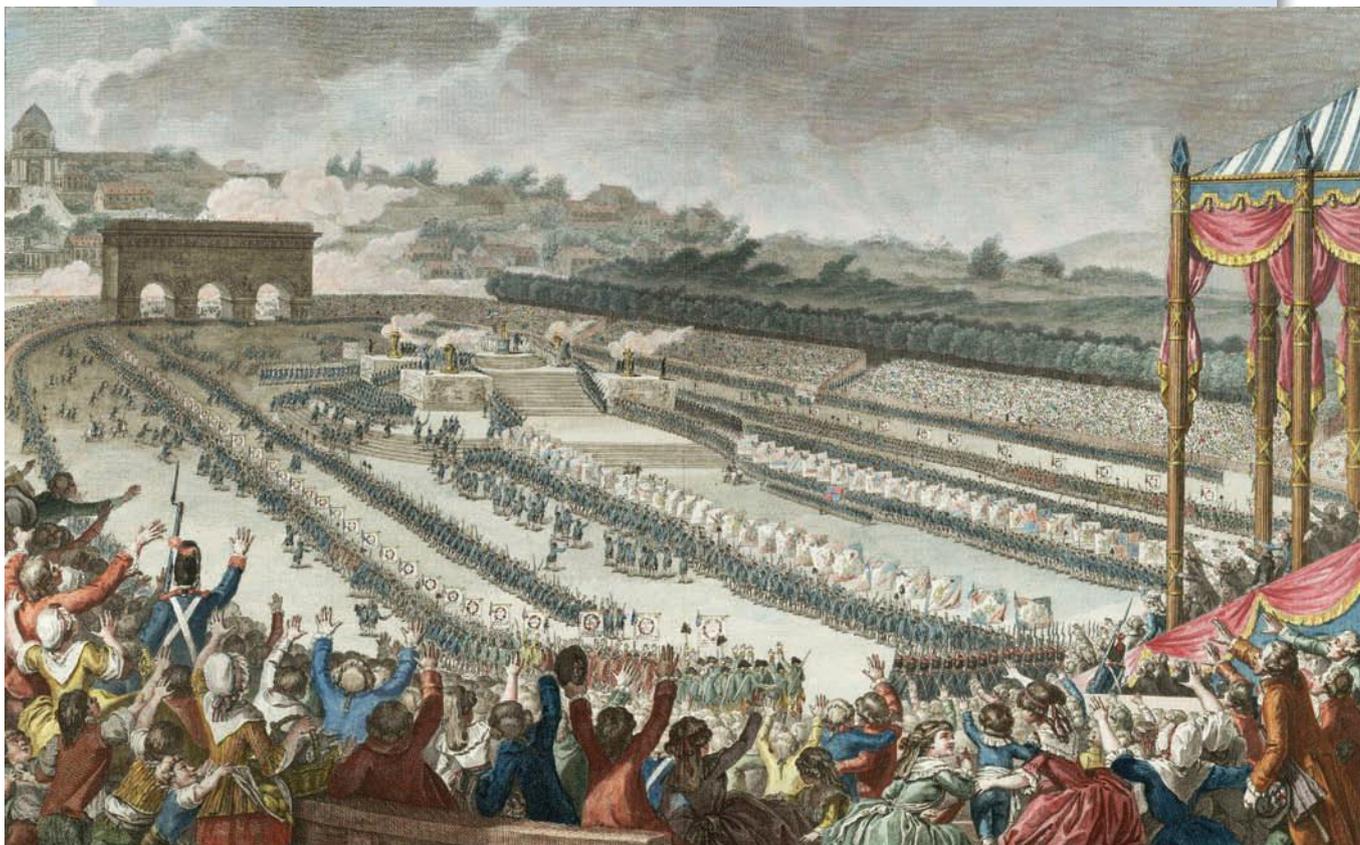
The Women's March to Versailles also highlighted the difficulties of Lafayette's position. When two demonstrations of working men and women joined and marched to Versailles, Lafayette was placed in an impossible situation. He could not approve the direct pressure on the King or the National Assembly, but he could not prevent the march, so he stayed in Paris hoping it would falter. When it did not, his own National Guardsmen virtually forced him to follow it to Versailles.

FLASHPOINT!**Can Lafayette control the popular movement?**

Lafayette's most important challenge occurred in July 1790. The Assembly knew that the popular movement was preparing to celebrate the first anniversary of the capture of the Bastille, and feared that these could become violent. It asked Lafayette for a solution. Knowing that nobody could stop the popular movement, he thought he could channel its energies into safer forms of celebration. He showed this skill when he organised the crowd into an orderly ceremony for the arrival of the King at the town hall (July 1789). The Assembly now put him in charge of the anniversary of the capture of the Bastille, which he transformed from a celebration of one event into a complex symbolic statement about law, order and constitutional legality. He renamed it the Festival of Federation, and used it to dramatise his personal vision of law, order and national unity.

This ceremony worked on several levels. The first, suggested by the name of the festival, insisted that the provinces acknowledge their membership of the national entity; Lafayette was probably thinking of the confederation of American states. The second was to bind the National Guards into an oath of loyalty to the body politic. The third was to bind the King into an oath of loyalty to the representative government. Underlying all this was Lafayette's obsession with legality and order: he stated that his aims were to:

protect in particular private property, the free circulation of food, the collection of taxes, and to remain joined to all the French by the indissoluble ties of brotherhood.



Source 8.6 This coloured engraving provides an overview of the vast amphitheatre built for the Festival of Federation in 1790.

The festival captured the imagination of the people: thousands turned up voluntarily to dig tonnes of earth from the Champ de Mars to create the grand amphitheatre required for the event. Even the most cynical spectators were impressed by this surge of popular support. Historian Mona Ozouf states that spontaneous celebrations had occurred across France, but this was the greatest outpouring of genuine enthusiasm during the revolution. The end result was spectacular. At least 300 000 people attended, and they arrived to find an imposing space that one entered through a massive triumphal arch; the focal point was a central 'altar of the fatherland', behind which was a canopy for the dignitaries.

The main point of the ceremony was Lafayette's oath of allegiance to the 'nation, law and King'. He then accepted the same oath from National Guards from all over France. Predictably, the King, who came next, muffed his part of the ceremony: because it was raining, he insisted on taking his oath under the shelter of the pavilion, which meant that the assembled multitude could not see him. Lafayette diplomatically suggested that he do it again outside, to which Louis snobbishly replied that an oath was not an aria you could do as an encore.

Focus questions

- 1 How do we know that Lafayette really could exercise some control over the popular movement?
- 2 How do we know that Lafayette did not enjoy complete control over the revolutionary situation?

8.3 The roles of other leaders in the French Revolution

While the Marquis de Lafayette was an influential leader, he was not the only important actor in the first phase of the revolution. It is important to be aware of the contribution of other powerful leaders.

8.4 SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL Camille Desmoulins (1760–1794)



Source 8.7 This painting shows Camille and Lucile Desmoulins with their son Horace in about 1792.

The voice of democratic republicanism: Camille Desmoulins

Robespierre French revolutionary who was leader of the Jacobin Club and architect of the Terror

Camille Desmoulins was a childhood friend of Maximilien de **Robespierre**. He was inspired by the *philosophes* such as Voltaire to hate organised religion and to criticise the monarchy. His study of the classics inspired his republicanism. He became a lawyer, but his stutter caused his practice to fail. In the crisis of 1787–89, he saw an opportunity to exercise his talents more effectively. He wrote pamphlets and attempted, unsuccessfully, to be a delegate to the Estates-General. He achieved fame when, on 12 July 1789, he urged the Parisian crowd to arm themselves, leading to the capture of the Bastille. He then wrote pamphlets such as *Free France* (1789), which suggested that a republic would allow popular political participation, and *Discourse from the Lantern to Parisians* (1789), in which he explained the role of revolutionary violence. He initially supported Mirabeau, but then found Danton and the radical Cordeliers Club more sympathetic to his democratic beliefs. His newspaper, *The Revolutions of France and Brabant* (1789–91), continuously made the case for greater political democracy. In 1791, he campaigned with the Cordeliers for the abdication of the King, and was blamed for the Champ de Mars Massacre. He then went into hiding. When he re-entered politics, he played a key role in organising the Second Revolution of 10 August 1792. In 1793, he used a new journal, *The Old Cordelier*, to attack the radical Hébertists and to propose an end to Terror. In 1794, he was associated with Danton's 'Indulgent Party', criticising the Terror and demanding a Tribunal of Clemency. Despite Robespierre's friendship, he was guillotined on 13 April 1794.

8.5 SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL

Comte de Mirabeau (1749–1791)



Source 8.8 In contrast to the restrained Bailly (see next page), Mirabeau was a fiery and eloquent speaker who was seen as the popular hero of ordinary working people. He once said, 'I am a mad dog from whose bite despots will die'. The engraving on the right imagines Mirabeau as a Jupiter figure, using his thunderbolts to blast the privileges of nobles and clergy.

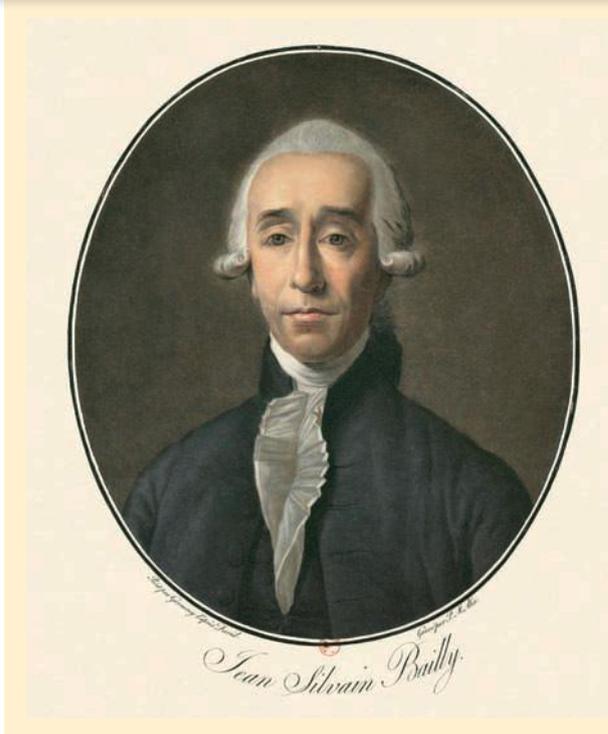
‘A mad dog from whose bite tyrants die’: Honoré Gabriel, Comte de Mirabeau

Mirabeau came from a great noble family. He owed his great influence not to his political radicalism but to the enormous power of his public speaking: unlike Robespierre, he had a magnificent voice, a commanding presence and an inspiring delivery. His vision of a constitutional monarchy was more conservative than Lafayette’s and the Feuillants’: he suggested that the King have an **absolute veto** (right to reject legislative enactments) over laws, rather than the suspensive veto he was given. As a member of the National Assembly, he served as a moderating counter-balance to its more radical elements.

absolute veto right to reject legislative enactments

He later became subject to rumours that he was in the pay of the King and was a royal spy; he died from natural causes in 1791, and was later identified as a traitor to the revolution.

8.6 SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL Jean-Sylvain Bailly (1736–1793)



Source 8.9 Jean-Sylvain Bailly. This portrait provides a dignified representation of a man known for his moderation and restraint.

The voice of moderation: Jean-Sylvain Bailly

Bailly trained as a scientist, specialising in astronomy. He was not a political activist before the revolution, and his political beliefs were moderate; he refused to contribute articles to the *Encyclopaedia* because he realised that its intention was political. He respected the monarchy, but also believed that society must be based on merit rather than birth, aligning him with the patriots in 1788–89. Elected



to represent the Feuillants district in Paris, he participated in the writing of the Books of Grievances and attended the Estates-General. A moderate man – conscientious and unassuming – he led the Assembly in taking the Tennis Court Oath and was later elected President of the National Assembly and Mayor of Paris. Like Lafayette, Bailly enjoyed his great successes during the first revolution, but by 1791 was being pressured by the radicalisation of the revolution; his involvement in the repression of the Champ de Mars demonstration immediately affected his popularity and would later lead to his death at the guillotine.

The story so far

Between 1789 and 1791, a large number of leaders emerged. Most deputies in the Constituent Assembly were from the Third Estate and of middle-class origins, especially from the law and administration. Other notable leaders came from the liberal nobility (Lafayette and Mirabeau) and from the clergy (Sieyès and Talleyrand). All leaders realised that they needed the support of the popular movement, but could never be sure of controlling its power.

CHAPTER REVIEW

DEVELOPING CLEAR DEFINITIONS

Write your own definition of each of the following key terms:

- the American spirit
- the National Guard
- the Festival of Federation

PRACTISING PARAGRAPH ANSWERS

Using four or main five points, explain what revolutionary leaders contributed to the French Revolution and what their role was in relation to the popular movement.

ANALYSING HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Historian J.M. Thompson wrote of Lafayette:

Lafayette's command of the National Guard made him, from 1789 to 1791, the most important figure in France next to the King; and it was impossible for anyone to control the situation without his support. Moreover, after October

1789, the King was prisoner, the Tuileries was his prison, and his warder was Lafayette. The tragedy of these years was that, like Louis himself, Lafayette misread the political situation, had no policy of his own, and refused to ally himself with anyone who had. (Leaders of the French Revolution, 1963, p. 50)

- 1 According to Thompson, what made Lafayette the most powerful person in Paris after the King?
- 2 What was Lafayette's main weakness as a leader?
- 3 If Lafayette was seen as the 'guardian' of the King, what dangers might this role present in the future?

PRACTICE ESSAY QUESTION

'Revolutions are driven by the power of the popular movement, but they are guided by the vision of their leaders.' Discuss this view with reference to the French Revolution from 1789 to 1791.

READING MORE DEEPLY

Easy

Arnold Whitridge, 'Lafayette Goes to America', *History Today*, August 1970, pp. 527–33.

Moderate

Harlow Giles Unger, *Lafayette*, John Wiley and Sons, New York, 2002.

Challenging

J.M. Thompson, 'Lafayette', *Leaders of the French Revolution*, Basil Blackwell, London, 1965.

Although this is now a very old text, Thompson's 'portraits' of revolutionary leaders such as Lafayette are masterly.



The development of significant revolutionary ideas, 1789–1791

“

The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen revealed an attention to practical realities as well as to current ideologies. It provided a powerful tangible revolutionary gospel.

– J. H. STEWART, 1971

”

OVERVIEW

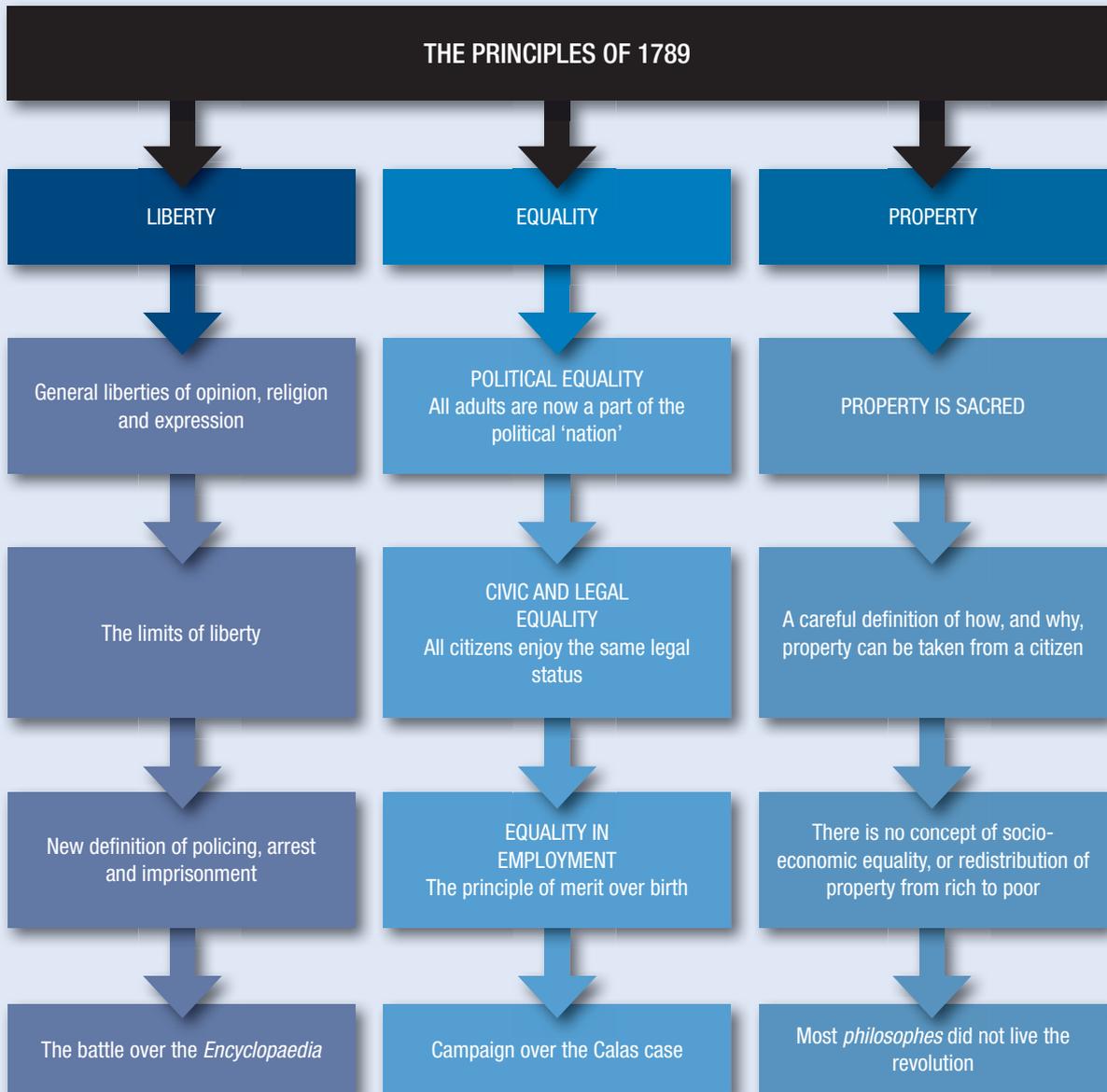
While the revolutionary movement provides the energy and force of a revolution and leaders that attempt to guide its course, it is revolutionary ideas that state the basic principles of the new society.

In France, there was a rich inheritance of ideas, including the older ideas of the Enlightenment, the more recent American ideas of egalitarianism and representation, the development of ‘patriot’ ideas in the 1780s and the recent practical suggestions of the Books of Grievances. Rarely have revolutionaries had such a varied body of ideas upon which to draw, although these ideas did not form an ideology (a system of ideas) comparable to Marxist-Leninism in Russia. The events of 1789 made it necessary to clearly define the revolution’s basic principles. The result was one of the most important documents in modern history.

KEY ISSUES

- What were the terms of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen?
- What were the principles of the men and women of 1789?
- What were the debates about the Declaration?

FLOW OF CHAPTER



9.1 Ideas: The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen

The title of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen refers to a tradition of thought predating the revolution. Its authors drew upon the strongest strand of political thinking in the eighteenth-century world, based on the philosophy of law and the concept of the social contract.



Source 9.1 This painting by Le Barbier, from 1789, shows the text of the Declaration made into monumental form – as if cast in stone.

The Declaration proposed that human beings were ‘naturally’ born with certain rights and that they retained them when they moved from nature to a state of civilisation. The authors of the Declaration did not create new human rights, but described rights that enlightened people thought already existed. The stirring opening words are based on the belief that these rights existed and that when societies ignore these rights, they risk despotism.

The Declaration proclaimed the great principles so they could never be forgotten. This legislation was not to create new rights, but to acknowledge those rights that the *philosophes* had established. They stated these general principles while awaiting the longer completion of the Constitution.

There was general agreement about the need for such a document, because it was debated and adopted in the space of only one week (20–26 August 1789). The Declaration was not meant to be the instrument to create the new society into existence, but an early statement of the basic principles upon which this society was to be built.

9.2 The principles of the men and women of 1789

The first calls for a declaration of universal human rights occurred early in 1789 in the Books of Grievances of the Third Estate and the liberal nobility. On 11 July 1789, Lafayette read his suggestion for a Declaration to the Assembly after consulting with the American Thomas Jefferson. Other deputies were evidently interested, for there were at least 20 substantial drafts submitted, including one by Abbé Sieyès.

What are the principles recognised by the final Declaration? Article 2 defines the innate human rights as ‘liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression’.

When human beings surrender their individual freedom to a society that exercises political power, society has a responsibility to protect their natural rights. Article 4 defines liberty as the freedom to do whatever you like, providing it does not harm another person or their liberty. Article 10 defines specific liberties, including the freedom to hold opinions. It defines religious belief as an individual’s free choice. Article 11 guarantees the freedom to express those beliefs in speech, writing or print.

The theme of individual rights is strongly counterbalanced by the theme of **legality**. Article 6 defines law as the expression of the general will, which can be expressed by the direct or *indirect* participation of all citizens.

Article 3 repeats that sovereignty rests with the nation.

Article 2 restates John Locke’s important idea that people

only surrender their individual freedom to a government so that it might work to protect their lives and their property; logically, once a government has ceased to protect their lives and property, that implicit contract has been broken and the government is no longer fulfilling its original purpose. The rule of law means the absolute right to own property: Article 17 makes property inviolable, meaning it cannot be taken from the individual by the state, except by exceptional legal methods.



Focus questions

- 1 What was the reason for writing a Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen in 1789, when the Constitution was still unfinished?
- 2 What are the main principles of the Declaration?

legality the rule of law

9.3 Key concepts of the Declaration

Ideas: The influence of the Books of Grievances

Many aspects of the Declaration respond to the ideas stated in the Books of Grievances, particularly those written by bourgeois lawyers of the Third Estate and liberal nobles of the Second Estate.

Ideas: Equality

The idea of equality means *political* equality – all people are now citizens in the political body – and *civic and legal* equality, meaning that all people will receive uniform legal treatment. It does not mean social or economic equality. There was no plan to change society or to redistribute wealth more evenly. The Declaration did eliminate fiscal privilege. Article 13 insisted that taxation be apportioned fairly to all citizens and varied according to their ability to pay.

Ideas – merit and utility

equality political equality – all people are now citizens in the political body – and civic and legal equality, meaning that all people will receive uniform legal treatment

equality of opportunity merit and utility over birth and privilege

The first article is not about liberty or **equality** but that third great theme of the revolution, utility. It translates into law the great Third Estate principle of merit and utility over birth and privilege, creating **equality of opportunity**. It accepts that people will be unequal, but now inequality has a different basis: your social rank will depend on your skills and achievements. Article 6 translates this general principle into practice: all citizens must have equal access to public office, based not upon their birth but upon their merit.



Source 9.2 This engraving illustrates the revolutionary principle that from now on all the orders in France shall be equal in rights and responsibilities.

Ideas: A new theory of justice

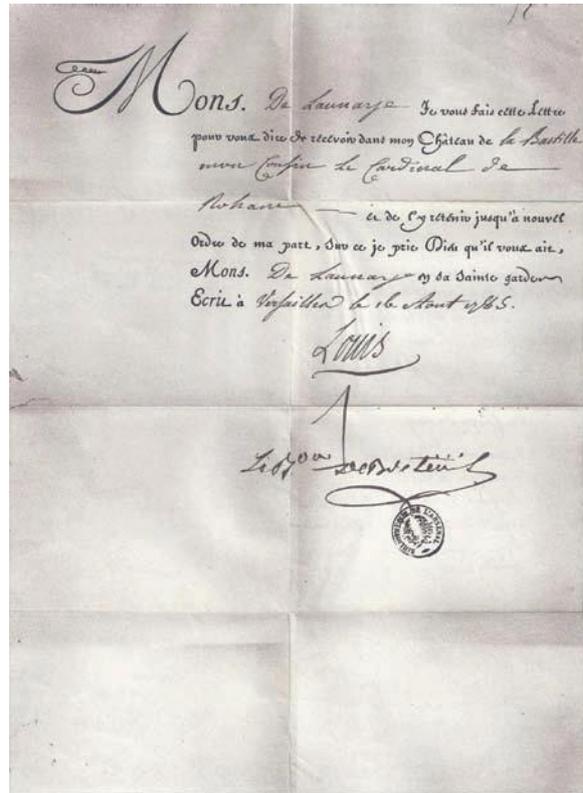
The Declaration attacked the judicial abuses of the old regime and elaborated a new theory of justice. Articles 7–9 abolished arbitrary arrest and *lettres de cachet*, and stated the important principle of the presumption of innocence.

Ideas: The abolition of slavery

The men and women who believed in the principle of natural rights firmly believed that all human beings without exception had a right to Liberty, and for this reason opposed slavery. But the men who drafted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen in August 1789 did not proceed to abolish slavery, simply because they could not: French colonies such as Saint-Domingue (modern Haiti) relied heavily on African slave labour in their many wealthy plantations, which provided a large proportion of France's economic wealth. To have abolished slavery would have decimated France's entire economy. It was thus that the slaves had to fight for their own freedom, and in doing so created a slave version of the French Revolution that was far more violent and bloody than the one on French soil. Indeed, as historian William Doyle put it, 'the impact on the colony itself was volcanic', because it inspired both slaves and free people of colour to demand the rights that had not been extended to them. After two bloody rebellions by free people of colour (March, October 1790), the French National Assembly voted rights for this group (May 1791, expanded April 1792). Then, in August 1791, a massive slave army of 100 000 slaves rose in rebellion in Saint-Domingue, slaughtering the white plantation owners and their supporters. It is a sad fact that the National Assembly did not at first abolish slavery on the grounds of principle.

It was a special commissioner, Léger Sonthonax, who had been sent to stabilise the situation, who made his own decision to do so. The French colony was threatened by France's enemy Spain, and rather than lose Saint-Domingue altogether, he offered freedom to slaves who helped defend it from the Spanish (June 1793). Later, he simply announced that all slavery was abolished on Saint-Domingue (August 1793). Fortunately, the new National Convention approved his decision (January 1794). They too were desperate to gain control of the wealthy Caribbean area and to defeat British and Spanish influence there. Later, they passed their own decree abolishing slavery in all French colonies (February 1794).

To acquaint yourself with the little-known history of this slave version of the French Revolution (also known today as the Haitian Revolution), please refer to the essay published on *Cambridge GO* accompanying this publication.



Source 9.3 An example of the *lettres de cachet* abolished by Articles 7–9 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. This example is from 1785, and is an order for the arrest of Cardinal de Rohan for his role in the Diamond Necklace Affair, signed by Louis XVI. The Cardinal was to be imprisoned in The Bastille.



FLASHPOINT!

Stormy debates about a 'radical' Declaration

The finished document gives no sign of the flashpoint of angry debates and disputes that surrounded its creation. The Declaration was not as self-evident as it claimed to be. On 12 August 1789, the Assembly appointed a committee of five, headed by Mirabeau, to choose the best draft, but this proved moderate and favoured one of the weakest statements of all. More radical deputies pressured the Assembly to accept a compilation of the best clauses from a number of documents.

Even so, the Declaration we know today was modified by propertied men to ensure that it did not give ordinary people unrealistic hopes of social change. The statements about natural law were substantially weakened to prevent the poor and those without property from becoming too **radicalised**. The clause about freedom of religious belief was heavily modified because the deputies thought the traditional Catholic religion was a good instrument for controlling ordinary people.

Despite being a momentous statement of human rights, the Declaration has some important silences. It is silent on social welfare, making no mention of the nation's responsibility to aid the poor and unemployed. It follows Rousseau's emphasis on law as the expression of the general will, but ignores what is allowed for those who disagree with the general will. It does not guarantee individuals' right to group action, to freedom of association – even for a trade union – or the rights of petition or assembly.

radicalised having adopted radical political views

Focus questions

- 1 What are the main ideas of the Declaration?
- 2 Why were the deputies afraid that the Declaration might become too 'radical'?

CHAPTER REVIEW

DEVELOPING CLEAR DEFINITIONS

Write your own definition of each of the following key terms:

- liberty
- equality
- utility
- merit
- property

PRACTISING PARAGRAPH ANSWERS

Using four or five main points, explain briefly the key principles of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen.

ANALYSING HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

In 2002, historian Peter McPhee wrote:

[The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen] represented the end of the absolutist, seigneurial, and corporate structure of eighteenth-century France. [It] was also a revolutionary proclamation of the principles of a new golden age . . . While universal in its language, and resounding in its optimism, it was nonetheless ambiguous [unclear] in its wording and silences. That is, while proclaiming the universality of rights and the civic equality of all citizens, the Declaration was ambiguous on whether the propertyless, slaves and women would have political as well as legal equality, and silent on how the means to exercise one's talents could be secured by those without education and property. (The French Revolution, 1789–1799, p. 59)

seigneurial semi-feudal system of land distribution

- 1 What exactly was abolished when the Declaration ended 'the absolutist, seigneurial and corporate structure' of France?
- 2 Why does McPhee see a contradiction between the Declaration's 'universal' ideas and the range of people who actually benefited from it?

PRACTICE ESSAY QUESTION

'In the French Revolution, ideas of legality, property and utility were as important as the key revolutionary terms of liberty and equality.' Discuss, with reference to the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen.

READING MORE DEEPLY

Easy

Lynn Hunt, *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History*, Bedford Books, Boston, 1996.

Moderate

Keith Michael Baker, 'The Idea of a Declaration of Rights', in Gary Kates (ed.), *The French Revolution: Recent Debates and New Controversies*, Routledge, London, 1998.

Challenging

Dale Van Kley (ed.), *The French Idea of Freedom: The Old Regime and the Declaration of Rights of 1789*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1994.

A university-level academic study of the ideas of the patriots of the 1780s in France.



The role of popular movements, 1789–1791

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The ‘popular’ revolution of 1789 quite naturally falls into two main parts: that associated with the peasants and that with the urban sans-culottes. Though sharing common political background, each had its own distinctive origin and mode of behaviour.

– GEORGE RUDÉ, 1988

”

OVERVIEW

Most definitions of ‘revolution’ agree that it must involve some mass movement; without a popular following, it is merely a *coup d’état*, in which a small group seizes power by armed force.

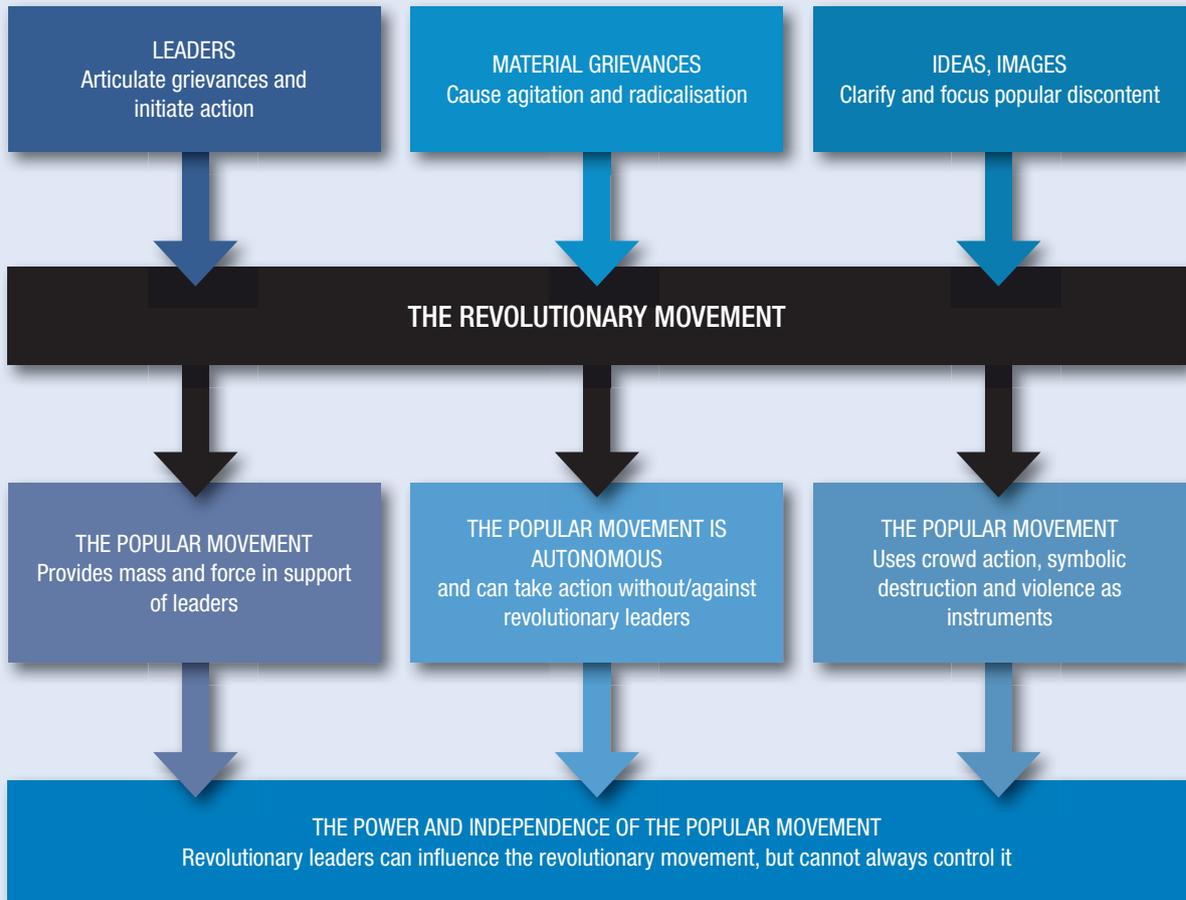
One definition of ‘the crowd’ was given by Marie-Antoinette, who believed that the good common people loved their King and that the revolutionary crowd comprised a desperate rabble manipulated by criminal revolutionary leaders.

For some time, historians knew little about the role of the popular movement in the French Revolution, assuming that the crowd was indeed just a ‘rabble’ of desperately poor people. Marxist historians, however, developed sophisticated methods of studying the membership and motives of revolutionary crowds.

KEY ISSUES

- What is meant by a revolutionary ‘movement’?
- How did the revolutionary movement form in France?
- Do leaders control revolutionary movements?
- How did the revolutionary movement express its ideas?

FLOW OF CHAPTER





10.1 What is meant by a revolutionary ‘movement’?

Marxist historian George Rudé argued that we must understand what types of people made up the revolutionary crowd and what motivations drove them to action. In his classic *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (1959), he showed that the crowd was not usually made up of desperately poor people, although material problems such as the price of food certainly motivated them.

Rudé discovered that the revolutionary crowd contained a large range of people, from the working classes to the lower bourgeoisie. Most were employed and socially respectable, including artisans (skilled craftsmen), ‘master’ artisans (those who ran a workshop), small shopkeepers and small traders (such as wine merchants), minor government officials and journalists. The crowd also included unskilled labourers and working women.

10.2 The formation of a revolutionary movement in France

Long before 1789, ordinary working people knew how to protest. In both city and country, workers had a strong tradition of crowd action, usually prompted by food issues and directed against the nearest cause of these problems. During the 1780s, however, this tradition of crowd action changed, because urban workers participated in national political affairs, such as the conflict between Louis XVI and the *parlements*. Working people read the remonstrances published by the *parlement* and demonstrated in favour of the courts. By June and July 1788, these crowds were exercising their power by taking over cities to support the *parlements*.

As early as the drafting of the Books of Grievances (1789), working people throughout France followed news of events in Paris and expected that the revolution would solve their urgent problems. By 1791, however, they had begun to realise that bourgeois deputies ignored workers’ material problems. Thereafter, the popular movement both defended the revolution and challenged it by demanding economic policies to benefit working people.

10.3 Do leaders control the revolutionary movement?

One of the most common images of the popular movement is of a crowd being stirred into action by a revolutionary leader, such as Camille Desmoulins calling on the crowd to arm itself on 12 July 1789. This suggests that the popular movement depends on revolutionary leaders to make decisions about when to act and what to attack.

This is partly true. In July 1789, for example, the Duke d’Orleans, who supported the Third Estate, was an influential leader. Gathering a team of radical journalists, he used his commercial centre of the Palais-Royal as a meeting point for radical speakers. He encouraged men such as Desmoulins to speak to crowds and to write revolutionary pamphlets and newspapers. These were eagerly read – or at least discussed – by working people.

While leaders could, and did, direct the popular movement, this was not always the case. Historians increasingly have recognised that the revolutionary crowd had **agency** – that is, the power to make decisions for itself and to take action independently of revolutionary leaders.

agency power to make decisions for oneself and to take action independently of revolutionary leaders



Source 10.1 This engraving shows the journalist Camille Desmoulin urging the crowd at the Palais-Royal to arm itself.

FLASHPOINT!

The murder of de Launay, July 1789

The Capture of the Bastille was one of the revolution's first great crowd actions. During 12–13 July, revolutionary leaders held meetings and demonstrations, urging revolutionary action, so they were 'directing' the popular movement. The actual attack on the Bastille, however, occurred spontaneously, with working people in several suburbs deciding independently to act.



One of the most important, and shocking, flashpoints of the French Revolution occurred after Commander de Launay and his officers had surrendered. For the bourgeois leaders of Paris (a committee known as the 'Electors of Paris') who were running the government, it was crucial that he have a legal trial. The crowd, however, wanted revenge and argued fiercely with the members of the committee. In a sense, here were two French Revolutions face to face – one middle class, legalistic and restrained, the other popular and prone to use violence as a means of political expression. A young journalist recorded, in the first issue of *The Revolutions of Paris* (17 July 1789), what happened next:

*On arriving, these people who were so impatient to avenge themselves allowed neither de Launay [sic] nor the other officers to go into the city court; they tore them from the hands of their conquerors and trampled them underfoot one after the other; de Launay was pierced by countless blows, his head was cut off and carried on the end of a spear, and his blood ran everywhere. (Quoted in Philip Dwyer and Peter McPhee (eds), *The French Revolution and Napoleon*, 2002, p. 19)*

Focus questions

- 1 What do historians mean when they say that the revolutionary crowd had 'agency'?
- 2 What does the murder of de Launay suggest about the revolutionary crowd and its relationship with revolutionary leaders?

The crowd also killed three staff officers and three veteran soldiers in their fury. Later, the crowd killed a judge, Jacques de Flesselles, because he tried to stop the handing out of weapons. It is, however, important to remember that the crowd itself had been fired upon, with a loss of 98 lives. Moreover, the crowd also voted more calmly on the fate of the soldiers who had defended the Bastille, and decided unanimously to spare their lives. Their actions clearly showed that the popular movement could take more extreme and violent action than its middle-class leaders wanted. When the crowd turned violent, few would dare to stand in its way.

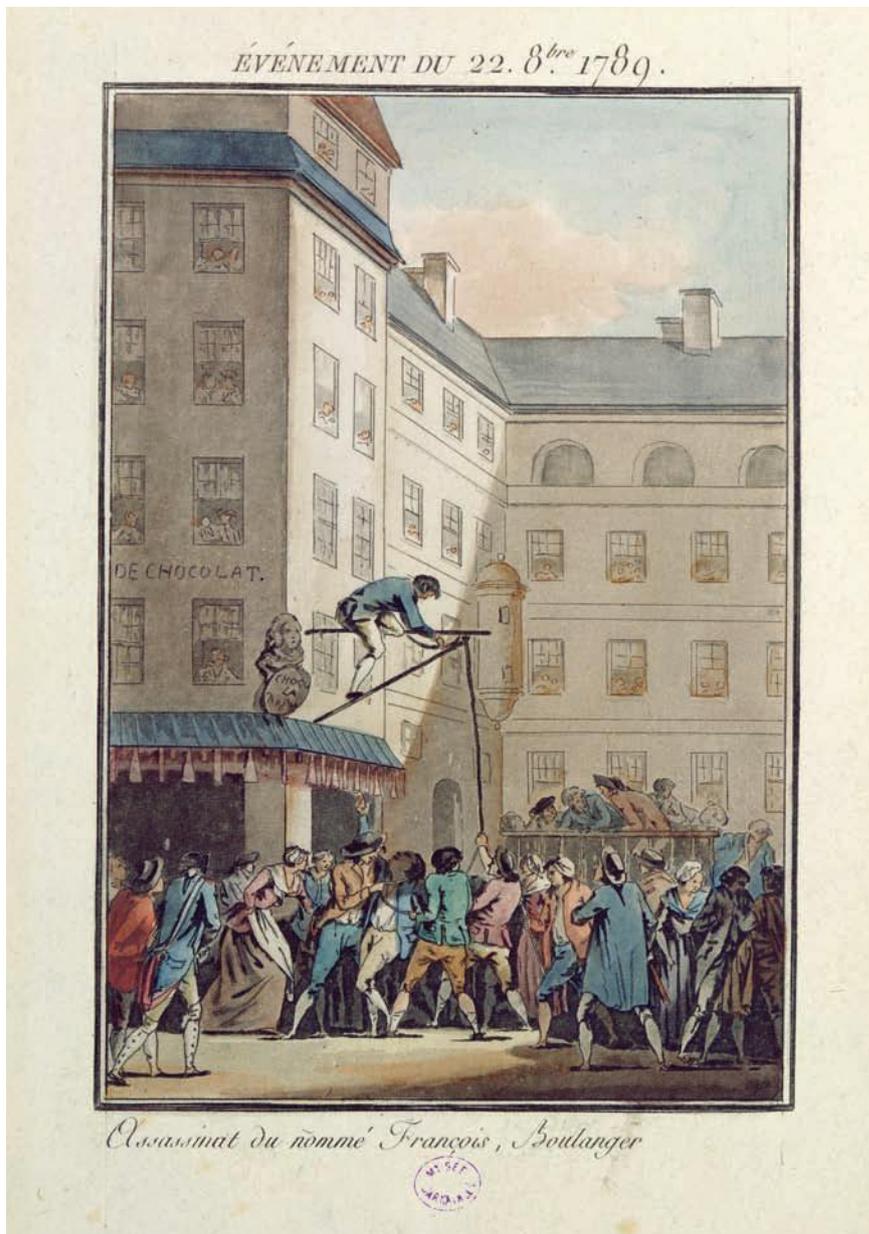


Source 10.2 The Parisian crowd could and did take its own independent action. In this representation, we see the crowd taking severed heads of the commander of the Bastille, de Launay, and Judge de Flesselles to the Paris Town Hall.

10.4 How did the revolutionary movement express its ideas?

Violence as the language of the crowd

The flashpoint of the capture of the Bastille was no exception: the Parisian crowd used violence as a 'language', often taking matters into its own hands. The crowd turned suddenly on individuals, declaring the person guilty and executing them on the spot by beating, decapitation or hanging. Such actions shocked middle-class people, who believed that law and order should prevail.



Source 10.3 This engraving shows the popular movement using violence to express itself. On 21 October 1789, a crowd attacked a baker who had been selling mouldy bread.



What was the role of the political club?

Jacobin Club the most famous and influential political club in the revolution, which developed into an extensive, nationwide network. Led by Maximilien de Robespierre, at its height it controlled the government and directed the Terror of 1793–94

Cordeliers Club first known as Claude Dansard's Fraternal Society, the Cordeliers Club was the first society to admit women to political debates and give them equal voting rights

Many working people in Paris were literate enough to read political pamphlets, and nearly all of them had the verbal literacy to discuss political ideas. What they did not have at first was a venue in which they could express their opinions and debate revolutionary issues.

After 1789, the revolutionary movement worked mainly through the political clubs. These were not new: a Club of the Arts had been founded at the Palais Royal in 1782; revolutionary clubs multiplied after February 1790 when ordinary citizens became involved in national politics on this popular level. Two of the most famous clubs, the **Jacobin Club** and the **Cordeliers Club**, contained so many influential figures that they resembled political parties. The Cordeliers Club first encouraged working people to join in the discussion of national affairs. It was not long before a club member – a teacher by the name of Dansard – also invited women to participate in his club, and this became a common practice.



Source 10.4 This engraving is a representation of the interior of a political club.

How did the popular movement express its new sense of identity?

While revolutions overthrow old political systems and create new ones, they also cause changes in the ways people see themselves. We could call this a revolution in psychology because people gain a new sense of identity, self-awareness and pride. For the working people of Paris, this involved the reversal of the old culture of **deference**. Instead of feeling inferior to the wealthy and well-educated, working people took pride in their way of life.

They were now proud to wear plain trousers and to grow bushy hairstyles. They also developed an egalitarian culture, which meant celebrating their common way of life and, later, expressing hatred for the rich. Historians know that working people created their own symbols: the popular movement enforced the wearing of the revolutionary cockade and adopted the fashion of wearing the red **Phrygian bonnet**.



Source 10.5 The red Phrygian bonnet became a code word for the revolutionary principle of Liberty.



Source 10.6 Here, an artisan (left) and a Parisian laundry woman (right) proclaim proudly – and in bad grammar – ‘I are of the Third Estate’, demonstrating a new sense of identity and self-confidence.

deference showing respect to your social betters

Phrygian bonnet copied from the red hat worn by the slaves of ancient Rome once they had been freed

Focus questions

- 1 What role did the revolutionary clubs play in making the popular movement begin to think in political terms?
- 2 In what ways can it be said that the French Revolution caused a major psychological change among French working people?

The story so far

In the French Revolution, the role of the crowd was both old and new. Working people had a long tradition of crowd action, protest and the use of violence. The various crises of the French Revolution revealed how strong the crowd was. Working people proved that they could think beyond immediate material grievances and contemplate national political issues. By late 1789, the popular movement demonstrated that it did have agency, and could take action independently of middle-class political leaders.



CHAPTER REVIEW

DEVELOPING CLEAR DEFINITIONS

Write your own definition of each of the following key terms:

- material grievances
- egalitarian culture
- Phrygian bonnet
- Cordeliers Club

PRACTISING PARAGRAPH ANSWERS

Using four or main five points, explain the role of the popular movement in the French Revolution to 1789.

ANALYSING HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Marxist historian Albert Soboul wrote:

The insurrection of the popular classes had ensured the victory of the bourgeoisie. Thanks to the [revolutionary days] of July and October the attempted counter-revolution had been shattered. The National Assembly, having emerged triumphant from its struggle with the monarchy only with the help of the Parisians, now feared that it might find itself at the mercy of the people and was in future every bit as distrustful of the forces of democracy as it was of absolutism. [Because] it was afraid to call on the popular classes to participate in political life and public administration, it was reluctant to draw from the solemn statement of the Declaration of Rights the conclusions which followed so naturally from them. (The French Revolution, 1787–1799, 1975, pp. 157–8)

- 1 According to Soboul, what was the main achievement of the revolutionary crowd during 1789?
- 2 Why does Soboul feel that the bourgeois deputies feared the popular movement and hesitated to give working people a greater place in political life?
- 3 From what you know of the revolution, is it accurate to say that it was a middle-class revolution, making only reluctant use of the popular movement when it was threatened by counter-revolution?

PRACTICE ESSAY QUESTION

'While revolutionary leaders needed the support of the popular movement, and at times guided its actions, the popular movement could take political action of its own.' To what extent is this true of the French Revolution between 1789 and 1791?

READING MORE DEEPLY

Easy

Allan Todd, *Revolutions, 1789–1917*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, pp. 48–50.

Moderate

George Rudé, 'Popular Movements in the French Revolution', *Agora*, History Teachers' Association of Victoria, Melbourne, 1966, pp. 12–14.

Challenging

George Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1966 [1959], pp. 12–14.

This academic text is demanding, but it was the masterpiece that probed into the makeup and motives of the revolutionary crowd.



Creating a new society, 1789–1791

“

Most of the reforms carried out by the Constituent Assembly ... were the product of the revolutionary process itself. They were responses to events and situations without any historical precedent, rather than the known desires of the French nation ... The work of the Revolution's first twelve months, in fact, had the support of a broad national consensus.

– WILLIAM DOYLE, 1989

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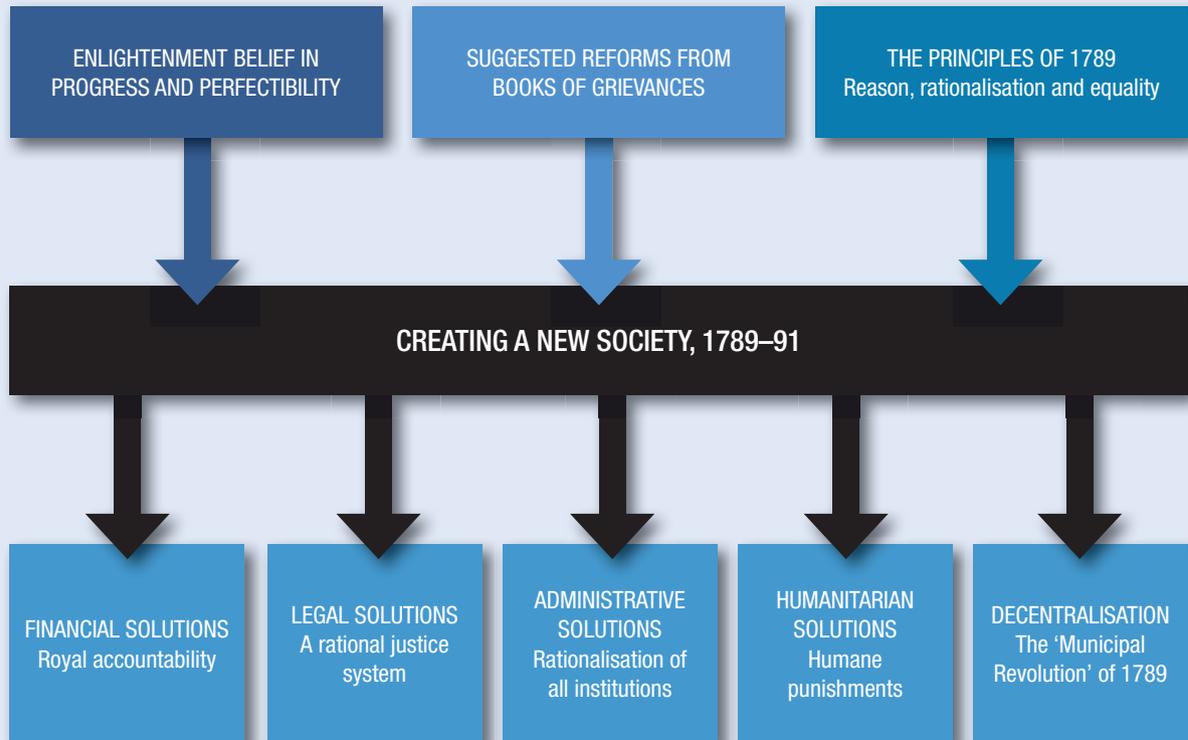
OVERVIEW

While the patriots of 1789 drew on a broad range of ideas to define the principles of the new society, these would have little value for people unless they were translated into law and into reality. The publication of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, followed later by the Constitution of 1791, completed the first process of turning principles into law. The great campaign to reorganise all the administrative structures of France, which literally swept away the jumble of institutions from the old regime, accomplished the second aim of creating the administrative, religious and legal structures of the new society.

KEY ISSUES

- Why do historians debate the creation of a new society in France?
- What were the key principles of reform?
- How was the administration of France rationalised?
- Did the reforms create a fair and accessible judicial system?
- Did the revolution improve life for most people?

FLOW OF CHAPTER



11.1 The historians' debate about the creation of a new society in France



Source 11.1 *Top:* This engraving imagines the three estates as blacksmiths, who have to work together to 'hammer out' France's new constitution (*right*) on an anvil.

epochal an event significant in terms of history

The revolution's success in creating a new society is one of the most bitterly contested questions among historians. For the generation of great Marxist historians, for example, the French Revolution was an **epochal** event that changed a political regime and took France from feudalism into the more advanced stage of capitalism. Seen amid such a grandiose scheme, the French Revolution seemed unquestionable.

For Revisionist historians, by contrast, the French Revolution was partly a failure. In his authoritative summation of the revolution, William Doyle acknowledged that the revolution created significant changes, but questioned whether they were really sufficient to justify the amount of struggle, violence and loss of life it also caused. He concluded:

Was, then, the revolution worth it in material terms? For most ordinary French subjects turned by it into citizens, it cannot have been.

Doyle's negative conclusion is questionable, but it provides a useful warning: we cannot assume that a revolution automatically makes a society better, but must prove that it actually did.

11.2 The key principles of reform: Reason and equality

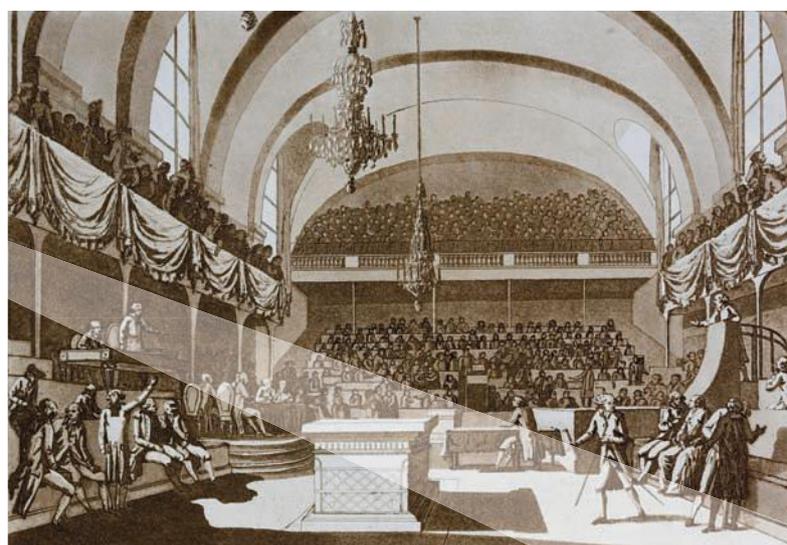
The first great project to reorganise France was completed between 1789 and 1791, and created a new society by reforming, rationalising and improving the administrative structures of national life. The revolutionaries believed, correctly, that if they applied the principles of reason and equality to the structures of everyday life – from government through to justice – then the nation's life must be improved. This first program to create a new society is frequently forgotten or underestimated, especially by those who argue that the revolution did not do much to improve the lives of the people.

The first great campaign of reform began almost immediately in 1789, proceeded quickly and was brought to a successful conclusion in 1790–91; it thus belongs to the first, moderate, stage of the revolution. The political project to create a viable constitutional monarchy was paralleled by a massive administrative project to clear the chaotic organisation of the old regime and to create a more rational and equitable system of administration and justice. By October 1789, the newly formed National Assembly was consolidated in its legal existence and its strategic position, and could start its true task of reforming France.

For the generation of 1789, the revolution occurred quickly – albeit with some violence and loss of life – and France appeared to achieve a liberal revolution like that of the American colonies. As early as October 1789, and throughout 1790, people concluded that the revolution was over. They could not know that the revolution would become a series of radical upheavals, destabilising the nation for years. There were a few worrying signs, such as nobles leaving the country, but otherwise the revolution seemed to be finished.

We are therefore studying the first ‘project’ for revolution – that is, what the revolutionaries intended in 1789, long before the grim realities of the Terror occurred.

Translating the principles of 1789 into practice

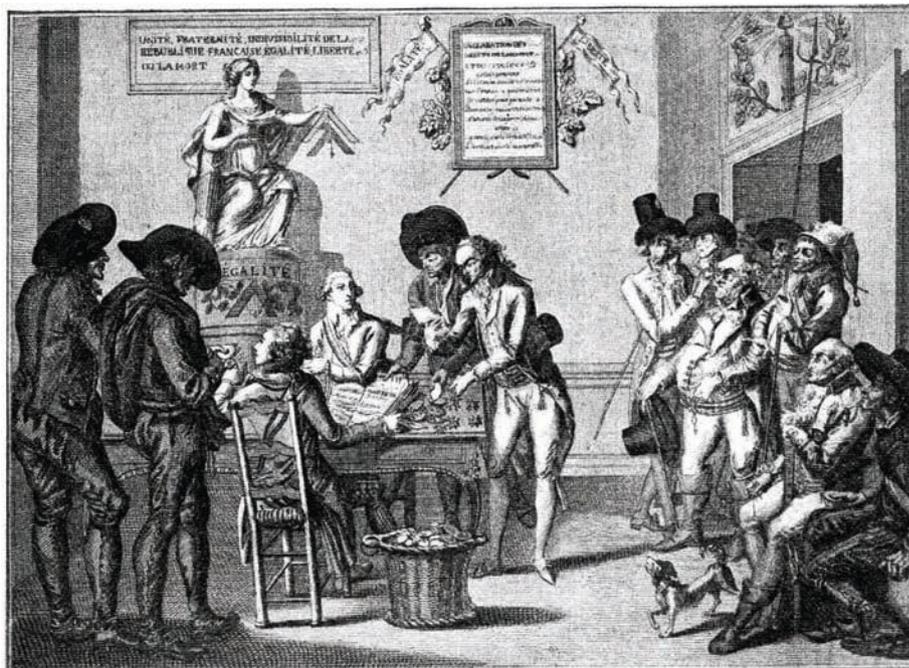


Source 11.2 *Left:* This engraving shows how much faith people put in the National Assembly as a body that would break the privileges and power of the ‘aristocrats’, who are shown here as upper clergy (right), nobles (left) and a member of *parlement* (centre). The figure in the sky is symbolic: it holds a copy of Rousseau’s *Social Contract*, and uses a mirror to direct a beam of light at the door of the National Assembly. *Right:* This engraving shows the inside of the building used for the National Assembly – a riding school.

By late 1789, the Assembly had committed itself to fundamental principles, including equality before the law, the abolition of privilege and the recognition of merit. It reversed the idea of the origins of power. Previously, power came from above – from God, via the King; now it came from below, from the entity known as ‘the nation’. It had also rejected the corporate society, in which groups enjoyed privileges: basic human rights were universal, applying equally to everybody.



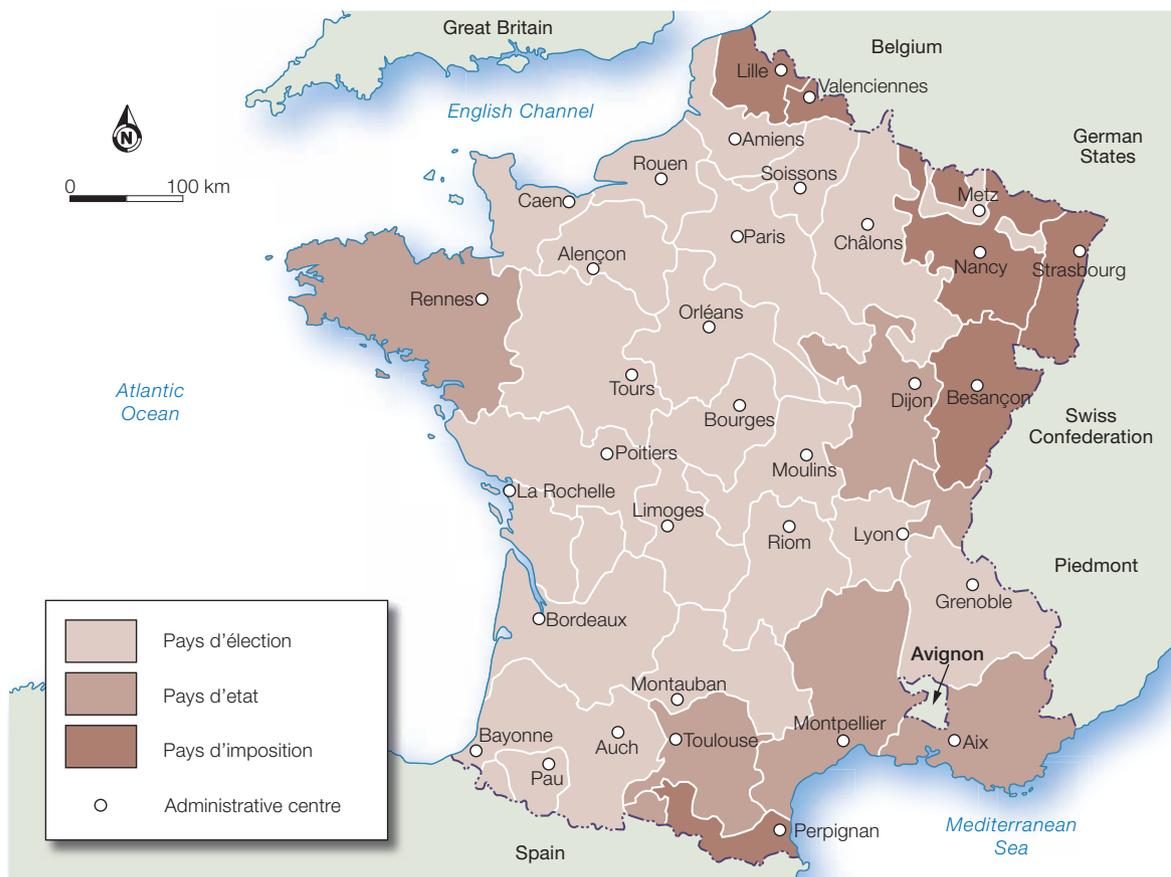
Source 11.3 This painting by Lesueur shows the new political personnel who emerge when democratic institutions are created.



Source 11.4 This engraving shows the process by which nobles (right) surrendered their honorific titles, which were banned in the new society. Even the corporation of coal porters (left) surrendered an emblem the king had granted them.

There are two ways of seeing this comprehensive program of national reform, accomplished between 1789 and 1791. First, it was a response to the problems listed in the Books of Grievances. From these, the government took three main ideas. It accepted that the *financial* problem – the national debt – could be solved by a *political* solution: that of making the King accountable to a parliament. This prompted the progression from absolute monarchy, in which the King ruled as he wished, to **constitutional monarchy**, in which the King ruled in conjunction with a representative assembly. The government also accepted that the financial problem would be solved by a complete fiscal reform, making all citizens responsible for paying tax. Finally, the government accepted that the new citizens of the nation should have civic and legal equality and some guarantees of individual liberties.

constitutional monarchy
a political system in which the King rules in conjunction with a representative assembly



Source 11.5 The chaotic jumble of overlapping authorities in France under the old regime

Second, the revolutionaries went far beyond the suggestions contained in the Books of Grievances and implemented reforms that nobody had even dared to dream of in 1788. In other words, the revolution had created the revolutionaries, and these new revolutionaries invented a total program of national reform.



Source 11.6 The rational, new administrative framework, which allowed improvements in the organisation of government, justice and the law

The Books of Grievances had not suggested an administrative reorganisation of the entire nation; the revolutionaries conceived of the idea of abolishing the old provinces and creating in their place a more rational system of departments. The Books had not contained many demands to actually abolish noble titles and all other titles. Likewise, there were only grumbles about feudal dues and special privileges, but nobody had suggested dismantling the entire feudal system. Nor had they contained an overall plan for church property: there were certainly grumbles about the polarisation of wealth in the church, but nobody had suggested that the state confiscate all church possessions. The Assembly also destroyed institutions that nobody had dared question, such as the system of venality of office and the *parlements*.

Focus questions

- 1 To what extent did the revolutionaries of 1789 base their reform of France on the problems that had been outlined in the Books of Grievances?
- 2 In what ways did the revolutionaries of 1789 go far beyond the suggestions that had been made in the Books of Grievances?

11.3 The rationalisation of administration

Before the revolution, France was a confused jumble of overlapping institutional networks. Faced with this tangle of inherited institutions, the reformers of 1789 realised that they had to achieve a **rationalisation** – a practical application of what the *philosophes* had called reason – to reduce overlapping and unnecessary institutions.

Previously, France had been divided unequally into traditional regions. The Assembly now re-divided France into 83 more equal departments. Each department was then subdivided into districts, and these in turn into communes. This was a clear, rational, efficient administrative grid within which all national matters would be handled.

The second principle of the reform was **decentralisation**. Previously, political power had been concentrated in the royal government at Versailles. The reformers hoped that if the powerful central government in Paris were counter-balanced with a network of local government in the provinces, then it would be much more difficult for the King and the conservative nobles to regain power by securing control of the centre.

rationalisation practical application of what the *philosophes* had called reason

decentralisation counter-balancing the powerful central government with a network of local government in the provinces

151

11.4 The creation of a fair and accessible judicial system

The third great principle of reform was **uniformity**, or the idea that any institution should work much the same way, no matter where it was in France. One of the best examples of the need for uniformity was France's legal system. Under the old regime, the confusion was appalling. There had been two distinct systems of law, one in the north of France and one in the south. In addition, there had been a tangle of numerous different types of courts: apart from the *parlements*, there were also seigneurial courts, administered by the nobles, and **ecclesiastical** courts, administered by the church.

For these reformers – many of them lawyers and government officials – it was not acceptable to have one sort of justice administered by the King, another by nobles and yet another by clergy. There

uniformity the idea that any institution should work much the same way, no matter where it was located

ecclesiastical involving the Christian church



Source 11.7 Joseph Lecocq, a former judge in the *parlement*, puts away his red robes and his coat of arms (visible in background, being covered over) and proudly puts on the costume of a lawyer in the new, revolutionary system of justice. By putting on his *tricolore* sash, he is accepting that the law will apply equally to every citizen in France, no matter who they are.

would be one system of justice, administered equally to all people by trained lawyers. This made justice more accessible, fair and humane. For the first time, every French citizen could expect to receive the same treatment as everyone else, no matter what their social standing might be.

canton a division of an area of France

The judicial system was established in the new administrative structure of departments, districts and **cantons**. At the head of the system stood a Court of Appeal, which would be made up of judges democratically elected by the departmental assemblies. The buying of high office (venality) was banned, and applicants had to have practised as lawyers for at least five years. Each department had a criminal court. Trials were heard in public and judged by a jury of 12 citizens chosen by ballot, along the same lines as the English system. Finally, there was a Justice of the Peace appointed in each canton, to provide some legal guidance at the local level – mainly reconciliation and arbitration, and hearing some minor cases.

The administration of the law was improved. Previously, a person could be sent to prison and left there indefinitely, simply on the strength of a royal instruction. The *lettres de cachet* were abolished and the process of arresting a person was strictly formalised. Anybody arrested must appear before the court within 24 hours or be released.

Humane principles of punishment

Finally, these reformers re-examined punishment. Inspired by Enlightenment commentary upon the barbarity of inhuman punishments, they reduced the number of crimes for which people were executed and abolished cruel punishments such as breaking on the wheel, torture and

mutilation. They abolished the differential system of execution, whereby nobles were beheaded while commoners suffered hanging. They adapted the machine suggested by enlightened people such as Dr Louis and Dr Guillotin to ensure that if a citizen were executed, they would die swiftly and almost painlessly.

Focus questions

- 1 What were the key principles that guided the reorganisation of France in 1789?
- 2 In what ways might the actual reforms have improved life for most French people?

11.5 Did the revolution improve life for most people?

The revolution's reform of France's administrative structures was an enormous achievement: virtually all the official structures that governed everyday existence were made more rational, more efficient and more accountable – and hence became more accessible and fair. The revolution also established the organisational structures that modern France still uses, with some later consolidation by Napoleon Bonaparte.

It is worth remembering the breadth and depth of this first campaign of reform. By resolving the contradictions and the inequities of the old regime, everyday life became immeasurably better for most people in France. It is therefore difficult to agree with Doyle's sweeping statement that, for most ordinary people, the revolution cannot have been 'worth it'. In purely structural and administrative terms, the French Revolution began with a magnificent success, one that brought substantial benefits to all people.

The revolution failed to help the poor

It must be admitted, however, that not all of the attempts to reorganise France were successful. In purely theoretical terms, the government introduced the important innovation of recognising the principle of systemic social welfare – that is, that people who were poor had a right to assistance and that the government had a duty to provide it. They were prepared to fulfil the role previously carried out by the church and by private agencies, and understood the concept of social services as a system available to all citizens.

When they examined the problem in practice, they discovered that the population of 28 million included at the very least two million who survived by begging, and of course this did not include the number of people who joined the poor in bad times. The revolutionary government was in a hopeless position: it had committed itself to the principle of social welfare and created a committee to investigate poverty, but did not have sufficient funds to implement assistance on such a vast scale.

The story so far

While all revolutions tend to state their ideals, the French Revolution is remarkable for the seriousness with which it committed itself to a legal statement of its fundamental ideas. Once the Declaration was completed in August 1789, it was intended to be a provisional statement until the Constitution itself was finished. When that happened, the Declaration would become an introduction to the Constitution and could be changed. However, the Declaration rapidly took on an almost religious importance, and nobody later dared to suggest any changes to it, except for a few minor amendments.



CHAPTER REVIEW

DEVELOPING CLEAR DEFINITIONS

Write your own definition of each of the following key terms:

- rationalisation
- accountability
- decentralisation

PRACTISING PARAGRAPH ANSWERS

Briefly describe three main changes made in the reorganisation of France, and explain the significance of one of them.

ANALYSING HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

In 1989, historian William Doyle admitted the importance of the reorganisation of France:

In the sense that they [gave] France a constitutional monarchy, decentralised and representative institutions, civil and fiscal equality, and guarantees for individual liberty, [the revolutionaries] were broadly true to the instructions of the [Books of Grievances]. [But these] contained no mandate for the abolition of the provinces, municipalities, nobility or titles. [Almost] none called for a declaration of rights, and none at all for a National Guards or paper money. Most of the reforms ... were the product of the revolutionary process itself ... And yet, once made, the far-reaching changes of the revolution's first year were well received. Their implementation may have been chaotic and disorganised, but they were carried through with remarkable goodwill and even enthusiasm considering the multitude of vested interests they threatened or damaged. ('The Revolution in Perspective', in The Oxford History of the French Revolution, 1989, pp. 134–5)

- 1 According to Doyle, which revolutionary reforms can be seen as responses to suggestions made in the Books of Grievances?
- 2 Which revolutionary changes were completely new in 1789?
- 3 Why does Doyle assume that these radical reforms must have met with approval from the majority of the French people?

PRACTICE ESSAY QUESTION

'When we see the new society that had been created in France by 1791, the changes from the old regime are far more powerful than the continuities.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?

READING MORE DEEPLY

Easy

Andrew Matthews, 'Perspectives in History', *Revolution and Reaction. Europe, 1789–1849*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 43–6.

Moderate

Jocelyn Hunt, *The French Revolution*, Routledge, London, 1998, pp. 29–43.

Challenging

William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989, pp. 112–35.

Doyle's analysis is detailed and academically sophisticated, but will appeal to advanced readers.



Sources of disunity in the revolution, 1789–1791

“

The oath to the Civil Constitution is rightly considered one of the great crises of the Revolution because it gave the counter-revolution a popular base ... In other words, to reject the Revolution was to reject the rule of the citizen-lawyers who had come to power in 1790.

– D.M.G. SUTHERLAND, 1985

”

OVERVIEW

The period 1790–91 is significant because this is the point at which the revolution lost the broad support and agreement it enjoyed during the first two years. More than any other year, 1791 highlighted the deep divisions in the revolutionary project. Examination of this year allows us to identify the sources of tensions and divisions, and to explore why the revolutionary project began to fragment.

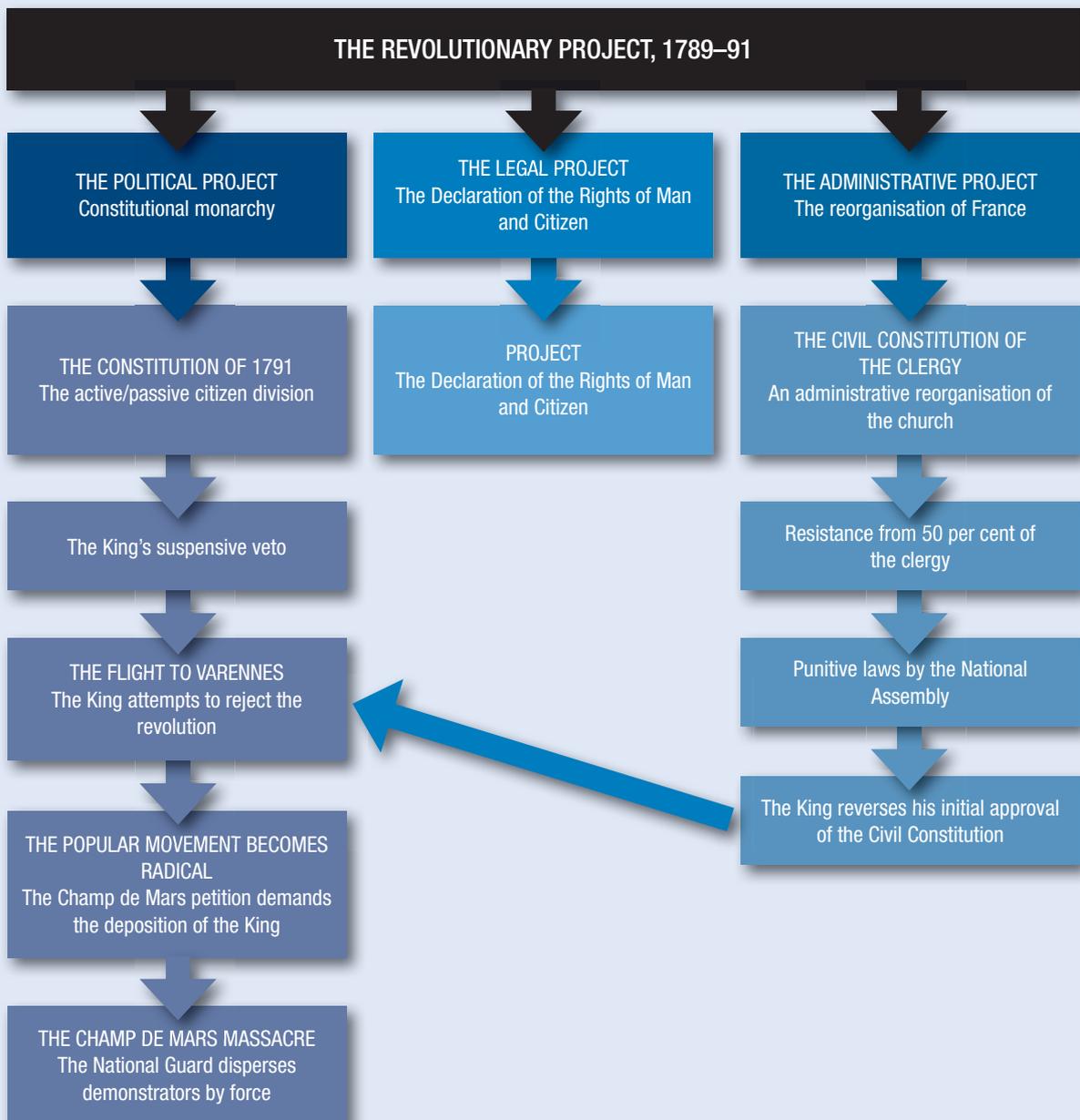
By 14 July 1790, the revolution seemed to be making good progress. In this hopeful atmosphere, the revolutionaries proceeded to a reform that most people agreed was necessary: the church. This, however, unexpectedly proved to be the first serious obstacle to the revolution's progress.

This ecclesiastical reform was not a destructive attack by a revolutionary government upon the church. The revolution did not aim to destroy the church, and the church was not opposed to the revolution. Nobody expected that the administrative reform of the nation could not include the church, which was now part of the state. It was also a relic of that old regime corporate society and an extreme example of inequitable privilege. It did not pay its fair share of taxation, and its hierarchy favoured birth over merit. There was therefore little disagreement that church reform was necessary.

KEY ISSUES

- What was the administrative reorganisation of the Catholic Church?
- What were the reforms created by the Civil Constitution of the Clergy (August 1789 to July 1790)?
- To what extent did the clergy oppose the reforms (October–November 1790)?
- How was France’s Constitution drafted (1789–91)?
- Why did the revolution divide against itself (1790–91)?

FLOW OF CHAPTER



12.1 The administrative reorganisation of the Catholic Church

The French Revolution did not aim to destroy the church, nor was the church opposed to the revolution. Many clergy admitted in their Books of Grievances that the church needed reform. In June 1789, they left their order and crossed the floor of the Estates-General to vote with the Third Estate, transforming the Third Estate into the National Assembly. Members of the nobility and the Third Estate also criticised the church in their Books of Grievances. Many agreed that the church must lose its privileges, but few predicted how much it would lose. However necessary, these reforms were devastating to the church. So why did the reform of the church create such bitter division in France?

The first reforms changed the church's financial and organisational structure. Church privileges were abolished without compensation and the church lost both feudal dues from its lands and the tithe paid by peasants by the August Decrees. The church no longer decided how much tax it would pay. Plural appointments were abolished. Yet most clergy accepted these sweeping reforms because they were better off as civil servants. Later reforms affected the prestige and spiritual authority of the church because the Declaration refused to make Catholicism the sole state religion, granting freedom of religious belief to Protestants and Jews.

By October 1789, it was clear that the church would lose more than its monopoly on belief. Bishop Talleyrand suggested that the nation solve its financial problems by confiscating and selling church land. On 2 November 1789, the Assembly duly nationalised church property. Still, most clergy accepted the radical change to the church's status. As civil servants, they were paid better, and they felt no major conflict of conscience.



Source 12.1 This engraving symbolically suggests that the 'fat' upper clergy needed to be put through a machine called 'The Patriotic Fat-Remover'.

12.2 The Civil Constitution of the Clergy, August 1789 to July 1790

The Civil (or administrative) Constitution of the Clergy completely reorganised the church (12 July 1790). The French bishops advised the King to accept it and proclaim the constitution (24 August 1790).

The committee that drafted the document assumed that there was a clear division between the *administration* of the church, which is a secular matter, and the *theology* of the church, which is a spiritual one. Its document was a *civil* constitution because it dealt solely with church organisation. While the committee respected the Pope's spiritual authority, it believed that the administration of the church in France was its business.

The first upset occurred when, in May 1790, the French bishops suggested that, if church reforms were necessary, the Assembly should consult with a national church council. The Assembly refused to consult with a remnant of the old, privileged church. If the Assembly was the nation, it had the right to make reforms unilaterally.

Positive aspects of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy

When the committee unveiled its constitution to the National Assembly (May 1790), it was clear that it had responded intelligently with constructive solutions. The state guaranteed generous salaries for all clergy and all clergy had to live near their appointment. The crazy patchwork of church organisation was streamlined, creating 83 bishops for the 83 departments and reorganising thousands of parishes. The only real administrative disadvantage was that some upper clergy lost their positions.

Two new measures were alarming, however. The appointment of clergy was democratised: everybody from bishop to priest was elected by meetings of citizens. The second problem was the government's aggressive attitude to the spiritual head of the church. Although it acknowledged the role of the Pope, it forbade French citizens any contact with foreign church representatives and deprived the Pope of the power to appoint archbishops and bishops.

Focus questions

- 1 Why did the National Assembly feel that it was obliged to reform the Catholic Church in France?
- 2 What were some of the positive aspects of its reorganisation of the church?

12.3 The opposition from the clergy, October and November 1790

On 30 October 1790, 30 bishops in the Assembly voted against the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and were branded 'unpatriotic'. They argued, quite reasonably, that such significant changes must be made in consultation with the Pope or a church assembly. During October, November and December 1789, the French church divided over these reforms.

The result was chaos. In some departments, people elected their bishops but the archbishop would not confirm them. Elsewhere, bishops thundered criticism of the reforms and suffered the indignity of being sacked by the local government. In the town of Nantes, all 104 priests refused



the reforms and the department stopped their salaries. By the beginning of 1790, the Assembly was flooded with reports of conflict, confusion and chaos in churches across France.

The National Assembly asserts its authority: The decree requiring the oath of loyalty, 27 November 1790

The deputies, accustomed to praise for their reforms, were stung by this opposition. On 27 November 1790, after two days of bitter debate, they asserted their authority, requiring all priests, as civil servants, to take an oath of loyalty to the government that employed them. They believed there would be little resistance.

This strong-arm tactic was disastrous. Many priests regarded this as a matter of conscience. Forcing them to resist this specific reform forced them to reject the whole revolution. Unwittingly, the Assembly created a second large group of counter-revolutionaries where none had existed.

The King passed this decree (26 December 1790) and priests had to obey by 4 January 1791. The Assembly believed few would refuse, for fear of losing their salaries. The oath-taking began in the Assembly, where the first oath was taken by the Abbé Grégoire. Then proceedings stalled. Only two of 44 bishops took the oath. Of the priests, the majority of clerical deputies simply refused and only 109 took the oath.

By January and February 1791, the situation was poisonous. First, the priests who refused the oath were named **'refractory' clergy**, or non-juring clergy. The 'refractories'

'refractory' clergy priests who refused to swear the oath of loyalty to the revolution required by the Civil Constitution of the Clergy



Source 12.2 These engravings express anger at 'bad' or 'refractory' priests (left) and support for the good or 'juring' priests (right).

were intimidated by the revolutionary crowd; in Paris, few priests dared to refuse. Across France, the Assembly faced a disastrous backlash. The average rate of refusal was 50 per cent of the clergy overall, although the actual average per region varied enormously from almost complete obedience to almost complete refusal.

The situation rapidly worsened. On 21 March, the Pope formally condemned the reforms and later urged all clergy to refuse the oath or, if they had taken it, to deny it. He suspended the two bishops who had taken the oath in the Assembly. This was now no longer a matter of private conscience, but an issue of spiritual obedience. Another 10 per cent of clergy now retracted their oath, becoming – intentionally or not – enemies of the revolution.

Then there was another ominous development. The King approved the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and the oath only because the French bishops advised him to. He still considered himself a Christian King and acknowledged the Pope's spiritual authority. He now withdrew his support. His feelings were clear: when his personal priest took the oath, he rejected him then very publicly took communion from a refractory priest. This sharpened doubts about his loyalty to the revolution.

Louis was convinced that he could not cooperate with the revolution, and equally that he could not safely coexist with it. Since he could not be reconciled with the new order, he would have to leave it altogether.

Focus questions

- 1 Why did many priests resist the constructive reforms of the church?
- 2 Why did the National Assembly feel it had the right to force priests to agree to the reforms?

Why did the King begin to resist the revolution?

The church reform was, arguably, the first great mistake of the revolution – historian André Latreille calls it a ‘tragic error’ – and although it occurred without malice, it was still disastrous. As 1791 progressed, it became clear that there were other divisive forces active. To understand these, we must analyse the French political landscape.

12.4 The making of France's Constitution, 1789–91

Having demanded a constitutional monarchy, the revolutionaries wrote the constitution to define such a political system. They worked quickly and efficiently to create a system in which the executive power, including the power of the King, was carefully limited, and in which considerable authority was given to the **legislature**.

legislature law-making body

There was no question that the King would remain, but his power was now counter-balanced by a parliament. His title was ‘Louis, King of the French’, rather than ‘King of France’, indicating that he did not ‘own’ the country. He was now a public servant, paid by the nation. He had real executive power: he appointed ministers but, once chosen, they were accountable to the National Assembly. In diplomacy, he kept the power to declare war and conclude peace, subject to approval, and to appoint his foreign ambassadors and senior military commanders.

The main limitations on his power restricted him to a purely executive role (running government), and forbade him to interfere with the legislature. For example, he could never close the Assembly.



Source 12.3 This portrait shows Louis XVI as a king who has accepted the constitutional monarchy: he wears the tricolore cockade, and holds a sword labelled 'Law'.

Sources of division: The King's suspensive veto

suspensive veto the ability of the King to delay law for four years

The King could interfere with the Assembly's work by his **suspensive veto**. He could not stop laws from being passed, but could delay them for four years.

The Constitution created a legislature called the National Assembly. It was a single-chamber legislature, unlike the British and American models, which both had two houses. The Assembly represented the nation, from which all authority flowed; it accordingly held supreme power. Since the crisis that created it was about the approval of new taxes, it had ultimate authority over all fiscal matters.

Sources of division: Active citizens and passive citizens

The Constitution did not grant universal suffrage. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen stated that all citizens would participate in passing laws – either directly or *through representatives* – but it did not guarantee universal suffrage. The Constitution divided citizens into those who paid taxes that were equivalent to three days' wages and those who did not. Specifically, a citizen had to be male (thus excluding 50 per cent of the population), resident in their home for a year (thus excluding all travelling working people), not engaged in domestic service (thus excluding all servants) and paying the equivalent of three days' labour in taxes. This was a democracy for property holders.

Many people earned enough to pay three days' wages in tax – about 70 per cent of the population qualified to be active citizens and vote at the first level, forming an electorate of five to six million people in a population of 28 million. Historian George Rudé argues that these conditions were not as narrow as in Britain at that time, so France was relatively 'democratic'.

12.5 The revolution divided against itself, 1790–91

FLASHPOINT!

The betrayal that divided the revolution: The King's flight to Varennes, 20–21 June 1791

The Constitution contained the makings of a serious crisis, as the Assembly had to submit the Constitution to the King for approval. Would he accept it?

Recent events had helped make up the King's mind. He later stated that the breaking point occurred when members of the royal family tried to leave Paris for their holiday at Saint-Cloud and were stopped by a jeering, angry crowd that surrounded their carriage. Not even the popular Lafayette could persuade them to let the King continue. Nor could he convince his National Guards to do that: when he ordered them to open the palace doors and to clear a way, they also refused. He and his family sat in the coach for nearly two hours while members of the crowd hurled abuse and obscenities at them.

At the same time, their protector, the revolutionary leader Mirabeau, unexpectedly died. Marie-Antoinette detested the revolution and warned Louis against further hesitation. She argued that the revolution was a plot by disloyal members of the nobility, such as Lafayette, aided by dishonest members of the Third Estate, whom she called 'tramps'.



Source 12.4 This map shows the route of the royal family towards Varennes (red) and their return route (blue). The map makes it clear how close they came to safety, represented by the border of the Austrian Netherlands (purple), where Austrian troops waited to rescue them.



In addition, ex-ministers such as Calonne and Breteuil warned him that the only safe place was overseas. His military adviser, Bouillé, assured him that he could reach the army garrison at Montmédy, gather loyal troops, call in Austrian troops, then crush the revolution.

At midnight on 20 June 1791, the royal family departed. The escape was planned in great detail, involving disguises, two separate coaches and relays of fresh horses along the way. However, various mishaps, such as broken wheels, delayed the escape, causing the complicated arrangements to fail.

Meanwhile, news of the King's flight reached Paris and messengers were sent galloping to France's borders. One messenger got to Sainte-Menehould before the royal party; there, a postmaster, alerted to look for the fugitives, recognised Marie-Antoinette. To double check, he looked closely at Louis's face and then compared it with the image of the King on a bank note. Nonetheless, Louis managed to leave for Varennes, where he was recognised, detained and, the following morning, returned under escort to Paris.

His attempt to flee France put him under heavy suspicion, but was worsened by the fact that he left behind a document stating that he rejected the revolution.



Source 12.5 *Left:* This painting by Lesueur imagines the dramatic scene when Louis XVI was arrested at Varennes. *Right:* This engraving does not accept the official story that the King had been 'kidnapped': it is titled *The Arrest of the King and his Family Deserting the Kingdom*.

A MATTER OF FACT

The flight of the royal family was almost ruined by mishaps. At one point, the children's governess, the Duchess of Tourzel, had to quickly hide the young Dauphin in her wide skirts so that Lafayette would not see that the boy was fully dressed so late at night. At another point, when Marie-Antoinette crept out of the palace in disguise, she almost bumped into Lafayette, but hid in the shadow of a doorway. He did not see her, thus failing to stop the attempted escape that changed the course of the French Revolution.

The return of the King and the royal family to Paris

Until the flight to Varennes, the King enjoyed considerable popularity, both in his traditional role as the Father of the Nation and in his more recent role as the apparent supporter of the revolution. Upon his return, he found the mood of the people of Paris utterly changed. The crowds lining the streets stood in sullen silence, refusing to lift their hats as the carriage went by.



Source 12.6 This engraving shows the silent crowds that stood angrily by the roadside as the carriage transporting the royal family re-entered Paris.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 12.1: READING A PRIMARY SOURCE

The crowd's reaction to Varennes

Surrounded by a barrier of five hundred thousand citizens, of whom a large number were armed, Louis XVI, his wife and sister arrived at the Tuileries [the royal residence in Paris]. No sign of disapproval, no apparent sign of contempt escaped from the numerous gathering. It was limited to denying any military honours to these fugitives. They were received with grounded arms. All the citizens kept their hats on their heads as if in common agreement. (Adapted from the original document cited in Leonard Cowie, The French Revolution, 1987, p. 73)

- 1 Although the crowd made no verbal statement of disapproval, their behaviour showed real disrespect for the royal family. How was this expressed?
- 2 How do we know that this 'silent protest' had not been organised by a revolutionary leader?



The anger of the revolutionary crowd



Source 12.7 This engraving shows the fury of the Parisian crowd after the flight to Varennes: the people moved through the city tearing down all symbols of monarchy, even innocent tavern names such as The King's Arms.



Source 12.8 The revolutionary crowd in Strasbourg made effigies (dummies) of the people involved in planning the flight to Varennes, paraded them through the streets, then burned them.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 12.2: READING A PRIMARY SOURCE

An image of royal disgrace



La famille Des Cochons ramenéé Dans L'étable

Source 12.9 This popular engraving, *The Family of Pigs Brought Back to the Sty*, was made within days of the flight to Varennes, and had been drawn, printed and sold by 25 June 1791.

- 1 Why would this 'farmyard' image have been an effective way of communicating a message to ordinary French people?
- 2 Recalling the several 'strands' of royal power, which strand would have been most affected by a demeaning image such as this?

The effect of the flight to Varennes on the development of the revolution

The flight to Varennes was the second great turning point in the revolution. If the **deposed** (overthrown) King was **deposed** (overthrown), there could be no constitutional monarchy: his two brothers were in exile and his son was too young to rule. Most deputies preferred a moderate constitutional monarchy and feared a radical republic.

The second problem was psychological: if the King meant to leave the country, it was to join the revolution's enemies, Austrian troops or emigrated French nobles. There was a panicky sense of threat from enemies waiting to attack, which became one of the great accelerators of the revolutionary situation.



Attempts to save the constitutional monarchy

The first challenge was to save the monarchy. The Assembly constructed a new version of events, stating that the royal family had been 'kidnapped' by counter-revolutionaries. Fortunately, the story ran, the patriots at Varennes had 'rescued' the royal family and returned them to safety. The Assembly later decreed that this story was true.

Radical agitation against the King

The Assembly's handling of this crisis ignored the fact that the political scene had become more complicated. The new element was the political clubs, which had grown in popularity since 1789. The first to act was the Cordeliers Club. On 24 June 1791, its members petitioned the Assembly to depose the King. A crowd of 30 000 people presented the document. The club movement had linked up with the popular movement. The Parisian crowd was angry and methodically destroyed all symbols of monarchy.

The same agitation occurred in the radical clubs. The most important was the Jacobin Club, which now had a network of about 900 clubs across France. At this stage, being Jacobin did not necessarily mean being radical: the club originally included all shades of opinion. In 1791, many Jacobins were dissatisfied with the way the Assembly had handled the question of the King. Many believed that the



Source 12.10 This engraving expresses popular anger at politicians such as Barnave, who attempted to save the constitutional monarchy by persuading the King to accept the Constitution.



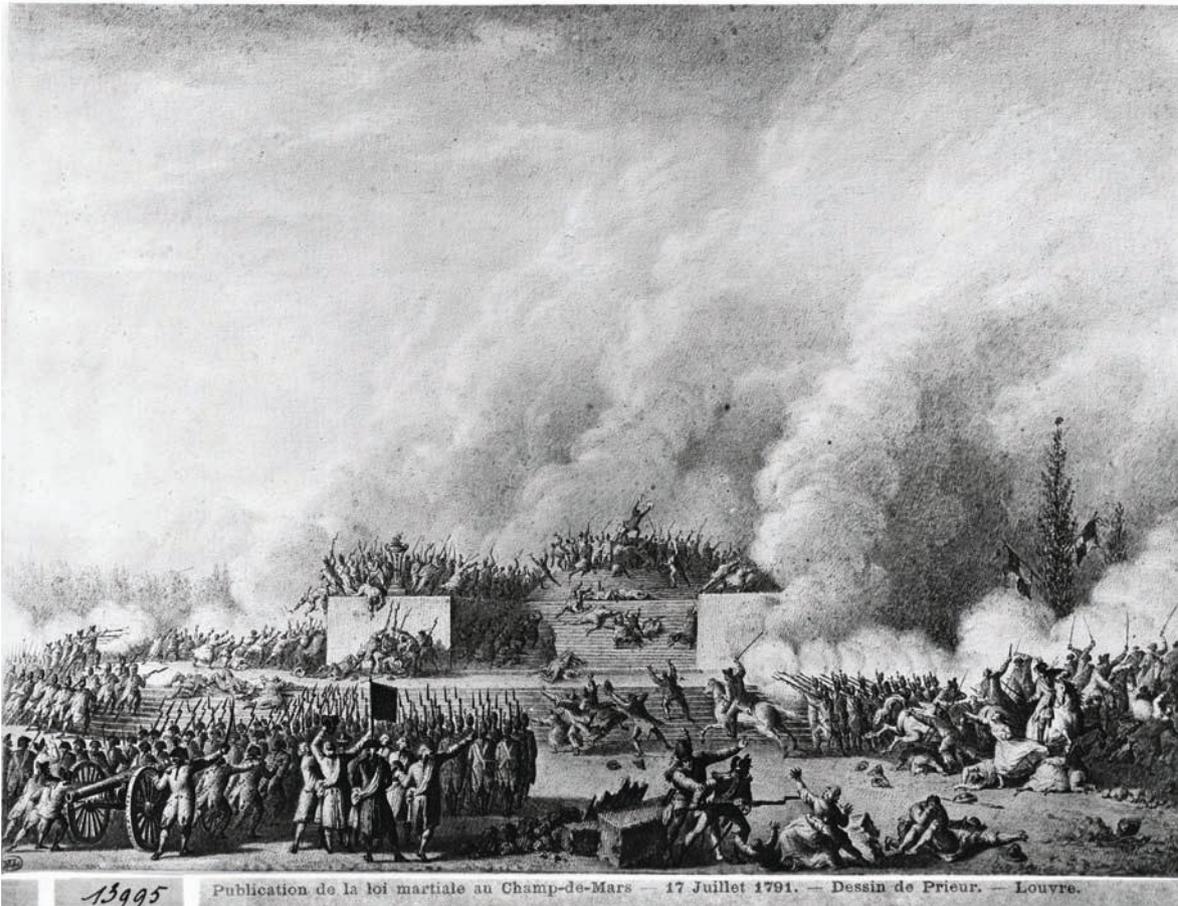
Source 12.11 This engraving expresses the radicals' criticism of the King: he too is seen as two-faced, turning to the Third Estate (*left*) and promising to uphold the constitution, but turning to a refractory priest (*right*) and promising to destroy it.

King should be deposed, and some suggested that he should be put on trial for treason. A few went further, calling for a new political system – a republic.

When the Assembly declared the King free of all blame (15 July 1791), radical members of the Social Circle Club joined with the Jacobin Club to demand that the King not be restored to office. They planned a public petition on the Altar to the Fatherland on the Champ de Mars. Later, the militants changed the manifesto, declaring that, by leaving, the King had abdicated and could not be reinstated unless the whole nation decided that he should be. It did not mention the word ‘republic’, but it really put an end to the monarchy. Many members of the Jacobin Club, like Lafayette, resigned and formed the Feuillants Club.

The massacre on the Champ de Mars, 17 July 1791

On 17 July 1791, a crowd of 50 000 flowed into the Champ de Mars. People were signing the petition when the crowd turned on two suspicious individuals and prepared to murder them. The Mayor of Paris, Bailly, called in the National Guard to restore order. Lafayette arrived with his guards and gave a warning to disperse. Stones were thrown, shots were fired and suddenly the guards opened fire into the dense crowd. About 50 people were killed and many more were injured.



Source 12.12 In the Champ de Mars massacre, the National Guard opened fire on a revolutionary crowd signing a petition demanding that the King be deposed.



This was a crucial turning point in the revolution because here, for the first time, revolutionaries fired on fellow revolutionaries, not on the forces of the old regime. This massacre revealed that there was no longer one French Revolution but two, and that they were now in conflict. The first revolution was the liberal project of 1789: the King would stay and would rule with close accountability to the Assembly. But the second revolution, the one forming in 1791, was more radical: it would insist that the monarch be deposed, the constitutional monarchy be ended and, finally, a republic be established.

In the short term, the moderate revolution won. The police arrested 200 political militants and important figures, such as Danton, fled overseas, while others, like Marat, went into hiding. The more radical clubs, such as the Social Circle, closed down, as did some radical newspapers. The opposition seemed to be intimidated.

12.6 SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL

Lafayette suffers from the tensions within the revolutionary movement

In the longer term, what effects did this event have on revolutionary leaders such as Lafayette? If 1790 had been the year of Lafayette, 1791 was the year in which divisions became obvious in France, and in which suspicions about the King, the nobles and the church worsened. Lafayette's position was undermined by two conflicting forces. As people became more suspicious of the King, they became increasingly suspicious of Lafayette himself. Additionally, as

protector of both the King and the Assembly, and defender of property against popular disorder, Lafayette was increasingly finding himself in an ambivalent situation.

By now, the tension between crowd action and legality was acute, and Lafayette used bullets – rather than his popularity – to control the people. This was the first of a number of critical incidents in which Lafayette's leadership was destroyed by the very forces that had created it.



Source 12.13 This engraving shows that the sense of disunity and suspicion typical of 1791 affected even the popular Lafayette.



Source 12.15 This engraving is not literal: the King was never kept in a cage, but he felt as if he were. The Austrian emperor asks him what he is doing, and Louis XVI replies, 'I am vetoing'.

'The revolution is over ...'

When Louis XVI accepted the Constitution, he declared, 'The revolution is over'. So he believed, and so his supporters hoped. Tragically, the King's oath did not guarantee acceptance of the principles of 1789 or completion of the revolution. He revealed his real thoughts to friends when he commented cynically, 'Giving the impression of adopting the new ideas is the safest way of quickly defeating them.'

The story so far

What were the problems facing the revolution by 1791?

First, the whole nation was bitterly divided over the issue of the church, and thousands of priests had been transformed into enemies of the revolution. Tragically, the revolution had created its own counter-revolutionaries. Second, the King's reputation was now poisoned by suspicions of treason, vividly expressed in hostile cartoons. Third, the revolutionaries had polarised into those supporting a constitutional monarchy and those preferring a republic. Fourth, this **incipient** republican movement became linked with radicalism and the dangerous idea that the revolution must go further. This republican movement was also increasingly associated with the Parisian popular movement, which aimed to depose the King and install a republic. Fifth, the revolution had divided on more than ideological grounds: revolutionaries had fired on revolutionaries. People realised that within this one revolution were two conflicting

incipient beginning to develop

understandings of the revolution. This was obvious when the conservatives celebrated the massacre. According to Marie-Antoinette's sister, the shooting showed that the demonstrators belonged to the rabble who needed to be punished. The National Guards who shot them belonged to the responsible, property-owning bourgeoisie, keen to defend law and order.

The events of 1791 redirected power to new political figures. Those who tried to protect the monarchy, such as Mirabeau and Lafayette, were discredited. Even radical deputies like Barnave, who negotiated with Louis over the Constitution, lost support. Radical politicians remained untouched by the scandal and now enjoyed increasing support from the working-class popular movement. Maximilien de Robespierre controlled the Jacobin Club when many other deputies walked out, and proceeded to rebuild the club and to consolidate his popular support.

Finally, most dangerously, foreign rulers reconsidered this revolution and concluded that the lives of the royal family were under threat.

CHAPTER REVIEW

DEVELOPING CLEAR DEFINITIONS

Write your own definition of each of the following key terms:

- Civil Constitution of the Clergy
- 'juring' priests
- the flight to Varennes
- Civic Oath
- 'refractory' priests
- the Champ de Mars Massacre

PRACTISING PARAGRAPH ANSWERS

Explain why the reform of the Catholic Church was both a significant achievement in the reorganisation of France and an unexpected cause of division in the revolution.

ANALYSING HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Marxist historian George Rudé wrote:

Why had the situation changed so abruptly [by the end of 1791]? In the first place, the King had only accepted the Constitution with his tongue in his cheek: long before it had been signed, he had made an unsuccessful bid to seek safety in flight and, having been returned ignominiously [ingloriously] to his capital, he continued to intrigue with the rulers of Sweden, Prussia and Austria for the restoration of his old authority by force of arms. [The nobles] formed



a constant focal point of dissension, sullen resentment and suspicion, and provoked the revolutionary authorities to take ever harsher measures to restrain their liberties and keep them in check. More serious perhaps was the division caused among the clergy by the new Church settlement ... These dissensions would, in themselves, have made it impossible to arrest the course of the Revolution ... Yet it was not only the opposition of forces having more to lose than to gain by the revolution that drove it onwards, but, perhaps even more, the intervention of classes that had looked to the outbreak of 1789 for a solution to their problems and whose initial hopes had, in the outcome, been disappointed or only partially fulfilled. (The French Revolution, 1988, pp. 71–2)

- 1 Who, according to Rudé, were the main sources of opposition to the revolution?
- 2 Why can the constructive reform of the Catholic Church in France be seen as one of the causes of this crisis?
- 3 Rudé mentions, but does not name, people who had supported the revolution but by now had been disappointed with its achievements. Who might these people have been?

PRACTICE ESSAY QUESTION

'The creation of the new society involves changes that arouse opposition. In most cases, it is this opposition that forces the revolution to become more radical.' To what extent is this true of the French Revolution by the end of 1791?

READING MORE DEEPLY

Easy

Nigel Aston, 'Turbulent Priests? The Church and the Revolution', *History Today*, May 1989, pp. 20–5.

Moderate

Christopher Hibbert, *The Days of the French Revolution*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1982, Chapter 4, 'The Days of the Fédérés and the Flight to Varennes'.

Challenging

John McManners, *French Ecclesiastical Society Under the Old Regime*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1960.

A detailed tertiary-level study of the role of the Catholic Church in the revolution.



The revolutionary events of 1792

“ *Power now lay not with the Assembly, but with the new Paris Commune.*

– WILLIAM DOYLE, 1989

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175

OVERVIEW

By early 1792, it was clear that the French Revolution was not, as the King had said, ‘over’. The all-powerful popular movement pushed the revolution into more radical areas. We must now trace the reasons for the radicalisation of the revolution in 1792.

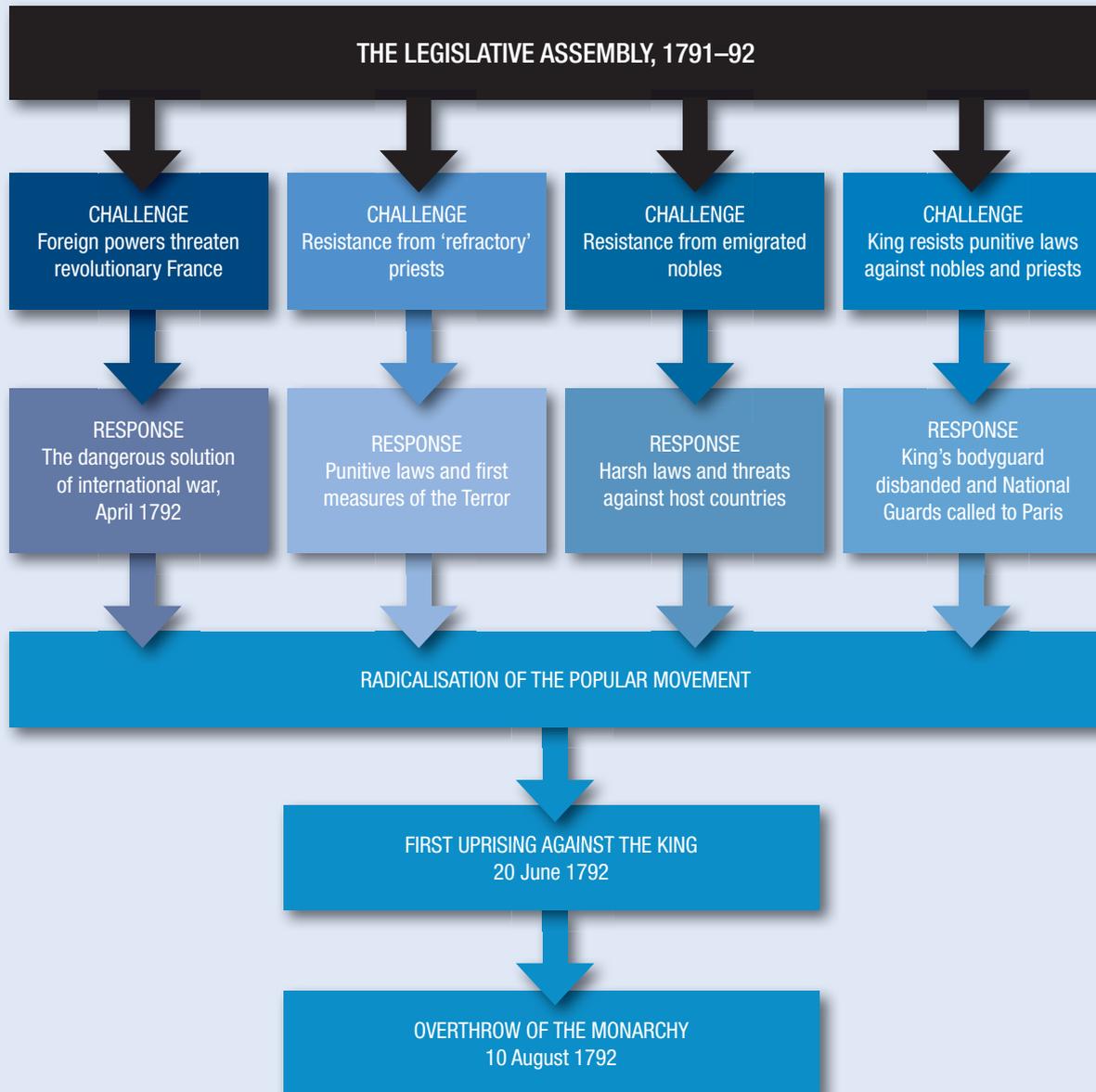
It was unexpected circumstances, rather than the nature of revolution itself, that drove this revolutionary project to extremes that no deputy could have predicted in 1789. We will witness a chain of consequences, revealing how the revolutionaries were virtually dragged into a complex conflict made up of a number of interlocking crises.

KEY ISSUES

- How did foreign powers put pressure on the revolution (August 1791)?
- What was the significance of the Legislative Assembly?
- Why did the revolution participate in international war?
- Why did the experience of war radicalise the revolution?



FLOW OF CHAPTER



13.1 How did foreign powers put pressure on the revolution in August 1791?

During 1791–92, the revolution faced the new threat of foreign intervention. Initially, the foreign response to the French Revolution was cautious. In 1789, British liberals hailed the revolution as the beginning of constitutional monarchy in France. Austrian Emperor Leopold II accepted France's constitutional monarchy, hoping that his powerful rival would be less able to dominate international affairs.

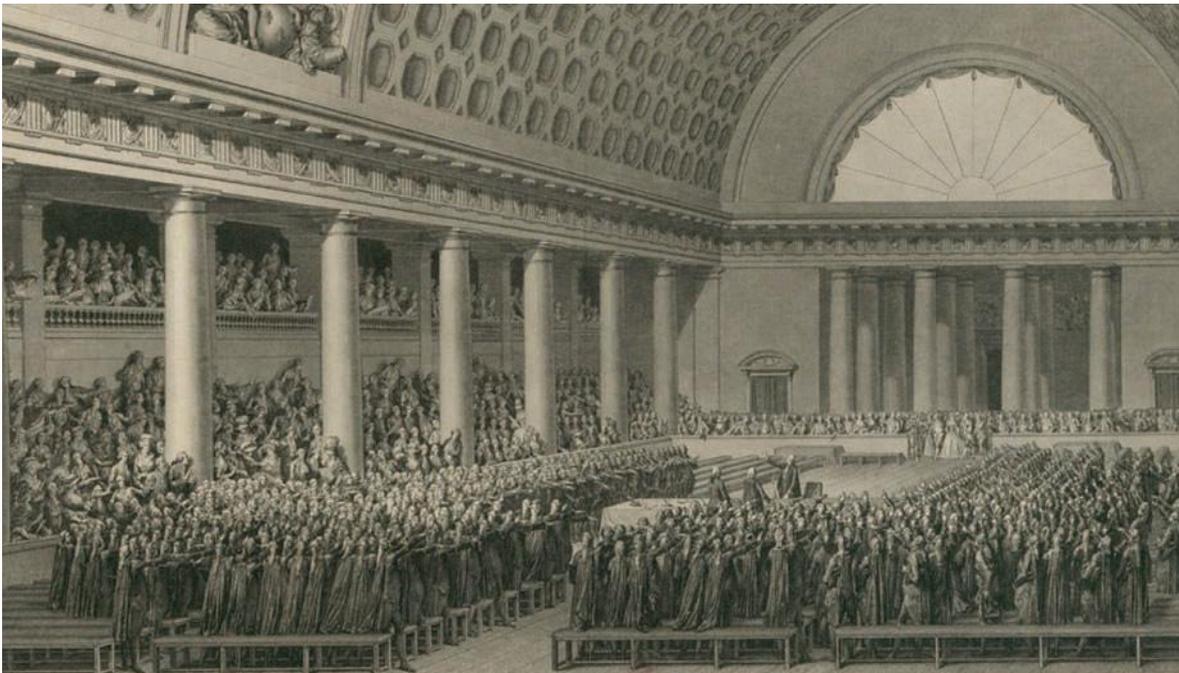
Disturbed by the imprisonment of the royal family after the flight to Varennes, however, he demanded their safety. His Declaration of Pillnitz (27 August 1791) warned that the European monarchies might restore Louis's authority. The Assembly ignored this Austrian-Prussian challenge.

13.2 New leaders, new challenges: The Legislative Assembly, 1 October 1791

The Constituent Assembly closed on 30 September 1791. The new political team guiding the revolution comprised more practical, determined men who introduced a new style of politics.

Socially, the second 'Legislative' Assembly consisted of 745 deputies elected on a high property qualification: a parliament of comfortably rich men. Its membership was narrower: it was almost completely bourgeois, containing few nobles, only 23 clergy and no urban workers or peasants.

Politically, the Assembly was controlled initially by conservatives, but radicals slowly gained control and radicalised policies. There were no distinct political parties: the deputies were grouped informally in voting 'blocs' (rather than formal parties).



Source 13.1 This engraving shows France's second national assembly, the Legislative Assembly. The men sitting here were all new to national politics: the deputies of the previous Constituent Assembly had, at Robespierre's suggestion, been banned from sitting in the next Assembly.



On the political right, 264 deputies belonged to the Feuillants Club, which believed that the revolution should stop at the constitutional monarchy. Prominent were Lafayette, the commander of the National Guard; Bailly, the Mayor of Paris; and Barnave, who had urged the King to accept the Constitution. They were 'new conservatives' with conviction, prepared to use violence to stop the revolution going any further. (Bailly sent the National Guard to stop the Champ de Mars Petition and Lafayette gave the order to fire.)

On the political left was a loose coalition of several small groups of more radical deputies, sometimes named simply after their leader: the followers of Brissot were the 'Brissotins'; the followers of Roland were the 'Rolandists'. There was also an influential group of brilliant speakers, such as G.P. Vergniaud, who came from the region of the Gironde in south-west France. Historian Gary Kates points out, however, that the term 'Girondin' did not come into common use until later, during the National Convention.

In the centre was a larger group of 350 non-aligned deputies. In this parliament, outcomes would depend on whether the conservatives or the radicals managed to win over these independent voters.

Challenges: Resistance from refractory priests (*réfractaires*)

The Assembly feared the growing conflict over the church. Many deputies came from departments where serious resistance caused local government to repress refractory priests as enemies of the revolution. Reports flooded in of increasing resistance, including a massive 90 per cent refusal rate in the Vendée in the north-west of France. The Assembly passed harsher laws against refractory priests: they must take the oath of loyalty or lose their government pension. Priests who had twice refused the oath were declared to be suspects, subjected to police surveillance and deported.

Challenges: The emigrated nobles (*émigrés*)

amnesty guaranteed safe return

Terror the deliberate use of violence by government to discourage and repress its enemies

Brissotins the followers of the radical politician Brissot in the Legislative Assembly (1791–92), who advocated revolutionary war and punitive policies against refractory priests and emigrated nobles

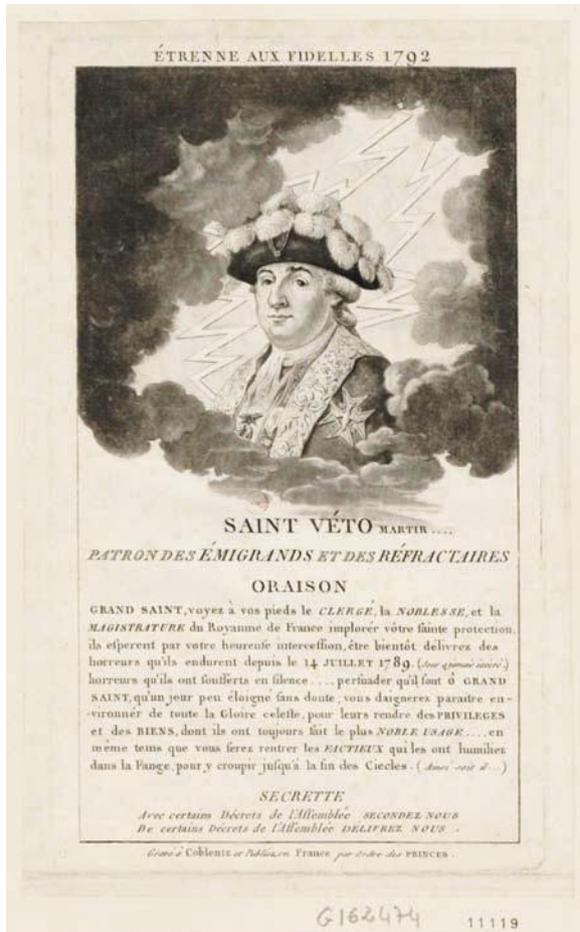
The Assembly was equally concerned about the increasing emigration of nobles, who joined the armies gathering on the borders of France. The revolutionaries offered an **amnesty** to nobles, but few accepted. Some 6000 army officers had fled the country by late 1791, depleting the French army of 60 per cent of its officers and expertise.

The Assembly invented government by **Terror**, using laws to intimidate the revolution's enemies. Deputy Brissot demanded that emigrated nobles return or lose their property (20 October 1791). He also proposed war against countries harbouring emigrated nobles. Brissot's followers, the **Brissotins**, constituted a loose group supporting these strong-arm policies. They declared that nobles remaining abroad after 1 January 1792 were enemies of the revolution who deserved execution.

The growth of the Jacobin Club

The Jacobin Club, weakened by the walk-out of the moderates, now recovered under Robespierre's leadership. People supported Robespierre and Pétion as serious politicians, who in turn drew confidence from the rowdy approval of the large crowds in the Jacobin Club. When they returned to the Convention, they brought that popular radicalism with them. The conservative Feuillants Club, in contrast, declined rapidly.

Challenges: The King obstructs emergency measures



The Assembly's harsh laws required the King's approval. He **vetoed** these radical laws against nobles and priests. People now realised that the King would **vetoed** blocked repeatedly block revolutionary laws and wondered what would happen when emergency measures were needed. This sharpened their doubts about the King's loyalty.

Focus questions

- 1 Why did the new politicians of the Legislative Assembly feel that they were facing a number of serious challenges?
- 2 What techniques did these deputies use to deal with the challenges?

Source 13.2 This sarcastic cartoon expresses the bitterness and hatred of the King by 1792. Using religious language, it names Louis 'Saint Veto', and calls him the patron saint of emigrated nobles and refractory priests.

13.3 Dangerous solutions: The option of international war

During late 1791, there was increasing discussion of war as an instrument of revolutionary policy. Tragically, people of all political persuasions saw war as a solution for the revolution's problems. In reality, this disastrous and costly war would ultimately be the single greatest force radicalising and endangering the revolution.

Brissot wanted to use war to prevent foreign governments from harbouring emigrated nobles, but a broad group of left-wing deputies also claimed that it would carry revolutionary freedoms to oppressed peoples in Europe. The King, nobles and priests would also be forced to declare their loyalty. Finally, war would draw attention away from political divisions at home and unify people again in a shared patriotism. The radicals also hoped that they could win over the independents by the patriotic appeal of war.



The suggestion of war suited nearly everybody else for varying reasons. The King and Marie-Antoinette cynically encouraged a hopeless war that would allow foreign armies to invade France, crush the revolution and restore the monarchy. Conservative deputies supported war because they hoped that success would strengthen the monarchy. Lafayette hoped to revive his dwindling popularity by new military exploits.

Louis agreed to threaten German princes who were sheltering emigrated nobles (14 December 1791), but when the princes obeyed, the excuse for war seemed lost. Yet the idea was too useful to too many people to be abandoned altogether. Only Robespierre and some Jacobins saw the danger: if the French won a war, it would strengthen nobles like Lafayette, while if they lost, foreign armies would crush the revolution. Sadly, Robespierre's self-exclusion from the Legislative Assembly limited his speeches to the Jacobin Club.

Challenges: Renewed threat from the Austrian Emperor, 21 December 1791

The Brissotin campaign for war strengthened. The Austrian Emperor, outraged by the ultimatum to the princes, promised to defend them (21 December 1791). The Assembly cancelled existing Austrian–French peace treaties, declared the royal princes guilty of high treason and instructed the King to demand that Austria renounce all treaties hostile to France or face war. In February 1792, Austria, far from conceding, signed a military alliance with Prussia against revolutionary France.

Responses: The Brissotins create a ‘war’ ministry, March 1792

The Girondin supporters of war recruited numbers from the independent deputies. In March 1792, they forced the King to replace a pacifist ministry with pro-war Brissotins such as Clavière, Roland and Dumouriez, who controlled important ministries, including the one responsible for war. The Austrians mobilised their army and Louis prepared to declare war (20 April 1792). Only seven deputies voted against the declaration. The Assembly indulged in ecstatic scenes of patriotic fervour.

The unsuccessful start to the war, 1792

This optimism was ill-founded. Austria and Prussia had excellent professional armies. By contrast, with inexperienced recruits and lacking experienced officers, the French revolutionary armies soon crumbled. When the French Army advanced into the Netherlands (29 April 1792), it retreated in panic to Lille, where the troops murdered their own commander. By May 1792, defeat was general and the three commanders of France's armies recommended peace. Meanwhile, the Austrian/Prussian armies invaded France, creating the possibility that the revolution might really be crushed by foreign soldiers.





Source 13.3 This engraving is a representation of the events at Lille soon after war was declared. General Théobald Dillon failed in his attack on foreign forces at Tournai, and was executed by his own troops.

13.4 The experience of war radicalises the revolution

Responses: Panic, paranoia and repressive measures

Reports of defeat created panic, then accusations. People now condemned the Brissotins and Girondins for starting the war. Panic intensified existing fears and suspicion into full-blown paranoia. Political discussion focused on betrayal by the King or by his commanders. All foreigners in Paris were placed under police surveillance.

Challenges: The growing fear of a *coup d'état* (armed takeover) by the King

Louis vetoed emergency measures against priests, creating a new fear that he might try an armed takeover. As a precaution, the King's bodyguard was disbanded and regular soldiers were ordered out of Paris.



Enter the loyal *fédérés*

Focus questions

- 1 Why did people of nearly all political opinions support the idea of international war as a solution to France's problems?
- 2 Why and how did the experience of war 'radicalise' the revolution?

To replace them, the Assembly ordered 20 000 National Guards (*fédérés*) from the provinces to Paris to safeguard the revolution (Decree of 8 June 1792), allowing more troops to go to the front. The Brissotins also hoped they would be a reliable force against opposition to their rule. These volunteers marched across France, some of them singing a fiery patriotic song written by Rouget de Lisle, called 'The Marseillaise'.

The King vetoed these measures too, aggravating suspicions. On 13 June, the radical Brissotin minister, Roland, criticised the King's obstructiveness. Louis responded by dismissing the radical Brissotin ministry. Lafayette ordered the Assembly to curb the radical clubs in Paris, creating fears that he was the likely coup leader.



Source 13.4 This song-sheet and the painting by Lesueur show how 'The Marseillaise' instantly became popular and was sung in cafes and taverns.

Responses: The revolutionary upheaval (*journée*) of 20 June 1792

sections municipal meetings

The popular movement, based in the municipal meetings (**sections**) of Paris, now demonstrated its power. These 'sections' criticised the active/passive citizens division and admitted passive citizens – that is, working people – into their meetings. They stated that the true defenders of the revolution were the people, who should be armed with pikes. These sections called a demonstration for 20 June – the anniversary of the Tennis Court Oath – to defend the revolution from its enemies, notably Lafayette.

The radical Cordeliers Club mobilised 8000 working people and radicalised National Guards. They marched first on the Legislative Assembly, where the crowd sang the bloodthirsty revolutionary song, the 'Ça Ira', and paraded a calf's heart impaled on a pike, labelled 'The Heart of an Aristocrat'. The representatives of the nation sat in stunned silence for three hours, helpless before this popular movement.



Source 13.5 This engraving is a representation of the first invasion of the Tuileries palace by the revolutionary crowd, imagined by painter Henri-Paul Motte around 1892.

The crowd then attacked the Tuileries palace. They surrounded Louis, making him wear the red bonnet and toast the nation. They demanded the end of Louis's veto and the recall of the Brissotin ministers. Louis refused to do either. His calm response restored his prestige and the crowd withdrew.

This near-insurrection made the Brissotins more conservative and led them to defend the King. The Jacobins became more radical: Robespierre now opposed the Constitution of 1791 and urged that the King be deposed (29 July 1792).

The opening up of the National Guard

The Paris Commune now argued that the emergency situation was so serious that any person who simply possessed a pike could be useful to defend the capital and so should be allowed into the National Guard.



Source 13.6 The opening up of the National Guard to working people changed its nature and function completely. No longer made up of bourgeois citizens, the Guard was less likely to obey orders to repress crowd action.

FLASHPOINT!**The overthrow of the monarchy, 10 August 1792**

By 10 August, the Insurrectionary Commune had 20 000 people in the streets. They were no 'rabble', but included 400 volunteers from Marseilles and National Guards from the rest of France. Casualty lists reveal that they included a broad spectrum of classes, from shopkeepers to small manufacturers and traders, master artisans and artisans. Fewer than 50 per cent of them were ordinary wage earners.



Source 13.8 This painting depicts the heavy fighting at the royal palace of the Tuileries on 10 August 1792.

At the Tuileries palace, Louis had just 900 mercenary Swiss guards, another 700 royalist volunteers and 2000 National Guards whose loyalty was doubtful. Alarmed, he walked with his family to the nearby National Assembly to seek protection. The deputies, equally scared of the crowd, unwillingly admitted him. At the Tuileries, the National Guards joined the demonstrators. The Marseilles volunteers asked the Swiss troops to surrender, but the Swiss refused and fired on the crowd. The crowd surged into the palace, murdering terrified servants and Swiss guards. Some were decapitated and their heads impaled on pikes, others were thrown from windows while still dying and naked bodies of Swiss guards were dragged away for further desecration. About 300 defenders were killed in the actual fighting (as were 90 of the volunteers from Marseilles), but another 500 Swiss guards were slaughtered in cold blood.

This 'second revolution' attacked both the monarchy and the National Assembly. The militant crowd rejected parliamentary representative democracy, preferring the radical working-class form of government: popular democracy. The Insurrectionary Commune, formed directly by the people, was the new form of revolutionary government, aggressively demanding that the Assembly recognise it or risk insurrection. It demanded a new parliament elected by universal male



suffrage and the surrender of the King to the people. The significance of this event is that the centre of power in the revolution shifted dramatically from the middle-class National Assembly to the popular revolutionary movement.



Source 13.9

This drawing is a representation of the chaotic scenes in the National Assembly when the King sought refuge, causing the crowd to invade the building on 10 August 1792.

Focus questions

- 1 Why did the popular movement overthrow the King in 1792?
- 2 How do we know that the popular movement in 1792 was becoming even more radical and independent than it had been before?

The Legislative Assembly enacts the political agenda of the working-class movement

The Assembly now debated in a hall crowded with working people and obediently enacted the Insurrectionary Commune's demands. It suspended the King but did not depose him, leaving that to the next Assembly to decide. It established an interim government of six ministers and imposed all the laws previously blocked by royal veto. Finally, it allowed the creation of a National Convention, elected on the basis of universal male suffrage.

The first measures of the Terror?

The Assembly established a special Committee of Vigilance (17 August) with extraordinary powers to arrest counter-revolutionaries. Historian Simon Schama believes that this marked the beginning of a revolutionary police state in France. It was certainly thorough, arresting approximately 1000 people on various pretexts and rounding up refractory priests; Danton, the new Minister of Justice, authorised 'home visits' to locate these 'enemies'.

All nobles feared for their lives: monarchists and constitutional monarchists hid. This left only about 300 deputies in the Assembly and the Brissotins, increasingly referred to now as the Girondins, in control. They passed harsh laws: refractory priests were deported and the property of emigrated nobles was seized. The land would be divided into small portions so that working people could buy allotments. To win back the rural areas, angry at the treatment of the King, remaining feudal dues were abolished without compensation.

The Jacobins establish their power in the radical Paris ‘sections’

Even this harsh legislation could not close the gap between the Assembly and the popular revolution. While the Girondins dominated the Assembly, their enemies, the Jacobins, were gathering power in the Insurrectionary Commune. From this position of considerable popular strength, they could threaten the Assembly with further popular action. The King and his family were taken to the Temple Prison, a medieval dungeon, where they were kept under close and humiliating guard by revolutionary soldiers.



Source 13.10 The medieval dungeon of the Temple Prison, where the royal family was kept under close guard after 10 August. The royal prince later known as Louis XVII died of mistreatment and ill-health there.

The threat of invasion, 2 September 1792

Meanwhile, the war faltered. On 2 September, the Austrian army captured the last fortress before Paris, leaving no defences between the population and the Duke of Brunswick's threat. When the first atrocity stories of women being raped and babies being impaled on spikes reached Paris, the effect was electrifying. Imminent invasion usually causes panic, but this was not due solely to rumour:



the invading army had stated its intention to punish Paris if the King were harmed. This great psychological pressure-point of the revolution generated a surge of patriotism, and Paris sprang into intensive military preparations.

13.5 SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL

A new leader and organiser: Georges-Jacques Danton

Military emergencies bring out new leaders. Danton was already a popular leader and member of the Insurrectionary Commune, enjoying such power over the crowd that the Assembly appointed him minister. He now used his influence over the people to organise an enormous war effort, speaking powerfully to prevent the Assembly from panic and defeatism. He galvanised the deputies into action, stating that no revolution had ever gained freedom without a struggle, and that it was a good thing that their enemies were so close at hand because they could finally engage with them and destroy them.



Source 13.11 *Left:* Danton's portrait captures his fiery personality. *Right:* This painting by Lesueur shows the citizens whom Danton inspired to make weapons in preparation for a final defence of Paris against the invading Austrians.

Responses: The September Massacres, 2–6 September 1792

The threat of invasion created panic, which generated violence. Before the troops left Paris for the front, there was a serious outbreak of violence. People feared what might happen when Paris was left undefended, and fears turned into rumours. The popular press spread ominous rumours that 'the prisons are full of conspirators', while Marat urged people to attack prisons and murder refractory priests and traitors such as imprisoned Swiss Guards.

According to Simon Schama, Fabre d'Églantine urged destroying internal enemies before they dealt with foreign opponents: 'Let the blood of traitors be the first holocaust to liberty, so that as we advance to meet the common enemy, we have got nothing behind us to threaten us.'

The rumour was that prisoners would escape and capture Paris until the Austrians arrived. This was unlikely, since the prisoners were only petty criminals, refractory priests and nobles. Vigilante groups formed juries, questioned prisoners and illegally condemned about 1200 to death, including 240 parish priests. Execution was usually carried out by beating the victims to death with metal bars.

**Source 13.12**

This engraving is a representation of the brutal and pointless massacre of women at the Salpêtrière Prison on 3 September 1792.

At the Abbaye Prison, the murder squads carried hatchets, razors and saws, and under the guidance of a local butcher literally hacked 19 priests to death. At the Salpêtrière Prison, which imprisoned prostitutes, these innocent women were massacred. Aristocratic women were also attacked. One famous victim was the Princesse de Lamballe, who had been a friend and lady-in-waiting to Marie-Antoinette. Her head was impaled on a pike and displayed to Marie-Antoinette at the Temple Prison.



Source 13.13 *Left:* the unfortunate Princesse de Lamballe. *Right:* In this engraving, the crowd is shown carrying her head to the prison where Marie-Antoinette was imprisoned. The princess had successfully escaped revolutionary France and reached the safety of England, but loyally returned to Paris to assist Marie-Antoinette.

No revolutionary authority tried to stop these massacres. The Assembly did not have the power and the Paris Commune remained silent. People hesitated to call out the National Guard, fearing another massacre.



ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 13.1: READING A PRIMARY SOURCE

The horrors of the September massacres

The Parisian novelist and chronicler Restif de la Bretonne, wrote:

*Finally, I saw a woman appear, pale as her underclothing, held up by a counter clerk. They said to her in a harsh voice: 'Cry out: Long live the nation!' – 'No! No!', she said. They made her climb up on a heap of corpses ... They told her again to cry out 'Long live the nation!' She refused disdainfully. Then a killer seized her, tore off her dress and cut open her belly. She fell, and was finished off by the others. Never had such horror offered itself to my imagination. I tried to flee, my legs failed, I fainted. (Quoted in Peter McPhee, *The French Revolution, 1789–1799*, 2002, p. 98)*

- 1 What was the significance or meaning of the crowd's demand to the victim?
- 2 Why do you think the princess refused to make a statement in favour of the nation?

No historian can justify the terrible brutality of the September massacres, but we can perhaps try to understand the forces that drove them. Wars are situations of extreme stress, especially in defeat. Crowd violence is often an expression of fear, not simply of brutishness.

The turning of the tide in the war, 1792–93

Late in 1792, the military situation improved. In the Battle of Valmy (20 September 1792), the Prussian army was devastated by an outbreak of disease and retreated to the frontier. At the Battle of



Source 13.14 This panoramic painting of the Battle of Valmy was created in 1826 by the French military expert Horace Vernet.

Jemappes (6 November 1792), the French army defeated the Austrians and captured most of Belgium. This was followed by a declaration of war on England, Holland and Spain in early 1793.

The story so far

By the end of 1792, it was clear that the international war was not unifying the revolution as the Brissotins had hoped, but was radicalising it. In particular, the popular movement had by now proved to be far more militant and independent than anybody had thought possible. From the overthrow of the monarchy on 10 August 1792 onwards, there was a complete change in the balance of power. There was still a National Assembly passing laws, but it now did so only with the approval and support of the popular movement.

CHAPTER REVIEW

DEVELOPING CLEAR DEFINITIONS

Write your own definition of each of the following key terms:

- Legislative Assembly
- refractory priests
- emigrated nobles (*émigrés*)
- Duke of Brunswick's Manifesto

PRACTISING PARAGRAPH ANSWERS

Using four or five main points, explain why the experience of international war worked to radicalise the revolution after 1792.

ANALYSING HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

In 1997, historian J.M. Roberts wrote:

On both French and European history the impact of the Legislative [Assembly] was colossal, but also indirect. It was made by taking France to war at the beginning of 1792. No single decision so much influenced the course of the Revolution at home and abroad. It had not been intended that it do so, but the war changed everything. It was the major determinant of all that followed for nearly a decade ... Yet the war was in large measure a by-product of a long and deepening political crisis which ended in disaster for the Legislative Assembly itself and for the Constitution which it set up. (The French Revolution, 1997, p. 44)



- 1 According to Roberts, what was the most important decision the Legislative Assembly made in 1792?
- 2 From your own knowledge of events in 1791–92, was the war caused mainly by political problems within France at this time? If so, what were they and how would international war solve them?

PRACTICE ESSAY QUESTION

'The real force causing revolutionary violence was not brutality, but fear.' To what extent do you agree that this was true of the revolution in 1792–94?

READING MORE DEEPLY

Easy

Andrew Matthews, *Revolution and Reaction, 1789–1849*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 48–52.

Moderate

Christopher Hibbert, 'The Days of the Tuileries', *The Days of the French Revolution*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1982, Chapter 5.

Challenging

M.J. Sydenham, *The Girondins*, Athlone Press, London, 1961.

Sydenham's classic study of the Girondins is now quite old, but it remains one of the most clear and reliable analyses of the complex nature of these groups, and of the subtle nature of their policy differences to the Jacobins.



Creating the new society, 1792–1794

“ *[The French Revolution could] be characterised as energy – a will to build a new world from the ruins of the regime that fell apart in the summer of 1789. That energy permeated everything during the French Revolution. It transformed life, not only for the activists trying to channel it in directions of their own choosing but for ordinary persons going about their daily business.*

– ROBERT DARNTON, 1990

”

OVERVIEW

The second campaign to create the new order in France was undertaken between 1792 and 1794, and represented a more radical attempt to create a new type of society and a new type of citizen. Robespierre and his fellow Jacobins believed that it was not enough simply to create the political structures of a republic: they had to make people good republicans.

What sort of society did the revolutionaries of 1792–94 hope to create? To answer this, we should analyse a range of evidence prior to constructing an argument about the new society created by the revolution. In the section that follows, we shall examine the Jacobins’ plans for society as they were stated formally in the Constitution of 1793, and also examine how they tried to change everyday life and consciousness.

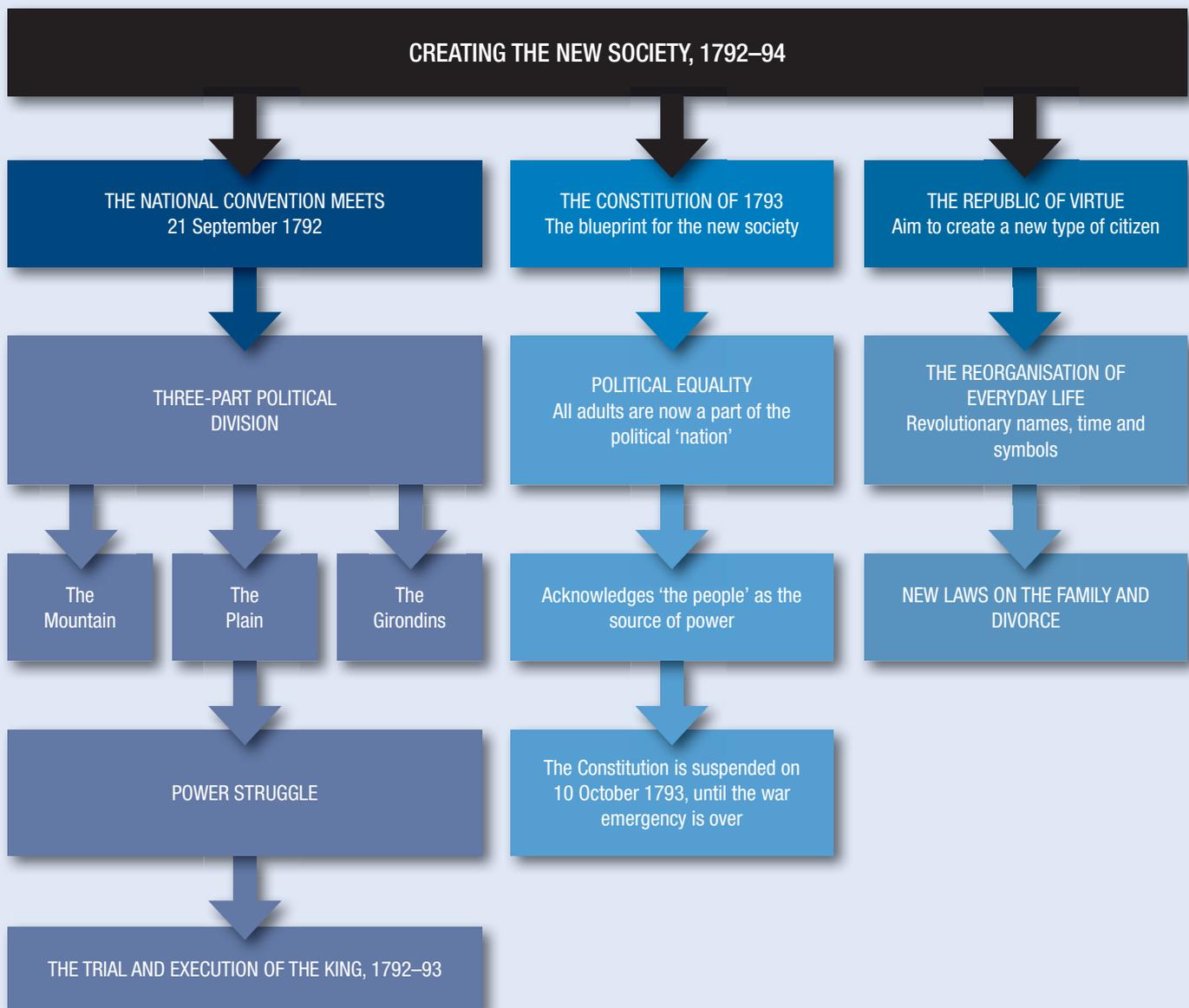
Historians also analyse resistance to reform. The creation of the new society involves first imagining a ‘blueprint’ of the new order, then implementing it; however, the process is not always smooth. We must consider how the revolutionaries responded to these challenges and decide whether these responses were suitable. In particular, the second stage of the revolution, and the Terror, have provoked debate. Terror means the deliberate use of violence by a government to discourage and repress its enemies. This violence was completely legal, insofar as it was approved by the National Assembly and applied by special parliamentary committees.



KEY ISSUES

- What was the nature of the new political team in the National Convention?
- What was the 'blueprint' for the new society?
- How were the structures of everyday life changed?
- What was the Jacobin vision of the new 'virtuous' citizen?

FLOW OF CHAPTER



14.1 The new political team: The National Convention

Once the King was deposed, the Constitution of 1791 was unworkable: a new assembly must design a new constitution. Borrowing a term from the American Revolution, the revolutionaries called their third national assembly the (National) Convention.

When the Convention met on 21 September 1792, it comprised 750 members elected by universal male suffrage. Socially, this third political ‘team’ was still dominated by the middle classes: some 47 per cent were lawyers and civil servants. A new group – radical writers such as Marat, Brissot and Desmoulin – transformed the nature of political debate with their extremist, accusatory style. This group included some *sans-culottes* (members of the militant working-class movement) and peasants.

sans-culottes a general name for the militant working-class movement during the revolution; originally meant someone who didn't wear stylish clothing (*cullottes*)

Politically, these deputies were all republicans. After 10 August, monarchists and constitutional monarchists disappeared. Many deputies were more democratic than their predecessors, having built their political persona around being, as Marat styled himself, a ‘friend of the people’, believing vaguely in ‘political equality’.

Table 14.1: The power blocs in the National Convention

The National Convention		
Radical revolutionaries	Independent deputies	‘Moderate’ revolutionaries
La Montagne (The mountain)	La Marais (The plain or swamp)	Girondins

Source 14.1 By the time the National Convention met in September 1792, the political spectrum had narrowed, excluding monarchists and constitutional monarchists. The two main groups, the Montagnards and Girondins, were divided more by a struggle for power than by neatly opposed policies.



Strategically, the deputies formed voting ‘blocs’, not formal parties. On the right were **Girondin deputies**, including Condorcet, Brissot, Roland and Isnard. Initially, they continued to be the ‘governing’ party. On the left were Jacobin deputies, including Robespierre, Marat, Danton, Desmoulin and St Just. The elections chose many radical members of the Paris sections to the Assembly. All 24 members elected for Paris were Jacobins and supporters of the Paris Revolutionary Commune. This radical group was called **the Mountain (la Montagne)** because its members sat up in the higher seats of the Assembly; they were also referred to as ‘the left’, because they sat to the left of the speaker’s chair. Between them was the uncommitted majority, referred to as **the Plain (la Marais)**, sitting lower down in the Assembly and mid-way between the two other groups, including moderate revolutionaries such as Barère, Sieyès and Grégoire. These ultimately divided almost equally into three groups of about 250 members. This third National Assembly officially abolished the monarchy and proclaimed France a republic.

Girondins a loose grouping of deputies around leaders such as Monsieur and Madame Roland, who competed with the Jacobins for control of the National Convention

the Mountain (la Montagne) referred to as such because they (the Jacobins) sat up in the higher seats of the Assembly

the Plain (la Marais), or the uncommitted majority, referred to as such because they sat lower down in the Assembly and mid-way between the two other groups



FLASHPOINT!

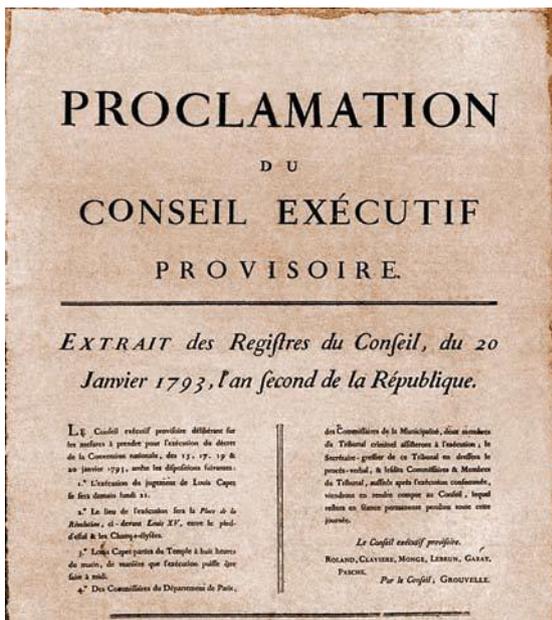
The struggle over the punishment of the King

Two great challenges awaited the new Assembly. The first was a basic power struggle between Girondins and Jacobins. Despite some excellent scholarship by Melbourne historian Alison Patrick, this competition remains largely mysterious, as historians argue whether it was a 'political' or 'party-based' struggle, or a class-based contest. While no formal parties existed, the Jacobins were certainly most like an organised party, and were able to develop their tactics in the Jacobin Club before going to the Assembly. The Girondins, by contrast, were a loose association of small factional groups and – despite Jacobin propaganda – did not form a party, and certainly not a conspiracy.



Source 14.2 This image is a representation of the scene in the Convention during the trial of Louis XVI.

Source 14.3 *Left:* The official execution order for Louis XVI. *Right:* This engraving shows the head of Louis XVI being held up as a defiant warning to 'other crowned heads of Europe'.

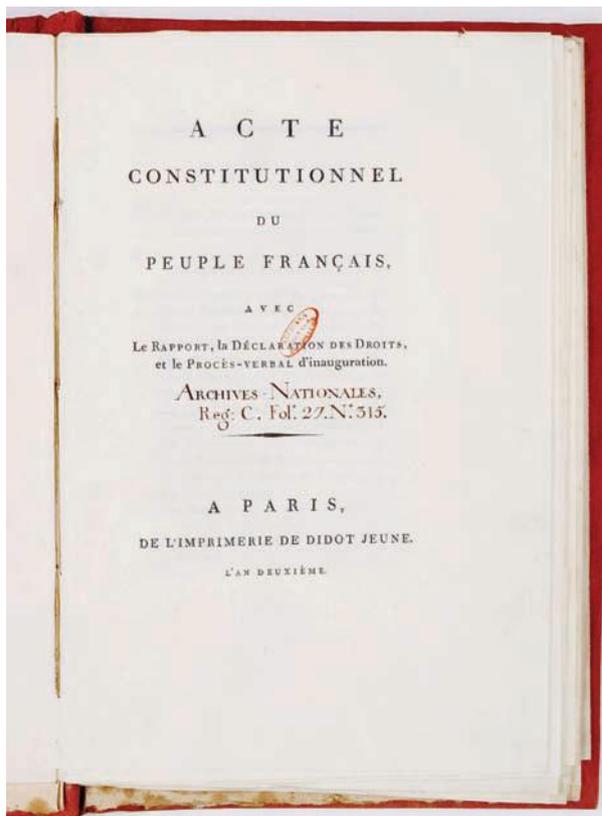


The second great challenge facing the new Assembly was the decision about the fate of the King, and this became the focus of the broader power struggle. In general, the members of the Jacobin Club and the Jacobin deputies in the Convention demanded the trial and punishment of the King, while the Girondins resisted it. In December, the Convention charged Louis with treason, appointing itself as the court. The decision on the King's guilt was rapid (26 December 1792). By 7 January 1793, the verdict was that 'Citizen Louis Capet' was guilty of conspiracy against public liberty. The critical issue was his punishment. Should he be imprisoned, exiled or executed? Over 16–17 January 1793, the Convention narrowly passed a decree for his execution (387 in favour, 334 against) and later voted against reprieve. He was executed on 21 January 1793.

Focus questions

- 1 What was the political and social makeup of the National Convention (the third National Assembly)?
- 2 Why would this Assembly become a political battleground for the main revolutionary groups?

14.2 Creating the new society: The blueprint



Source 14.4 This is the text of the most radical French constitution, which was never implemented.

freedom of thought and worship, and the basis of laws and of arrest, trial and punishment. Although the *sans-culottes* clamoured for government direction of the economy and the radicals (*enragés*) demanded a socialistic redistribution of property, the Jacobins insisted that property was sacred. In Article 2, property was declared a fundamental human right; this was repeated in Articles 16 and 19. However sympathetic the Jacobins were to working people, they were still property owners, and thus defended property rights.

The **Jacobin Constitution of 1793**, which established a republic, was more radical than that of 1791, and any French constitution since.

Jacobin Constitution of 1793 established a republic; was more radical than that of 1791 and any French constitution since

Ideas: The people as the source of sovereignty

The key principle was that 'the people' were the source of sovereignty (final authority). Under the old regime, the King was the source of sovereignty, bestowed directly by God. Under the Constitution of 1791, sovereignty came from 'the nation', but not everybody could vote. Now the term 'the people' referred literally to the population of 28 million people.

The principles of 1789: Liberty, equality and property

This new constitution retained the fundamental principles of 1791, such as equality before the law, the recognition of merit,



Ideas: The ‘right to insurrection’

The most radical new idea was the recognition, in Articles 32–35, of the ‘right to insurrection’: the right of working people to put direct pressure on the National Assembly to recognise their needs. This was formal, constitutional recognition that the popular movement’s practice of direct democracy was justified when a government was oppressive.

Document study: Constitution of 1793

Article 4: Law is the free and solemn expression of the general will ...

Article 5: All citizens are equally admissible to public office.

Article 6: Liberty is the power appertaining to a man to do whatever is not injurious to the rights of others.

Article 27: Let any individual who would usurp [take over] sovereignty be put to death instantly by free men.

Article 35: When the government violates the rights of the people, insurrection is for the people, and for every portion thereof, the most sacred or rights and the most indispensable of duties.

The optimistic belief that a balance of power is not necessary

This Constitution did not seek a balance of power by having an upper and lower house. In creating a single-house legislature, the Jacobins believed that legislation should so obviously be for the common good that every class would support it, **transcending** sectional interests.

transcending going beyond a limit or range

The Constitution and real social reform

This Constitution also offered social reforms. The sale of confiscated noble lands occurred in small lots, so that working people could afford to buy strips (3 June 1793). Common land in villages was divided out equally (10 June 1793) and all remaining feudal dues were abolished without compensation (17 July 1793). This was to demonstrate that a Paris-based revolution could still produce benefits for peasants in the provinces.

Focus questions

- 1 What were the main principles of the Constitution of 1793?
- 2 What features made it the most democratic constitution that France had ever had?

‘Democracy on hold’?

The Jacobins almost immediately suspended this Constitution. This was not done cleanly or legally. On 11 August, Robespierre stated – in the Jacobin Club, not the Assembly – that the Constitution could not be implemented immediately. This was not legalised until 10 October, when the Convention declared that government was revolutionary until peace was won, and suspended the Constitution.

14.3 The new society: The structures of everyday life

Cultural historian Robert Darnton argues in his book *The Kiss of Lamourette* (1990) that the revolutionaries aimed to transform the very fabric of life and create a new type of citizen. Darnton believes that the revolution's driving force was actually energy, not violence. The revolution was an unceasing project of change. It began mainly as a political and administrative reform, but by a quantum leap of the imagination went on to imagine the world in a different shape. He sees the deepest level of revolutionary change as psychological change, and concludes that while not everybody participated in the revolution, everybody in France was touched by it in some way.

The reorganisation of time

Darnton cites, for example, the reorganisation of time – the most basic structure by which we understand and structure reality. The Jacobins' decree to create a new framework of time reveals a gentler, almost lyrical side of their ideology. The old measurements of time were based on Christian terminology, and were scattered with all sorts of **archaic** holidays **archaic** ancient related to the monarchy and the old regime. The Jacobins now swept everything away, rewinding the clock to the fall of the monarchy, which they dated Year 1. When the French overthrew the monarchy, they began a new era, so time itself restarted.

The months of the year were beautifully named after natural phenomena – this was the influence of Rousseau's cult of nature – so that the month of grape harvest became Vendémiaire, the foggy month became Brumaire, the month of frost became Frimaire and Germinal was the month in which plants germinated.

If beauty provided one basis for the new world, reason provided another. Weights and measures were chaotic under the old regime: the Jacobins introduced the metric regime – the metre and the gram – to all measurements, creating the first uniform national system of measures in France.



Source 14.5 This revolutionary image of the newly named month of 'Germinal' (the growing month) shows that Jacobin culture had a more peaceful and lyrical aspect, apart from political violence.



14.4 The new citizen: The republic of virtue

The Jacobins did not intend to change people from the outside. They wanted to change the inner spirit, the psychology and the emotions. The concept they put forward was virtue. During 1793–94, Robespierre developed the idea that the new society would depend upon two counterbalancing qualities: Terror, which eliminated the enemies of the new order; and Virtue, which created its citizens and supporters. He believed that the new citizen, like the classical heroes of the past, would be patriotic, altruistic and self-sacrificing, able to put the welfare of society before their own.

However, the concept of virtue was not to remain abstract: the new republican citizen would be created by improving the basic unit of society: the family, which shapes the individual. This inspired the law allowing divorce. Other humane laws gave legal and civic status to illegitimate children.

The story so far

By 1793, France had a new, republican political system. The monarchy had been overthrown and the King executed. Robespierre was prepared to use Terror to overcome the revolution's immediate enemies. In the longer term, he would use education and culture to create new types of human beings who, because they were 'virtuous', would not resist the revolution.

CHAPTER REVIEW

DEVELOPING CLEAR DEFINITIONS

Write your own definition of each of the following key terms:

- the Convention
- Montagnards (also known as 'La Montagne' or the Mountain)
- Girondins
- Constitution of 1793
- right to insurrection

PRACTISING PARAGRAPH ANSWERS

Briefly describe three important changes made by the Jacobins to create their new society. Explain the significance of one of these in more detail.

ANALYSING HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Historian Patrice Higonnet has recently re-evaluated the full scope of the Jacobin plan to regenerate society. He argues that Jacobin culture was made up of two conflicting elements: a broad, generous desire to include all people in an enlightened, humane society and a tendency to exclude ‘impure’ elements with almost religious fanaticism. Left-wing historians have always tended to praise the first quality, while right-wing historians focus upon the second:

Jacobinism's core belief was that mankind could best realise its true self in the [political] context of a universalist republic. Only in that ideal setting could men and women, as individuals in their own right, fully become what nature and reason wished them to be, namely, the free and active citizens of a harmonious state. [I reject] the idea that the essence of Jacobin politics culminated in the immoral and useless Terror of 1793–1794 ... Jacobinism can still be a model for modern democrats. Jacobins were enlightened libertarians who to their own uncomprehending dismay found themselves re-enacting a past of persecution that they desperately wanted to deny. (Goodness Beyond Virtue: Jacobins During the French Revolution, 1998, pp. 1–2)

- 1 According to Higonnet, why did the Jacobins hold such high hopes for the republic as a political system in France?
- 2 Given that Higonnet admits that the Terror was ‘immoral and useless’, why does he not criticise the Jacobins more for their role in this aspect of the revolution?
- 3 From your own knowledge of the revolution, explain why the Jacobins can be said to have been ‘forced’ to use repressive measures.

PRACTICE ESSAY QUESTION

‘While the first French Revolution successfully created new political and social structures, the second revolution was more ambitious and tried to create a completely new social culture and a new type of human being.’ To what extent is this true of France in the years 1792–94?

READING MORE DEEPLY

Easy

George Rudé, *The French Revolution*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1988, pp. 80–7.

Moderate

Robert Darnton, ‘The Kiss of Lamourette’, in *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History*, W.W. Norton, New York, 1990.

Challenging

Patrice Higonnet, *Goodness Beyond Virtue: Jacobins During the French Revolution*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1998.

A thought-provoking study of the Jacobins, proposing that they genuinely believed in democracy, but at the same time found themselves obliged to use coercion.



The new society: Challenges and responses, 1792–1794

“

Even though the Terror did not last long, its legacy was the reintroduction of the spirit of religious warfare ... Both politics and war became black-and-white struggles between good and evil, with compromise or negotiation ruled out.

– D.G. WRIGHT, 1991

”

OVERVIEW

The creation of the new order continued energetically, but met with greater resistance than before. The new society was now being created under the pressure of a complex set of crises.

Times of crisis normally force governments, however democratic, to become more authoritarian to deal effectively with challenges. To study how the French applied more stringent policies of social

control, we must explore the Terror and analyse how and why it was introduced.

This raises the issue of **revolutionary violence**: the use of intimidation, physical violence and execution to deal with people who oppose the revolution. This is the most misunderstood aspect of the French Revolution: the use of revolutionary violence bears little resemblance to what is usually shown in popular depictions. Terror is,

however, troubling in political terms, because the revolution turned upon itself and destroyed its own people. In moral terms, too, the human suffering and the loss of life were real and tragic.

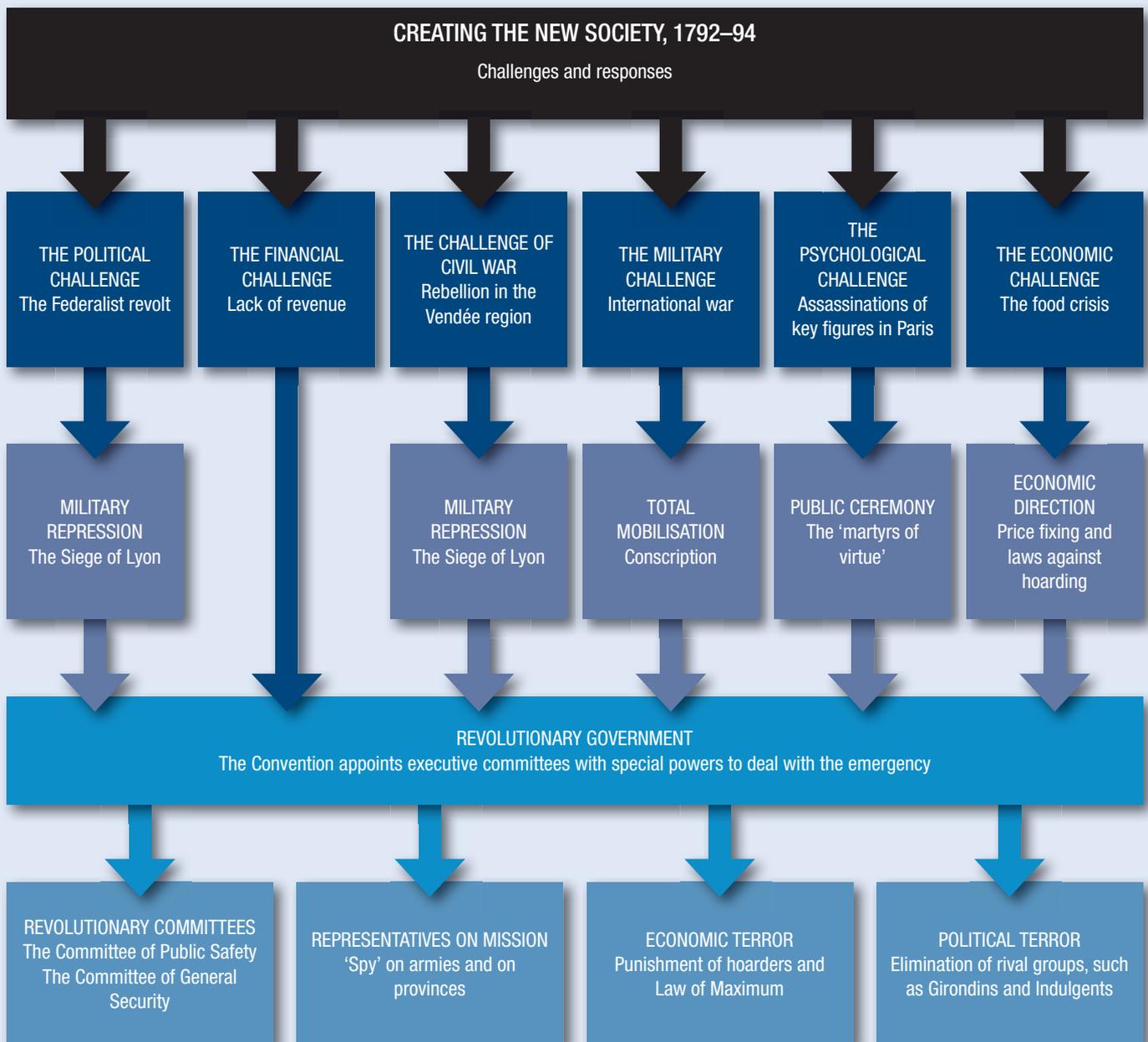
revolutionary violence the use of intimidation, physical violence and execution to deal with people who opposed the revolution

KEY ISSUES

- What caused the crisis in revolutionary finances?
- What was the nature of the military challenge of international war?
- What caused the food crisis of the revolution?
- What were the causes of the civil war in the Vendée?

- What were the nature and effects of the Federalist revolt?
- What was the psychological impact of political assassinations in Paris?
- How successful were the responses of 'revolutionary government' and Terror?
- What was the Great Terror?

FLOW OF CHAPTER



15.1 The financial challenge: The crisis in revolutionary finances

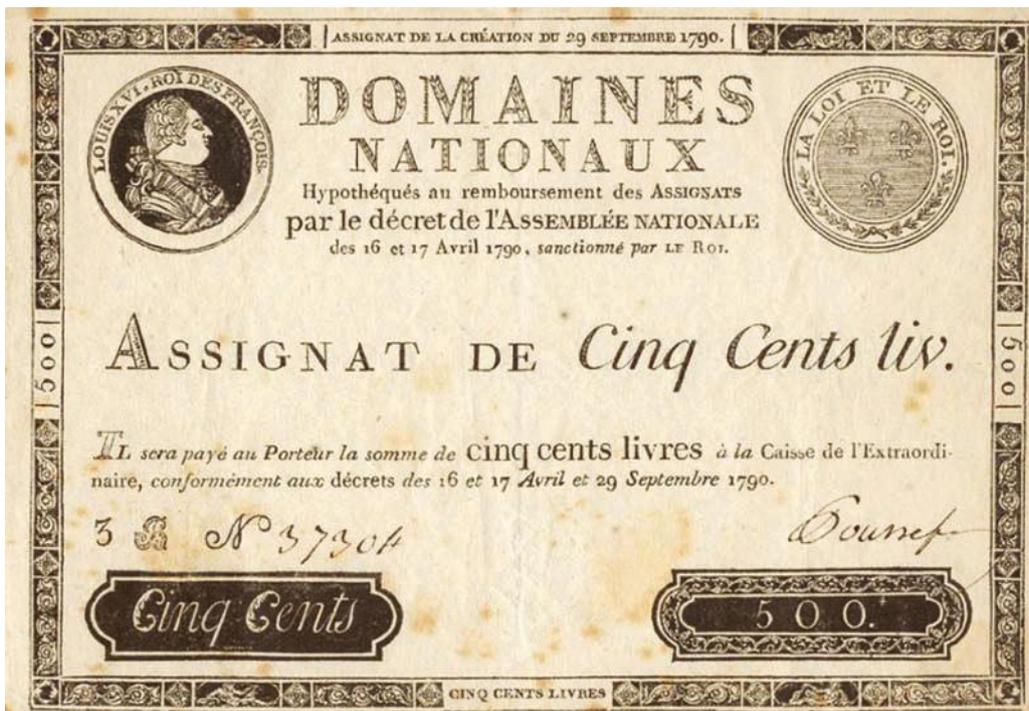
The first problem facing the revolution was, ironically, financial: this revolution, which started over the issue of the nation's debt and bankruptcy, and the principle of the accountability of finances, became an ongoing financial crisis.

The revolutionaries forgot that when society is disrupted, people stop paying taxes. The Assembly decreed that people must continue paying the old taxes until new ones were applied, but by late 1792 only 50 per cent of taxes were paid, and revenues plummeted.

Responses: Revolutionary bonds (*assignats*)

assignats government bonds The system created to finance the revolution was theoretically effective: expecting a national debt of £80 million, church lands were sold and the money used to issue government bonds (*assignats*) to the value of £400 million, carrying 5 per cent interest.

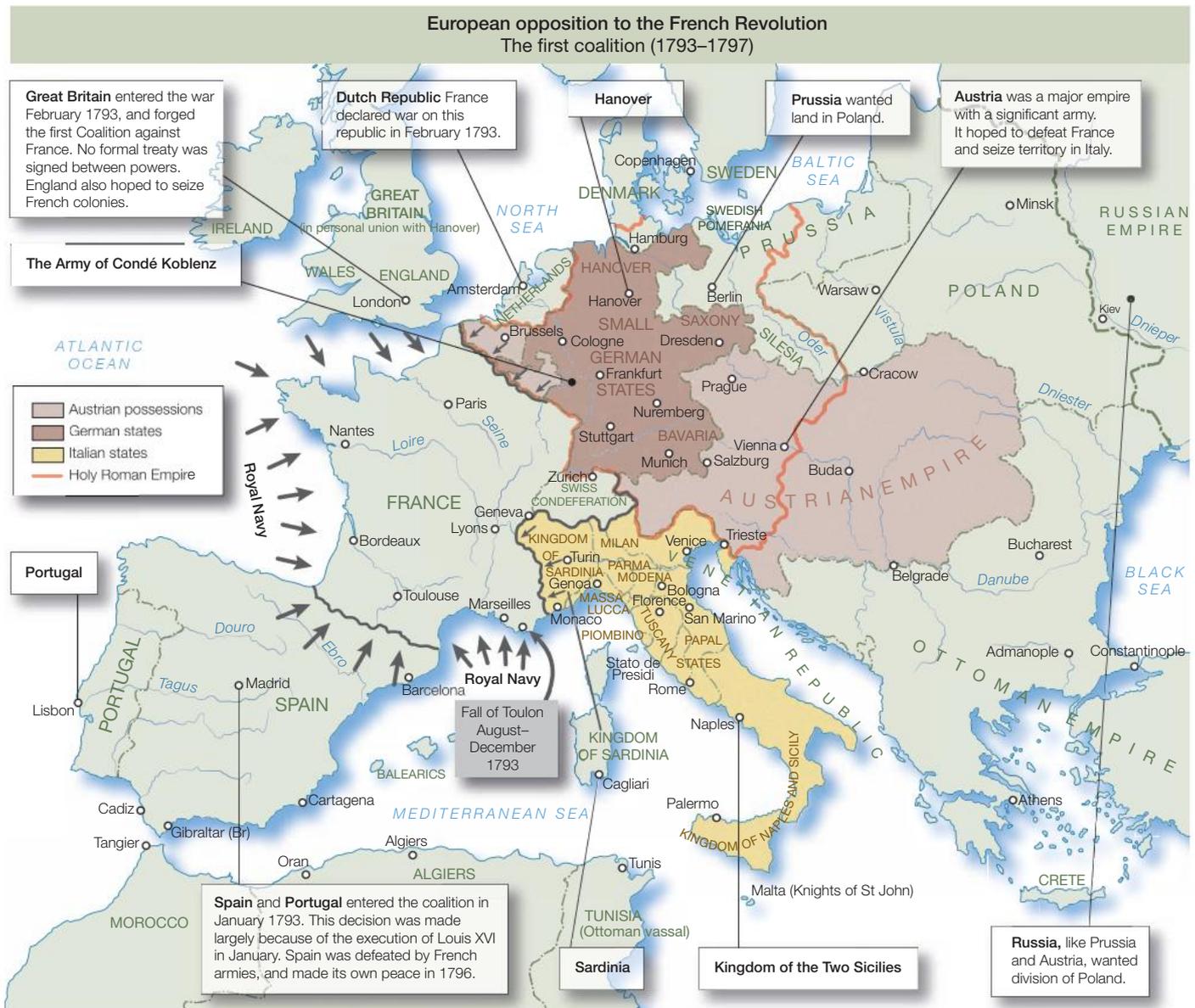
It could have worked, but the Assembly was financially naïve: when revenues from taxes dropped and government spending increased, leaving a massive debt, the Assembly made the classic mistake of issuing more bonds to compensate. The *assignat* developed from a government bond to become paper money. The *assignat* fell 20 per cent in value between June 1791 and March 1792. Prices soared. In early 1793, the *assignat*'s value fell to 51 per cent of its worth and bondholders panicked. People hoarded metal coins, causing a shortage of hard currency.



Source 15.1 *Assignats* began their life as government bonds, and were backed by the value of nationalised property. When they began to be used as bank notes, and were overprinted, inflation resulted and their value fell.

15.2 The military challenge: International war

During the winter of 1792–93, the military situation improved. The September massacres reassured Parisian workers, who volunteered in their thousands and went to the front. At the Battle of Valmy (20 September 1792), shocked Prussian generals watched as the new French citizen army, led by General Dumouriez, devastated the Prussian forces. The French had more soldiers and better cannon, but these soldiers, straight from the Parisian revolutionary meetings, surged into battle with fire and spirit, singing revolutionary songs. The German poet Goethe, who was invited to witness a Prussian victory, commented quietly to the generals, ‘Here and today, a new era in world history has begun, and you can be proud that you were here to see it born.’ The Prussians prepared to surrender.



Source 15.2 This map shows the array of powers that formed the overwhelming First Coalition against revolutionary France.

First Coalition an alliance formed by England that included Russia, Austro-Hungary and Spain

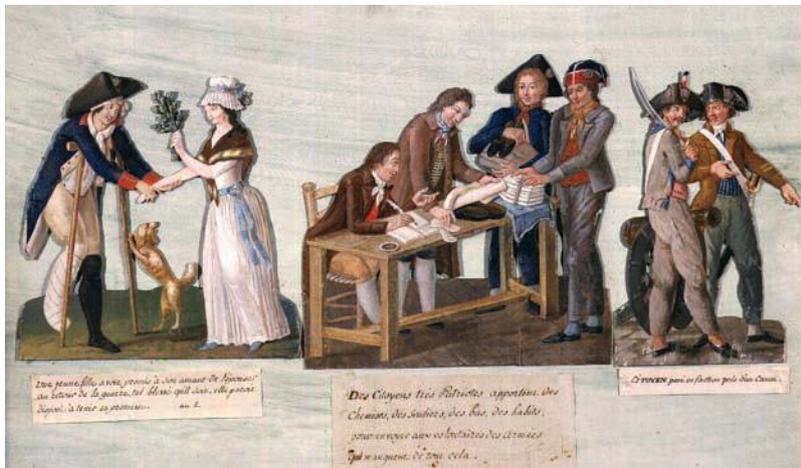
War flared up again after the execution of Louis (January 1793), with France fighting the **First Coalition**, an alliance formed by England that included Russia, Austro-Hungary and Spain (March and April 1793). France again suffered defeats. In April 1793, the hero of Valmy, General Dumouriez, sought an armistice with the Austrians, offering to crush the revolution, free the royal family and place the Dauphin on the throne as Louis XVII. His army rebelled so he defected to the Austrians. By July 1793, enemy armies again entered France on almost every border.

Responses: Total mobilisation



Source 15.3 This painting by Lesueur represents some of the officers and men who formed France's early revolutionary army.

The situation seemed hopeless. The French fought on, slowly regaining ground. They conscripted 300,000 new troops and declared a total war emergency. By 1794, France had an army of 1.5 million men in the field. This concept of total war was not invented by the Assembly, but by the radical working-class movement of the Paris 'section' meetings. Every citizen now had some duty: veterans were urged to sit in public squares and fire young people's minds with heroic stories to arouse hatred of kings and love of republics.



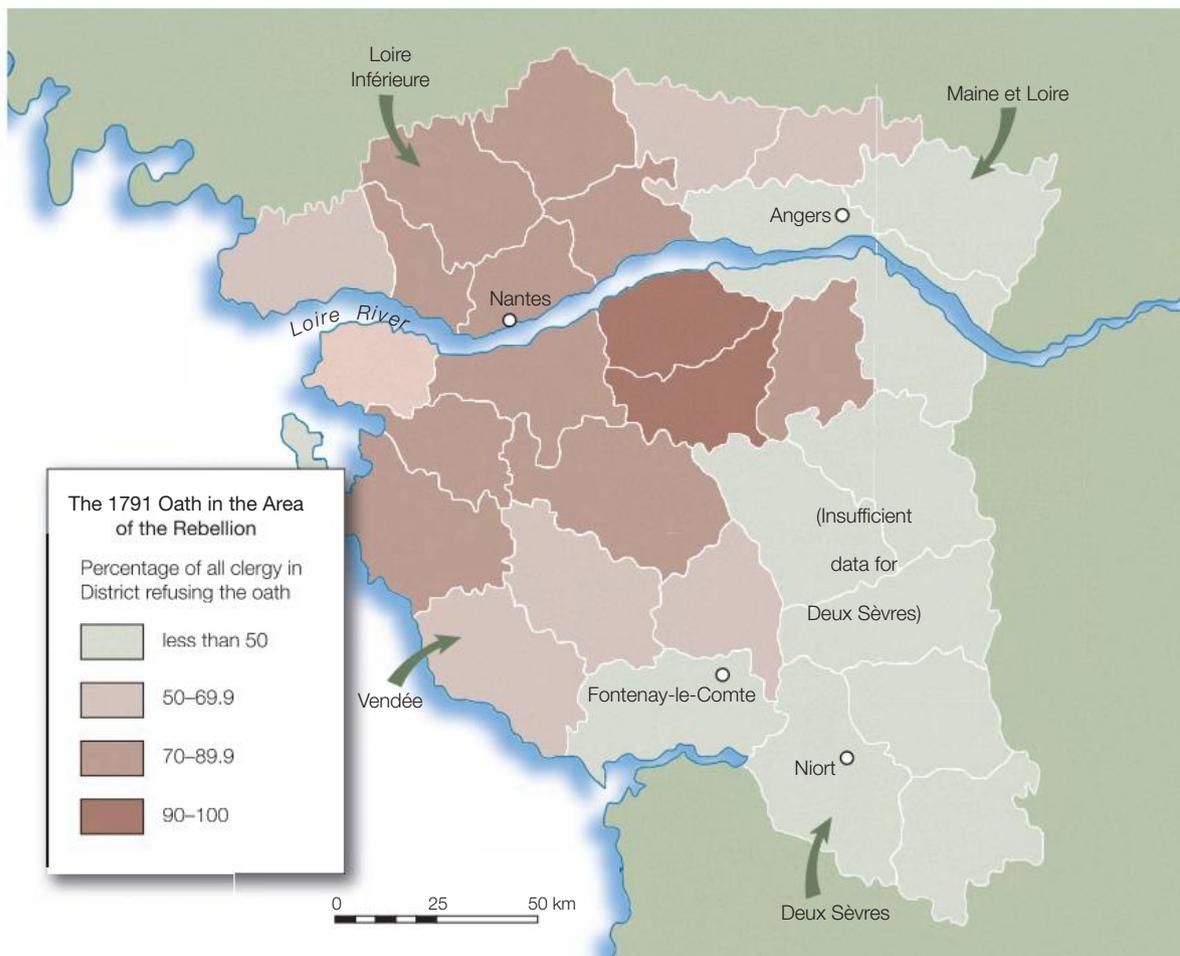
Source 15.4 This painting by Lesueur represents three examples of how all citizens tried to play a role in the war effort. A young woman promises to marry her fiancé even if he comes back wounded from the war; citizens bring sheets and shirts to make bandages for the troops; and two men report for duty with a cannon.

15.3 The economic challenge: The food crisis

The war drew heavily upon France's food supplies and disrupted her international trade. All basic commodities, including sugar, coffee, soap and candles, were in short supply and prices were trebling. By January 1793, food riots again occurred in Paris. In February, the radical 'section' meetings of Paris condemned free trade, which middle-class deputies in the Convention supported. The popular movement petitioned both the Jacobin Club and the Convention for government regulation of prices. When the Convention refused, the *sans-culottes*, encouraged by the radical group called the 'enraged ones' (*les enragés*), responded with the practice of 'popular taxation' (25–26 February 1793). It was not looting: crowds, led by women, broke open shops, declared what they thought a fair price for the goods – usually the 1790 price – and sold them at that price, then handed the money to the terrified shopkeeper.

the 'enraged ones' (*les enragés*) an ultra-radical group produced by the *sans-culottes*

15.4 The military crisis: Civil war



Source 15.5 This map shows the large number of priests who refused the clerical oath in the Vendée region: in several areas, 70–100 per cent of priests did so.

FLASHPOINT!**Civil war in the Vendée region, March–December 1793**

France's international problems were compounded by the outbreak of civil war. The trouble began in the Vendée region in the south-west. This civil war embarrassed the revolutionaries because it denied the revolution's central purpose. How can a revolution claim to be improving the world for the people when thousands are actively resisting it?

It is important to understand just how complex causes of rebellion can be. In popular myth, this was a rebellion of loyal peasants who loved their King and the Catholic Church, and who stood up against the revolution that had destroyed both. In reality, these peasants had simply decided that they were worse off under the revolution. The first cause was the reintroduction of conscription by ballot. Since the bourgeois of the towns were excused because they served in the National Guard, the conscription took mainly peasants, who resented leaving their farms. Behind this grievance was a more basic division between town and country, bourgeois and peasant. The peasants could not afford to buy church land and resented the bourgeoisie, who bought large amounts. Second, the reorganisation of the church caused the closure of locally loved churches and the issue of the clerical oath caused a massive 90 per cent rate of refusal in the Vendée. The area lost most of its priests, and the locals hated the replacement 'revolutionary' priests.

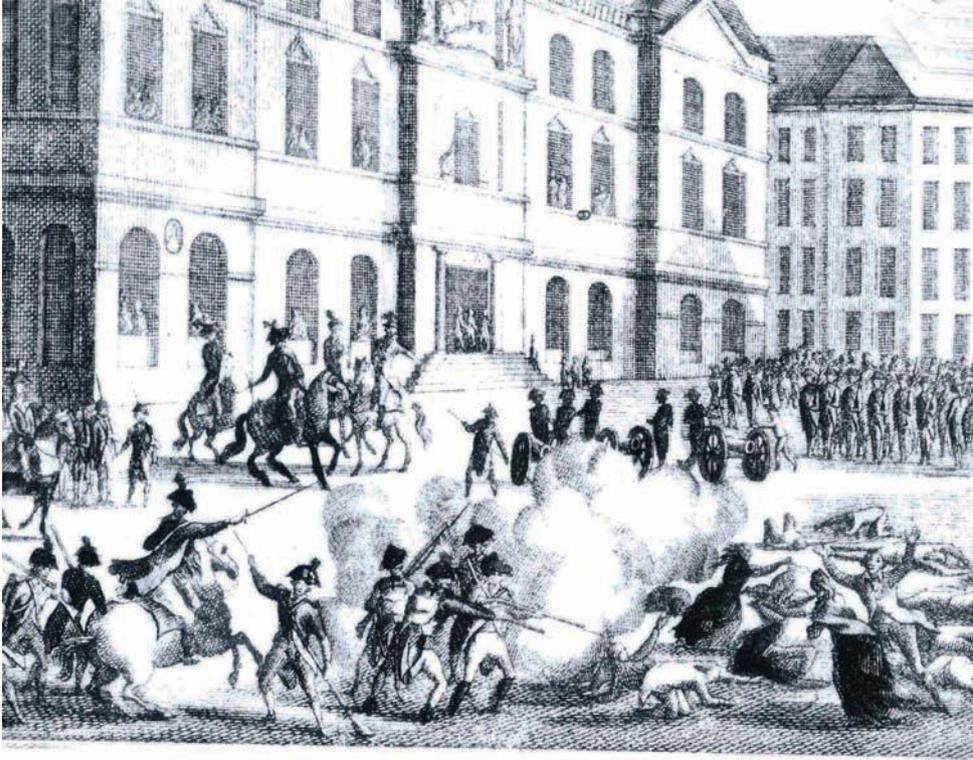
Isolated peasant skirmishes became broad peasant resistance. The peasant army stormed towns and took over whole parts of the region. When the Jacobins sent revolutionary armies to repress the rebellion, they found themselves fighting guerrilla warfare in a landscape divided by thick hedges. The rebels formed the Catholic and Royal Army and demanded the return of their King, their former priests and the death of all revolutionaries. They planned to seize a French port to open the way for a British invasion.

By March 1793, the Assembly was facing major insurrection. The response was firm: republican armies were sent to the region to repress the rebellion utterly. The Vendée Rebellion is remembered for the extremely cruel atrocities committed by both the revolutionaries and the rebels, creating a bitter legacy of hatred that survives to this day.



Source 15.6 This engraving is a representation of a member of the small, highly mobile armed groups of peasants who conducted guerrilla warfare in the hilly countryside of the region.

15.5 The political challenge: The Federalist revolt



Source 15.7 This engraving represents the brutal repression that killed some 2000 Federalist rebels in the city of Lyons. When the guillotine proved too slow as a means of execution, the republican troops loaded cannon with shrapnel and fired point blank at their victims, cutting them to pieces.

The Federalist revolt created a different sort of challenge to the revolution. Technically, it was not strictly counter-revolutionary, because its members were revolutionaries who supported the Republic and the Constitution of 1793. They did not want to stop the revolution but rather acted to protect it from the pressure of 'direct democracy' from the working-class movement in Paris.

This was essentially a regional movement, affecting about 60 of France's 83 departments. The main centres of the rebellion against the revolution were Bordeaux, Lyon, Marseille and Toulon.

These provincial revolutionaries believed in representative democracy and supported the Republic. They did not, however, understand the political realities of Paris, where the popular movement was all-powerful. Horrified by attacks on the Convention, such as the upheaval of 31 May–2 June 1793, the Federalists started a number of rebellions of varying seriousness during 1793. In Lyon, for example, these moderate revolutionaries seized local government from more radical Jacobin deputies. They then planned to raise an army of 10000 men, march on Paris, protect the Convention and crush the popular movement.

The Convention responded firmly to such challenges. It declared Lyon a rebel city and ordered all inhabitants to leave the town. When the Lyon Federalists resisted, the Convention sent a revolutionary army to crush the rebellion. In the resulting Siege of Lyon (October 1793), some 2000 Federalists were executed and the revolutionary government, infuriated by the resistance, initially ordered the city to be flattened. Although many other revolts were crushed relatively easily, they did harm the revolution by taking revolutionary troops away from the war front, increasing the mood of crisis, uncertainty and fear.

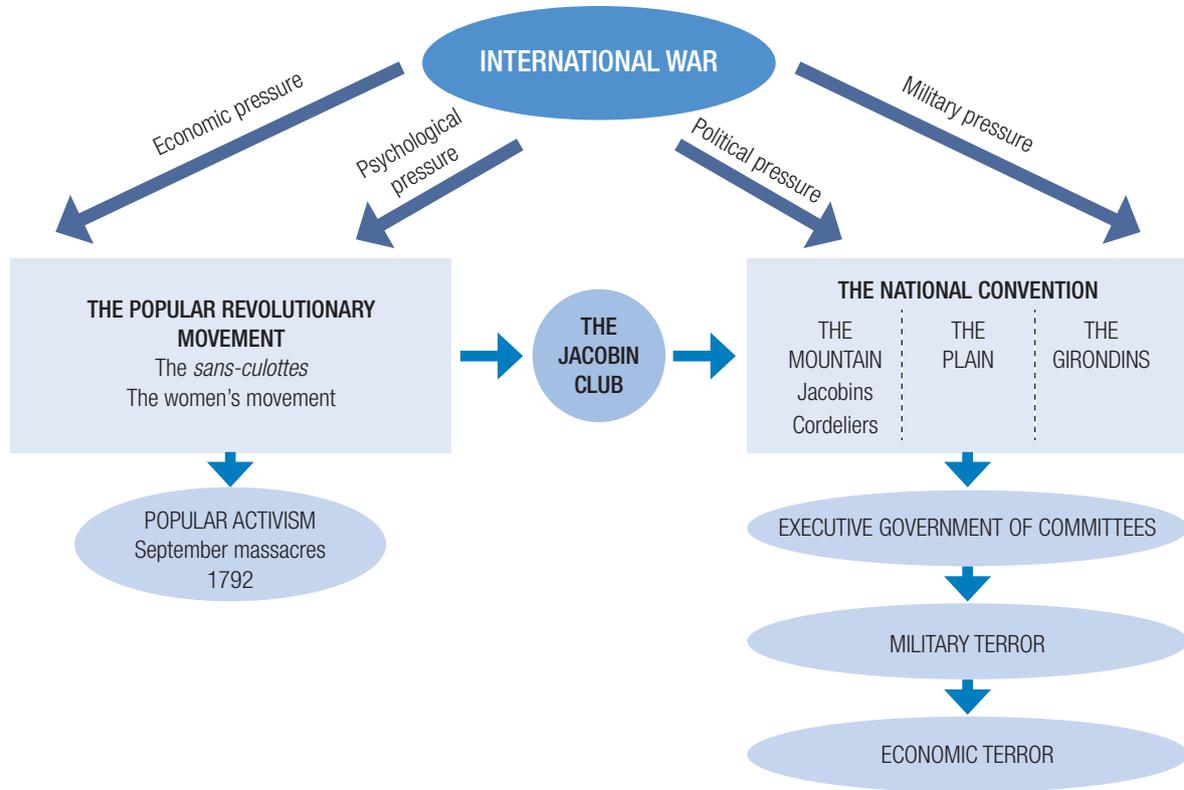
15.6 The psychological challenge: Assassinations in Paris

This general sense of emergency and crisis was sharpened by dramatic events in Paris. First, an assassin murdered the deputy Le Peletier de Saint-Fargeau, as punishment for voting for the King's execution (20 January 1793). In July, the radical Montagnard Marat was stabbed to death by a supporter of the revolution, Charlotte Corday, who claimed that the revolution had lost its sense of legality and justice. These assassinations, together with an unsuccessful attempt on Robespierre's life, created a paranoia that the revolution was threatened by invisible enemies.

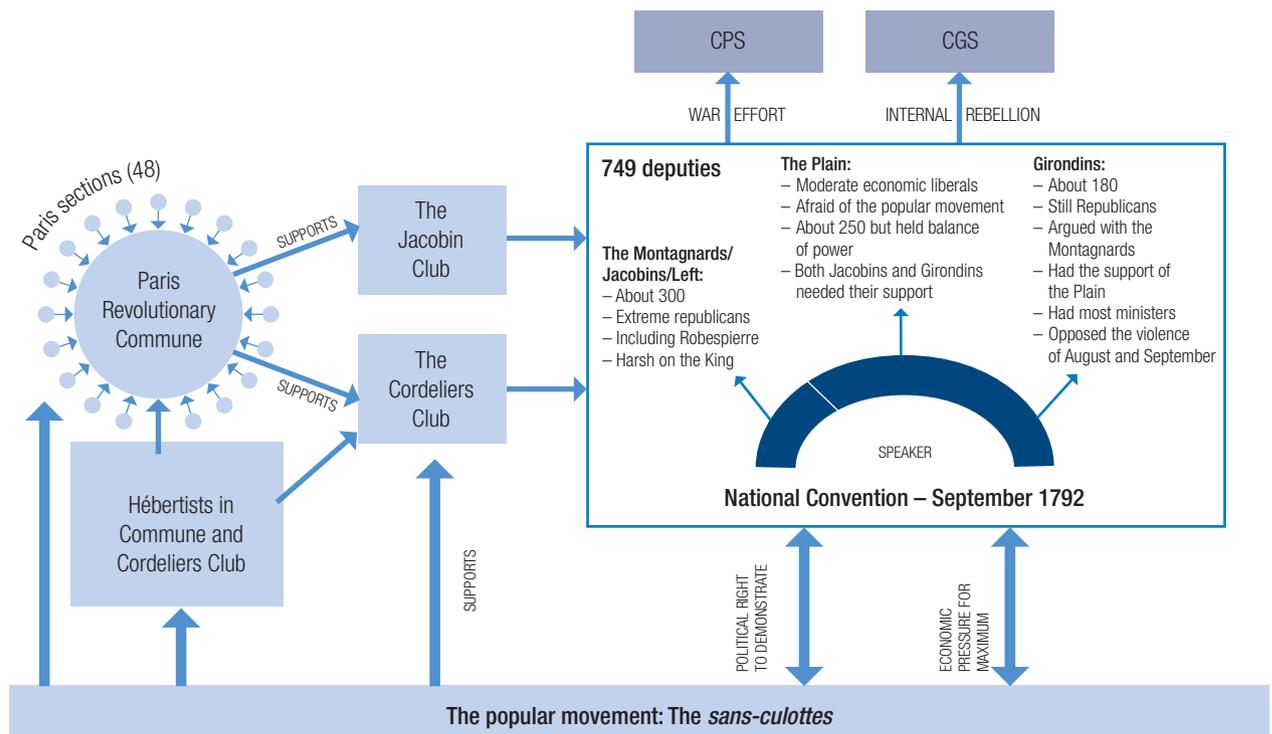


Source 15.8 *Above:* This engraving provides a dramatic, but imagined, account of Corday's act of 'principled murder'. *Centre:* Charlotte Corday. *Right:* This painting by Jacques Louis David offered a dramatic image of the dead Marat in his bathtub. The representation was intended to be a sympathetic image of the leader, who was now seen as a martyr to the cause of Liberty.

The role of war in radicalising the French Revolution

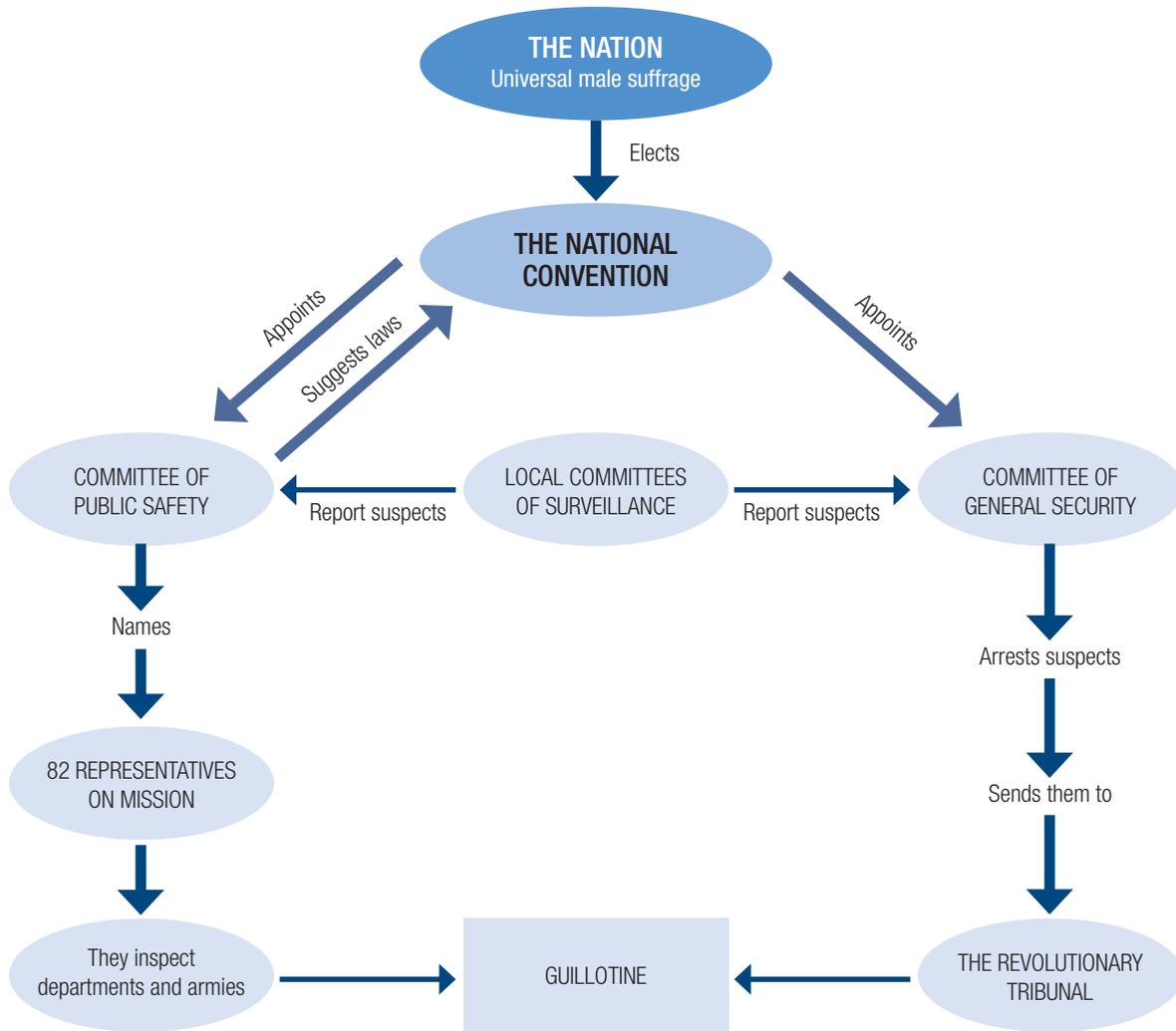


The political landscape 1793–94



15.7 Responses: 'Revolutionary government' and Terror

How the 'machinery of Terror' worked



The forms of Terror 1792–94

THE INSTITUTIONS OF THE TERROR

The Committee of General Security (1792)
 The Committee of Public Safety (28 March 1793)
 The Law of Suspects (17 September 1793)
 The Law of 14 Frimaire (4 December 1793)

THE MILITARY TERROR

The Representatives on Mission (22 September 1792)
 The Revolutionary Tribunal (10 March 1793)

THE ECONOMIC TERROR

The Law of the Maximum (4 May 1793)
 The Law of the General Maximum (29 September 1793)
 The Law Against Hoarding – death penalty (26 July 1793)

THE LOCAL TERROR

The Revolutionary Committees of Surveillance (21 March 1793)

THE FACTIONAL TERROR

The trial and execution of the Girondins (31 May–2 June 1793)
 The trial and execution of the Hébertistes (13–24 March 1794)
 The trial and execution of the Indulgents (5 April 1794)

THE GREAT TERROR

The mass execution of victims including Marie-Antoinette (16 October 1793) and numerous key revolutionary figures

revolutionary government temporary emergency measures to deal with the threat to the revolution

In March 1793, all these elements of crisis – war, economic disruption, civil war and popular radicalism – joined to prompt measures that would have horrified the men of 1789. At this point of supreme crisis, when the revolution seemed most threatened, the Convention adopted the first measures known as **revolutionary government**, meaning temporary emergency measures to deal with the threat to the revolution.

Focus questions

- 1 What were the challenges facing the revolution in the years 1792–94?
- 2 How did the revolutionaries try to deal with these challenges?



The 'military' Terror

Popular demands for the creation of the Revolutionary Tribunal to try traitors, 10 March 1793

The popular movement demanded strong measures to win the war. Events followed a familiar pattern: anger, suspicion, paranoia and vengefulness boiled over in the Paris 'section' meetings, which demanded firm action; the Jacobin Club, anxious to please the popular movement, loudly agreed; and the Convention quickly passed legislation. For example, the idea of a Revolutionary Tribunal to try traitors first arose in the Paris 'sections', was taken up by the Jacobin Club, then was enacted by the Convention on 10 March 1793.

The concept of the 'representative on mission', March 1793

The same process generated the idea of the 'representative on mission'. These 82 deputies were sent to each department to inform people why emergency measures were necessary and coordinate those measures. The representative was virtually a spy, responsible for checking that generals and officers were doing their utmost for victory.



Source 15.9 Right: This painting depicts a representative on mission, Jean-Baptiste Milhaud, in full ceremonial uniform. **Left:** This engraving shows the work of the representatives on mission: General Custine was condemned and executed for losing the Rhineland to France's enemies.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 15.1: READING A PRIMARY SOURCE**Civil war breeds dehumanisation and atrocities on both sides**

An official report by Commissaire Benaben describing the mass shooting and mass drownings of rebels in the town of Savenay, 26 December 1793:

I witnessed all the atrocities that a town taken by force can offer. The soldiers, having spread out into the houses, and having brought out the wives and daughters of the bandits who had not had time to leave and flee, led them into squares and streets, where they were piled up and their throats cut on the spot: with rifle shots, bayonet blows and cuts of the sword. Claude Petitfrere, La Vendee et les Vendéens (Paris: Archives, 1981).

- 1 What two techniques were used to kill large numbers of people quickly and conveniently?
- 2 Consider the tone of this report. What does this document reveal about the process of dehumanisation that occurs during civil war, when atrocities are committed on both sides?

The ‘religious’ Terror

Other violent responses to counter-revolution came from the popular revolutionary movement. The Convention passed further harsh laws against non-juring priests, allowing them to be deported on the basis of six citizen complaints. In Paris, the Insurrectionary Commune encouraged symbolic acts such as turning the Cathedral of Notre-Dame into a Temple of Reason. In the provinces, representatives on mission, such as Joseph Fouché, encouraged the revolutionary crowd to attack churches, vandalise sacred objects and prevent public church services. This revolutionary movement was largely out of the control of the leaders. Robespierre saw that this form of Terror would turn people against the revolution, but neither he nor the Convention could stop this process of de-Christianisation.

The ‘local’ Terror: Revolutionary Committees of Vigilance, 21 March 1793

Another emergency measure was the creation of revolutionary committees, or committees of vigilance, across France to keep an eye on foreigners and other suspects. Although they were intended only to be vigilante committees, they quickly became instruments of local oppression.





ETAT du Civil & du Moral des détenus de la Section de MUTIUS SCAEVOLA, par mesure de sûreté générale, dressé suivant l'ordre du Comité de sûreté générale de la Convention Nationale, par le Comité Révolutionnaire & de Surveillance de ladite Section.

De la Section de la République Française une & indivisible.

Nom du détenu, son domicile avant la défection, son âge, le nombre de ses enfants, leur âge; où ils font; s'il est veuf, garçon ou marié.	Le lieu où il est détenu; depuis quand; à quelle époque; par quel ordre; pourquoi.	Sa profession avant & depuis la révolution.	Ses revenus avant & depuis la révolution.	Ses relations, ses liaisons.	Le caractère & les opinions politiques qu'il a montrés dans les mois de mai, juillet & octobre 1793; au 20 août; à la fête de la mort de Louis; au 31 mai; de dans les crises de la guerre; s'il a signé des pétitions ou autres libellés.
<p><i>N. 12</i></p> <p>Bro Jean-Louis Père âgé de 60 ans Démocrate. rue du St moy N. 732. Marié il a 5 enfans après la suite transféré apôtre l'année a 25 ans est marié Les autres son âgé depuis 25, 13, 15, et 19 ans.</p>	<p>Détenu de 15 févrière par la Comité révolutionnaire à la maison de surveillance de Carême rue de Valenciennes et transféré dans l'anglais rue de Charante le 14 pluviose Pour mesure de suspicion.</p>	<p>Notaire avant et après la révolution.</p>	<p>De classe Jours de Dix mille livres de revenu il s'opposait de suspendre de l'histoire.</p>	<p>Lis avec les hommes de la et les assistés de la section.</p>	<p>Son caractère est son opinion sur les événements Des mois de mai, juillet, et octobre 1793 ans de août a la fête et à la mort de Louis, son de ny avoir jamais applaudi et les avoir désapprouvés à la suite Des vices patriotiques dans l'opinion Bien de la guerre, il espérait la section sans de l'ancien régime au total, mais bien de même régime modifié, Il était opposé à la destruction De la Bastille, il était opposé à la destruction de la Bastille de l'histoire Bailli et La Fayette, a fait des attention contre, a proposé de regarder de la Commune, dans le Cas où elle les voudrait détruire, et opposer les gardes nationaux accusation des état de L'ancien régime dont il se dit l'ennemi Il a applaudi au massacre des nobles de l'Champ de Mars, dont il s'est flatté en avoir l'annonce les mouvement avec un tel orgueil Le 12 juillet</p>

Pour Extraits conformes au Règlement des motifs sur le dévouement au service de la Roy sur le genre suspectif.

Sigalle
Le 12
Vigneron
Dixant
Le 12
Vigneron

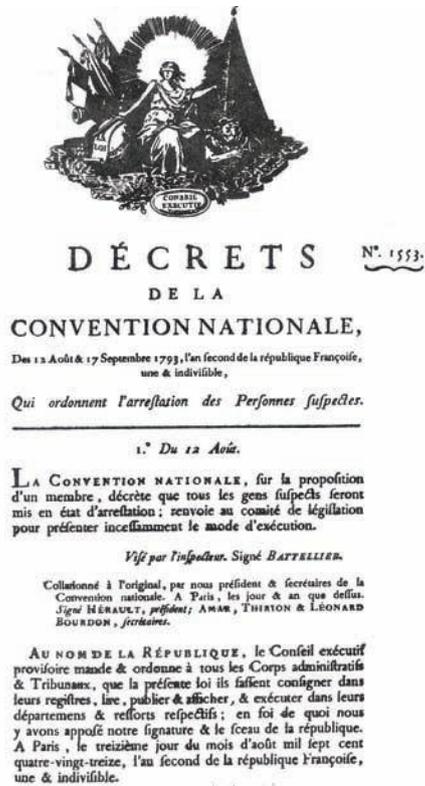


Committees of Surveillance (Watch Committees)

local meetings of patriots in the cities, towns and villages of France, given responsibility for discovering enemies of the revolution

Source 15.10 Top: This document is part of the revolution's 'bureaucracy of death'. Drawn up by one of the 'sections' of Paris, it reports on one Jean-Louis Bro, a 60-year-old father of five children. The document accuses him of not applauding the execution of the King, of not supporting the war and of hoping for the return of the old regime. This piece of paper may have cost the unfortunate man his life. **Bottom:** This engraving shows a local **Committee of Surveillance** meeting to interrogate an accused man and to read his certificate of accusation, like the one shown.

The Committee of Public Safety, 25 March 1793–6 April 1793



Finally, the Convention established the coordinating Committee of Public Safety (28 March 1793) of 25 members to command the war effort. The committee was directed by Barère and dominated by Danton, who preached reconciliation rather than terrorisation; Robespierre did not initially join.

By September 1793, the crisis forced the Convention to formally accept Government by Terror, exemplified by the harsh **Law of Suspects** (17 September 1793). This expanded earlier definitions of what sorts of behaviour could make a person suspect so that it could include almost anyone, and shifted the burden of proof onto the suspect, who had to find a way of proving his/her innocence.

Law of Suspects expanded earlier definitions of the types of behaviour that could make a person suspect; it shifted the burden of proof onto the suspect



J. Bouchonville
Gobier

Source 15.11 The law that allowed authorities to arrest all those 'who, by their conduct or their relationships, either by their words or writings, have been partisans of tyranny or federalism', often on the flimsiest of pretexts



Source 15.12 This painting shows the arrest of a 'suspect'.



Focus questions

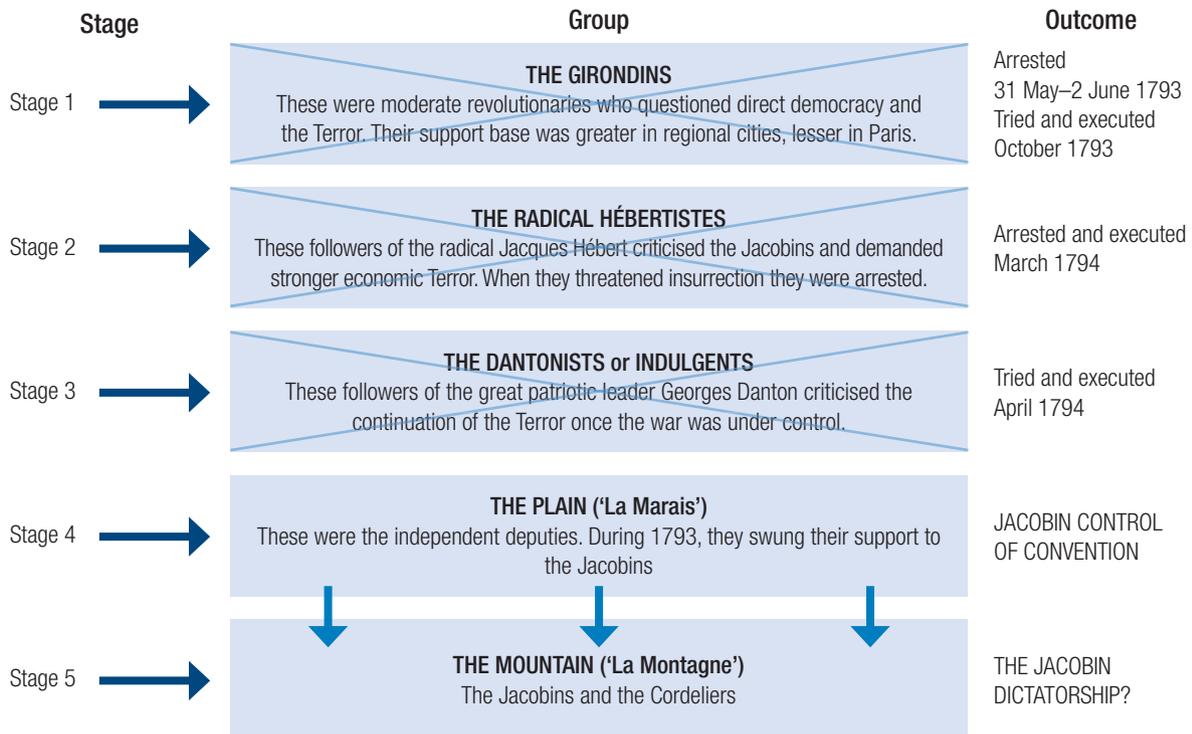
- 1 What forms did the Terror take, in terms of special committees and special laws?
- 2 To what extent was the popular movement responsible for introducing some of these forms of Terror?

The 'economic' Terror

While the emergency measures known as the 'Terror' were initially conceived to deal with a military crisis, the use of force to deal with enemies rapidly expanded into other forms. The 'economic Terror' emerged when the popular movement, angered by food shortages, demanded laws, and finally capital punishment, against merchants who were hoarding grain to create price increases.

The factional Terror

The elimination of all rival groups and criticism



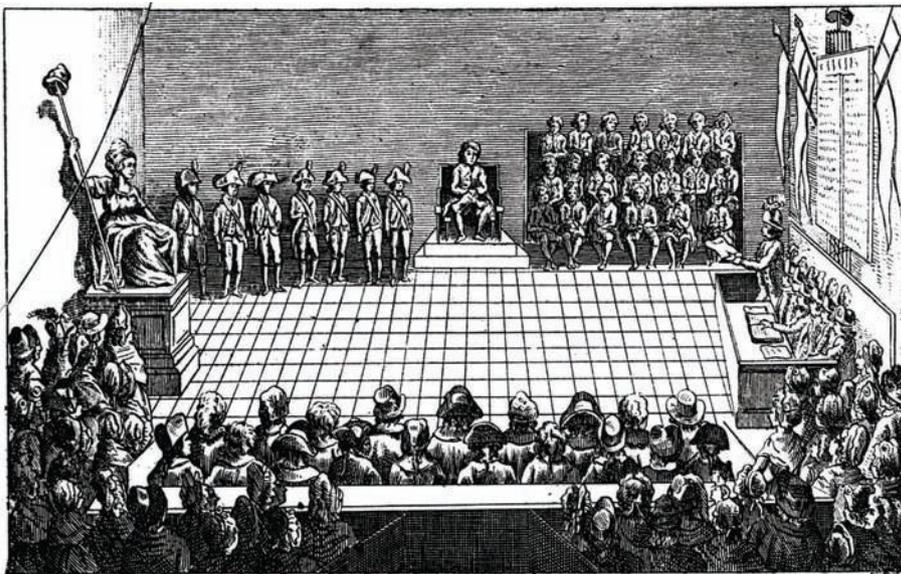
The attack on the Girondins (October 1793)

The third form of Jacobin Terror was the use of violence to eliminate other revolutionary groups.



Source 15.13 *Left:* This engraving shows a typical Girondin, Pierre-Victurien Vergniaud. His tragic death at the guillotine on 31 October 1793 was as pointless as it was immoral. *Right:* This representation shows the moment when the Girondins, led by Héault de Séchelles, left the Convention to protest against their arrest.

The first was the popular attack on the Girondins (31 May–2 June 1793). The Jacobins suggested to the popular movement that the 'sections' of Paris might order the Convention to expel 'unpatriotic' Girondin deputies.



Source 15.14 This engraving is a representation of the Revolutionary Tribunal at work; here Brissot and 20 followers are being condemned.



The 'sections' listed the deputies to be purged, secured the support of the National Guard and formed another militia of some 20 000 workers. They conducted the uprising with military precision, surrounding the Assembly building with armed workers and demanding that 29 Girondin deputies surrender to house arrest. For Robespierre, this had simply secured the bases of a workable government capable of firm, effective measures to meet the emergency.

The arrest of the Girondins, their trial on 3 October 1793 and their execution on 31 October 1793 were not the last examples of the elimination of political opposition.

In early 1794, the Jacobins proceeded to the third stage of the Terror, the 'political' or 'factional' Terror. Robespierre argued that, in a state of national emergency, any opposition to a government that was trying to conduct resistance and preserve the revolution was treason. He reasoned that any resistance – whether from the left or the right of the political spectrum – tended to distract and weaken the government, and hence to help the counter-revolution.

The attack on the Hébertistes

On 13 March 1794, he attacked the followers of the radical leader Jacques Hébert, the fiery editor of the *Father Duchesne* newspaper, who had publicly called for an insurrection of working people against the government. Since this contravened a law against insurrection, they were speedily tried and executed within two weeks.

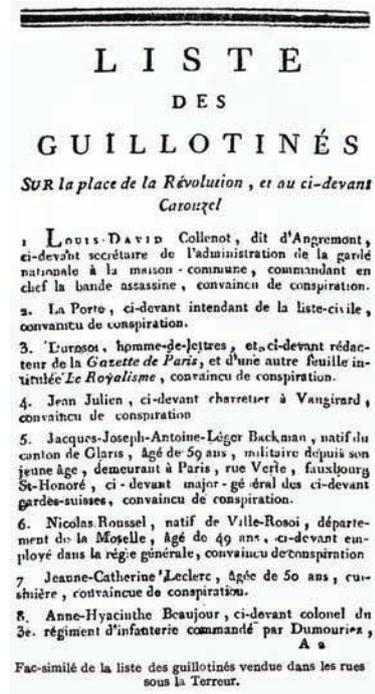
The elimination of Danton and the Indulgents

Indulgents an informal group among the Jacobins and the Cordeliers whose members argued that the war was essentially won after the Battle of Fleurus, and the Terror could be wound down

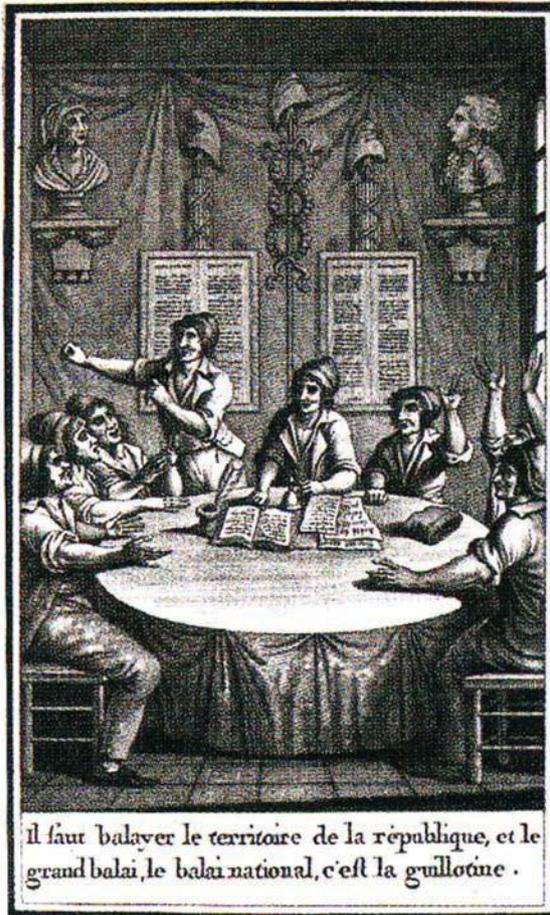
Having silenced the extreme left, Robespierre turned on the moderate faction that had formed around Danton and Desmoulins, and that had demanded the end of the Terror. These **Indulgents** were executed on 5 April 1794.



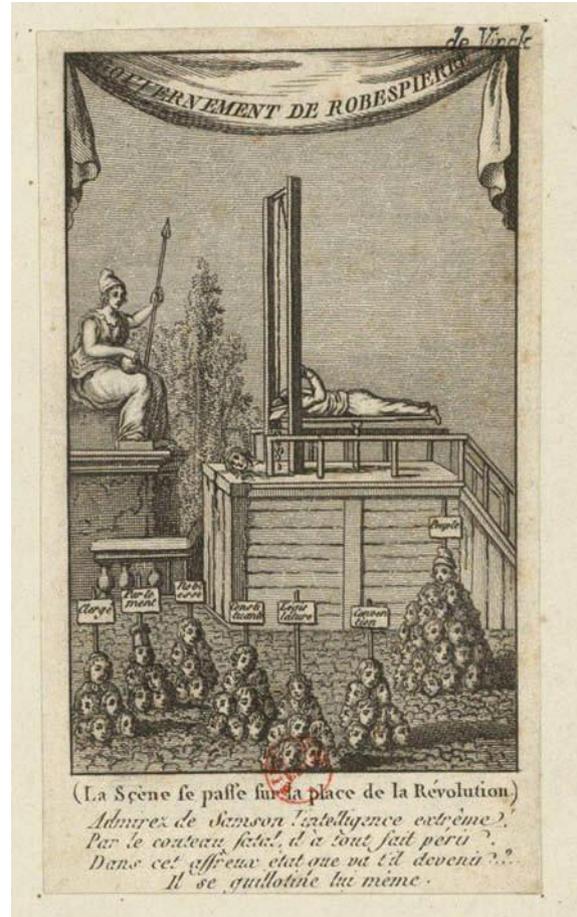
Source 15.15 *Left:* This drawing captures the moment the great revolutionary leader Georges Danton went to the guillotine. His 'crime' was to suggest that the Terror needed to end. *Right:* This document is a list of the week's victims of the guillotine.



15.8 The Great Terror



Source 15.16 The Revolutionary Committee member who is gesturing violently is saying, 'It is necessary to sweep the territory of the Republic, and the great broom, the nation's broom, is the guillotine.'



Source 15.17 This engraving is an anti-Robespierre image, wrongly suggesting that the death toll of the Terror was entirely due to Robespierre's government. Each pile of heads is labelled, left to right, 'Clergy', 'Parlement', 'Nobility', 'Constituent Assembly', 'Legislative Assembly' and 'Convention', but the largest pile (right) is labelled 'Common People'.

The **Great Terror** was the worst and final stage of the Terror, which continued and redoubled after the stabilisation of the military situation late in 1793. By late 1793 and early 1794, the war emergency was largely resolved, yet the Terror that had been introduced to meet this emergency continued unabated, and even doubled in intensity. McPhee reminds us that before the **Law of 22 Prairial** (10 June 1794), 1251 people were executed over four months; after the law, 1376 people were executed in just six weeks.

People were now appalled by the sheer number of executions, and the petty nature of the crimes punished. The relentless executions disgusted the crowds, and the guillotine was moved from the Square of the Revolution (now Place de la Concorde) to suburban Paris, then to the city's fringes. For example, the great scientist Lavoisier was executed simply for having been a part of the old tax farming system.

Great Terror the worst and final stage of the Terror

Law of 22 Prairial 10 June 1794; exceeded even the Law of Suspects in giving the committees power to arrest and execute people and eliminating deputies' parliamentary immunity



Jean-Sylvain Bailly, the first President of the National Assembly and master of the Tennis Court Oath, was condemned for causing the Champ de Mars Massacre. Rouget de Lisle, the author of 'The Marseillaise', was another victim. The revolution was devouring its own children. Marie-Antoinette was also tried and executed. The innocent young royal prince, the **Dauphin** (1785–95)

Dauphin innocent young royal prince who was subjected to such physical and psychological mistreatment that he died in the Temple Prison in 1795

was not guillotined, but was subjected to such physical and psychological mistreatment that he died in the Temple Prison in 1795.

Ultimately, the unstoppable rush of executions appalled the remaining deputies of the Convention, and they realised that they could be next.



Source 15.18 This unusual painting by Lesueur captures a small but significant aspect of the revolutionary experience. Some 'patriots' have become alarmed that an individual does not seem to be wearing any revolutionary symbols, and they stop him to question where his loyalty lies.

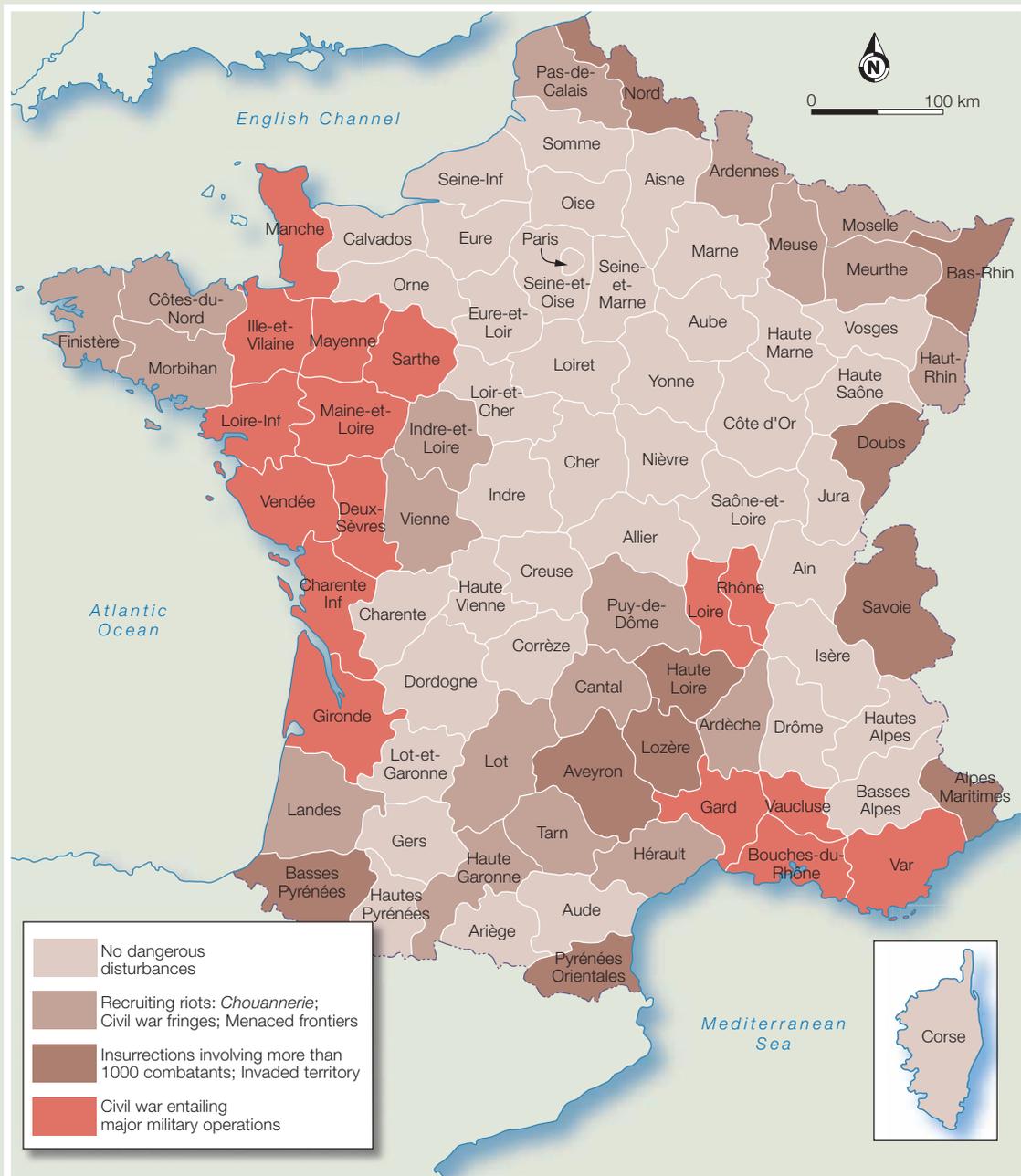


Source 15.19 Marie-Antoinette was one of many victims executed during the Great Terror. The painter Jacques-Louis David watched her journey to the guillotine from a first-floor window (imagined at left by a later artist) and quickly drew a sketch of the devastated woman (centre). One of the last things Marie-Antoinette saw was the revolutionary posters (right) fixed high on the walls at eye level with the prisoners in their carts.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 15.2: READING MAP AND DATA SOURCES

Mapping the Terror

Document 1: Map – the counter-revolution

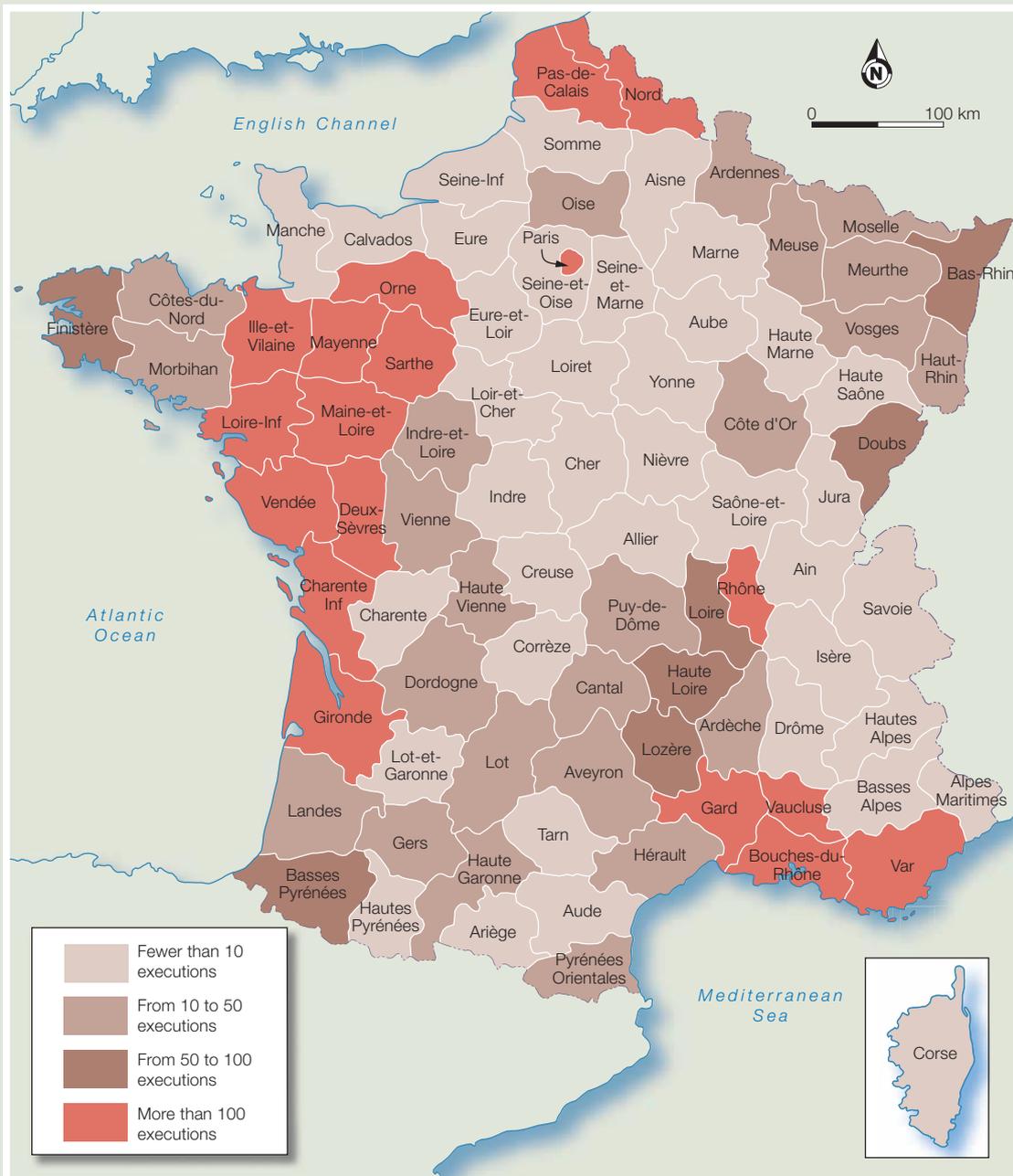


Source 15.20 This map (from Donald Greer, *The Incidence of the Terror During the French Revolution: A Statistical Interpretation*, 1935) shows four levels of counter-revolutionary activity, with the most serious marked in red.

223



Document 2: Map – the incidence of executions



Source 15.21 This map (also by Donald Greer) shows four levels of incidence of executions in the Terror, with the most frequent marked in red.

- 1 After examining Greer's two maps, write a brief analysis of the relationship between the incidence of counter-revolutionary activities and the incidence of the Terror.
- 2 What do these two maps suggest about the origins and purpose of the Terror?

Table 16.1: The incidence of the Terror/causes of indictments

Social and sexual incidence of the Terror				
Global figures, including Paris				
	No.	%	Of whom women	% of each category
Old nobility	878	6.2	226	21.36
Robe nobility	278	2.0	–	–
Upper middle class	1964	14.0	137	6.98
Lower middle class	1488	31.2	389	8.86
Clergy	920	6.5	126	13.70
Working classes	4389	31.2	389	8.86
Peasantry	3961	28.1	281	7.09
Unknown	200	1.4	65	32.50
TOTAL	14 080	–	1314	9.33
Paris Revolutionary Tribunal (Paris figures from Godfrey 1951, which differ slightly from those of Greer 1935)				
Nobles	533	19.4		
Clergy	240	8.7		
Upper middle class	903	32.9		
Lower middle class	540	19.7		
Workers	478	17.4		
Unknown	53	1.9		
TOTAL	2747	–		
Causes of indictments for revolutionary offences				
	No.	%		
Emigration	212	1.5		
Intelligence with the enemy	457	3.1		
Sedition	10 456	72.1		
Federalism	427	2.9		
Treason	96	0.7		
Conspiracy	703	4.9		
Offences involving trees of liberty	12	0.1		
Counter-revolutionary opinions	1302	9.0		
Economic offences (hoarding, traffic in <i>assignats</i> , counterfeiting)	119	0.8		
Corruption	104	0.7		
False witness	11	0.1		
Refractory clergy	293	2.0		
Concealment of refractory clergy	32	0.2		
Other	273	1.9		
TOTAL	14 497	–		

Source 15.22 This table (adapted from Colin Jones, *The Longman Companion to the French Revolution*, 1988, p. 120) gives an idea of the alleged crimes for which people were executed. Information from Donald Greer, *The Incidence of the Terror During the French Revolution: A Statistical Interpretation* (1935) and J.L. Godfrey, *Revolutionary Justice* (1951).



- 3 To what extent is the popular image of the Terror as a 'holocaust of the nobility' confirmed by the figures assembled by Greer and by Godfrey?
- 4 What does the list of causes of indictments for revolutionary offences suggest about the main causes of the Terror?

A MATTER OF FACT

One of the most brilliant thinkers of the revolution, the philosophe Condorcet, tried to escape the Terror by fleeing Paris disguised as a workman. He successfully reached the outskirts of Paris, but made the mistake of stopping at an inn and ordering an omelette made up of several eggs – a luxury no working person could afford. The revolutionary innkeeper reported the suspicious event to the authorities and Condorcet was identified and arrested. He committed suicide in prison in 1794 to avoid the guillotine.

The story so far

By late 1793, the revolution was threatened by numerous serious, interlocking challenges. It responded by a series of emergency measures known as 'revolutionary government' or 'Terror'. These certainly destroyed many of the political and civil liberties the revolution had created earlier. The harsh laws allowing arrest and imprisonment enabled the government to resolve a major crisis that could have destroyed the revolution.



Source 15.23 This watercolour by Bericourt depicts the incident at Nantes during the Terror when Representative on Mission Jean-Baptiste Carrier ordered the mass execution of political prisoners by firing squad.

CHAPTER REVIEW

DEVELOPING CLEAR DEFINITIONS

Write your own definition of each of the following key terms:

- popular taxation
- the homeland in danger
- conscription
- the Federalist revolt
- de-Christianisation
- Terror
- Committee of Public Safety

PRACTISING PARAGRAPH ANSWERS

Evaluate the extent to which the experience of war and civil war was the main force guiding the development of the new society in France between 1792 and 1794.

ANALYSING HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

In 1989, historian William Doyle wrote:

It was resistance that made the revolution become violent. It was naïve of the men of 1789 to think that they could regenerate the nation without opposition, and imagine that the honesty and benevolence of their intentions would be as obvious to others as to themselves ... Even after the nation had been sickened with public carnage [i.e. the mass killings of the Terror], politicians still found it impossible to accept the legitimacy and good faith of their opponents. (The Oxford History of the French Revolution, 1989, p. 394)

- 1 Why does Doyle believe that the revolutionaries had been naïve (childishly innocent) about what they were trying to do?
- 2 From your understanding of events so far, do you believe that revolutions are automatically violent, or that, as Doyle suggests, they only become violent when people start to resist them?

PRACTICE ESSAY QUESTION

To what extent did the new society created in France during the period 1792–94 really change the political, economic and social structures of France?



READING MORE DEEPLY

Easy

Andrew Matthews, *Revolution and Reaction, 1789–1849*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 52–62.

Moderate

Christopher Hibbert, *The Days of the French Revolution*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1982, Chapter 6, 'The Days of the September Massacres and the Execution of the King' and Chapter 8, 'The Days of the Terror'.

Challenging

Alan Forrest, 'Federalism', in Peter Jones (ed.), *The French Revolution in Social and Political Perspective*, Arnold, London, 1996.

An academic study of the neglected question of the nature of Federalist opposition to the Revolution.



Source 15.24 *La levée en masse, 12 Août 1793*, Jean-Baptiste Lesueur, c. 1793



Significant individuals: The role of Maximilien de Robespierre, 1792–1794

“ *Was Robespierre the first modern dictator, inhuman and fanatical, an obsessive who used his political power to try to impose his rigid ideal of Spartan ‘virtue’? Or was he a principled [self-sacrificing] visionary, the great revolutionary martyr who succeeded in leading the French Revolution and the Republic to safety in the face of overwhelming military odds?* ”

– PETER MCPHEE, 2012

”

OVERVIEW

By 1792, Maximilien de Robespierre, who had participated in the revolution from the start, emerged as a prominent political leader. He remains the figure most commonly associated with the French Revolution, but is also the most misunderstood.

It is difficult to penetrate the cloud of mythology that surrounded Robespierre when alive; upon his death, he became the focus for those who condemned or applauded the revolution. Robespierre's celebrity – or notoriety – as a leader is based primarily upon his revolutionary activity during the second, emergency phase of the revolution (1792–94).

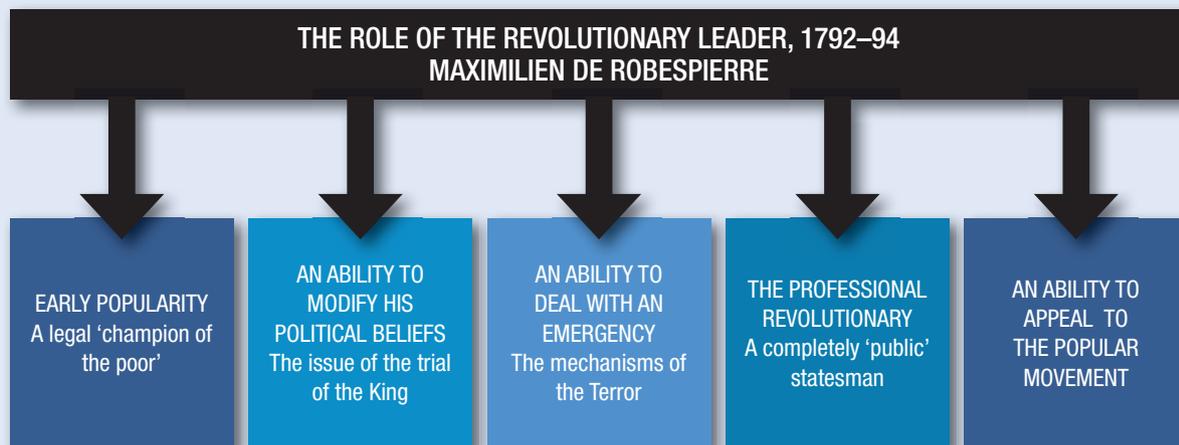
Robespierre provided considerable intellectual leadership to the revolution through his writings and speeches. He also mastered popular leadership, commanding a strong following among the Parisian people. In his career, the roles of leader, popular movement and revolutionary ideas combine, providing a fascinating example of how these three powerful forces interacted. His rapid ascent to a position of enormous power, and his sudden and fatal fall, make him an ideal example of a revolutionary leader.



KEY ISSUES

- Why did Robespierre emerge as a leader in a time of crisis?
- What were Robespierre's qualities as a leader?
- What was Robespierre's relationship with the revolutionary movement?
- Was Robespierre the first example of the 'professional revolutionary'?
- How did Robespierre make political use of paranoia?
- What was the role of other leaders in the revolution in the years 1792–94?

FLOW OF CHAPTER



16.1

SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL

A leader in a time of crisis: Maximilien de Robespierre (1759–1794)



Source 16.1 This portrait shows Robespierre as a successful young lawyer at the time when he gained a reputation for defending both enlightened scientific thought and championing the common man.

Like many revolutionary leaders, Robespierre's introduction to radical thought occurred through his profession, which was law. Maximilien-François-Isidore de Robespierre was born in 1758 into a bourgeois family in the town of Arras. He followed his father and grandfather into law, being admitted to the Bar in 1781.

A brilliant barrister, he was rapidly promoted to responsible positions. In 1783, his defence of the scientific use of lightning rods aligned him with an enlightened society. Later, his defence of a ropemaker who had been accused of theft by a dishonest monk led him to attack the church itself. His victory won him the reputation of 'the upholder of the wretched, avenger of innocence'. By 1788, this role inspired him to attack privilege and denounce the old regime's fundamental injustices. As a critic of royal absolutism, he was elected by a workers' guild to represent Arras at the Estates-General. As an admirer of the *philosophes*, his ideals were formed by Voltaire and Rousseau. At the start of the revolution, he wrote this statement of principles to the people of his region:

- 1 *The aim of society is the happiness of all.*
- 2 *All men are born free and equal in rights, and cannot cease to be so.*
- 3 *The principle of sovereignty resides in the nation; all power emanates [comes from] and can only emanate from it.*

(Cited in McPhee, Robespierre: A Revolutionary Life, p. 232)

How did Robespierre acquire his early popularity?

Robespierre's political career began when, on 6 June 1789, he first spoke in political assembly, attacking the upper clergy. He initially failed to impress because he could not speak forcefully. When



the National Assembly became the Constituent Assembly, Robespierre progressed from the 'lawyer of the poor man' to the political spokesman of working people. More democratic than most deputies, he condemned martial law (October 1790), attacked the active/passive citizen division (April 1791) and demanded an 'open' National Guard. He also wrote a passionate speech condemning capital punishment in these terms:

When fanaticism, born of the monstrous union of ignorance and despotism, invented in its turn the crimes of divine lèse-majesté, when it conceived, in its delirium, to take vengeance for God, was it not necessary to offer Him blood, and thus reduce to the level of monsters those who thought they were created in His image? (Translated from the French by Michael Adcock)

When Robespierre delivered this speech to the Constituent Assembly on 30 May 1791, he had little idea of the coming revolutionary emergency that would force him to compromise these ideals.

16.2 Robespierre's qualities as a leader

Biographer David Jordan argues that Robespierre was the main revolutionary leader who guided the revolution through its greatest crisis. The deputies called him to power in 1793, electing him to the Committee of Public Safety, giving him authority to use extraordinary measures to solve a situation that threatened to destroy the revolution altogether. People who see Robespierre as an extremist are confusing cause and effect: he only directly exerted power during the last year of his life, and this was under conditions that were themselves extreme.

Robespierre was the architect of a set of emergency measures known as 'revolutionary government'. From a contemporary viewpoint, they were severe but necessary temporary measures that were created progressively to deal with a serious crisis. He proposed – probably correctly – that the revolution would only survive the war emergency if it allied itself with the armed working people of Paris:

What we need is a single will ... This rising must continue until the measures necessary for saving the Republic have been taken. The people must ally itself with the Convention, and the Convention must make use of the people. (Quoted in William Doyle, The Oxford History of the French Revolution, 1989, p. 7)

He also proposed that the Convention give executive powers to smaller, more efficient committees. On 6 April 1793, the final Committee of Public Safety was created, although Robespierre did not join it until 27 July 1793 – and then unwillingly. The legal basis of the committee's power was defined carefully by the Convention: it was to take executive



Source 16.2 This portrait shows Robespierre dressed in the sober black costume of a Third Estate Deputy at the meeting of the Estates-General in May 1789.

FLASHPOINT!**Robespierre changes his political beliefs in a time of crisis**

How did Robespierre change his political beliefs as the revolution developed? Until July 1792, Robespierre believed that the political crisis caused by the King's betrayal could be solved by constitutional change, but gradually came to support – and possibly help organise – the insurrection of August 1792, which toppled the monarchy. Elected as a deputy for Paris to the National Convention (September 1792), Robespierre realised that the reality of power consisted of a struggle between the Jacobins and the Girondins, played out over issues such as the response to pressure from the radical Paris Commune and the speedy execution of the King for treason. He also believed that the pressure of war and revolution made political stability necessary, even at the cost of eliminating rival political parties.

He therefore abandoned his early liberal beliefs – such as the idea that an elected assembly is inviolable – and accepted that the popular movement could exert direct and violent pressure on the Convention. He may not directly have provoked the popular rebellion of 31 May–2 June 1793, but he was aware of its intentions and accepted its serious outcome: an armed crowd forced the Assembly to give up 29 Girondin deputies to arrest, leaving the Jacobins in control.

measures to ensure the internal and external defence of the Republic, but it could not declare war, make peace or pass legislation. It met secretly, without a **quorum**, and passed security decrees by simple majority. Once Robespierre joined, it began its proper task of saving the Republic. This was a 'war emergency cabinet' endowed with extraordinary powers to fulfil the task of winning the war.

quorum minimum number of people needed for a meeting

According to Jordan, Robespierre then achieved the ultimate goal of revolutionary leaders, to serve – initially, at least – as a unifying force for the many different groups in the revolution:

He was the living link between the Committee and the Convention, the Committee and the Jacobins, the Committee and the Commune, and the Committee and the sans-culottes. For the moment he seemed about to reconcile all the terrible contradictions of the Revolution in his person. (Quoted in David Jordan, The Revolutionary Career of Maximilien Robespierre, 1985, p. 168)

Despite his enormous authority, Robespierre did not control the committee in policy matters. His power came from his ability to articulate his ideas, and he spoke ceaselessly – at the Jacobins Club and before the Convention – on almost every matter of national importance.

16.3 Robespierre's relationship with the revolutionary movement

The Jacobins had armed the militant *sans-culottes* who patrolled the streets to defend the revolution, both abroad and at home. This alliance with the people had two results: it forced Robespierre to support the economic policies that were most important to working people, most notably **The Maximum** (limit on food prices), and also to implement these policies with the greater severity demanded by working people, such as the death penalty for hoarding (26 July 1793).

The Maximum economic policy that set a limit on food prices



The basis of Robespierre's leadership was a special popularity. He enjoyed credibility as a defender of democratic causes. 'I am not the defender of the people,' he claimed. 'I am of the people, and have never been anything else.' By 1792 he had, as Patrice Gueniffey suggests, come to represent – even to embody – the will of the people.

Robespierre's relationship with the popular revolutionary movement was, curiously, both distant and close. While many bourgeois revolutionaries secretly feared working people, Robespierre was unusual in championing the crowd:

Stop slandering the people by constantly portraying it as unworthy of enjoying its rights ... It is you who are unjust and corrupt; it is the people [who are] good, patient and generous. (Quoted in Patrice Gueniffey, 'Robespierre', in François Furet and Mona Ozouf (eds), A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution, 1989, p. 301)

Such statements favoured the popular movement, and suggested that some revolutionaries did not respect 'the people'. This was no vague goodwill: Robespierre specifically committed himself to the idea of direct democracy, by which the crowd has a right to take direct and violent action against its enemies. While his counterparts were horrified by the brutal murder of Foulon in July 1789, Robespierre declared ominously:

M Foulon [sic] was hanged yesterday by the decree of the people.

Such declarations thrilled working-class militants; his speeches were eagerly followed by the public in the gallery of the Assembly and were passionately discussed in taverns and cafes.

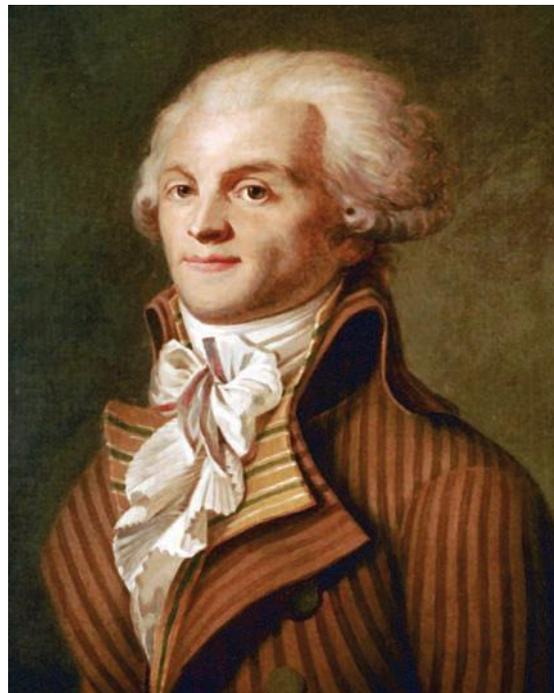
Robespierre's public image: A democrat, but not a demagogue

An important aspect of Robespierre's leadership was what we might call his 'public image'. Usually, a democratic politician adopts the simple manners and dress of a 'champion of the people', partly to express sympathy for them, and partly to help them identify with him.

Curiously, Robespierre did not. Portraits reveal that, when others were adopting a democratic, egalitarian style of dress, he kept the elegant formal clothing, the powdered wig and the impeccable manners of an old regime gentleman. Robespierre was not naturally a **demagogue**.

demagogue political leader who appeals to people's emotions to gain power

His relationship with the popular movement was special: the *sans-culottes* admired him not for his personal qualities, but for his policies (sympathy for direct democracy and acceptance of government economic interference) and his apparent representation of the popular will. Strangely, Robespierre enjoyed greater popularity



Source 16.3 This portrait of Robespierre in about 1792 shows that he maintained the elegant dress and the polished manners of an old regime gentleman, thus going against the revolutionary taste for simpler manners and dress.

than the self-styled ‘friends of the people’: in the elections to the Convention, he was the most popular deputy, gaining more votes than either Marat or Danton.

Robespierre’s national network of Jacobin Clubs

Robespierre’s leadership was also based upon his mastery of the revolutionary movement outside the Assembly. His second important venue for political expression was the club. He first joined the Breton Club, which later became the Jacobin Club. By April 1790, he was its president, but more importantly, he learnt how to dominate discussions with his public speaking, easily outshining other capable speakers such as Mirabeau. He also frequented a number of other popular clubs in Paris, building up a strong mass following.



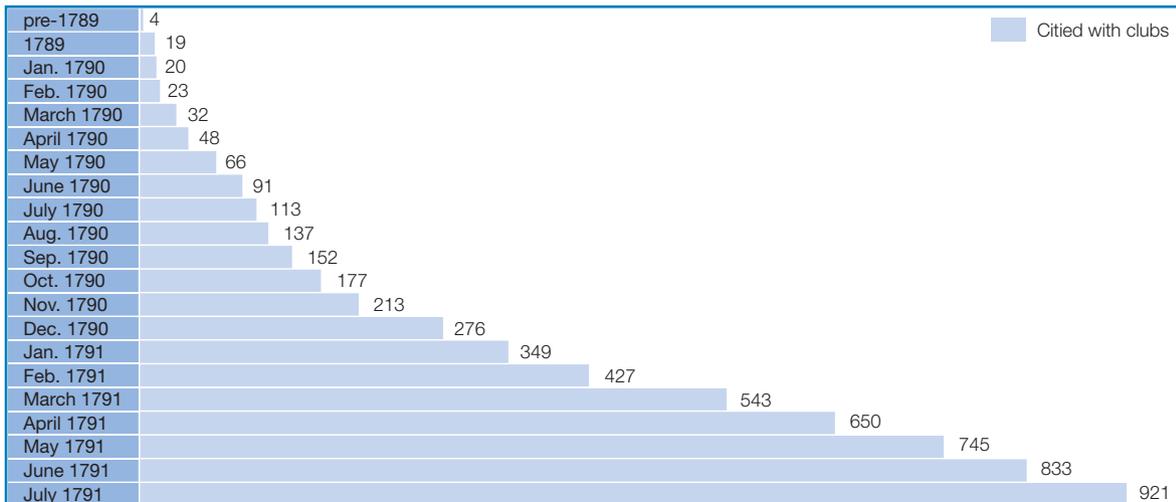
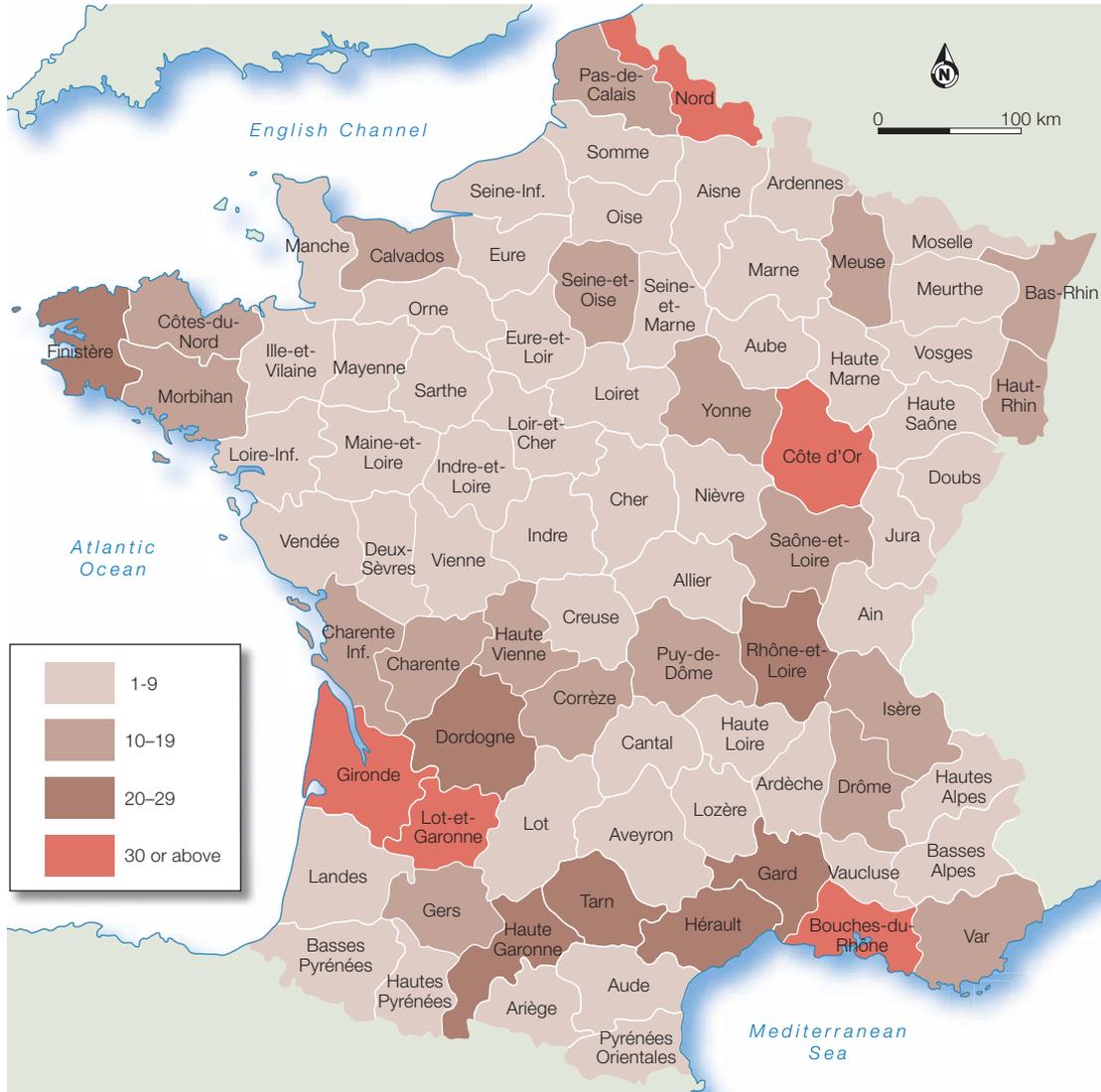
Source 16.4 *Left*: This engraving shows the Jacobin Club in Paris. It was not just a place to meet and discuss: it was the centre of the whole Jacobin faction, and the nerve centre of a network of similar clubs spread across France. *Right*: The interior of a typical Jacobin Club.



Source 16.5 *Left*: This painting by Lesueur shows a member of the Jacobin Club making a passionate speech. *Right*: This journal shows how the Jacobins discovered what we today call networking: the Jacobin Club in Paris created a web of 5500 similar clubs across France. As soon as a speech was delivered in Paris, it was printed and distributed across the whole nation.

Focus questions

- 1 How did Robespierre gain his early reputation as a ‘friend of the common person’?
- 2 Why was Robespierre’s ‘public image’ strangely out of line with his popularity with the revolutionary movement?



Source 16.6 Top: Departments with Jacobin Clubs. Bottom: The growth of the Jacobin Club network.

16.4 The ‘professional revolutionary’

According to David Jordan, Robespierre’s significance as a leader was that he represented a completely new *type* of revolutionary. His contemporaries, as well as subsequent historians, believed that Robespierre had established the model of the ‘professional revolutionary’ – one who sacrifices his private life to public affairs. Jordan states that we know little about Robespierre’s first 30 years, and that for the brief five years of his revolutionary career ‘his personal and public lives are virtually indistinguishable’.

Historian Peter McPhee has recently remedied this by insisting that we must understand the first 30 years of Robespierre’s life before we can understand the way he acted after 1789. Robespierre must be ‘understood as a young man, as uncertain about the future as he was exhilarated by its possibilities’. According to other biographers, Robespierre not only led the French Revolution, but also *embodied* (represented) it. He did so by an act of **self-sublimation**, providing the first model of the ‘virtuous citizen’.

self-sublimation
eliminating personal interests
in favour of the public interest

The incorruptible politician

The essence of Robespierre’s reputation was his integrity. He offered the quality of evident sincerity when the revolution itself was becoming more divided and factionalised. By 1790, his popular nickname was ‘The Incorruptible’. He rapidly became the defender of the great principles of the revolution, rarely initiating decrees himself while in the Assembly, but subjecting all new laws to merciless examination. He became the ‘conscience’ of the revolution, probing his fellow revolutionaries for hidden motives and selfish ambitions.

A MATTER OF FACT

In any nation, a survey of the historical figures who have been commemorated by statues reveals who is really considered important. It is extraordinary that, while Paris has a statue of Mirabeau, it has no major monument to Robespierre; there is only a small bust of the leader on display in the radical working-class suburb of St Denis.

16.5 The political use of paranoia

One aspect of Robespierre’s leadership would, however, prove to be his downfall. Historian Alphonse Aulard believes that Robespierre made systematic use of a sort of ‘political paranoia’, constantly hinting that the revolutionary project was being frustrated by treacherous but invisible enemies who must therefore be identified and eliminated.

This technique was particularly powerful during the emergency of 1792–93, when the enemies of the revolution were multiplying and threatening its completion. Robespierre never named these enemies directly, simply hinting that he knew them. As soon as one group of opponents was



ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 16.1: READING A PRIMARY SOURCE

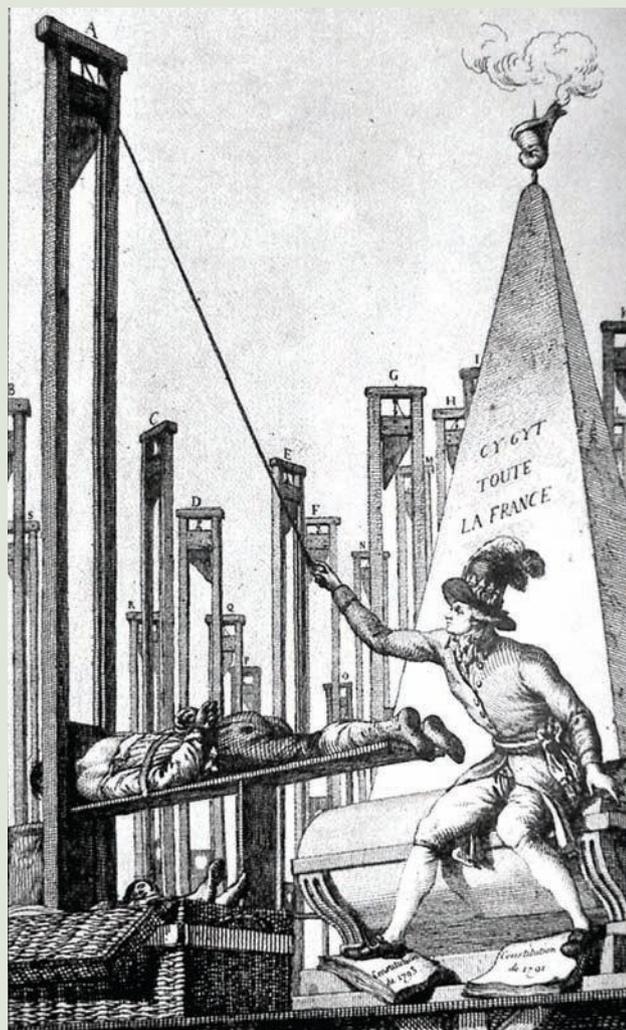
Artist Jules Perrin communicates his meaning by the technique of exaggeration, multiplying the number of guillotines far beyond what would ever really have been seen in one place. Perrin suggests, quite correctly, that once a process of Terror is implemented, it tends to gather momentum and to draw in many more victims than intended – often for minor crimes.

The multiplication of guillotines is visually powerful, but it is reinforced by a textual element that is often omitted when this image is published. Each guillotine is identified by a letter, and these letters are identified in a long caption below the image. They explain the general message with dreadful clarity. We know that ‘a’ represents the guillotine for the executioner (Robespierre) himself, while each other guillotine represents another victim: ‘b’ is the Committee of Public Safety, ‘c’ is the Committee of General Security, ‘d’ is the revolutionary tribunal, ‘e’ is the Jacobins, ‘f’ is the Cordeliers, ‘g’ is the Brissotins, ‘h’ is the Philipotins, ‘i’ is the Chabotins, ‘j’ is the Hébertists, ‘k’ is nobles and priests, ‘l’ is men of talent, ‘m’ is old people, women and children, ‘n’ is soldiers and generals, ‘o’ is constitutional authorities, ‘p’ is the National Convention and ‘q’ is the popular societies. These details are important because they make the nature of the artist’s criticism clear: he is accusing the Jacobins of eliminating virtually every shade of opinion from the political landscape.

Indeed, the image contains even more serious accusations. Robespierre tramples two documents, the Constitutions of 1791 and 1793. The artist therefore alleges that Robespierre and the Jacobins not only suspended the democratic Constitution of 1793, but also destroyed it. Perrin refers to the human cost of the Terror by the individual example of a corpse visible in the wicker basket beneath the guillotine and by a gruesome inscription on the obelisk behind him: ‘Here lies all of France.’

During 1793–94, Perrin’s belief that the Terror would continue to escalate until it killed nearly everybody became widespread, and helped prepare the way for the later dramatic fall of Robespierre. This etching is approximately dated by James Cuno to c. 1793, perhaps because it represents the widespread doubts about the Terror after the end of the war emergency, but before Robespierre’s fall. It is also a critique of Robespierre himself and, according to tradition, Perrin himself went to the guillotine for this attack.

- 1 What is the main criticism of Robespierre being made in this image?
- 2 From your own knowledge of the Terror, how accurate is it to blame the Terror and its victims on Robespierre alone?



Source 16.7 Robespierre as architect of the Terror

eliminated, another seemed to come into existence. On 12 June 1794, just after the passing of the Law of Prairial, a deputy challenged Robespierre to say who he was criticising. He answered:

I will name them when I need to. At every moment of the day, at every moment even of the night, there are plotters working to insinuate into the minds of the men of good faith who sit on the Mountain, the falsest ideas, the most atrocious slanders. (Cited in McPhee, Robespierre: A Revolutionary Life, 2012, p. 204)

According to Aulard, Robespierre's threats caused 'vague feelings, a vague admiration, a vague terror, vague hope. He made the tyranny of uncertainty weigh on people's minds'. This works in the short term, but ultimately it is dangerous because it intimidates people. In the longer term, the technique would cause Robespierre's downfall.

Focus questions

- 1 What was Robespierre's main technique for controlling other revolutionaries?
- 2 What are the dangers of using this form of control?

A MATTER OF FACT

Robespierre had many enemies, due partly to his authority and partly to his involvement in the Terror. He also made enemies in a curious way: he was so short-sighted that he often passed people in the streets of Paris without recognising them as colleagues, and he lost a good number of supporters due to this apparent rudeness.

239

16.6 The role of other leaders in the revolution, 1792–94

It is important to understand the contributions of the other leaders who experienced the emergency period of the French Revolution.

16.7 SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL Georges-Jacques Danton (1758–1794)

Georges-Jacques Danton (1759–94) had a complex and fascinating revolutionary career. Trained in law, Danton bluffed and bribed his way into a legal practice, finally achieving a position as advocate to royal councils in 1787. A passionate reader of the *philosophes*, he became the centre of radical discussion when he married the daughter of the owner of the famous Procope Café, a gathering place for patriots. Danton found his path in politics from 1789 through local rather than national politics: in October 1789, he was president of his local Paris 'section'. His imposing presence and fiery skills as an orator made him an ideal democratic leader, and he won an enormous popular following when he defended the radical Marat against attacks.



In 1790, he joined the radical revolutionaries who formed the Cordeliers Club, and henceforth sided with the most popular and radical causes. In 1791, he defended the crowd's actions in preventing the King from going to Saint-Cloud and attacked Lafayette for allegedly helping the royal family to escape. By 1792, he was one of a few deputies who opposed the war, but once the emergency of 1792–93 began, he emerged as an organiser of war measures and as the architect of government by Terror. As a revolutionary leader, he was a complex and often contradictory figure, and his career was for some time sullied by rumours of financial malpractice – including, at the very least, embezzlement of government money and possibly acceptance of more dubious funds. By 1793–94, his advocacy of the abandonment of Terror brought him into conflict with Robespierre, a controversy that resulted in his execution in 1794.

16.8 SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL

Jean-Paul Marat (1743–1793)

Jean-Paul Marat was practising as a doctor when the revolution occurred. As early as 1789, he had adopted the radical, populist stance that would characterise his brief, violent revolutionary career. While leaders such as Lafayette and Robespierre exerted their influence to control and direct the popular movement, Marat did his utmost to encourage popular militancy. He founded his radical newspaper, *The Friend of the People*, in 1789, and by 1791 was associated with the Jacobins. He appealed directly to the *sans-culottes* movement, encouraging their claim to direct democracy and urging the government to greater ferocity against the enemies of the revolution.

Marat provides a fascinating example of a revolutionary leader who was more revolutionary than the revolution itself. Politically, he was a 'loose cannon', dangerous because his extremist statements inflamed the situation to an extreme point. He was in fact more useful to the Jacobins after he was dead – murdered by Charlotte Corday in 1793 – because they transformed him into a martyr for the republic of virtue (a sort of secular saint) without having to fear his fiery denunciations.



Source 16.8 This portrait of Marat by Boze captures the features of the politician said to be 'the ugliest man in Paris'.

The story so far

Robespierre came to power at a time of general crisis, and used emergency measures to deal effectively with it. In other countries and other times, these would be called war emergency measures. Nonetheless, the measures of ‘revolutionary government’ did involve the abuse of civic rights – one of the earliest ideals of the revolution – and the use of measures that ultimately would threaten revolutionaries of all shades of opinion. While few historians would dispute Robespierre’s view of a need for unity, most ask whether it is really necessary for revolutions to destroy their own political ‘children’.

CHAPTER REVIEW

DEVELOPING CLEAR DEFINITIONS

Write your own definition of each of the following key terms:

- ‘The Incorruptible’
- the professional revolutionary
- virtue

PRACTISING PARAGRAPH ANSWERS

Using four or five main points, explain what special skills or qualities Robespierre offered the revolution at its time of greatest crisis in 1793.

ANALYSING HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

In 2002, historian David Garrioch wrote of Robespierre:

Robespierre remains a controversial figure because he embodies [represents] the contradictions not only of the French Revolution, but of every country that feels itself to be under siege; and of every leader who must make decisions that pit idealism against pragmatism ... Until 1792, he opposed the death penalty, and after that advocated it only for treason. [During 1793] Robespierre betrayed most of the principles he stood for. The staunch opponent of capital punishment sent hundreds to the guillotine. The defender of the rights of man suspended civil



and political liberties. The spokesman for religious toleration persecuted priests and nuns ... Faced with military defeat and the loss of all they had hoped for and fought for, he and his colleagues set the nation and their vision of the Revolution above civil liberties. Let us defeat our enemies first, they argued, by any means necessary. Then human rights and freedom will be secure. ('The Road to the Guillotine', *The Age*, 21 August 2002)

- 1 What does David Garrioch see as the great contradiction of the French Revolution in the period 1792–94?
- 2 In what ways is it fair to say that Robespierre was 'pragmatic', in the sense that he changed his own principles in order to be able to deal with the practical realities of the emergency situation?
- 3 Does Garrioch seem to agree with those historians who argue that the seriousness of the situation in 1792–93 justified emergency measures?

PRACTICE ESSAY QUESTION

'The quality of a great leader is not only to be able to state his political beliefs and principles, but to know when and how to change them in response to the developing revolutionary situation.' To what extent is this true of Maximilien de Robespierre?

READING MORE DEEPLY

Easy

Andrew Matthews, *Revolution and Reaction, 1789–1849*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 63–6.

Moderate

Robespierre's essential writings have been translated and edited by George Rudé in his *Robespierre (Great Lives Observed Series)*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1967.

Challenging

Peter McPhee, *Robespierre, A Revolutionary Life*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2012.

An analysis of the intellectual and political formation of Robespierre.



Popular movements: The role of the *sans-culottes* in the French Revolution, 1792–1795

“ *Who were these revolutionary Frenchmen, those sans-culottes (men without fancy breeches) who stormed the Bastille, who extended their nation’s borders by defeating the best armies of Europe’s monarchs, who survived, and even prospered, amid the cruel excesses of the Terror? They were by no means the frenzied, mindless mob portrayed in most fictional accounts of the Revolution ... Rather, they were clerks and tradesmen, lawyers and goldsmiths, bakers and merchants: a crowd of fighting patriots, not a rabble.*

– DAVID DOWD, 1965

”

OVERVIEW

To understand the French Revolution properly, we must realise how powerful, and dangerous, the popular revolutionary movement was. The urban working people, now calling themselves *sans-culottes*, formed large, militant crowds capable of controlling whole sections of Paris. They developed their own identity and clear demands about material issues, such as bread prices. While revolutionary leaders such as Maximilien de Robespierre could influence them, no leader could claim to control them.

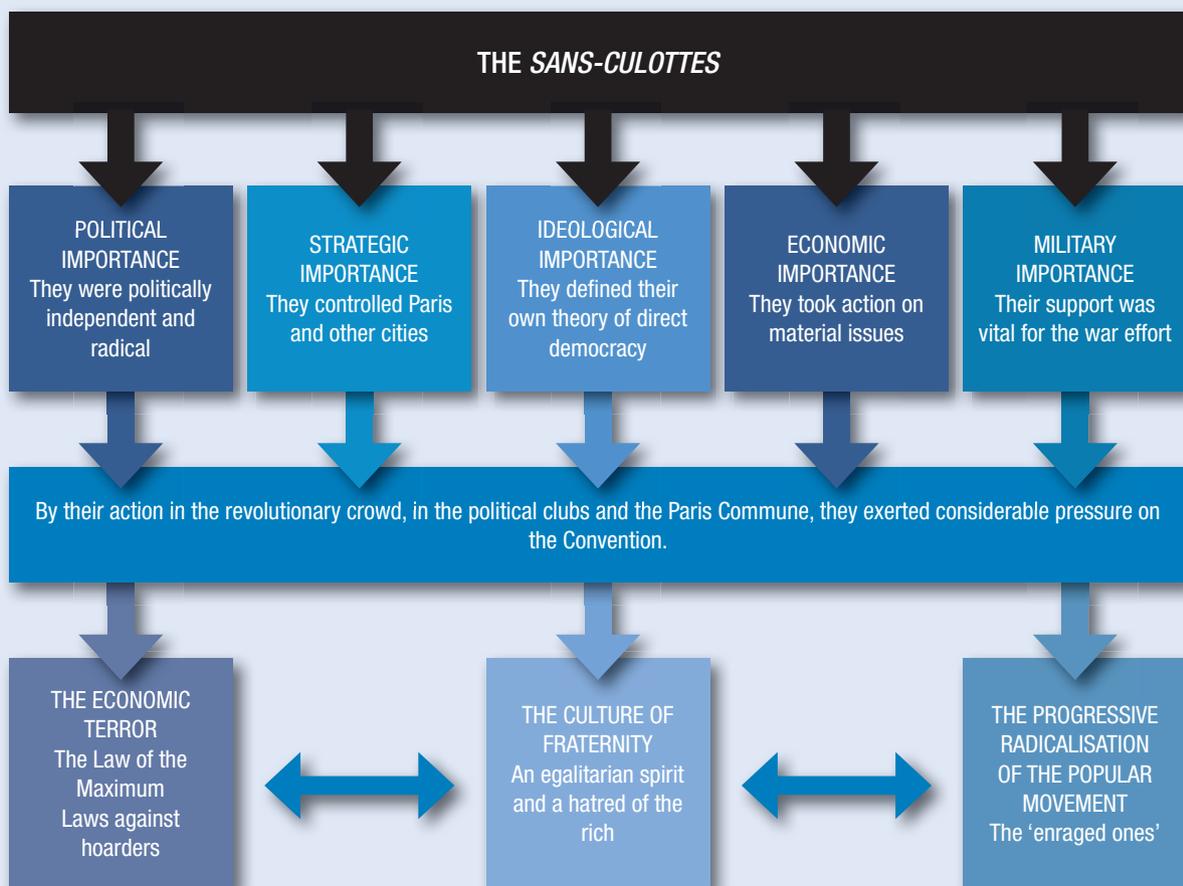
The second important aspect of this movement is that it was radicalising, developing extreme policies in bodies such as the Paris ‘section’ meetings and the Paris Commune. Dangerous as the *sans-culottes* were, Robespierre understood that during the war emergency the government needed working people’s support. Accordingly, Robespierre granted many *sans-culottes*’ demands for economic measures, such as fixed food prices.



KEY ISSUES

- Who were the *sans-culottes*?
- What was the relationship between the Jacobins and the *sans-culottes*?
- Who were the *enragés*?

FLOW OF CHAPTER



17.1 Who were the *sans-culottes*?

The word *sans-culottes* originally meant ordinary people who did not wear stylish clothing, such as the aristocratic knee-breeches (*culottes*), just plain trousers (the *pantalon*). During the French Revolution, this term was adopted by working people who were proud to be ordinary folk. The adoption of a name is often a landmark in the **process of self-identification**, when people become aware of themselves as a social group able to state its needs and concerns. Because the term *sans-culottes* does not translate well into English, we use the French term.

process of self-identification when people become aware of themselves as a social group, able to state their needs and concerns

The *sans-culottes* were not a party or a club, or even a formal organisation: it was just a general name for the militant working-class movement. They were not a single class, but a broad alliance ranging from poor labourers through to artisans, master artisans, shopkeepers and even lesser professions.



Source 17.1 This representation by Lesueur shows the broad range of social types who comprised the *sans-culottes*, including labourers, artisans, shopkeepers and minor professionals.

Their main aim as a political force was to pressure the government into taking action on material problems, such as the price of food. Their main technique was ‘direct democracy’ – that is, the use of crowd action to exert pressure on the government. Their main strength was in their tradition of militant action (they were very good at controlling the capital) and, later, the fact that their support would be crucial to the war effort.

The *sans-culottes* were more broadly a movement that was constantly radicalising so quickly that even the Jacobins struggled to keep up with them.



Source 17.2 This engraving is a representation of the revolutionary culture of the *sans-culottes*. They expressed themselves through a preference for simple clothing, revolutionary loyalty (wearing tricolore decorations such as sashes and cockades), song (the bloodthirsty 'Ça Ira!'), dance (the Carmagnole dance, shown here) and symbols (the Liberty Tree). This image also makes it clear that they knew how necessary they were to the revolution: on the right, their first great triumph, the Bastille, bristling with guns, is captured; on the left, the Austrian army flees in panic at the sight of them.

17.2 The Jacobins and the *sans-culottes*



Apart from this new sense of identity, the *sans-culottes* enjoyed great power because they knew that the Jacobin government could not survive without their support.

Source 17.3 This painting by Boilly does not show an actual *sans-culottes*, but an actor dressed as one. In 1792–94, working people were made the heroes of many popular plays.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 17.1: READING A PRIMARY SOURCE

Working people define their identity

A reply to the impertinent question, 'What is a *sans-culottes*?', April 1793:

A sans-culottes, you rogues? He is an individual who always goes on foot, who has no millions as you all wish to have ... and who lives quite simply with his wife and children, if he has any, on the fourth and the fifth floor. He is useful, for he knows how to plough a field, to work a forge, to saw and file, to roof or make shoes, and how to pour out his blood to the last for the safety of the Republic ... In the evening, he presents himself to his section meeting [local political meeting, ed.]. Moreover, a sans-culottes always keeps his sword sharp to split the skulls of the malevolent. Sometimes he parades with his pike; but, at the first sound of the drum, you see him leave for the Vendée, or for the army of the North ... (Quoted in D.I. Wright (ed.), The French Revolution, 1974, p. 171)

- 1 How does this document show that the *sans-culottes* possessed a strong sense of identity – even pride in themselves?
- 2 For what reasons was the support of the *sans-culottes* useful and even necessary to the government at this time?

How did revolutionary leaders communicate with the popular movement?

While working people were defining their identity and grievances, a second process was accelerating the development of their self-awareness. Most revolutionary leaders were bourgeois lawyers or government officials, and many were not democratically minded. A few, such as radical journalists who had a better understanding of the lives of the working classes, gathered in April 1790 to form the Society of the Friends of the Rights of Man, later called the Cordeliers Club, after the building in which they met.

The members were genuinely radical thinkers, including Danton, Desmoulins, Marat, Brissot and Hébert. They were democratic, enjoying strong relationships with the working people of Paris. They had strong links with the local suburban meetings of Paris (the 'sections'), and could quickly summon up a crowd. They radically opposed the active/passive citizen division that deprived many working people of the vote, and demanded the revision of the Constitution of 1791 for near-universal (male) suffrage. They also supported 'direct democracy' and the **right to insurrection**, by which working people could attack the government if it was not defending their interests.

Finally, they ferociously opposed privilege and wealth in all its forms, hoping to hound out anybody who abused their power or who threatened the great principles of 1789. This was an early vigilante movement, with the eye of vigilance as its symbol. Originally a club of prosperous bourgeois, it progressively drew in working people and, ultimately, women of all classes, introducing them to formal political debate and empowering them to express their grievances in political terminology. This is the true meaning of the word 'movement': it is not simply a crowd supporting revolutionary action where necessary, but a powerful wave of popular energy that revolutionary leaders can ride, but never completely control.

right to insurrection

working people can attack the government if it is not defending their interests

Focus questions

- 1 Why and how did the popular movement become far more radical after 1792?
- 2 Why did the Jacobins feel that they needed the support of this radical popular movement, and how did they win this support?



FLASHPOINT!

Revolutionary ideas: Popular sovereignty and direct democracy

While the *sans-culottes* are best known for their insistence on material issues, they also developed radical political ideas. The concept of direct democracy provided a means of forcibly drawing their concerns about material problems, such as the price of food, to the attention of the Assembly.

Historian Barrie Rose states that it was bourgeois deputies who created the representative National Assembly, but the popular movement in the Paris 'section' meetings that created another, more direct, system of democracy. Since it presumed to legislate not only on local affairs but also national ones, it soon found itself in conflict with the National Assembly. Out of this conflict arose the theory of direct democracy, based partly on theory (Rousseau's idea that an individual's sovereignty can never be totally surrendered) and partly on fact (this was a grassroots democratic movement, and it had created venues of debate and executive committees all over Paris). With it came the theory of **permanent popular movement** – that is, that the people will continually be actively involved in politics, meeting regularly at the popular level. By 1790, radicals in the Cordeliers Club challenged the National Assembly's mandate to rule, demanding that laws under discussion also be submitted directly to the vast mass of voters, meeting in their local assemblies.

permanent popular movement people will continually be actively involved in politics, meeting regularly at the popular level

Between 1790 and 1792, Rose argues, people not only created the structures of direct democracy, but also an ethos: only the local assemblies, they argued, truly represented the revolutionary principles of equality and fraternity. There were contradictions: while local districts such as Saint-Etienne tried to further democratise local structures, others excluded poor citizens, and all excluded women from formal participation. In July 1790, the National Assembly reduced some of the powers of the districts, but their role was continued by the many popular societies that had appeared.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 17.2: READING A PRIMARY SOURCE

Revolutionary ideas: The 'right to insurrection' (rebellion)

Document 1: Rousseau on popular sovereignty

Man was born free, and he is everywhere in chains ... Sovereignty cannot be represented, for the same reason that it cannot be alienated; its essence is the general will, and cannot be represented ... Thus the people's deputies are not, and could not be, its representatives; they are merely its agents; and they cannot decide anything finally. Any law which the people has not ratified in person is void; it is not a law at all. (Jean Jacques Rousseau, The Social Contract, 1968, p. 141)

Document 2: The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789)

Article 6: The law is the expression of the General Will. All citizens have the right to take part in its formation in person or by their representatives.

Document 3: Robespierre on popular sovereignty (10 May 1793)

Man is born for happiness and for liberty, and everywhere he is a slave and unhappy. The purpose of society is the conservation of his rights and the perfection of his being, and everywhere society degrades and

oppresses him. Government is established to make the general will respected; but men who govern have individual wills, and every will seeks to dominate. If they use for this purpose the public force with which they are armed, the government is nothing but a scourge of liberty. Conclude, then, that the first objective of every constitution must be to defend public and individual liberty against the government itself. Pose first this incontestable maxim: that the people are good, and that their delegates are corruptible; that it is to the virtue and the sovereignty of the people that we must look for safeguards against the vices and despotism of government. (From Robespierre, 'A Speech on the Principles of Government', May 1793, in Paul Beik (ed.), The French Revolution, 1970, pp. 255–9)

Document 4: The 'Jacobin' Constitution of 1793

Article 32: The right to present petitions to the depositaries of public authority may not be forbidden, suspended or limited under any circumstances.

Article 33: Resistance to oppression is the consequence of the other rights of man.

Article 34: There is oppression against the social body when a single one of its members is repressed.

Article 35: When the government violates the rights of the people, insurrection is the most sacred of rights and the most indispensable of duties for the people and for each portion thereof. (Quoted in D.I. Wright (ed.), The French Revolution, 1974, p. 174)

- 1 To what extent was Rousseau the initiator of the idea of 'direct democracy'? (Document 1)
- 2 What form of democracy is referred to in Article 6 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen? (Document 2)
- 3 On what points do Robespierre's theories echo those of Rousseau? (Document 3)
- 4 Did the Jacobin Constitution of 1793 (Document 4) specifically and explicitly allow for direct democracy? If so, on what grounds?



Source 17.4 As this artist observed, the revolutionary crowd was large, dynamic and absolutely in control of the streets. These are people from the working suburb of Saint-Antoine (near the Bastille), who are making their way to the Tuileries palace and the National Assembly on 20 June 1792.

17.3 Who were *les enragés*?

Focus questions

- 1 How do we know that the popular movement was becoming so radical that even the Jacobins were losing control of it?
- 2 Why did the theories of *les enragés* frighten most bourgeois deputies?

The most important aspect of the political situation during 1792–94 was the radicalisation of the popular movement, threatening to leave the Jacobins behind. Other leaders and groups now appealed to the Parisian revolutionary crowd. The Jacobins feared they would lose their popular support to others. The practice of radical worker action was now strengthened by a theory of militant action.

The *sans-culottes* produced an ultra-radical group called the enraged ones (*les enragés*). Their leaders, Jacques Roux and Jean Varlet, aggressively demanded economic justice, calling for the execution of food hoarders. They hated all wealthy people, and even suggested some redistribution of property. These ultra-radical workers were so militant that they could not be tamed by any political group. The popular movement moved to the left, threatening both the Jacobins, who felt they led the popular movement, and even the Paris Commune, which was the organising body of the militant working classes.



Source 17.5 *Les enragés* were an ultra-radical group of *sans-culottes*. On the right is Jacques Roux, one of the leaders who radicalised the *les enragés*, while on the left is a cartoon critical of such people from France in 1793.



The story so far

The history of the French Revolution is not the history of the brutal ‘mob’, but the history of a rational, thinking revolutionary crowd. Between 1792 and 1794, the Parisian crowd developed into an independent force, creating its own name and its own identity, material grievances, political theory and form of militant action. It worked by violence or the threat of violence. Briefly, until the war emergency was over, the popular movement enjoyed a high level of popular involvement and power, successfully forcing the Convention to take practical measures to solve working people’s material problems.

CHAPTER REVIEW

DEVELOPING CLEAR DEFINITIONS

Write your own definition of each of the following key terms:

- *sans-culottes*
- the right to insurrection
- *les enragés*

PRACTISING PARAGRAPH ANSWERS

Using four or five main points, explain how and why the popular movement became a more radical and independent force in the period 1792–93.

ANALYSING HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

In his book *Citizens*, historian Simon Schama provides a vivid account of the French Revolution. Many of his pages focus on the violence of the revolution. In his conclusion, he writes:

Why was the French Revolution [so violent]? Why, from the beginning, was it powered by brutality? Popular revolutionary violence was not some sort of boiling subterranean lava that finally forced its way onto the surface of French politics ... Perhaps it would be better to think of the revolutionary elite as rash geologists, themselves gouging open great holes in the crust of polite discourse and then feeding the angry matter through the pipes of their rhetoric out into the open. (Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution, 1989, p. 860)

- 1 The French Revolution, like most revolutions, did involve acts of violence. What is Schama's view of the role of violence in the French Revolution?
- 2 To what extent do you feel that the French Revolution was 'powered by brutality'?
- 3 Can you offer any other explanations than brutality for outbreaks of revolutionary violence such as the September massacres?

PRACTICE ESSAY QUESTION

'The relationship between the Jacobins and the *sans-culottes* was not so much a relationship of leaders and followers as of two allies; one a powerful political party, the other a powerful popular movement.' To what extent do you think this statement is true? What were the dangers and problems of this 'alliance'?



READING MORE DEEPLY

Easy

Andrew Matthews, *Revolution and Reaction, 1789–1849*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 68–72.

Moderate

Patrice Higonnet, 'Sans-culottes', in François Furet and Mona Ozouf (eds), *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1989, pp. 393–9.

Challenging

Barrie Rose, 'Paris and Direct Democracy, 1789–1794', in *Tribunes and Amazons. Men and Women of Revolutionary France, 1789–1871*, Macleay Press, Melbourne, 1999.

A tertiary-level publication, this is the work of a master historian who knows the popular revolutionary movement in Paris as well as its contemporaries did.



Popular movements: The role of women in the French Revolution, 1789–1794

“ *Woman is born free and lives equal to man in her rights. Social distinctions can be based only on the common utility.*

– OLYMPE DE GOUGES, *DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN AND THE FEMALE CITIZEN*

”

253

OVERVIEW

The history of great events such as revolutions is too often only the story of men’s actions and achievements. While women were definitely present in revolutionary events, frequently their contributions have been ignored. Feminist historians seek to remind us of all that has been forgotten in this way.

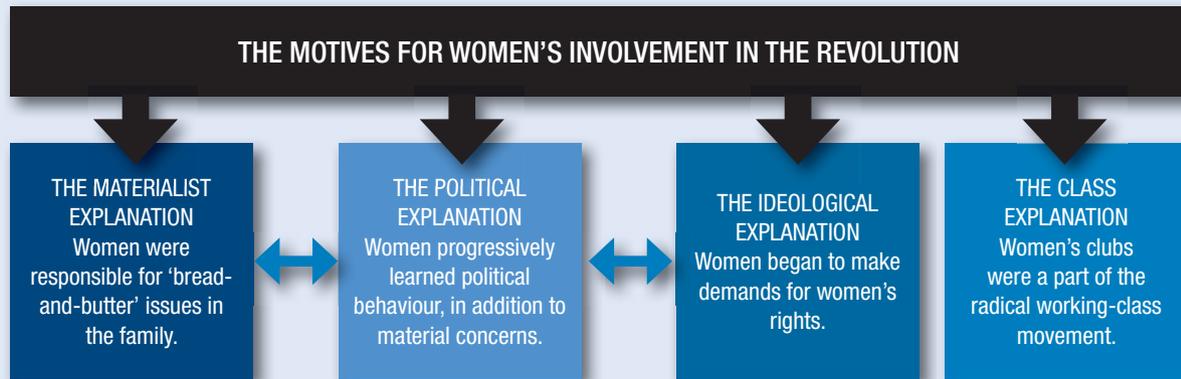
If we acknowledge that women were present in revolutionary crowds, we generally assume they were there for material reasons, such as the cost of bread and other foods. This is not the whole truth, however. During the revolution, French women also had their first experience of popular political involvement. Some women argued specifically for women’s rights in important theoretical statements. Later, women were excluded from the political life of the revolution. Nonetheless, these pioneers began a discussion that inspired French feminism in the nineteenth century.

KEY ISSUES

- The historical debate – why did women participate in the revolution?
- How do we discover the political action of revolutionary women?
- What caused the radicalisation of revolutionary women between 1792 and 1794?
- Who were some of the key women of the French Revolution?
- What did Olympe de Gouges say in her *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen*?
- How effective were activists such as Pauline Léon and Claire Lacombe?
- Why were revolutionary women excluded from the revolution in the period 1794–95?



FLOW OF CHAPTER



Source 18.0 Women's March on Versailles, 5–6 October 1789, 1789

I am a revolutionary woman of Paris. I am an ordinary working person, who lives by growing vegetables in my market garden, and running a stall at Les Halles market in Paris. My name will not be remembered in the history books.

Although I cannot tell you my name, I can tell you my story.

For people like me, life is a constant battle to keep the household running, to keep bread on the table. My husband and I usually spend more than half of our income on bread alone. We fear the years of bad harvests, when bread prices climb rapidly.

When the revolution broke out, my husband, a carpenter, took part in the attack on the Bastille. The National Assembly began reforms, but it did little to solve the problem of bread prices. In October, I marched with the women to Versailles. As we forced the King and Queen to return to Paris – and brought back many sacks of wheat from the palace – I felt how powerful we working people could be. For me, the greatest change was being invited into the Cordeliers Club, where Dansard and his friends taught me the language of politics. This was just a start, because women realised that we needed women's clubs to really be able to talk about women's issues. Politics changed us. We used to think just about food. Now we learned to talk about politics. We understood that food *is* politics, and politics *is* food.

I then joined the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women. We supported the Jacobins because they seemed willing to use their Terror to help working people with everyday problems such as the price of food. Citizen Léon urged us to support the Jacobins, and they in turn would help us. We rejoiced when, following our suggestions, they actually passed the Law of the Maximum, then a Law of General Maximum, fixing prices for food in Paris. Later, Citizen Lacombe criticised the Jacobins for not doing enough. In the end, the Jacobins turned their backs on us, and closed down our clubs.

Source 18.1 This powerful painting of *The Market Gardener* captures the wary look of a revolutionary woman who has struggled to keep her family fed during years of hardship. (This person, like most working women, left no written document of her life and struggle in the historical record. If she could write her story, this is what she might have said. This testimonial has been written by the author.)



The Market Gardener

18.1 The contribution of women and their involvement in revolutionary activity

In September 1789, the all-male members of the National Assembly heard a knock on the door of their hall. A group of educated bourgeois women entered the political space to express their support by donating their jewels to the work of the revolution. These women did not challenge the all-male assembly; they merely made a gesture of support, inspired by a similar action by women in ancient Rome. Their loyal gesture must, however, have raised the question of how 50 per cent of the population – women – could relate to a revolution that did not allow them to participate formally in politics.



Source 18.2 This engraving shows a group of women donating their jewels to the National Assembly.

The deputies themselves were aware of the contradiction central to their revolution. Following Rousseau, their *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* stated that rights were 'natural' and 'universal', applying automatically and without exception to all human beings.



Source 18.3 These engravings, *The Great Injustice* and *The Great Justice*, translate patriot principles into the form of female figures. In the first, the Third Estate ‘carries’ the two privileged estates; in the second, the situation has been reversed.

We can see them struggling with this contradiction in images such as *The Great Injustice* and *The Good Justice* (Source 18.3), in which the classic image of the Third Estate carrying the two privileged estates on its back – usually represented by male figures – is translated into female figures. This can be done easily enough in images, but less easily in real political life. The female patriots of the French Revolution had first to *demand* rights for women and then struggle to *gain* them.

18.2 The historical debate: Why did women participate in the revolution?

There is no doubt that women *did* participate extensively in the French Revolution at all levels, but there is debate about *why* they acted. The big question is whether working women participated mainly for subsistence issues (the price of basic foods), or acted for broader principles, such as women’s political and legal rights.

Feminist historian Olwen Hufton discovered that working women in the eighteenth century were certainly very important to keeping the ‘economy’ of the household running. This went far beyond just housekeeping: women actually had more techniques for earning money than men did. When the revolution occurred, working women still had the main responsibility to keep their households provided with basic foods. They therefore had to let the (all-male) middle-class deputies of the National Assembly know what was important to women and the family.

This issue must be placed in a broader historical debate about the role of women. For feminist historian Sheila Rowbotham, the main reason why women participated in the revolution was subsistence issues: working women supported the revolution for the same reasons men did.



ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 18.1: READING A PRIMARY SOURCE

Revolutionary women state their grievances

Revolutionary women address the National Convention, 24 February 1793:

Legislators, the laundresses of Paris have come into this sacred sanctuary of the laws and justice to set forth their concerns. Not only are all the essential foodstuffs being sold at excessive prices, but also the price of raw materials used in bleaching have become high ... It is not that materials are lacking; they are abundant; it is hoarding and speculation which drive up the price. You have made the head of the tyrant fall under the blade of the laws; let the laws bear down on the heads of these public bloodsuckers. We ask the death penalty for hoarders and speculators.

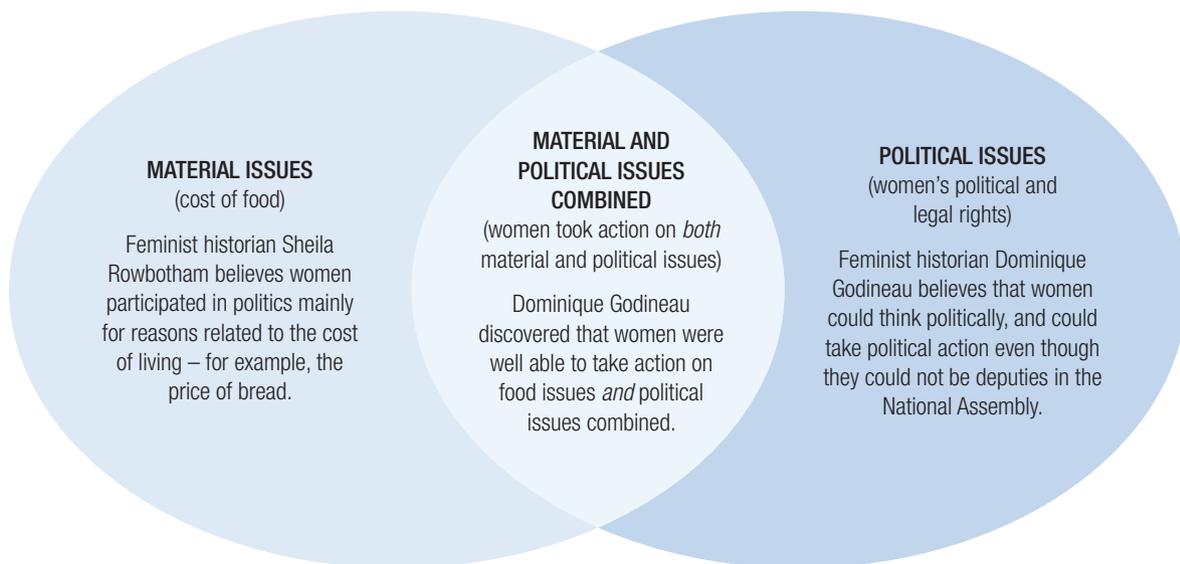
The Convention's President replied:

Revolutionary women, the Convention will occupy itself with the object of your concern, but one of the ways of driving up the price of goods is to scare away commerce by constantly crying 'Hoarding!' etc. (Quoted in D.G. Levy et al., Women in Revolutionary Paris, 1789–1795, 1979, p. 131)

- 1 What does this document tell us about the main concerns of women of the working class in 1793?
- 2 From what you know of the French Revolution, how were demands like this one translated into the 'economic' Terror?

Feminist historian Dominique Godineau disagrees. Her research shows that although food issues were important, women were also aware of political issues and civic rights. She found that women took three different types of action. The first was action on purely *subsistence* issues (such as the price of food). The second was for purely *political* reasons (such as women's rights). But the most common action was for *combined* subsistence issues and political issues in the same protest.

MIND-MAP: HISTORIANS' OPINION OF WOMEN'S REVOLUTIONARY ACTION



18.3 Rediscovering the many political roles of women

For Godineau, women were ‘political’ because they were everywhere involved in revolutionary discussion. Although they could not vote or be elected deputies, they could attend popular societies and the debates of the National Convention. Although many did not write pamphlets, they were involved in other ways, such as political discussions or spying on their neighbourhood.



Source 18.4 This painting by Lesueur shows an early women's club, but his representation suggests it was a tame little gathering. In reality, women enjoyed having a political voice, and debates were often fiery.

In these subtle ways, Godineau said, women were asserting their **popular sovereignty**, which was more important than subsistence issues. Strangely, although women had not been granted citizens' political rights, they still took action to defend the revolution that excluded them. Godineau notes that women were only excluded from formal political life, such as being a deputy. They could, and did, involve themselves in politics in many other ways. They demanded the right to organise and to bear arms. They boldly dared to comment on revolutionary politics, and to agree or disagree with men's decisions. As the revolution struggled with internal enemies, women also became **local vigilantes**: they attended executions, where the crowd 'supervised' the destruction of internal enemies, in the same way as the men fighting at the borders destroyed external enemies. In the same way, their attendance at popular clubs was a form of popular local vigilance.

Like most feminist historians, Godineau argues that women take action in different ways from men. For example, women began to speak informally on political issues in public places. Women also had real influence in the form of exhorting – that is, urging men to take political action.

popular sovereignty
 the right to be involved in political life

local vigilantes people who keep watch for unlawful activity



Source 18.5 This painting by Lesueur shows the range of ways in which women could participate in the life of the revolution. The woman on the far left is exhorting: she 'has placed herself at the gates of the city and is distributing cockades, songs, flowers, ribbons and water to volunteers who are marching out to the Vendée'.

The role of theorists

Although women's participation in revolutionary crowd action was important, the women's movement also needed theorists to argue that women deserved greater political and legal rights. The word 'feminism' did not actually appear in France until the 1830s, but the writers who demanded women's rights in the 1790s are seen by historians as the pioneers who began the debate.

18.4 SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL

Olympe de Gouges and the rights of women (1748–1793)

Marie-Olympe de Gouges was a leading intellectual and theorist. Brought up by a butcher who worked in the provincial town of Montauban, she secretly believed she was the illegitimate daughter of a local noble. She came to Paris in 1770, adopting the stylish name of Olympe de Gouges. She wrote an autobiographical novel (1784) and a play called *The Slavery of the Blacks* (1789). As political tensions rose, she also wrote a storm of pamphlets, such as her *Patriotic Remarks* (1788), which lashed out at the luxurious court at Versailles and high society generally. Her writings were often politically moderate, defending the monarchy, but also calling for practical relief measures to help the poor. They also made claims for women that would later be called feminist. She demanded the right to divorce, and even suggested in her own *Social Contract* (1791) that traditional marriage could be replaced by an equal social contract signed by husband and wife. This was too much for people at the time, who called her 'an hysterical virago'. In 1791, she found support for her beliefs in the Society of the Friends of Truth (also called The Social Circle), run by Sophie de Condorcet. That year, she published her brilliant *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen*, which cleverly copied the more famous document of August 1789, claiming women's right to participate actively in politics.

Article 1: All women are born free and are equal to men in their rights.

Article 2: The aim of all political gatherings is to protect the natural and unchangeable rights of Men and Women: these rights are liberty, the ownership of property, security and particularly the resistance to repression.

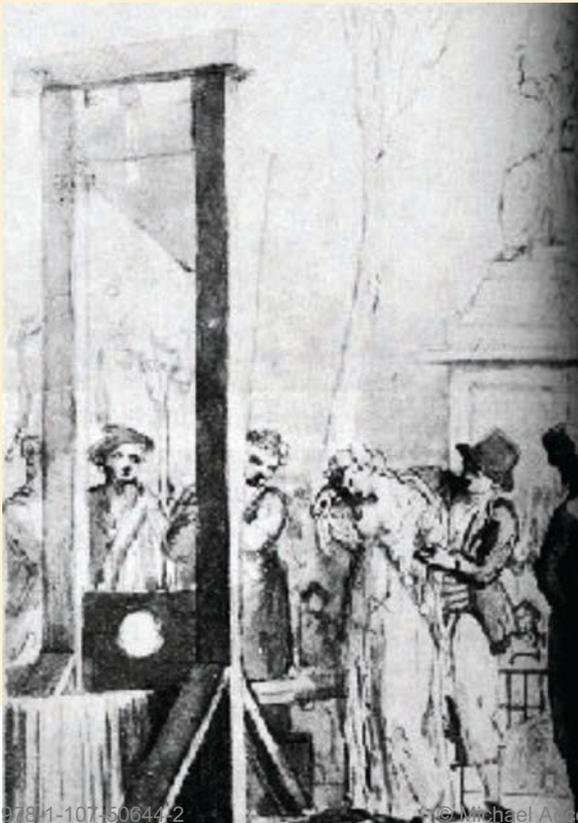
Article 6: Laws must express the General Will, all citizens male and female must contribute, either personally or through their representatives, to their creation; the Law must be equal for everybody; all male and female citizens, being equal before the law, must be equally eligible for all public honours, positions and employments, according to their abilities.

Article 10: No person may be troubled for their opinions, even basic ones. Women have the right to mount the scaffold; they should equally have the right to mount the rostrum; providing such behaviour does not disturb the public order created by the Law.



Source 18.6 This portrait of Olympe de Gouges is by Alexander Kucharsky.

Portrait of Olympe de Gouges



She did not like extreme political violence, however, and was disgusted by the Terror. In December 1792, she helped defend Louis XVI. She opposed the Jacobins' centralisation of power in 1793, and published pamphlets condemning Robespierre as 'the egotistical abomination' of the revolution. When she published a plan for a referendum to determine the new form of government in France, she provided Robespierre with an ideal excuse to arrest her for treason (July 1793) and guillotine her (November 1793). The official death notice mentioned not only the formal charge of sedition, but added that she had been punished 'for having forgotten the virtues which befit her sex'.

Source 18.7 This drawing shows the execution of Olympe de Gouges.



Focus questions

Carry out some further research on Olympia de Gouges:

- First, go to a good primary source.
- To gain a sense of Olympe de Gouges' powerful style of writing, have a look at one of her documents reproduced in the *Modern History Source Book* <http://cambridge.edu.au/redirect/?id=5684>.
- Next, read a good feminist analysis of de Gouges' importance to women's rights at <http://cambridge.edu.au/redirect/?id=5685>.

Society of Revolutionary Republican Women a radical female partner to the Jacobin Club

A MATTER OF FACT

Olympe de Gouges was a bold thinker. She even dared to suggest that there should be a National Assembly of Women to work beside the National Assembly (of men). She famously said, 'Women have the right to mount the scaffold; they should equally have the right to mount the rostrum.'

The role of activists

The women's movement also needed leaders who could organise popular societies and initiate action to publicise women's demands. The stories of these activists clearly show that women *could* think and act politically, but they also prove that the French Revolution was not really ready to accept their ideas.

What was the role of the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women?

While some early 'feminist' theorists lacked a large popular following, other revolutionary women – such as Pauline Léon and Claire Lacombe – communicated better with working people. Historian Allan Todd reminds us that their women's political club, the **Society of Revolutionary Republican Women** (founded May 1793) was a radical female partner to the Jacobin Club.

Politically, the Society supported the Montagnards against the Girondins, and actually helped in the attack on the Convention to arrest the Girondins (31 May–2 June 1793). Socially, it supported the *sans-culottes* movement, had links with the radical Paris 'section' meetings and, later, even backed the extreme left-wing group the *enragés*. With such credibility, the Society attracted a large membership of working women. They demanded the 'economic Terror', forcing the Jacobins to abandon the free market economy and to introduce some government control of the supply of goods and of prices, as well as the death penalty for hoarding.

How did these women help create the Terror?

Their pressure was partly responsible for the creation of the revolutionary armies (June 1793) to seize food and find traitors. By September 1793, the several hundred members of the Society criticised the Jacobins, and pressured them to undertake more radical laws. They got them: the Jacobins passed the Law of Suspects (September 1793) and the Law of the General Maximum (September 1793).



18.5 SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL

Women's activist Anne-Pauline Léon (1768–1838)

Pauline Léon's story shows clearly how much women contributed to the revolution, but also the limitations upon them. Léon was born in Paris, and was 20 years old when the revolution broke out. She was present at the capture of the Bastille (July 1789), and played the woman's classic role of exhorting (encouraging) men to join the attack. By 1791, she was campaigning against both royalists and constitutional monarchists such as Lafayette. She was one of many women who participated in the Cordeliers Club.

She soon made more radical demands, arguing to the National Assembly that women must be given the right to carry arms in defence of the revolution (March 1791). She asked the National Assembly for the creation of a female National Guard to defend Paris. She rejected the inevitable criticisms about women neglecting their domestic duties:

Do not believe that our intention is to abandon our homes and our families, which remain dear to our hearts. No, gentlemen, we only wish to be able to defend ourselves, unless you believe that the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen has no application to women, and that they must let themselves have their throats cut like lambs ... (Quoted in D.G. Levy et al., Women in Revolutionary Paris, 1789–1795, 1979, p. 79)

Pauline Léon attended the Champ de Mars demonstration (July 1791) and tried to sign the petition demanding the King's abdication. She also participated in the attack on the Tuileries Palace (10 August 1792), but was forced by men to give up the pike she was carrying. She established the Society of Republican Revolutionary Women (founded

May 1793), which she led until August 1793. She argued that women must be willing to take up arms to defend the revolution. She also supported the Cordeliers Club's radical demands for stronger laws against food hoarders and counter-revolutionaries. By June 1793, the society declared its support for the Jacobin Constitution of 1793, and also helped persuade a group of radical women not to take direct action over the high price of soap. She also supported the Jacobins by criticising the radical economic demands of the Enraged Ones. Clearly, she felt that the Jacobins were already doing enough by economic Terror to help working people. Not everybody agreed. In August 1793, she was replaced by the more radical Claire Lacombe, who swung the society into opposition to the Jacobins. Léon withdrew from political life and married Théophile Leclerc, a leading *enragé*.



Source 18.8 This engraving, *French Women Made Free*, dates to about 1790–91. It illustrates Pauline Léon's idea for a female National Guard. The idea, and this image, would have appeared outrageous to male revolutionaries at the time.

18.6 SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL

Women's activist Claire Lacombe (1765–unknown)



Source 18.9 This miniature portrait of Claire Lacombe is one of very few images of a female revolutionary leader, compared with the many representations of famous male leaders. Feminist historians call this the 'invisibility' of women in the pictorial record of history.

A MATTER OF FACT

Claire Lacombe was a feisty woman. She joined in the fighting at the Tuileries Palace on 10 August 1792 and was shot through the arm, but kept fighting, being hailed by men as a hero of the insurrection against the monarchy. Her boyfriend was Théophile Leclerc, who later left her to marry her political rival, Pauline Léon.

Why did so few people support the women's movement?

There is a weakness hidden in documents such as de Gouges' *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen*: it was signed by only 319 women, revealing just how narrow the base of support was for these early feminists. It is true that another women's leader, Théroigne de Méricourt, did organise the working women of the Saint-Antoine district to form a women's National Guard, which actually marched to the Convention, carrying a pike topped by a Phrygian bonnet.

The first problem was social: these early feminists did not behave or speak in a way that was likely to win over working women. According to the left-wing feminist historian Sheila Rowbotham, this early feminist movement was divided by class: at this early stage, the working-class suspicion of bourgeois women was stronger than any sense of sisterhood. She pointed out that these leaders were wealthy: Etta Palm was a duchess, while Théroigne de Méricourt survived as a singer and courtesan. They used the noble 'de' to give themselves airs, and they dressed and spoke like wealthy people.

The second problem was political. The feminist leaders generally were associated with the Girondins. When the revolutionary crowd began to hate the Girondins, who were blamed for the King's betrayal and for the disastrous war, they also hated these early 'feminists'. For example, when Théroigne de Méricourt tried to talk to some working women about women's rights, they nearly lynched her (May 1793).

Why were women excluded from political careers?

Women did not gain the right to vote in either 1789 or in 1792; in fact, in France they would not win this right until 1944. Can we blame this simply on the sexism of male revolutionaries?

In the early stages of the revolution, there was an opening up of politics to women. For example, **Claude Dansard's Fraternal Society** (later known as the Cordeliers Club) was the first to admit women to political debates and give them equal voting rights on motions. Dansard was so committed to participation for women that he insisted that the club should have revolving appointments, with women elected 50 per cent of the time.

Historian Lynn Hunt believes that the French Revolution was really hostile to women. She discovered that the French revolutionaries used the word 'effeminate' to mean national weakness and corruption. 'Feminine' was almost a political dirty word, forcing revolutionaries towards its opposite, the idea of a stern, specifically male virility. If the old regime was frivolous, corrupt and feminine, the new order would be severe, more serious and more masculine.

Furthermore, as women moved into the political sphere, they intimidated male revolutionaries. Some asked the Convention to limit women's participation in politics. For example, in September 1793, the Jacobin Amar – one of the most ferocious members of the Committee of Public Safety – stated:

The political rights of a citizen are to discuss and make resolutions concerning the interest of the state ... Do women have the moral force and the physical strength required for each of these roles? Universal opinion says that they do not. Does a woman's decency allow her to appear in public and to argue with men? To argue with the people on questions affecting the safety of the Republic? In general, women are not capable of elevated thought or careful reflection ... Their presence in popular societies would therefore give an active role to people who are easily fooled or misled.

Were women linked with the threat of popular radicalism?

There is a political explanation for the growing hostility towards women's political action. The Jacobins, alleged 'friends' of the popular movement, only barely controlled the women's movement, and secretly feared its independence, radicalism and power. In 1793, for example, Claire Lacombe addressed Robespierre in the Convention and threatened him with militant action:

Our sex has produced only one monster [she meant Marie-Antoinette], while for four years we have been betrayed, assassinated, by monsters without number of the masculine sex. Our rights are those of the people and, if we are oppressed, we will know how to provide resistance to oppression. (Quoted in Darline Levy et al., Women in Revolutionary Paris, 1789–1795, 1979, p. 80)

Focus questions

- 1 To what extent did revolutionary France see the birth of ideas that would later be described as 'feminist'?
- 2 What were the weaknesses of this early movement for women's rights?

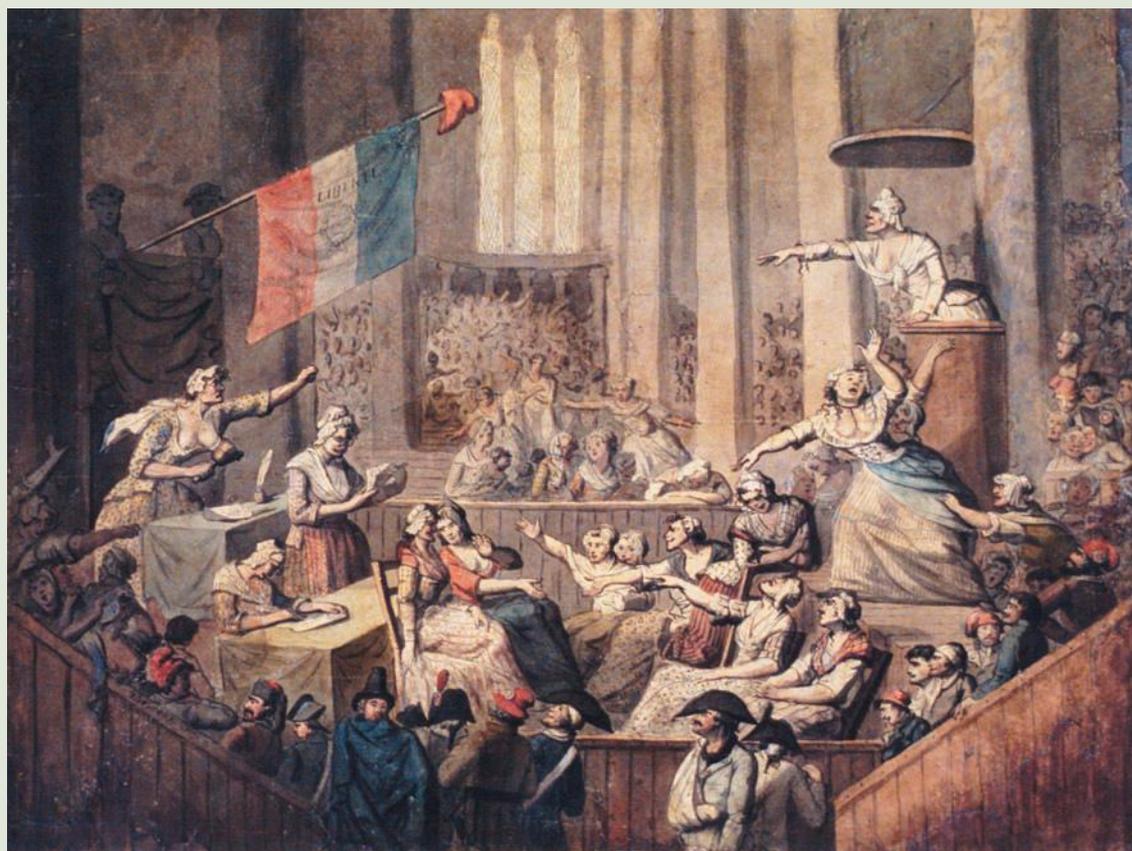
Claude Dansard's Fraternal Society (later known as the Cordeliers Club) the first society to admit women to political debates and give them equal voting rights on motions



She extended the *sans-culottes*' idea of the right to insurrection to women. This frightened male deputies because it was a threat of violence made by women. After August 1793, women began to associate with the radical Hébertistes, the radical club movement, the 'sections' of Paris and the *enragés*. They all agreed that the matter of subsistence was a political issue and pressured the Convention for laws against food hoarders and for economic Terror to punish them. The women's movement was closely linked with the popular movement, but the Jacobins only needed the support of the popular movement as long as the war emergency was a threat to the new society. When the Jacobins rejected the Parisian popular movement, they also rejected the women's movement, and finally banned women from involvement in political life (October 1793).

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 18.2: READING A PRIMARY SOURCE

Images reveal male fears of women's power



Source 18.10 This watercolour by Chérieux shows a women's club meeting in Paris, in a disused church, in about 1793.

- 1 Look carefully at this image. What is the overall impression of this women's club?
- 2 Look carefully at the rough drawing of the women's faces. What does this artist think of women who enter the male world of politics?
- 3 These women gesture wildly and, improbably, their dresses come undone, and they do not seem to care. What does the artist mean us to understand about the dangers of letting women into politics?

18.7 The repression of revolutionary women

One of the most powerful fears of the period 1792–94 was the fear of counter-revolution. The assassination of Marat was carried out by a woman: Charlotte Corday's act caused a wave of feeling against women as agents of the counter-revolution, further strengthened by a second, unsuccessful, assassination attempt against Robespierre by a young woman.

FLASHPOINT!

Why did the Convention close women's clubs (30 October 1793)?

By September 1793, the Convention was expressing alarm at the growing power of women's groups. For example, in October 1793 the Jacobins debated whether women had any right to enter the political field. A deputy asked the Committee of General Security whether women should be allowed into popular societies and whether they could expect political rights and participation. The committee's answer was a definitive no. This attitude probably explains the closure of the women's clubs (30 October 1793). The Jacobins were anxious to silence all forms of the left-wing popular movement that were making radical demands for economic measures and, since this left wing happened to include some of the women's clubs, they had to be silenced too.

They feared two things: the embarrassment of women bursting into the Convention to demand both economic measures and the stronger use of the Terror to enforce them. Any criticism that the Jacobins were not doing enough undermined the Jacobins' position as the people's champions. In addition, they were frightened by the fact that the working women who demanded economic measures were joining with other radical popular currents such as the *enragés*.

The Jacobins had a good excuse to shut down the women's clubs. The militant market women of Paris opposed price-fixing because it limited their profits. They complained to the Convention that the women of the clubs had tried to force them to wear the revolutionary cockade and that the price fixing was unfair.

267

How were women 'put back in their place'?

With regard to the women's movement – then, as now – it is clear that many men were afraid of the powerful political voice of women. Feminist historians see this fear very clearly in the way the revolution used and controlled images of women.

The Jacobins deliberately used images to reinforce traditional gender roles. In November 1793, for example, an official newspaper, the *Journal of Public Safety*, carried this exhortation:

*Women! Do you want to be republican women? You must love, obey and teach the laws which remind your husbands and your children of the use of their rights; be glorious in daring deeds so that they might help our homeland . . . be simple in the way you dress, and hardworking in your homes; do not go to popular assemblies with the intention of speaking in them; but let your attendance there sometimes encourage your children; then our country will bless you, because you will have truly done what it has a right to expect of you. (Quoted in Paule-Marie Duhet, *Les Femmes et la Révolution Française, 1789–1794, 1971, pp. 155–7, translated by the author*)*

The message was that working women should go home, have babies and raise good citizens.

The story so far

By late 1793, the Jacobins had begun the process of shutting down the political participation of both working people and women. Nonetheless, a generation of women had been changed by their experience of 10 years of revolution. Several had made significant statements of women's rights. In the longer term, the women's movement would have a long and rich history throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

CHAPTER REVIEW

DEVELOPING CLEAR DEFINITIONS

Write your own definition of each of the following key terms:

- popular sovereignty
- material grievances
- *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen*
- economic Terror
- woman's role of exhorting

PRACTISING PARAGRAPH ANSWERS

Using four or five main points, explain what factors led women to take part in the French Revolution.

ANALYSING HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Historian Dominique Godineau wrote:

Only a few women claimed the right to vote during the Revolution. Nevertheless, the question of their citizenship always faces the historian because the problem keeps recurring: how was it possible to be a citoyenne [female citizen], how was it possible for women to become involved in political life, without acquiring all the attributes of citizenship? An important women's movement, too long forgotten in the historiography, existed at the heart of the revolutionary movement. During certain periods, nothing distinguished this women's movement from the whole of the popular movement in Paris; at other times it stood out. One such moment was October, 1789, when women



marched to Versailles and returned with the King; another was the spring and summer of 1793, when groups of militant women were very strong and a minority of sans-culottes went so far as to argue that women as well as men could participate in politics ... (*Masculine and Feminine Political Practice During the French Revolution, 1793–Year III*, in Harriet Applewhite and Darline Levy, *Women and the Age of Democratic Revolution, 1981*, pp. 61–107)

- 1 Why, according to Godineau, is there a serious contradiction between the role played by women in the revolution and the political role given to them by the revolution?
- 2 Why does Godineau choose the two examples of October 1789 and mid-1793 as examples of the women's movement taking action?

PRACTICE ESSAY QUESTION

'The revolutionary women's movement rose with the popular movement and, once the emergency of 1792–93 was over, fell with the popular movement.' To what extent do you feel that this is true of the women's movement during the French Revolution?

READING MORE DEEPLY

Easy

Allan Todd, *Revolutions, 1789–1917*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, pp. 81–4.

Moderate

Linda Kelly, *Women of the French Revolution*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1987.

Challenging

Barry Rose, *Tribunes and Amazons. Men and Women of Revolutionary France, 1789–1871*, Macleay Press, Melbourne, 1999.

Rose has a particular interest in the radical working-class movement in the French Revolution. Chapters 14 and 15 focus specifically on the role of women.



The final settlement: The conservative republic of 1795

“

This Constitution was a return to the provisions of the Constitution of 1791: France was again to be governed by representative, parliamentary government based on property qualifications and the safeguarding of economic and civil liberties.

– PETER MCPHEE, 2012

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271

OVERVIEW

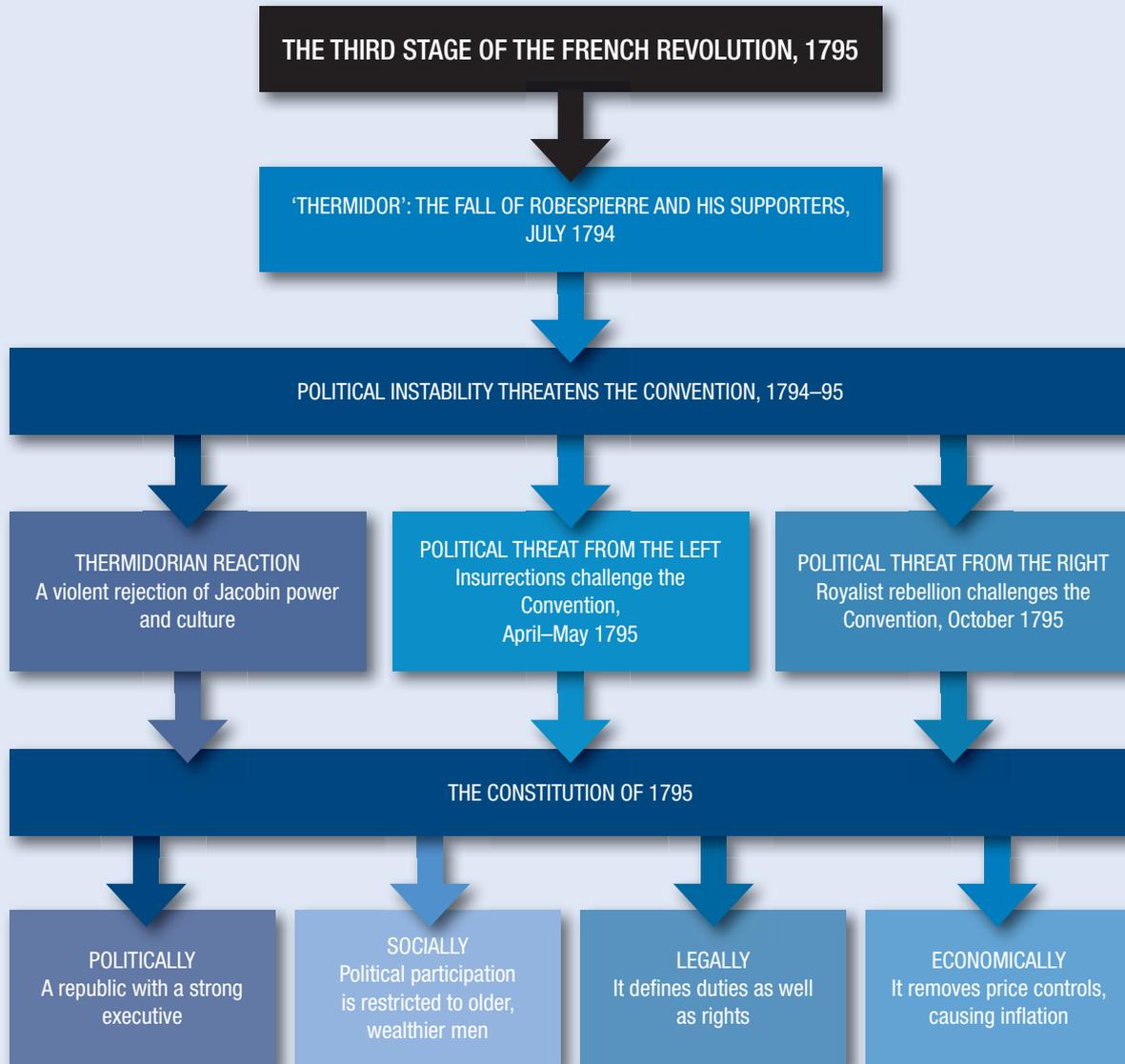
By July 1794, the ‘political’ (or factional) Terror had eliminated so many groups – the Girondins, the Hébertists, Danton and the Indulgents – that most remaining revolutionaries felt threatened. Robespierre’s vague accusations caused a group of deputies to plot his overthrow, causing his rapid execution. The events of Thermidor (July 1794) unleashed a nationwide backlash against the Jacobins. To stabilise the revolution, the Convention drafted a third, less radical, constitution: the Constitution of 1795. The so-called Directory was a conservative republic, yet it too was destabilised by the powerful political forces of both the left and the right.

KEY ISSUES

- What caused the fall of the Jacobin government in Thermidor (July 1794)?
- How has Robespierre been (mis)represented over time?
- What was the effect of the Thermidorian reaction?
- What were the aims of the Constitution of 1795?



FLOW OF CHAPTER



19.1 The fall of the Jacobin government in Thermidor, July 1794

Government by Terror and leadership by fear contain the seeds of their own destruction. When Terror kills even revolutionary heroes, the remaining people fear they will be next. The atmosphere of paranoia now worked against Robespierre.



Source 19.1 This painting is a representation of the Parisian *sans-culottes* on guard to protect the revolution from its enemies.

The atmosphere of fear

The Law of 22 Prairial (10 June 1794) exceeded even the Law of Suspects in giving the committees power to arrest and execute people, and eliminating deputies' parliamentary immunity. Anybody could now be arrested, as Danton discovered. Robespierre threatened anyone who questioned the law. Frightened, some deputies plotted to remove him.

On 23 July 1794, Robespierre criticised four committee members, saying that people who were not sufficiently revolutionary were traitors. He then made an inexplicable blunder: a long, rambling speech in the Convention demanding one last purge because there were still traitors to be destroyed. The deputies, panic-stricken, called for Robespierre to name them. He refused, saying that they were in the Convention, the Committee of Public Safety and the Committee of General Security, effectively threatening nearly everybody.



Source 19.2 *Left:* This sketch by François Gérard shows Robespierre very much in control of debates in the Convention.

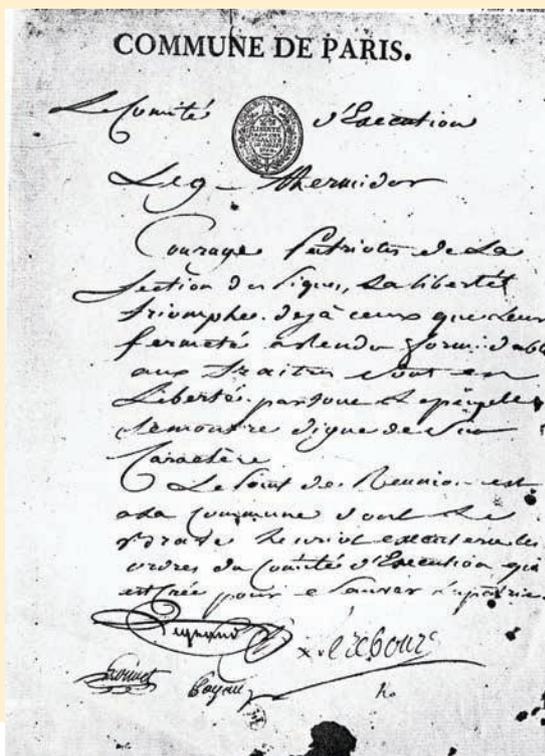
Right: The second sketch, in comparison, captures Robespierre at the moment of crisis, when the deputies of the Convention challenged his authority and demanded to know quickly who he was referring to in his speech announcing further Terror.

19.2 SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL

The overthrow of Robespierre in Thermidor

When Robespierre returned in July 1794 (the revolutionary month of Thermidor), a group of deputies hastily arrested him. This parliamentary coup was desperately dangerous because Robespierre was powerful. The popular movement responded, but too slowly to save him. Using a recent law, the Convention declared Robespierre an 'outlaw', allowing prompt execution. In the struggle, he was shot in the face, leaving his jaw hanging loose by a strip of skin.

Source 19.3 This tragic document traces the fall of a great revolutionary. The Executive Committee of the Paris Commune sent out an urgent call to the *sans-culottes* of the sections, asking them to come to the Town Hall to liberate Robespierre and the Jacobins. Some did respond, but they were not able to halt the conspiracy to overthrow and execute Robespierre. Robespierre himself began signing this request, but only wrote the first two letters of his name before his blood started dripping on to the document.



The executions followed with understandable rapidity that same afternoon: Robespierre was first and, since the guard cruelly wrenched off the bandage leaving his shattered jaw dangling loose, he was screaming with pain as he was laid under the blade. The Convention then purged 80 people in the first sweep, including Robespierre's brother, Saint-Just and Couthon.



Source 19.4 Left: This coloured engraving expresses the hostility of the conspirators to Robespierre and his colleagues. Right: This image shows Robespierre's severed head after he was guillotined.

19.3 The representation of Robespierre over time

How, then, has Robespierre been represented by historians over time? The answer is complex. Even before his execution, Robespierre was both revered and hated, and this duality of opinion was continued and intensified when he was overthrown. The first myth-makers were the **Thermidorians** – the revolutionaries who organised the coup against Robespierre.

In January 1795, E.B. Courtois presented a report to the Assembly that started the Robespierre myth. Precisely because the Assembly itself was guilty of the excesses of the Terror, it shifted the blame onto Robespierre, destroying all evidence of his moderation and exaggerating evidence of his action. The report accused him of seeking 'the levelling [of society] by the extinction of wealth and the ruin of commerce', by the dangerous technique of stirring up working people and inciting them to rule over the propertied classes (quoted in David Jordan, *The Revolutionary Career of Maximilien Robespierre*, 1985, p. 14). It presented him as a mediocre politician inflated with monstrous vanity and fired by an inhuman ruthlessness. The savagery of the attack on Robespierre continued unabated after his death.

Thermidorians the revolutionaries who organised both the coup against Robespierre and the arrest and rapid execution of the leader and his closest followers

19.4 The Thermidorian reaction

Thermidorian Reaction a campaign during 1794–95 to destroy the Jacobins' control of politics, to stop the processes of the Terror and to eliminate working people and women from political life

The period after the fall of the Jacobins is called the **Thermidorian Reaction**, meaning a campaign to destroy the Jacobins' control of politics and the society they had created. The Terror did not stop immediately: it claimed victims such as the public prosecutor, Fouquier-Tinville.

The Convention was now caught between two powerful political forces, the reborn left-wing and the right-wing groups. The popular revolutionary movement, driven by economic desperation, reasserted itself. Powerful counter-revolutionary forces, such as nobles and priests, now returned seeking revenge.

FLASHPOINT!

The insurrections of April and May 1795

The first challenge to the Directory came from the popular movement. Working people realised that the fall of the Jacobins meant the loss of their few remaining economic gains. In two separate insurrections, they invaded the National Assembly in a final attempt to push the revolution back onto its proper course of economic reform. Political and material demands were intertwined because they demanded the return of the democratic Constitution of 1793 and the lowering of the price of bread.

Source 19.5 By 20 May 1795, price rises and bread rationing had driven the popular movement to new levels of desperation, expressed in their attack on the Convention. The deputy Ferraud swore he would stop them, but was shot dead. When the crowd waved his head in front of the president, Boissy d'Anglas took off his hat and bowed to it.



The **Insurrection of 12 Germinal** (1 April 1795) demanded the return of the Constitution of 1793, the provision of cheaper bread and the outlawing of the gangs of gilded youth. This rebellion had no leaders because the Paris Commune and the section meetings had been infiltrated. There was no support from the National Guard, which defended the Convention. The Convention summoned the gangs of right-wing activists, who evicted the demonstrators.

The **Insurrection of 1 Prairial** (20 May 1795) was also a crowd attack on the Convention. One deputy, Jean Féraud, bravely put himself in front of the demonstrators. He was shot dead, his body was carried outside and a demonstrator with a sharp knife cut his head off – as effortlessly as slicing a pumpkin in half, noted one observer – tossing it like a trophy to the crowd. It was fixed on a pike, carried back into the Convention and held up under the nose of Boissy d'Anglas, who had taken the president's chair. Without leaders, though, the crowd did not know what to do and was soon dispersed by troops. The next day, the crowd threatened the Convention with an array of cannon, but again the situation was defused.

Insurrection of 12 Germinal (1 April 1795) an attack on the Convention by the Parisian crowd, who murdered a deputy and again demanded bread and the Constitution of 1793

Insurrection of 1 Prairial (20 May 1795) a second attack on the Convention by desperate *sans-culottes* demanding the reduction of bread prices and the return of the Constitution of 1793

Repression of the popular movement by the 'dry guillotine'

The Convention now savagely repressed the *sans-culottes* movement, arresting 4000 militants. Afraid to use the guillotine, the government deported them to a military prison on a remote desert island, which contemporaries grimly called 'the dry guillotine'. It declared it a criminal offence to demand the return of the Constitution of 1793.

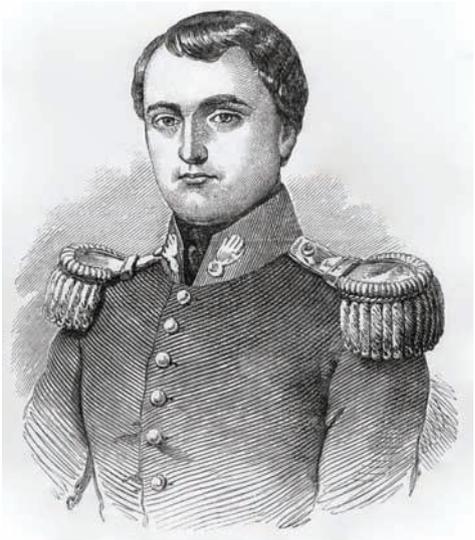
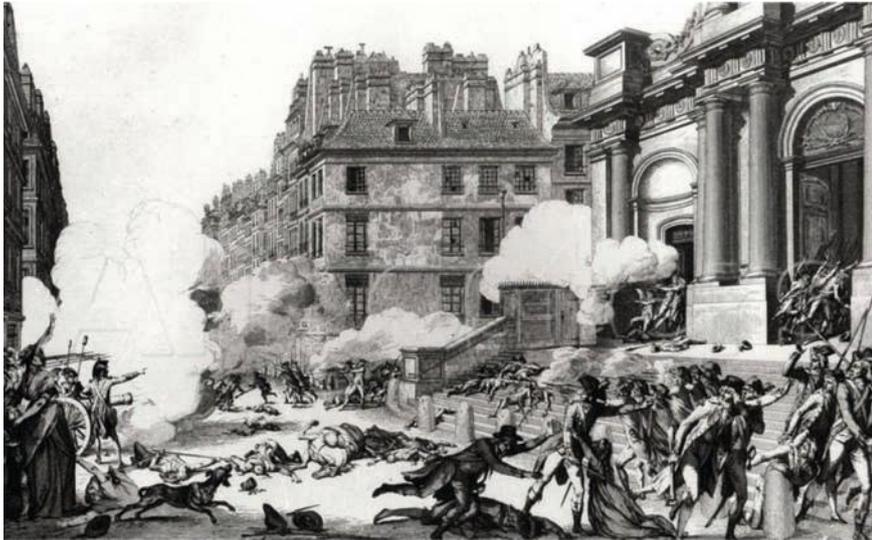
The Convention tried to execute the murderer of Jean Féraud, but the crowd rescued him. The Convention mustered an army of 25 000 men to 'invade' the Saint-Antoine suburb. It ordered that cannon be trained on the suburb and an ultimatum issued: stop the fighting and surrender the murderer or the entire suburb would be flattened.

The Convention now consolidated its victory over the popular movement. It banned the use of the word 'revolutionary' and ordered the police to arrest any activists. It changed the National Guard back to a bourgeois institution.

The revolutionary challenge from the right: The Royalist insurrection of 5 October 1795 (*Vendémiaire*)

By October 1795, the right-wing forces, especially royalists, were preparing to restore a king: although the young royal prince had died of tuberculosis of the bones in June 1795, the King's brother declared himself Louis XVIII and promised to reinstitute the old regime. When plans for military invasion by Britain failed, they turned to internal politics and won over seven 'sections' of Paris by saying that the government was starving working people.

When these 'sections' rose in rebellion, the Convention chose a young Brigadier of Corsican origin, Napoleon Bonaparte, gave him eight cannon and 8000 men and instructed him to defend the Assembly. The massive royalist force marched on Paris and fortunately decided to attack in military style – that is, in formal columns – rather than by revolutionary street fighting. Bonaparte placed his cannon brilliantly and loaded them not with cannon balls but with grapeshot, small bullets that scatter with the same effect as a modern machine-gun. The columns of royalist rebels attacked the Convention but the cannon effectively dispersed them.



Source 19.6 *Left:* This engraving by Helman is a representation of the events near the Church of Saint Roch, where Napoleon Bonaparte (*right*) used artillery to disperse the royalist attack on the Convention on 5 October 1795.

Dismantling the machinery of Terror

The most urgent task was to dismantle the legal machinery of the Terror. The Convention weakened the two powerful committees, splitting them up into 16 groups, each with lesser powers. The Committee of Public Safety lost its control of local government and the army. All committees were made more closely accountable to the Convention. The Law of Suspects and the Law of 22 Prairial were abolished. The revolutionary tribunal itself was closed. The civil liberties of 1789 were reintroduced.



Source 19.7 This engraving shows the dramatic closure of the Jacobin Club in Paris.

The White Terror: Monarchists take revenge on Jacobins

Jacobin rule had involved domination, repression and great human suffering, generating savage hatreds. People now sought revenge, creating the 'White' Terror. Throughout France, there was a murderous series of attacks against Jacobins. In Paris and across France, Jacobin clubs were shut down.

How did ordinary people use culture to express their new political ideals?



Ordinary people also rejected Jacobin beliefs by destroying artworks. A bust of Marat was thrown into the Paris sewers. David's paintings of the martyrs Marat and Le Pelletier were removed from the Convention. Bands of local officials searched houses, destroying popular revolutionary decorations.

People rejected the Jacobin taste for simplicity and adopted a luxurious style of dress. These gorgeously dressed men were called *muscadins*. They adopted a virtual uniform: square-cut coats, tight trousers into low boots and flamboyantly high collars and cravats.

muscadins lavishly dressed men who adopted a virtual uniform: square-cut coats, tight trousers into low boots and flamboyantly high collars and cravats: a rejection of the Jacobin taste for simplicity

Source 19.8 This engraving shows a young man adopting an exaggerated aristocratic style of dress, as a rejection of Jacobin values.

A MATTER OF FACT

By 1795, fashion was quite morbid. Men wore exaggeratedly high collars, pretending to hide scars from the guillotine. Their female companions were the 'Merveilleuses', or the marvellous ones. They held dinner balls for victims of the guillotine, macabre affairs in which women wore their hair roughly shorn off as if by an executioner. The illusion was completed by a small band of blood-red ribbon worn around the neck, creating the illusion that the head had been cut by the blade but not removed.



Focus questions

- 1 Why is it true to say that the Convention after 1795 found itself caught between the forces of the political left wing and the political right wing?
- 2 What was the 'White Terror'?

The campaign to crush the popular movement

The *muscadins*, drawn mainly from the middle-class youth of Paris and the sons of aristocrats who had died at the guillotine, now invaded working-class suburbs and attacked radical workers. They also made it impossible for working people to attend the local Paris 'section' meetings, quickly stifling the popular movement.

The new political 'team' of 1795

Politically, this fourth 'team' of politicians comprised moderates, such as the 75 surviving Girondins or the middling deputies from the Plain. Some were conservatives, such as the royalists who now formed a healthy right wing in the parliament.

Socially, the new political 'team' of 1795 was also moderate. These men were more established, more successful and more tough-minded. They were experienced, and used to holding positions of authority. They were wealthy, having made a fortune out of the revolution. They had a large stake in society and were determined not to lose it. They had principles, but practical concerns were uppermost. For example, the use of Terror did not bother them, but the idea of stirring up the working classes seemed to them to be very dangerous.

19.5 SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL

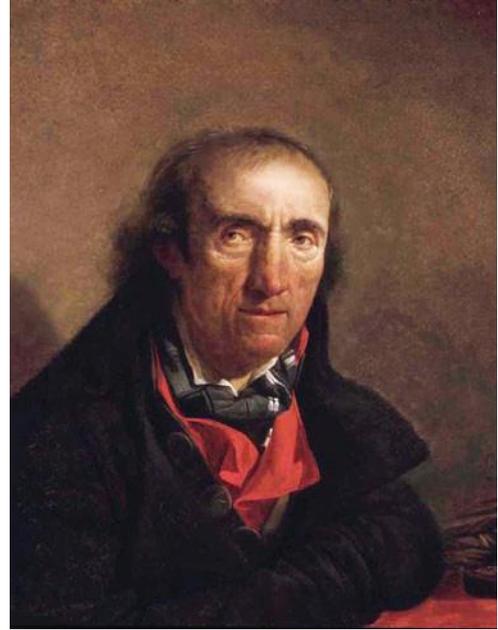
Boissy d'Anglas (1756–1828)



Source 19.9 This sculpture shows the new national hero after Thermidor: Boissy d'Anglas. He was a leader who offered a moderate alternative to the radicalism of Robespierre and the Jacobins. See the digital version for more information about this leader.



In politics – men of property: ‘You must therefore guarantee political rights for the well-to-do’ This portrait shows the sort of wealthy man who dominated politics. André-François Miot served as Consul for France to Florence. His luxurious home sends a clear message about his wealth and respectability.



Out of politics – The former mayor of Nantes dressed quite simply during the revolutionary era, to avoid any appearance of upper-class luxury.

Source 19.10 These two portraits – which you can see in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria – show the types of people who now dominated politics, and those who were shut out.

Thermidorian Political Life

19.6 The Constitution of 1795: A return to moderation

During 1795, Boissy d’Anglas and the Committee of Eleven drew up France’s third revolutionary constitution. When it was completed (22 August 1795), they believed that they had finally created a political structure allowing the original revolutionary ideals of 1789–91 to be realised, while protecting them from the radicalism that had distorted those ideals between August 1792 and July 1794. The Constitution of 1795 was accepted by the last act of the Convention, which, having fulfilled its role, was dissolved (October 1795). In designing a new version of the republic, it aimed to re-establish order by creating a strong executive government.

The political climate changed again: gone was the Jacobin culture of confraternity, the egalitarian spirit of citizen speaking to citizen; gone was Robespierre’s puritanical cult of simplicity and the simmering resentment against wealth. The new heroes of this stage of the revolution were the respectable, propertied classes.



ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 19.1: READING A PRIMARY RESOURCE

An image showing the Constitution of 1795

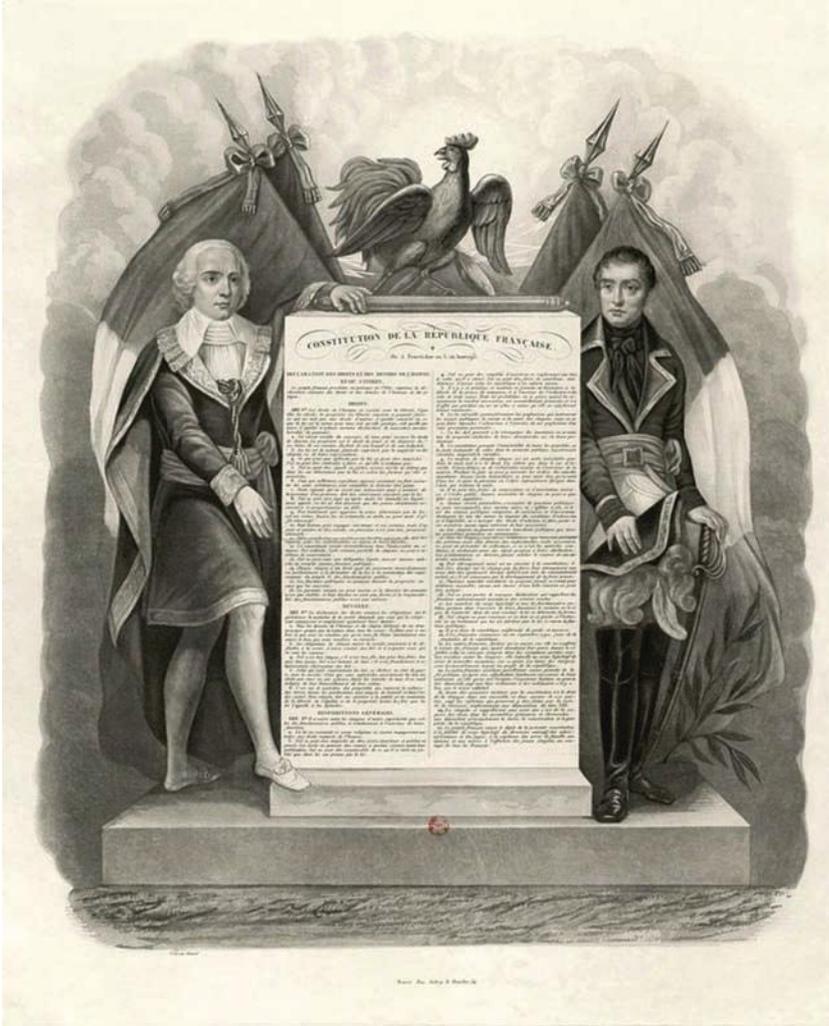


Source 19.11 The ideology of 1795 can be summed up in this political cartoon, showing a man of property crushing a radical *sans-culottes*, while pointing to the 'safe' Constitution of 1795.

- 1 According to this image, what sort of person was likely to be a friend of the Constitution of 1795 and what sort of person needed to be crushed underfoot?
- 2 From what you know of this third stage of the French Revolution, how accurate is this representation of the crushing of the popular movement?

New social values: The Declaration of Rights and Duties

The Constitution of 1795 reiterated the general principles and basic rights of 1789. In the section titled 'Rights', Articles 1–22 reaffirmed the origin of sovereignty, the law as the expression of the general will, basic rights such as liberty, equality, security and property, and the separation of powers. This section therefore guarantees what historian D.G. Wright calls 'the permanent political gains of the Revolution'.



Source 19.12 This engraving shows the new constitution of 1795. Notice that there is not a single revolutionary symbol but just the French flags and the French rooster, a sign of national military pride. A respectable politician stands at left, protected by a military officer at right.

Redefining words: Equality

The new social values are obvious in words that were subtly changed. In 1789, ‘equality’ meant a general sense of natural rights; in 1793, it meant a more radical political and social equality; by 1795, it was reduced to an assurance that everybody was equal before the law.

Banning words: Fraternity

For the men of 1795, ‘Fraternity’ was a dangerous word. Although it originally meant simply ‘brotherhood’, the *sans-culottes* used it to mean ‘hatred of the rich’. The most radical *sans-culottes*, especially the *enragés* led by Roux and Varlet, had made this into an aggressive hatred of all propertied people, and had even suggested the dangerous idea of taking property from the rich to give to the poor. The men of 1795 could not tolerate this radicalism: they were rich themselves, and were now preaching *respect* for the rich. The word ‘fraternity’ could not be spoken, and was even removed from public buildings. A complete language ban was also applied to the idea of the right to insurrection and the whole radical Constitution of 1793. It was illegal even to mention it.



Introducing words: Duties

The new buzzword was 'duties', which were all related to the good of society, including obedience, legality and property. Article 3 defined the obligation of each member of society as 'submitting to its laws and submitting to its agents'. For Boissy d'Anglas, who had witnessed the invasion of the Convention on the day of 1 Prairial, there would be no more direct intimidation of elected representatives. His idea of a good man was somebody who would 'religiously observe the law'.

Emphasising words: Property

The Constitution again emphasised the sacred nature of private property as the basis of all society (Article 8), an idea that had been stated three times in the Declaration of 1789.

Political precautions: The legislature (law-making body)

Structurally, these men of 1795 were more cautious, choosing a two-house (bicameral) parliament, which is 'safer' than a single-house national assembly. The upper house was designed, as in England, to be a brake upon the lower house. In 1789, this precaution was discussed but rejected as unnecessary; in 1795, it seemed crucial. Thus the Council of Five Hundred wrote and proposed new laws, which were submitted to the Council of Ancients, a group of 250 deputies whose minimum age had to be 40.

Political precautions: The strong executive arm of government

Focus questions

- 1 What were the main features of the Constitution of 1795?
- 2 How effective was the government of the Directory in dealing with France's serious internal and external problems after 1795?

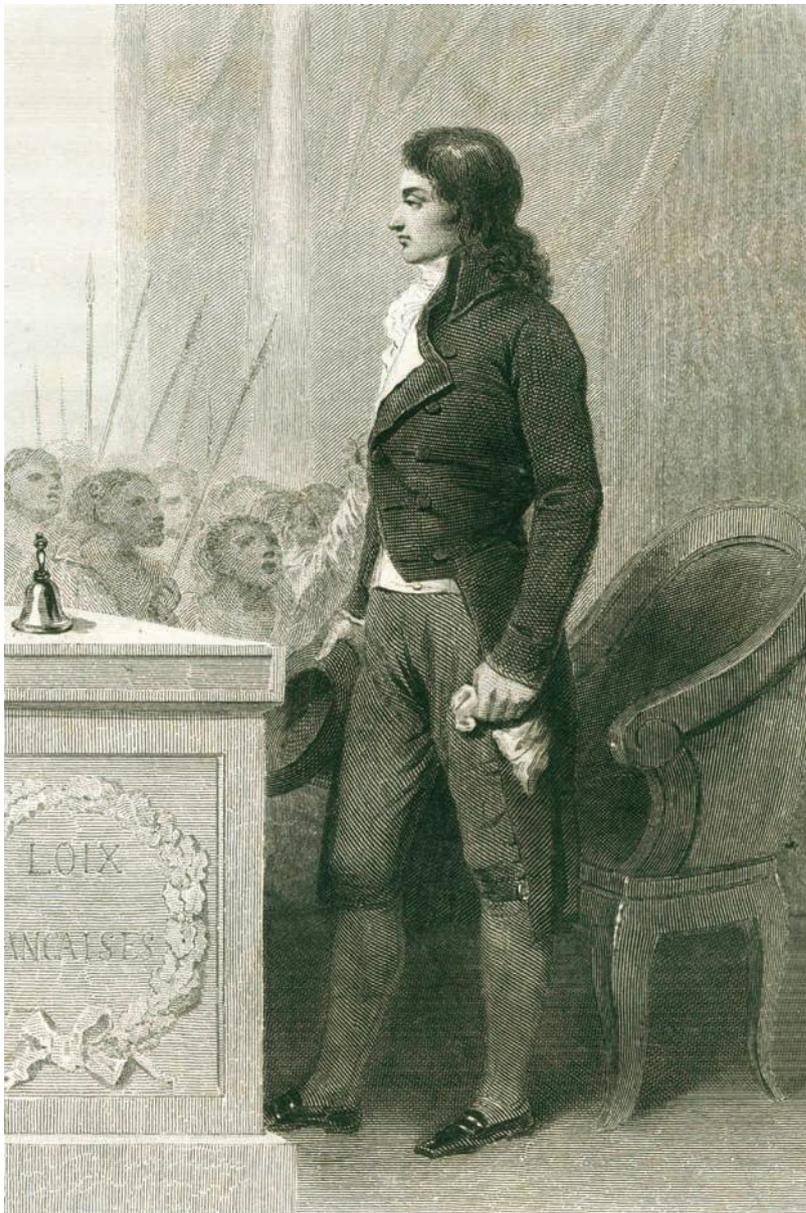
The Council of Five Hundred proposed 50 members for the executive arm of government. The Council of Ancients chose five of them, who formed a tight, effective, compact executive government, known as the Executive Directory. To avoid dictatorships, each was president for three months. These five directors appointed their own executive government. They were allowed to appoint seven ministers, each of whom had a specific portfolio, but the ministers never met as a group. Each minister reported individually to the Directory.



The story so far

During the third and final phase of the revolution, from the Thermidorian Reaction (starting July 1794) to the introduction of the Constitution of 1795 (voted 22 August and proclaimed 23 September 1795), the revolutionaries consciously tried to create a new and more stable form of government that would allow them to return to the great principles of 1789, but without the dangerous radicalism of the emergency period of 1792–94.

Foremost among their goals was the return to a constitutional government, and hence the steady abolition of the machinery of ‘revolutionary government’.



Source 19.13 Boissy d'Anglas was the popular leading statesman after the events of Thermidor, who helped to instigate a return to constitutional government in France after years of revolutionary government and extreme measures.



CHAPTER REVIEW

DEVELOPING CLEAR DEFINITIONS

Write your own definition of each of the following key terms:

- Thermidor
- Thermidorian Reaction
- White Terror
- dry guillotine
- Directory
- Constitution of 1795

PRACTISING PARAGRAPH ANSWERS

Using four or five main points, describe the powerful political forces affecting France during the period 1794–95, after the fall of Robespierre.

ANALYSING HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Historian Norman Hampson wrote:

The Constitution of 1795 ensured that the Directory would be a weak government. It tried to apply liberal policies in a situation where war, inflation, food shortages and the whole violent legacy of the Revolution made liberal government impossible. It has found few supporters, and historians have been reluctant to recognise either the achievements of these able men or the extraordinary problems that defeated them. They achieved outstanding military successes, but the country was ungovernable by normal constitutional methods. (The French Revolution: A Concise History, 1975, p. 161)

- 1 Why, according to Hampson, should we consider the Constitution of 1795 to be a good constitution in itself, but one that was created at the wrong time?
- 2 Why does Hampson feel that the situation in France around 1795 made normal, moderate, democratic government impossible?
- 3 What evidence does he give to prove that the men of the Directory were in fact very capable?

PRACTICE ESSAY QUESTION

To what extent did the 'final settlement' of the revolution in 1795 establish or destroy the hopes and ideals of 1789?

READING MORE DEEPLY

Easy

Andrew Matthews, *Revolution and Reaction, 1789–1849*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 66–8.

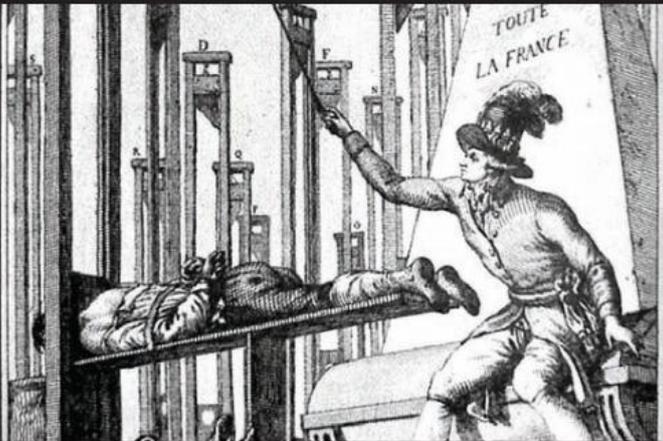
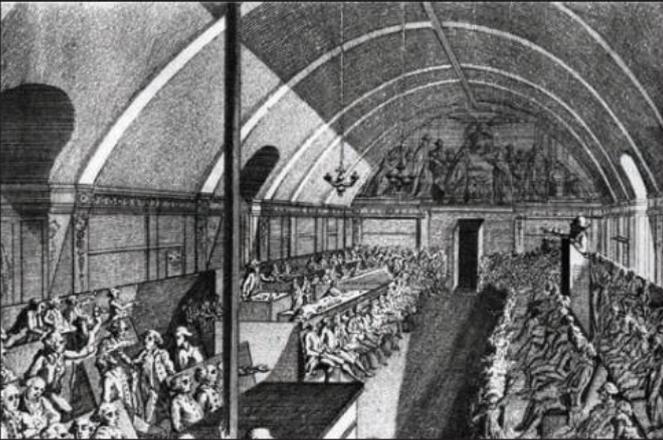
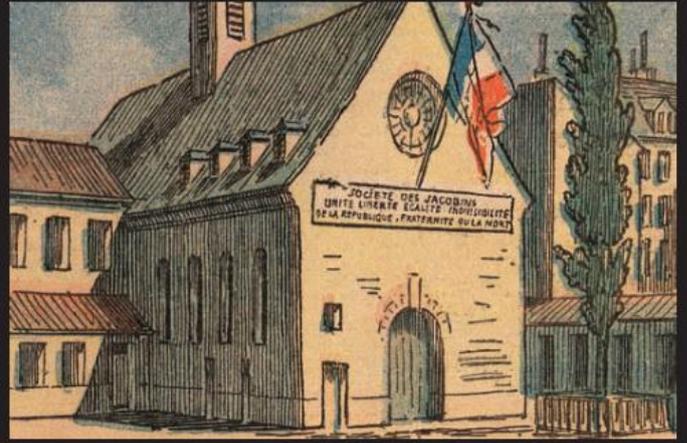
Moderate

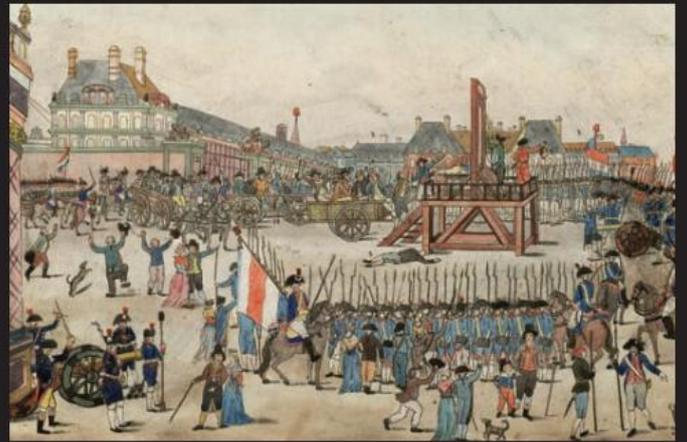
Peter McPhee, 'Ending the Revolution, 1795–1799', in *The French Revolution, 1789–1799*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, pp. 154–77.

Challenging

Georges Lefebvre, *The Thermidorians*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1965.

An academic study of the key figures who occupied the political stage after the overthrow of Robespierre.





part three

The revolution in retrospect

“

What sort of revolution was it – one of ‘poverty’ or ‘prosperity’? A bourgeois revolution that overthrew feudalism? A national struggle for liberty, democracy or ‘eternal justice’? Or again, a criminal conspiracy against the old social order?

– GEORGE RUDÉ, 1961

”

OVERVIEW

Living as we do in a relatively peaceful society, we become intrigued by the problems and contradictions of the revolutionary experience. Is revolutionary violence really necessary? Does a revolution change the world for the better? Why do revolutions change course once they have started? Who really benefits from a revolution?

Part Three offers guidance in analysing the differing views of various historians, each of whom has offered a particular interpretation of the revolution. Also included on **Cambridge GO** are practice examination questions relating directly to content in the book, which are designed to aid your preparation for assessment in VCE Revolutions.

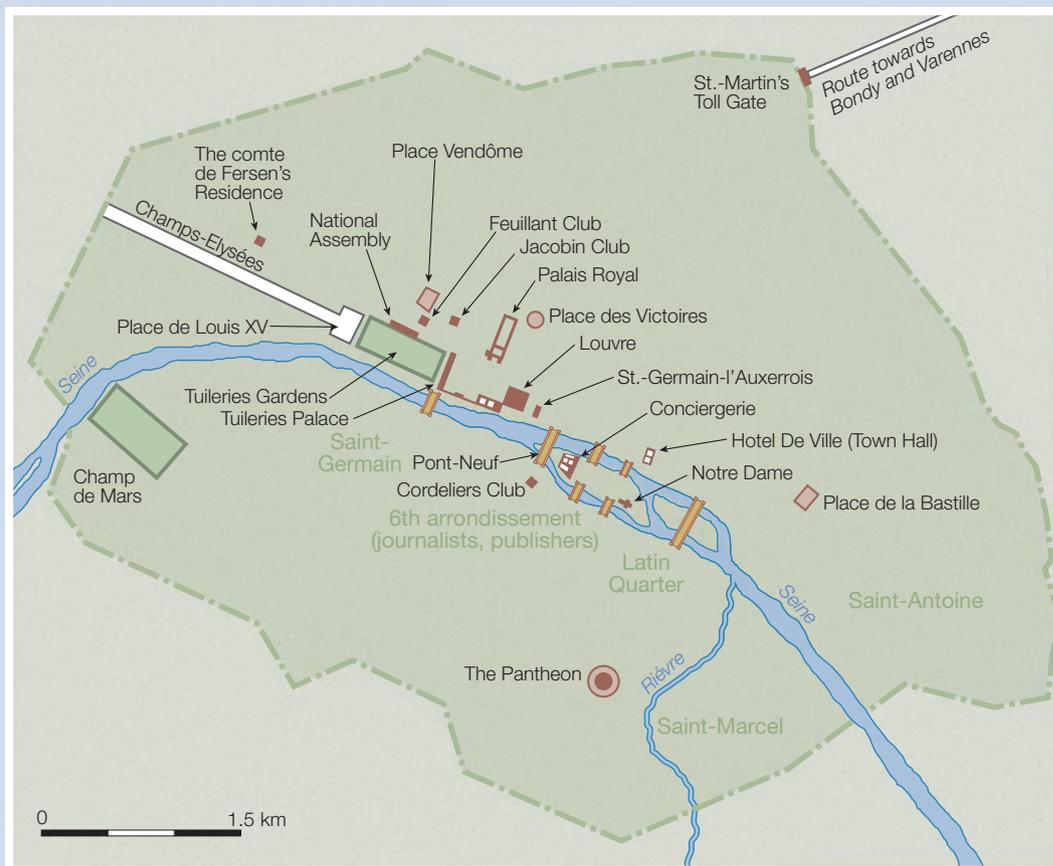
Above all, I hope that the book has offered you the opportunity to think critically about the revolution and to draw your own conclusions.

– Michael Adcock



Historical interpretations

REVISION MAP OF REVOLUTIONARY SITES IN PARIS



Source 20.1 A map of revolutionary sites in Paris

Please see *Cambridge GO* for a printable annotated map activity based on this map. This is designed to get students to recall and explain the importance of each of the key revolutionary sites in Paris.



20.1 How to write about historical interpretations

Dos and don'ts

You are required to write about historical interpretations in SACs and the examination: this topic is also known as 'historiography' (you may come across this word in your research). Writing about historical interpretations need not be difficult, providing you rehearse this skill regularly throughout the year. You should ask your teacher to start explaining historians' opinions from the very first lesson, and to continue to do so throughout the year as your course unfolds. The quoting, discussion and analysis of the work of historians should happen naturally throughout all your discussions, and in your writing about the Revolution.

There are some things you should definitely avoid doing. First, do not be tempted to write a set paragraph about groups of historians ('The Revisionist school of thought argues X; the Marxist school of thought argues Y'), which you just insert in your answer no matter what the question actually is. This seems an easy and safe way of dealing with historians, but it is not likely to gain many marks.

Second, you should not just jam quotes into your answer (for example, 'It is resistance that makes revolutions become violent' – Doyle) without explaining in your own terms why you have included a particular quote.

How to write meaningfully about historians' points of view

discriminator a skill that justifies a high mark

There is no quick fix for this task: you simply have to work hard to master it. Given that this is an important **discriminator**, it is well worth the effort.

First, you will need to have a set of quotes for each major event in the revolution (for example, The Revolution of 1789 – what caused it?) and for key issues (For example, The Terror – was it justified?).

Second, you need to find historians' views that vary; opposing views can be very powerful. You then need to learn to include them in your own explanation (for example, 'While Marxist historians tend to accept that the Terror was a necessary response to an emergency ...'). Sometimes you can even arrange three or four quotes on a spectrum of opinion. As you explain them, remember to use words like 'similarly' and 'by contrast' to show that you actually do understand how each historian stands in relation to the others.

Third, you will need to cut down long quotes from books into a short sentence or phrase that you can remember and write under pressure. If you can remember the quote exactly, quote it *directly*, and remember to open and close the quotation marks. If you cannot remember the quote, you may quote *indirectly*, but be sure to use the word 'that' (for example, 'William Doyle's argument *that* it is resistance that makes revolutions become violent ...').

Avoid using simplistic explanations of historical schools of thought

As you research historical interpretations, you will find that writers sometimes refer to different schools of thought.

One of the strongest groups of thinkers was French (Albert Soboul, Georges Lefebvre and the English George Rudé) and loosely inspired by Karl Marx. They are often referred to as the **Marxist historians**, and they tend to see the revolution as a war of classes – victory of the bourgeoisie over the nobility.

After decades of dominance, this school was challenged by the **Revisionist historians**, who pointed out that the Marxist historians were wrong to think of the revolution as a simple struggle between bourgeois and noble. Alfred Cobban led this campaign from the 1950s, and in 1989 William Doyle summed it all up in his scholarly *Oxford History of the French Revolution*. They proved that it could not have been a simple class war between team bourgeois and team nobles, because some nobles supported the revolution and many bourgeois did not. They saw it as a political revolution over constitutional principles.

Once the Revisionists had won their case in 1989, historians were able to realise that there were many different aspects of the French revolution, and that each one needed to be studied in depth. Some **Post-Revisionist historians** focused on political ideas and language, others on the peasants; some came back to the prime importance of the bourgeoisie as leaders. There was no one single French Revolution but rather several French Revolutions, and historical research now recognises this variety of viewpoints.

Marxist historians expert writers of Marxist history who were inspired by the theories of Karl Marx

Revisionist historians those who 'revised' the standard Marxist interpretation, arguing that the revolution was not a class struggle between bourgeois and noble, but a political revolution over constitutional principles

Post-Revisionist historians built upon the work of Revisionist and Marxist historians and specialised in many different aspects of the revolution, ranging from social groups to the role of ideas and language in shaping the revolution

Study hint

Students sometimes feel overwhelmed by the task of finding a set of quotes suitable for each main event, document and person relating to the French Revolution. In some classes, students and their teacher arrange for group work, in which one group takes responsibility for just one event (say, the Capture of the Bastille), looks for the best possible quotes and notes them down. At the end of the search-and-find exercise, each group shares its set of quotes with the others, very quickly and efficiently creating a broad spectrum of citations.

Examination hint

Some students find it useful to write out their favourite quotes large on A3 paper and to post them on the walls of their room, to make it easier to memorise them. This is called ambient learning, and can be very effective.

SOME USEFUL WEBSITES ON HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

- Wikipedia: Historiography of the French Revolution: <http://cambridge.edu.au/redirect/?id=5687>
- Alpha History: French Revolution Historiography: <http://cambridge.edu.au/redirect/?id=5688>
- Idea of History: R.G. Collingwood, *Historiography of French Revolution*: <http://cambridge.edu.au/redirect/?id=5689>
- From Burke to Schama: The historiography of the French Revolution: <http://cambridge.edu.au/redirect/?id=5690>
- History Today: Fifty Years of Rewriting the French Revolution: <http://cambridge.edu.au/redirect/?id=5691>

20.2 Comparing different views of the French Revolution

In order to write successfully about historical interpretations in SACs and the examination, you will first need to build up your own collection of short, effective quotes, and then be able to comment on them meaningfully. If you are able to use your quotes to explore the main issue in a question, you will have shown the skill for which examiners award high marks.

The following quotes have been chosen to clearly present the different views of historians on specific events in the revolution. You are encouraged to practise comparing the different views of historians by paraphrasing each quote then writing your own overall summary for each issue.

1 What caused the French Revolution of 1789?

Interpretation	Historian	Quote	Your paraphrase
Marxist	Karl Marx, <i>The Communist Manifesto</i> (1888), p. 482	'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle ... The French Revolution was the greatest revolution in the history of the world.'	
French Marxist	Albert Soboul, <i>A Short History of the French Revolution, 1789–1799</i> (1977), p. 3	'The revolution of 1789–1794 marked the appearance of modern bourgeois and capitalist society in the history of France ... it deserves to be considered the classic model of a bourgeois revolution.'	
Revisionist	Alfred Cobban, <i>A History of Modern France, Vol. 1: Old Regimes and Revolution</i> (1991), p. 35	'In the French Revolution, it is commonly said, the feudal order passed away and the rule of the bourgeoisie took its place. This is, put simply, the myth which has dominated serious research this century.'	
Revisionist	Timothy Blanning, <i>The French Revolution: Aristocrats versus Bourgeois</i> (1987), p. 5	'Why then did [the old regime] fall? The answer lies in the fortuitous coincidence of two separate crises at the end of the 1780s. The first crisis was political, deriving from the financial bankruptcy of the monarchy following the French participation in the American War of Independence. The second crisis was economic, stemming most immediately from the harvest failure of 1788 ... It was the fusion of these two crises in 1789 which allowed the mass of discontents to become critical and to turn a crisis into a revolution.'	

Interpretation	Historian	Quote	Your paraphrase
Post-revisionist	Gwynne Lewis, <i>Rethinking the French Revolution</i> (1993), p. 3	'If the Bourbon monarchy had successfully modernised its society and government then it might have sustained the cost of being a world power in the late eighteenth century ... But it did not, and this failure, allied to the accident of poor harvests, helps explain the timing of the French Revolution in 1789.'	
Your summary of the different points of view			

2 France during the Bourbon monarchy

Interpretation	Historian	Quote	Your paraphrase
French Marxist	Georges Lefebvre, <i>The French Revolution</i> (1939), p. 88	'The French monarchy lay midway between British constitutionalism and continental despotism.'	
Revisionist	William Doyle, <i>The Oxford History of the French Revolution</i> (1989), p. 1	'The king of France needed no coronation. He reigned by the grace of God from the moment his predecessor breathed his last.'	
Post-revisionist	Nigel Aston, <i>The French Revolution, 1789–1804</i> (2004), p. 10	'It increasingly appeared that the absolutist ... monarchy had failed France and was no longer appropriate to the times.'	
Your summary of the different points of view			

3 The crisis of the old regime, 1787–89

Interpretation	Historian	Quote	Your paraphrase
French Marxist	George Rudé, <i>The French Revolution</i> (1988), p. 33	'As the crisis deepened, bourgeois and <i>sans-culottes</i> , and even peasants, were drawn ... into a closer partnership and joint opposition to the privileged orders and the absolutist regime.'	
Revisionist	William Doyle, <i>The Oxford History of the French Revolution</i> (1989), p. 75	'[The Assembly of Notables] marked the beginning of a political crisis that could only be resolved by revolution.'	
Post-revisionist	Nigel Aston, <i>The French Revolution, 1789–1804</i> (2004), p. 9	'The French Revolution of 1789 was the product of medium-term political and financial crises within the state and the destabilising efforts made to resolve them.'	
Your summary of the different points of view			



4 The creation of the National Assembly, 17 June 1789

Interpretation	Historian	Quote	Your paraphrase
French Marxist	Georges Lefebvre, <i>The French Revolution</i> (1939), p. 114	'The legal, peaceful revolution of the bourgeoisie, achieved by lawyers who borrowed their methods from the <i>parlement</i> of Paris, was to all appearances victorious.'	
Revisionist	William Doyle, <i>The French Revolution: A Very Short Introduction</i> (2001), p. 40	'This assembly had seized sovereign power in the name of the French Nation. It was the founding act of the French Revolution. If the Nation was sovereign, the king no longer was.'	
Post-revisionist	Nigel Aston, <i>The French Revolution, 1789–1804</i> (2004), p. 22	'The infant National Assembly was secure, but at the price of protection from the people rather than the monarchy.'	
Your summary of the different points of view			

5 The capture of the Bastille, 14 July 1789

Interpretation	Historian	Quote	Your paraphrase
French Marxist	George Rudé, <i>The French Revolution</i> (1988), p. 56	'The capture of the Bastille was the affair ... of the people of Paris as a whole. On that day, between 180 000 and 300 000 Parisians were under arms.'	
Revisionist	William Doyle, <i>The Oxford History of the French Revolution</i> (1989), p. 110	'The monarch recognized that he no longer had the power to enforce his will. Henceforth, [the Parisians] would see themselves as the guardians of the liberty won that day.'	
Post-revisionist	Gwynne Lewis, <i>Rethinking the French Revolution</i> (1993), p. 26	'From now on, the Parisian crowd would haunt the battlements of bourgeois Revolution, reminding deputies that, in revolutions, the bullet is as important as the ballot.'	
Your summary of the different points of view			

6 The August Decrees, 1789

Interpretation	Historian	Quote	Your paraphrase
French Marxist	Albert Soboul, <i>A Short History of the French Revolution, 1789–1799</i> (1977), p. 148	The decrees 'were more a concession to the needs of the moment than the sign of a real desire to satisfy the grievances of the peasantry'.	
Revisionist	Simon Schama, <i>Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution</i> (2004), p. 437	'But those same aristocrats also had a consistent history of lending serious support to the cause of patriotic liberty ... One should not judge their famous intervention ... as a cynical attempt to save something from the wreckage.'	
Post-revisionist	Donald Sutherland, <i>France 1789–1815: Revolution and Counterrevolution</i> (1986), p. 80	The decrees were designed for 'containing mounting disorder, the risk of an attack on all forms of property and the catastrophe for state finances of a continuing tax strike'.	
Post-revisionist	Samuel Scott and Barry Rothaus, <i>Historical Dictionary of the French Revolution, 1789–1799</i> , vol. 1 (1985), p. 409	The decrees 'transformed a country of subjects divided by privilege into a united nation of citizens equal before and under the law. It marks the end of the old regime and the birth of modern France'.	
Post-revisionist	Gwynne Lewis, <i>Rethinking the French Revolution</i> (1993), p. 27	'If 14 July had dealt a death blow to the political authority of Bourbon France, the night of 4 August destroyed its social and administrative base.'	
Your summary of the different points of view			

7 The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, August 1789

Interpretation	Historian	Quote	Your paraphrase
French Marxist	Georges Lefebvre, <i>The French Revolution</i> (1939), p. 130	'Proclaiming liberty, equality and national sovereignty, the text was in effect [the death certificate] of the old regime, which had been put to death by popular revolution.'	
Revisionist	William Doyle, <i>The Oxford History of the French Revolution</i> (1989), p. 119	The Declaration 'has been looked to ever since by all who derive inspiration from the French Revolution as the movement's first great manifesto, enshrining the fundamental principles of 1789'.	
Post-revisionist	Peter McPhee, <i>The French Revolution, 1789–1799</i> (2002), p. 59	'[The Declaration] was an extraordinary document, one of the most powerful statements of liberalism and representative government ... nonetheless ambiguous in its words and silences.'	
Your summary of the different points of view			



8 The Civil Constitution of the Clergy, 1790

Interpretation	Historian	Quote	Your paraphrase
French Marxist	George Rudé, <i>The French Revolution</i> (1988), p. 66	'The deep divisions and hostility that the settlement provoked were due to circumstances outside the Constituents' control. It had been generally accepted ... that the Church was in grave need of reform.'	
Revisionist	William Doyle, <i>The French Revolution: A Very Short Introduction</i> (2001), p. 47	'It was the beginning of the first, deepest, and most persistent polarization of the French Revolution.'	
Post-revisionist	John McManners, <i>The French Revolution and the Church</i> (1969), p. 38	'If there was a point at which the French Revolution "went wrong", it was ... the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. This marked the end of national unity, and the beginning of civil war.'	
Your summary of the different points of view			

9 The Constitution of 1791

Interpretation	Historian	Quote	Your paraphrase
French Marxist	Georges Lefebvre, <i>The French Revolution</i> (1939), p. 153	'The Assembly was thus made master of the state, and the Assembly was the French bourgeoisie.'	
Revisionist	William Doyle, <i>The Oxford History of the French Revolution</i> (1989), p. 123	'The essence of the Constitution of 1791 ... was to keep the executive weak. Despotism must have no opportunity to revive in France.'	
Post-revisionist	Nigel Aston, <i>The French Revolution, 1789–1804</i> (2004), p. 23	'Sovereignty passed officially from the monarch to his people but the former remained as head of state, shorn of divine sanction but now ... the embodiment of the popular will.'	
Your summary of the different points of view			

10 The flight to Varennes, 20–22 June 1791

Interpretation	Historian	Quote	Your paraphrase
French Marxist	Georges Lefebvre, <i>The French Revolution</i> (1939), p. 206	'The initiative of Louis XVI himself precipitated the conflict that brought his downfall.'	
Revisionist	William Doyle, <i>The French Revolution: A Very Short Introduction</i> (2001), p. 47	'The flight to Varennes opened up the second great schism of the revolution. There had been hardly any republicanism in 1789 ...'	
Post-revisionist	Judy Anderson and Jill Fenwick, <i>Liberating France</i> (2010), p. 122	'The 1791 Constitution ... became obsolete before it even came into action.'	
Your summary of the different points of view			

11 The declaration of war, 1792

Interpretation	Historian	Quote	Your paraphrase
French Marxist	Georges Lefebvre, <i>The French Revolution</i> (1939), p. 219	'The war of defence and ideology preached by the Girondins undeniably worked its charms upon the revolutionary imagination, and its aura outshone any image of the disaster it would invoke.'	
Revisionist	William Doyle, <i>The French Revolution: A Very Short Introduction</i> (2001), p. 50	'War was the third great polarizing issue of the Revolution ... It identified the defeat or the survival of the revolution with that of the Nation itself, so that critics [of the revolution] could plausibly be stigmatised as traitors.'	
Post-revisionist	Alan Forrest, <i>The French Revolution</i> (1995), p. 111	'The war ... overshadowed all the other aims of the revolution and became the principal objective of the state.'	
Post-revisionist	Peter McPhee, <i>The French Revolution, 1789–1799</i> (2002), p. 93	'By early 1792, such was the combination of anxiety, exhilaration and fear pervading the Assembly that most deputies convinced themselves that the rulers of Austria and Prussia ... were engaged in naked aggression toward the revolution.'	
Your summary of the different points of view			



12 The Vendée Revolt, 1793

Interpretation	Historian	Quote	Your paraphrase
French Marxist	Albert Soboul, <i>The French Revolution, 1787–1799</i> (1977), p. 300	'The rising in the Vendée was the most dangerous example of the various forms of resistance encountered by the Revolution and was symptomatic of the widespread discontent of the peasantry.'	
Revisionist	William Doyle, <i>The Oxford History of the French Revolution</i> (1989), p. 224	This was 'an open rebellion against the entire course the Revolution had taken'.	
Post-revisionist	Peter McPhee, <i>The French Revolution, 1789–1799</i> (2002), p. 112	The revolt 'was not initially counter-revolutionary so much as anti-revolutionary'.	
Post-revisionist	Dylan Rees, <i>France in Revolution</i> (4th ed., 2008), p. 97	'It is appropriate to describe the Vendée as an "anti-revolution" rather than a counter-revolution in that it was directed more against the Revolution and its demands rather than for a restoration of the old regime.'	
Your summary of the different points of view			

13 The Terror, 1792–94

Interpretation	Historian	Quote	Your paraphrase
French Marxist	George Rudé, <i>The French Revolution</i> (1988), p. 100	'But to realise their aims, France's new rulers were compelled ... to abandon the haphazard methods of government accepted by their predecessors ... So the needs of war, civil war and public order combined to persuade Robespierre and his associates to take further steps to strengthen their control in Paris.'	
Revisionist	Simon Schama, <i>Citizens, A Chronicle of the French Revolution</i> (2004), p. 859	'Thus began the cycle of violence that ended ... in the forest of guillotines. From the very beginning – from the summer of 1789 – violence was the motor of the Revolution.'	
Revisionist	William Doyle, <i>The Oxford History of the French Revolution</i> (1989), p. 394	'It was resistance that made the revolution become violent.'	
Post-revisionist	Gwynne Lewis, <i>Rethinking the French Revolution</i> (1993), p. 42	'From the summer of 1793 to the summer of 1794, the period known to history as "The Terror", the revolution was saved from its internal and external enemies, at considerable costs to human life and the infant political democracy of the early 1790s ...'	
Your summary of the different points of view			

14 The settlement of 1795

Interpretation	Historian	Quote	Your paraphrase
French Marxist	George Rudé, <i>The French Revolution</i> (1988), p. 112	'The revolution, far from keeping its course, took a sharp rightward turn (it has even been argued that it stopped altogether). The <i>sans-culottes</i> were once more disarmed or disenfranchised, and the rulers of 1795 – the men of Thermidor – after a period of hesitation, tried to revive the principles of '89 on a new foundation.'	
Revisionist	William Doyle, <i>The Oxford History of the French Revolution</i> (1989), p. 318	'The problem facing the Convention in the summer of 1795 was now very clear. Having routed the forces of both terrorism and royalism, it had to devise a constitution ... that would prevent the recovery of either. The principles of 1789 were not to be confused with those of 1793.'	
Post-revisionist	Peter McPhee, <i>The French Revolution, 1789–1799</i> (2002), p. 161	'This Constitution was a return to the provisions of the Constitution of 1791: France was again to be governed by representative, parliamentary government based on property qualifications and the safeguarding of economic and civil liberties.'	
Post-revisionist	Martyn Lyons, <i>France Under the Directory</i> (1975), pp. 52–3	'The Revolution was by no means ended on 9 Thermidor ... the aspirations of the middle classes who made the revolution were only just beginning to come to fruition.'	
Your summary of the different points of view			



Glossary

absolute monarchy a political system in which the monarch rules personally, without being accountable to an elected parliament

absolute power gave the King ultimate control

absolute veto right to reject legislative enactments

agency power to make decisions for oneself and to take action independently of revolutionary leaders

allegorical symbolic

altruistic unselfish in relation to others

American spirit a wave of public sympathy for the American struggle, which was expressed in popular plays, novels and paintings

amnesty guaranteed safe return

arbitrary power or **despotism** by which a King ruled badly, without respect for existing laws

archaic ancient

aristocratic revolt the privileged orders resisted the royal government's attempts at fiscal (tax) reform

aristocratic salons intellectual gatherings of high society in private mansions

artisans workers who were trained and skilled in some trade, such as barrel-making or glass-making, and who worked in small workshops in cities, towns and villages

assignats government bonds

August Decrees abolished some of the feudal system and were later modified to ensure that peasants could buy their way out of their feudal payments

birth an individual's status as either commoner or nobility, determined at birth

Books of Grievances (French: *Cahiers de doléances*) lists of concerns drawn up by local meetings of the Three Estates across France before the meeting of the Estates-General (May 1789)

bourgeois the individual members of the bourgeoisie

bourgeoisie people of the third estate who lived in towns, owned property and engaged in trade, industry or the professions

Breton Club a group of deputies from the region of Brittany, who recommended, then demanded, that the National Assembly abolish feudal dues on peasants

Brissotins the followers of the radical politician Brissot in the Legislative Assembly (1791–92), who advocated revolutionary war and punitive policies against refractory priests and emigrated nobles

canton a division of an area of France

Claude Dansard's Fraternal Society (later known as the Cordeliers Club) the first society to admit women to political debates and give them equal voting rights on motions

cockade a bundle of ribbons in the revolutionary colours of blue, white and red, to be worn on a coat or hat to show that you were a 'patriot'

Committees of Surveillance (Watch Committees) local meetings of patriots in the cities, towns and villages of France, given the responsibility for discovering enemies of the revolution

Compte Rendu Jacques Necker's 'National Account', which cleverly hid the true nature of France's crippling national debt, thus delaying by five years the inevitable process of trying to resolve it by reform of taxation

constitutional monarchy a political system in which the King rules in conjunction with a representative assembly

convoked called together for a large formal meeting

Cordeliers Club first known as Claude Dansard's Fraternal Society, the Cordeliers Club was the first society to admit women to political debates and give them equal voting rights

corporate society a society made up of a number of powerful groups, each enjoying its own special customs, laws and privileges

corps an organisation of military personnel

- corvée** under the old regime, a labour tax paid by working people
- Council of State** the King's cabinet of ministers
- Dauphin** innocent young royal prince who was subjected to such physical and psychological mistreatment that he died in the Temple Prison in 1795
- decentralisation** counter-balancing the powerful central government with a network of local government in the provinces
- deference** showing respect to your social betters
- demagogue** political leader who appeals to people's emotions to gain power
- democratisation** the process of opening up politics to ordinary people who had previously not been able to participate in the political life of the nation
- deposed** overthrown
- discriminator** a skill that justifies a high mark
- don gratuit** the contribution of the Catholic Church to the French state. The church had the privilege of calculating how much it would pay on each occasion.
- dossiers** sets of papers containing information
- dynasty** a sequence of monarchs going back hundreds of years
- ecclesiastical** involving the Christian church
- Enlightenment** a Europe-wide intellectual movement in the eighteenth century that criticised absolute monarchy and despotism, and attacked organised religion and its tendency to intolerance
- the enraged ones (*les enragés*)** an ultra-radical group produced by the *sans-culottes*
- epochal** an event significant in terms of history
- equality** political equality – all people are now citizens in the political body – and civic and legal equality, meaning that all people will receive uniform legal treatment
- equality of opportunity** merit and utility over birth and privilege
- estate (French: *état*)** In the old regime, this was a system of social classification by function: the clergy's role was to pray (First Estate), the nobility's role was to fight (Second Estate) and the commoners' role was to grow food and provide soldiers for armies (Third Estate). Note that each estate was not just one social class, because it contained people ranging from the very poor to the very wealthy.
- ferment** stir up somebody or something
- feudal dues** extra payments of money, food or labour to the nobles
- feudalism** medieval political and economic system
- First Coalition** an alliance formed by England that included Russia, Austro-Hungary and Spain
- fiscal concessions** privileges relating to taxes
- gabelle** during the old regime, a tax on salt, an item crucial to working people for preserving food and for the care of farm animals
- Girondins** a loose grouping of deputies around leaders such as Monsieur and Madame Roland, who competed with the Jacobins for control of the National Convention
- governors** otherwise known as *intendants*; chosen by the King to apply his policies in provincial France
- Great Fear** a serious rural rebellion that forced the Assembly to abolish some of the feudal system
- Great Terror** the worst and final stage of the Terror
- highest courts of appeal** otherwise known as *parlements*; these 13 high courts checked and registered royal laws
- historical accident** the Revisionist idea that historical events happen simply by chance and that there are no long-term causes that make them inevitable
- honorific** a certain type of privilege – for example, the noble's right to wear a sword in public
- incipient** beginning to develop
- Indulgents** an informal group among the Jacobins and the Cordeliers whose members argued that the war was essentially won after the Battle of Fleurus, and the Terror could be wound down
- insurrection** rebellion against the government
- Insurrection of 1 Prairal** (20 May 1795) a second attack on the Convention by desperate *sans-culottes* demanding the reduction of bread prices and the return of the Constitution of 1793
- Insurrection of 12 Germinal** (1 April 1795) an attack on the Convention by the Parisian crowd, who murdered a deputy and again demanded bread and the Constitution of 1793
- Insurrectionary Commune** The Paris Commune became the Insurrectionary Commune in August 1792, refusing to take orders from the central French Government and instead giving a voice to extreme views of the people
- invulnerability** that which is unable to be breached or broken
- Jacobin Club** the most famous and influential political club in the revolution, which developed into an extensive, nationwide network. Led by Maximilien de Robespierre, at its height it controlled the government and directed the Terror of 1793–94
- Jacobin Constitution of 1793** established a republic; was more radical than that of 1791 and any French constitution since

jacquerie the peasants' long tradition of riot, which was usually general and indiscriminate, but short-lived

Law of 22 Prairial 10 June 1794; exceeded even the Law of Suspects in giving the committees power to arrest and execute people and eliminating deputies' parliamentary immunity

Law of Suspects expanded earlier definitions of the types of behaviour that could make a person suspect; it shifted the burden of proof onto the suspect

legal concessions privileges relating to the law

legality the rule of law

legislature law-making body

legitimacy sense of rightness

lettres de cachet letters or order signed by the King of France and closed with the royal seal

lit de justice a formal process by which the King ordered the *parlement* to convene, and then used royal authority to command them to register a decree

local vigilantes people who keep watch for unlawful activity

lower clergy parish priests and assistants, who earned only £750 yearly

martyred when someone is killed for refusing to deny a strong belief

Marxist historians expert writers of Marxist history who were inspired by the theories of Karl Marx

The Maximum economic policy that set a limit on food prices

mercenaries professional soldiers who are paid to fight

merit combination of an individual's personal abilities

militia a fighting force made up of non-professional soldiers

most useful class the magistrates, lawyers, doctors, landowners, merchants and traders formed the Second Estate, the 'Bourgeois' Estate

the Mountain (la Montagne) referred to as such because they (the Jacobins) sat up in the higher seats of the Assembly

municipal revolution after the Parisian revolution (July 1789), revolutionaries in the provincial cities overthrew royal officials and created elected governments

muscadins lavishly dressed men who adopted a virtual uniform: square-cut coats, tight trousers into low boots and flamboyantly high collars and cravats: a rejection of the Jacobin taste for simplicity

National Guard a force made up of reliable bourgeois citizens to protect private property

no taxation without representation the King could not impose taxes without approval by representatives such as the Estates-General

noblesse d'epée older 'nobility of the sword'

noblesse de robe more recent 'nobility of the robe'

old regime French society before the revolution

parlements the highest courts of appeal in France

peasants these were members of the Third Estate who lived and worked in the country, engaged in agricultural work. Some were wealthy and some moderately well-to-do, but many were poor sharecroppers who did not own enough land to make a living, and had to rent it from their local lord

permanent popular movement people will continually be actively involved in politics, meeting regularly at the popular level

perpetual taxes taxes occurring over and over

philosophes the writers, or critical thinkers, who highlighted reason

philosophie the system of ideas, emphasising science, progress and reason to create a more humane world, practised during the Enlightenment

Phrygian bonnet copied from the red hat worn by the slaves of ancient Rome once they had been freed

the Plain (la Marais), or the uncommitted majority, referred to as such because they sat lower down in the Assembly and mid-way between the two other groups

popular sovereignty the right to be involved in political life

Post-Revisionist historians built upon the work of Revisionist and Marxist historians and specialised in many different aspects of the revolution, ranging from social groups to the role of ideas and language in shaping the revolution

pragmatism a practical way of thinking about things

privileges special rights in matters of law and taxation

process of self-identification when people become aware of themselves as a social group, able to state their needs and concerns

propertied classes those who own property

public perceptions commonly accepted beliefs

quorum minimum number of people needed for a meeting

radicalised having adopted radical political views

rationalisation practical application of what the *philosophes* had called reason

'refractory' clergy priests who refused to swear the oath of loyalty to the revolution required by the Civil Constitution of the Clergy

religious orthodoxy the idea that one religion can be declared 'right' and all other religions 'wrong'

- remonstrance** a memo from the law courts to the King, pointing out a problem in the wording of a law
- representation** the political idea that people cannot be expected to obey laws for which they have not voted
- representations** large, unified collection of paintings, statues, medallions and literary works
- Revisionist historians** those who 'revised' the standard Marxist interpretation, arguing that the revolution was not a class struggle between bourgeois and noble, but a political revolution over constitutional principles
- revolt of the bourgeoisie** Tennis Court Oath
- revolt of the nobles** Assembly of Notables
- revolt of the popular movement** capture of the Bastille
- revolutionary government** temporary emergency measures to deal with the threat to the revolution
- revolutionary violence** the use of intimidation, physical violence and execution to deal with people who opposed the revolution
- right to insurrection** working people can attack the government if it is not defending their interests
- Robespierre** French revolutionary who was leader of the Jacobin Club and architect of the Terror
- sans-culottes** a general name for the militant working-class movement during the revolution; originally meant someone who didn't wear stylish clothing (*culottes*)
- sections** municipal meetings
- sedition** involving rebellion against a government or other authority
- seigneurial** semi-feudal system of land distribution
- self-sublimation** eliminating personal interests in favour of the public interest
- Society of Revolutionary Republican Women** a radical female partner to the Jacobin Club
- subversive** designed to overthrow a government or other institution
- suffrage** the right to vote
- suspensive veto** the ability of the King to delay law for four years
- tax farmers** private tax collectors
- tax farming** the collection of royal taxes by individuals on behalf of the government
- taxation by representation** taxes that have been discussed and approved by the elected representatives of the people who are going to have to pay these taxes
- Terror** the deliberate use of violence by government to discourage and repress its enemies
- Thermidorian Reaction** a campaign during 1794–95 to destroy the Jacobins' control of politics, to stop the processes of the Terror and to eliminate working people and women from political life
- Thermidorians** the revolutionaries who organised both the coup against Robespierre and the arrest and rapid execution of the leader and his closest followers
- tithe** a tax of between 8 and 10 per cent of people's income, or of the value of their crops and livestock, paid to the local Catholic priest
- traditional tensions within the nobility** one example is the ill-feeling between the court nobles and the provincial nobles
- transcending** going beyond a limit or range
- tumult** noisy commotion
- uniformity** the idea that any institution should work much the same way, no matter where it was located
- utility** usefulness, in terms of productive labour
- venal public office** the legal purchase of public office, often with a noble title attached, by wealthy and ambitious bourgeois who wanted to rise into the Second Estate
- Versailles** the palace that housed French kings from 1682, when Louis XIV moved the royal seat of power from Paris, to early in the revolution in 1789. By then Versailles had become a symbol of all that was wrong with the old regime.
- vetoed** blocked
- vivre noblement** living off investments like a noble



Index

- absolute monarchy 6, 8–10, 11–13, 149
 absolute power 10, 72, 83
 absolutism 17, 231
 administrative reform 72, 150–1
 American War of Independence 16, 60, 61, 114–16
 arbitrary power 10
 aristocratic revolt 3, 63
 aristocratic salons 35, 52
 army 90–1, 92, 98, 102, 178, 180, 191, 205–6
 assassinations 210
 Assembly of Notables 62, 63–4, 98
 August Decrees 96, 101, 102, 297
 Aulard, Alphonse 237, 239
 Austria 177, 180, 184
 authoritarianism 66
- Bailly, Jean-Sylvain 98, 122, 123–4, 169, 178, 222
 Barère, Bertrand 195, 217
 Barnave, Antoine 173, 178
 Bastille, capture of 2, 91–2, 98, 117, 120, 122, 137–8, 296
 Bastille Day 2
 Bergniaud, G.P. 178
 bicameral parliament 284
 Blanning, Timothy 43, 90
 Bonaparte, Napoleon 153, 277–8
 Books of Grievances 67–73, 78, 124, 129, 130, 136, 149, 151
 Bossuet, Jacques 8, 9
 Bourbon monarchy 12, 16, 295
 bourgeois revolution 89
 bourgeoisie
 composition and role 27–9, 47
 concerns of propertied members 89
 growing expectations 49–51
 popular rebellion encouraged by radicals 88–9
 relationship with Paris mob 88–9
 as revolutionary class 51–2, 53
 Breteuil 88, 164
 Breton Club 100, 235
 Brienne, Lomenie de 64–6, 82
 Brissot, Jacques-Pierre 178, 179, 195, 247
 Brissotins 178, 180, 181, 182, 183, 187
- Brunswick, Duke of 184, 187
 Burke, Edmund 34
 Burke, Peter 11
- Calas, Jean 36
 Calonne, Charles-Alexandre 57, 61–2, 80, 164
 Catholic Church
 administrative reorganisation 158–9
 criticisms by *philosophes* 32, 34, 36
 payments to the state 24
 resistance to reform 108–9, 159–60
 support for King's authority 9, 16
 support for revolution 158
 causes of 1789 Revolution 3, 294–5
 censorship 42
 Champ de Mars Massacre 109, 122, 124, 169–70, 173, 222
 Civil Constitution of the Clergy 159, 171, 298
 civil war 207–8, 215, 223
 class conflict 81
 Claude Dansard's Fraternal Society 265
- clergy
 criticism by *philosophes* 36
 drafting of grievances 68, 70
 oath of loyalty 160–1, 206
 refractory priests 160–1, 178, 186, 188
 resistance to reforms 108–9, 159–60, 178
 role 24, 36
 Cobban, Alfred 293
 Committee of Electors 89, 117, 138
 Committee of Eleven 291
 Committee of General Security 273
 Committee of Public Safety 217, 232–3, 273, 278
 Committee of Surveillance 215–16
 Committee of Vigilance 186
 concessions to privileged groups 21
 Condorcet, Marquis de 116, 195
 Constituent Assembly 177
 constitutional monarchy 108, 109, 123, 149, 161–2, 167–8, 170, 178, 195
 constitutional revolution 86
- Constitutions
 1791 161–2, 171–2, 183, 195, 197, 298
 1793 (Jacobin) 193, 197–8, 249
 1795 281–4
 Corday, Charlotte 210, 240, 267
 Cordeliers Club 109, 122, 140, 168, 240, 247, 248, 265
 corporate society 16, 19, 20, 21
 Council of Ancients 284
 Council of Five Hundred 284
 Council of State 9, 15, 16
 counter-revolutionary activity 223
 crowd *see* popular movement
- d'Anglas, Boissy 280, 281
 Dansard, Claude 140, 265
 Danton, Georges-Jacques 122, 170, 186, 188, 195, 217, 220, 235, 239–40, 247
 Dantonists 218, 220
 Darnton, Robert 50, 199
 de Condorcet, Sophie 260
 de Flesselles, Jacques 138
 de Gouges, Marie-Olympe 260–1
 de Launay, Commander 119, 137–8
 de Lisle, Rouget 222
 de Méricourt, Théroigne 264
 de Sauvigny, Bertier 119
 de Tocqueville, Alexis 78
 de-Christianisation 215
 decentralisation 151
 Declaration of Pillnitz 177
 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen 102, 109, 128–31, 153, 162, 248, 256, 297
 deference, culture of 21–2, 141
 d'Eglantine, Fabre 188
 democratic republicanism 122
 democratisation 89
 Desmoulins, Camille 88, 121–2, 136, 137, 195, 220, 247
 Diamond Necklace Affair 59
 Diderot, Denis 34, 41, 42
 direct democracy 196, 209, 234, 247, 248
 Directory 109
 divine right, rule by 9
 Doyle, William 10, 43, 51, 146, 154, 293

- Dumouriez, General 205, 206
duties 284
- economy
pre-Revolution 16
see also financial crisis; taxation
- Enlightenment
as cause of revolution 34, 43
criticism of old regime 32
in France 33
impact 43–4, 45, 47
main strands of thought 35–6
- equality 130, 147, 148, 197, 283
- estate social structure 22–30
- Estates-General 62, 64, 66, 67–73, 78, 82–3, 86, 124
- Executive Directory 284
- Federalist revolt 209
- Féraud, Jean 277
- Festival of Federation 120–1
- feudal dues/feudalism 29, 30, 96, 98, 100–1, 151, 187, 198
- Feuillants Club 123, 124, 169, 178
- financial crisis
actual cause 56, 57
attempts at reform 60–2
bankruptcy of state 66
evolution into political crisis 63–6
hiding the problem 61
political solution 149
revolutionary finances 204
royal wastefulness 58–60, 61
- First Coalition 205–6
- First Estate 22, 23, 24, 51, 68
- fiscal reform 72, 149
- food crisis 78–9, 81, 88, 98, 102, 207, 218, 233
- foreign opposition to Revolution 177, 179–80, 205–6
- foreign policy 16, 60, 61
- Foulon 119, 234
- Franklin, Benjamin 115
- Frederick II, King of Prussia 37
- free trade 16
- freedom of thought and speech 129, 197
- Geoffrin, Marie-Thérèse 35
- Girondins 178, 180, 181, 187, 195, 196–7, 218, 219–20, 262, 280
- Godineau, Dominique 258, 259
- governors (*intendants*) 9, 16
- Great Fear 96, 98–100
- Great Terror 221–2
- Grégoire 195
- guillotine 14, 153
- Hampson, Norman 32, 34
- Hébert, Jacques 218, 220, 247
- Hébertists 122, 218, 220, 266
- Henry IV, King of France 12
- historical accident 51
- historical interpretations 292–3
- honorifics 21
- Huften, Olwen 257
- human perfectibility 36
- human rights 129, 131
- Hunt, Jocelyn 74
- Hunt, Lynn 265
- ideas
as cause of revolution 43, 49
subversive power of 34
- Indulgents 122, 220
- inequality 16, 19
- Insurrectionary Commune 184, 185–6, 187, 188, 195, 215
- intellectual environment 16
- intellectual ferment 34
- inviolable rights 72
- Jacobin Club/Jacobins
agitation against the King 168–9, 197
elimination of political opposition 218–20
growth of network 235–6
influence and power 140, 187, 196–8, 214
and Insurrectionary Commune 187, 195
Montagnards 109, 195
republicanism 193
Robespierre's influence 140, 173, 178, 180, 183, 198, 235
suspension of 1793
Constitution 198
victims of White Terror 279
and women's movement 265–6, 267–8
- Jefferson, Thomas 116, 129
- Jordan, David 232, 233, 237
- judicial reform 72, 131, 151–3
- Kafka, Frank 42
- Kates, Gary 178
- Lacombe, Claire 262, 264, 265
- Lafayette, Marquis de
and American Spirit 114–16
as constitutional monarchist 123, 170, 173, 178, 182
declaration of human rights 129
destruction of leadership 170, 173
and flight of royal family 164
and National Guard 98, 103, 116–17
political club membership 169
relationship with popular movement 118–21
as revolutionary leader 52, 112, 114–21
support for war 180
- Lamballe, Princess de 189
- language bans 283
- Lavoisier, Antoine 221
- Law of 22 Prairial 221, 239, 273, 278
- Law of the General Maximum 233, 262
- Law of Suspects 217, 262, 278
- Lefebvre, Georges 51, 52, 98, 292
- legacy of revolution 2, 146, 153
- legal system 21, 38, 72
- legality 129
- Legislative Assemblies
first see National Assembly
second 176–9, 185–7, 188, 189, 191, 193
third see National Convention
- legislative power 72
- Léon, Ann-Pauline 262, 263
- Leopold II, Emperor of Austria 177
- les enragés* 207, 250
- Les Invalides, attack on 90
- lettres de cachet* 72, 131, 152
- Lewis, Gwynne 94
- liberalism, among nobility 52, 53
- Liberty 129, 141
- 'little academy' 11
- Locke, John 117, 129
- Louis XIV ('Sun-King') 8, 11
- Louis XV 10, 15, 16
- Louis XVI
attempt to flee France 163–7, 299
challenges revolution 102
closure of *parlements* 66, 136
coronation 14, 15–16
deposition 183, 184, 187, 195
dismissal of Finance Ministers 60, 64
in Estates-General 86
failures and mistakes 14
and Festival of Federation 121
imprisonment 187
marriage 13, 14
powers as constitutional monarch 161–2
ratification of 1791
Constitution 171–2
resistance to revolution 161
return to Paris 103–4
Royal Session of *parlement* 65–6
trial and execution 14, 197
veto of intimidatory laws 179
weakening of authority 34
- Louis XVII (Dauphin) 187, 222
- Louis XVIII 277
- lower clergy 24
- McPhee, Peter 237
- Marat, Jean-Paul 170, 188, 195, 210, 235, 240, 247, 267
- Marie-Antoinette of Austria 13, 30, 58–9, 60, 163, 164, 187, 189, 222
- 'La Marseillaise' 2, 182, 222
- martyrs 80
- Marx, Karl 51
- Marxist historians 51, 146, 292
- mercenaries 88
- merit 49, 130, 148, 197
- metric system 199
- military policy 90
- militia of property owners 89
- Mirabeau, Honoré Gabriel, Comte de 52, 88, 122–3, 131, 163, 173, 235
- Montagnards 109, 195
- Montesquieu 37, 38
- Moulin, Annie 70
- municipal revolution 98
- muscadins* 279, 280
- National Assembly 159–61, 185–6
attempts to save constitutional monarchy 168–71
constitutional foundation 162
creation 86, 296
demands by working women 103
ecclesiastical reforms 159–61
introduction of revolutionary government 109

- people's faith in 147
 program of national reform 147–51
 response to peasant revolt 100–1
 return to Paris from Versailles 104
 see also Legislative Assembly (second)
- National Convention 109, 186, 195–7, 207, 267–8, 274–5, 281
 National Guard 89, 116–17, 118, 120, 121, 169, 173, 182, 183, 184, 185
 national reform 147–51
 navy 16
 Necker, Jacques 61, 80, 81, 83, 86, 88, 98
 nobility
 demand for reforms by
 liberals 52–3, 73, 115
 drafting of grievances 68, 70
 émigrés in foreign armies 178, 180
 role 25–6
 traditional tensions within 52
nobless de robe (nobility of the robe) 25, 26, 28
nobless d'épée (nobility of the sword) 25
- old regime 10, 20, 32, 34, 108, 295
 Orleans, Philippe, duc d' 73, 136
- Palm, Etta 264
 Paris, revolutionary sites 291
 Paris Commune 183, 185
 Parisian mob 2, 88, 89
parlements
 closure by Louis XV 10, 16
 closure by Louis XVI 66
 popular agitation for return of 80–1
 reconvened in defiance of royal order 66
 refusal to register stamp duty law 65
 removal of powers 66
 restoration under Louis XVI 10
 role 10
 Royal Session disaster 65–6
 Patrick, Alison 45, 196
 peasant revolt 96, 98–100
 peasants
 drafting of grievances 70–1
 feudal dues 29, 30, 98, 100–1
 role within Third Estate 22, 29–30
 permanent popular movement 248
 Perrin, Jules 238
philosophes
 as critical thinkers 34
 criticism of Catholic Church 16, 32, 34, 36
 influence of ideas 34, 43, 44, 122, 129
 political beliefs 37–42, 45
 Phrygian bonnets 141
 political clubs 109, 122, 140, 168–9, 182
 political landscape
 1793–94 211
 pre-revolution era 16
 political order, legitimacy 3
 political reform 72
- popular movement 112, 116–17, 118–21, 135, 166, 173, 182–3, 209
 see also *sans culottes*
 popular revolution 98
 popular sovereignty 39–40, 197, 248–9, 259
 popular violence 2, 80, 119, 137–8, 139, 182–3, 184–6, 188–90
 Post-Revisionist historians 293
 pragmatism 80
 privilege 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 148
 progress, belief in 36
 propertied classes 81
 property
 inviolability of 129
 sacred nature 197, 284
 Protestants 15, 36
 Prussian army 180, 205
 psychological impact of
 revolution 92, 141
 public opinion 16, 80
 public servants 28, 72
 punishment, principles of 152–3
- rationalisation 151
 reason 147
 refractory priests 178
 religious orthodoxy 36
 religious tolerance 16, 36, 130, 131, 197
 remonstrances 10, 66
 representation
 as political ideal 40, 41
 and taxation 64
 representatives on mission 214
 republican movement 169, 170, 172
 Réveillon Riots 81, 88, 117
 Revisionist historians 43, 51–2, 146, 293
 revolutionary bonds 204
 revolutionary government 213, 232
 Revolutionary Tribunal 214, 219, 278
 revolutionary violence 202
 revolutions
 causes 3
 psychological impact 92
 role of leaders 114
- rights
 demand for basic inviolable rights 72, 108, 129
 special treatment for certain groups 16
- Robespierre, Maximilien de 122
 assassination attempt on 267
 background 231
 Committee of Public Safety 217, 232
 enemies 239
 execution 273–5
 influence over Jacobin Club 173, 178, 180, 183, 198, 235
 integrity 237
 National Convention deputy 195, 220
 opposition to war 180
 political beliefs 231, 232, 233
 political use of paranoia 237–9
 on popular sovereignty 248–9
 public image 234–5
- representation over time 275
 republicanism 183, 193, 195
 revolutionary government 213, 232
 as revolutionary leader 229, 232–3, 237
 and revolutionary movement 233–6
 support for Terror 220
 Rochefoucauld 116
 Roland, Jean-Marie 178, 180, 182, 195
 Rose, Barrie 248
 Rousseau, Jean-Jacques 39–40, 131, 231, 248, 256
 Roux, Jacques 250, 283
 Rowbotham, Sheila 257, 264
 royal authority
 resistance to 64–5
 strands of 7, 93
 Royalist insurrection 277
 Rudé, George 51, 136, 162, 173, 292
 rule of law 129
- St Just 195
sans-culottes
 aim 245
 direct democracy 245, 247, 248
 insurrections of April and May 1795 276–7
 members of National Convention 195
 popular sovereignty 248–9
 relationship with Jacobins 109, 233–6, 246–7
 repression by National Convention 277
 self-identification 245
 Schama, Simon 16, 186, 188
 Second Estate 22, 23, 25–6, 51, 68
 Second Revolution 122, 185
 separation of powers 37, 38
 September Massacres 188–90, 205
 settlement of 1705 281–4, 301
 Siege of Lyon 209
 Sieyès, Emmanuel Joseph 83, 84, 85, 86, 88, 114, 129, 195
 Soboul, Albert 51, 53, 142, 292
 Social Circle Club 169, 170, 260
 social contract 39–40, 128
 social criticism 35, 38
 social order
 classification by estate system 20, 22–30
 inequality 16, 19, 21
 legitimacy of 3
 questioning of 49–51
 social reform 198, 199
 social values 282
 social welfare 153
 Society of the Friends of the Rights of Man 247
 Society of the Friends of Truth 260
 Society of Revolutionary Republican Women 262, 263
 Society of Thirty 73
 stages of revolution
 first stage 63
 second stage 109
 stamp duty tax 65
 suffrage 70, 162, 186, 195

- tax farmers/farming 61, 62
 taxation system
 concessions 21, 24, 25, 39
 criticism of 38–9
 labour tax 72
 opposition to uniform land-tax 63–4
 perpetual taxes 65
 reform 60, 62–6, 72, 130, 149
 and representation 64
 salt tax 72
 uniform land-tax proposal 62, 63–4
 Taylor, George 51, 73
 Tennis Court Oath 86, 98, 124, 222
 The Terror 2, 109, 122, 178, 185–6, 193, 200, 212–26, 300
 dismantling of machinery of 278
 executions 197, 219–22, 224
 Great Terror 221–2
 women's role in 262
 Thermidorian Reaction 276–81
 Thermidorians 275
 Third Estate 22, 23, 26, 69, 70–3, 82–3, 85, 86
 see also bourgeoisie; peasants; working people
 time, reorganisation 199
 timelines
 1774 to October 1789 4–5
 October 1789 to November 1795 109–11
- Todd, Allan 262
 Tribunal of Clemency 122
 Tuileries palace 183, 185
 Turgot, Jacques 60
- unemployment 79
 universal male suffrage 195
 utility 49, 50, 130
- Vansittart, Peter 90
 Varlet, Jean 250, 283
 venal public office 28, 72
 venality 28, 72
 Vendée Rebellion 208, 300
 Versailles
 royal court 11
 women's march to 102–4, 119
 violence *see* popular violence; revolutionary violence
 Virtue/virtuous citizens 200, 237
 Voltaire 36, 37, 38–9, 49, 49–50, 122, 231
 voting by head 82–3, 86
 voting by order 82–3, 86
- war emergency 109, 206, 221
 wars
 civil 207–8, 215, 223
 international 57, 60, 61, 179–81, 205–6, 211, 299
 invasion by Austrian/Prussian army 180, 184, 187–8, 190–1
- Washington, George 116
 White Terror 279
 Wick, David 53
 women
 early feminists 264–5
 political roles 259–66
 repression of revolutionaries 267–8
 revolutionary activity 256–8
 rights 260–1, 265
 role in Enlightenment 35
 Society of Revolutionary Republican Women 262, 263
 Women's March to Versailles 102–4, 119
 working people
 in cities 28–9
 encouraged to rebel by radical bourgeoisie 88–9
 hopes and grievances 78–81
 and popular revolutionary movement 14, 136, 140
 see also popular movement; *sans-culottes*
- Young, Arthur 78