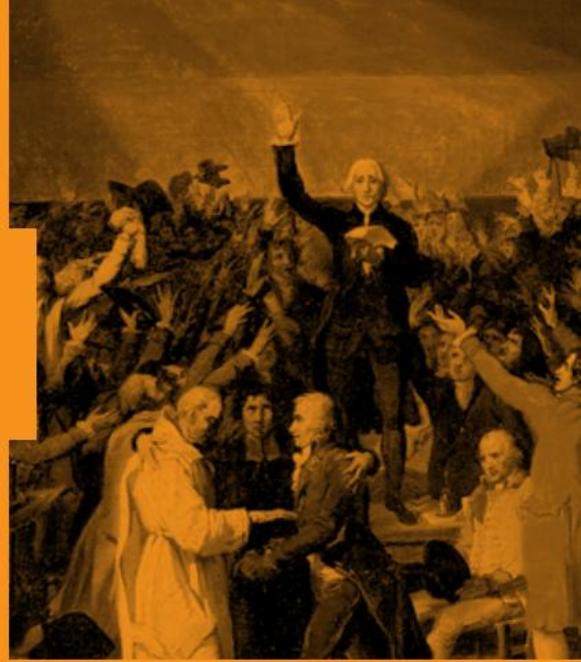
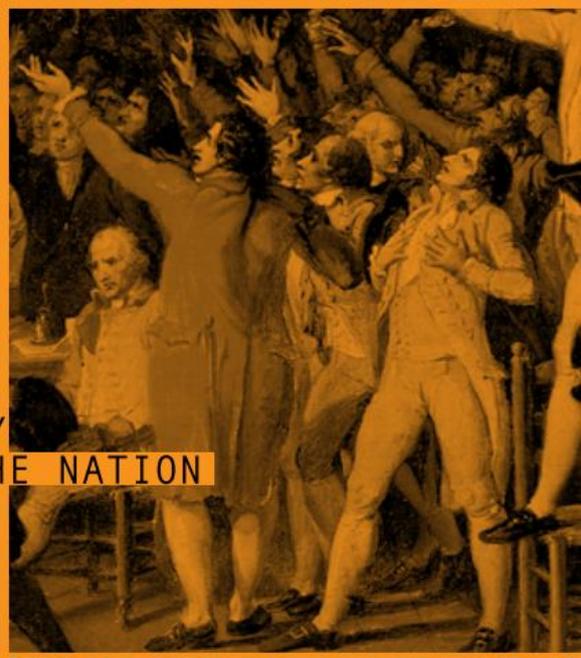


LIBERATING FRANCE

THE
REVOLUTIONARY
EXPERIENCE



WE ARE HERE BY
THE WILL OF THE NATION



NOTHING BUT BAYONETS
CAN DRIVE US HENCE



JUDY ANDERSON
JILL FENWICK
ALLAN KERR

LIBERATING FRANCE

THE
REVOLUTIONARY
EXPERIENCE

2ND EDITION

JUDY ANDERSON
JILL FENWICK
ALLAN KERR

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Allan Kerr is Head of Learning – Humanities at Carey Baptist Grammar School. He co-authored the *VCE Revolutions Teacher Pack* (HTAV, 2010) and has written HTAV Sample Exams (Revolutions) for many years, as well as presenting at HTAV conferences.

USING THIS SERIES

Textbooks in HTAV's Senior History Series include supplementary Web Resources (via *historyed*) which enhance students' knowledge and understanding through further activities and audio-visual materials. The Web Resources, which have been created by the authors and HTAV, will be added to over time.

To access Web Resources for this title, go to <http://historyed.com.au/course/view.php?id=16>.

In each chapter of this book you will see the following icons appearing in the margins. Follow the instructions at the URL above to access these resources.



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Video



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Interactive



Activity sheets

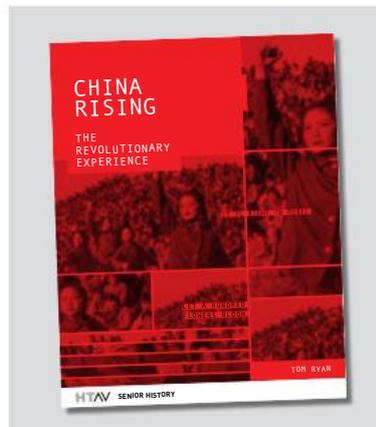


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The Revolutions series comprises four titles: *China Rising*, *Liberating France*, *Reinventing Russia* and *Forging America*. The series is available in print only, eBook or print/eBook bundle.

The textbooks, written by expert teachers and featuring innovative design elements, comprise a stand-alone resource for students of senior Revolutions.

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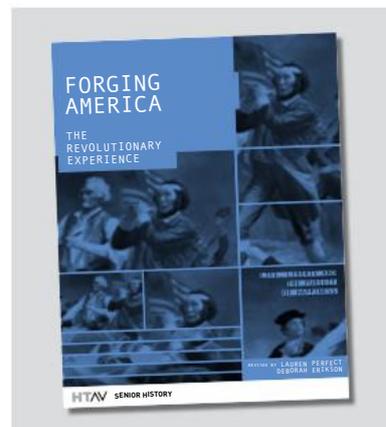
1 China Rising:
The Revolutionary Experience



2 Liberating France:
The Revolutionary Experience



3 Reinventing Russia:
The Revolutionary Experience



4 Forging America:
The Revolutionary Experience

FOREWORD

The French Revolution is one of the great turning points in modern history. It changed forever an apparently stable kingdom and society based on hierarchical, even divine, concepts of authority; a social order based on rights and exemptions belonging to privileged corporate social orders and provinces; and a rural society ordered by seigniorial rights and controls. Revolutionaries sought to remake that world according to principles of popular sovereignty, equality before the law, and the rights of individuals to make the most of their capacities and their property.

But there was nothing inevitable about the revolution of 1789. Its origins go deep into the economic and social conditions of eighteenth-century France, but the outbreak of revolution was due to the mismanagement of a fiscal and political crisis. The young king who came to the throne in 1774 soon found his regime embroiled in an international conflict, which, though successful in ending British imperial control of the Atlantic coast of North America, came at a huge cost to the French treasury. The inability of Louis XVI and his elite to manage the fiscal crisis and institute major reform became closely linked with 'internal' reasons for dissatisfaction inside France. The calling of the Estates-General in 1789 focused a wide spectrum of grievances and hopes.

In August 1789 the revolutionary National Assembly created the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. These were the principles on which the new nation would be founded, each clause a repudiation of what revolutionaries now called the *Ancien Régime* as well as a pointer to the future. However, there could not be agreement on the practical application of those principles, and the question of what sort of revolution this was to be quickly became a source of division, driving the revolution in new directions. Was the application of the principle of 'equality' to be confined to equality before the law, or should it also be applied to political rights, social structures and the rights of women and slaves?

Division between the revolutionaries of 1789 was one reason why the process of change could not end quickly or peacefully. Another reason was that there were increasing numbers of people inside and outside France for whom the revolution was threatening. The revolution rapidly alienated those who had lost privilege and power, but also many others in society who were dismayed by the collapse of old certainties.

Outside France, those who welcomed the inspiring example of the 1789 revolution were soon silenced by the angry noises of rulers

worried about revolutionary contagion. The course of the revolution would be determined by the wars which broke out in April 1792, and revolutionaries felt impelled to take rigorous measures to win those wars and silence counter-revolutionaries at home. This culminated in what was later called 'The Terror' (1793–94), the most controversial period of all. Were its sweeping controls and punishments the necessary price to be paid for making the revolution safe, or was it a period of needless blood-letting?

There had been many attempts to 'end' the revolution, to stabilise its gains by silencing popular demands for further change. This was particularly the case when Louis XVI, despite having attempted to flee France, was kept on his throne and endorsed the Constitution of 1791. But it was not until the National Convention introduced the Constitution of the Year III (1795) – a republican constitution – that a measure of stability was successfully imposed. Even then, France remained unstable; some historians argue that it was not until the 1870s, after three other revolutionary upheavals, that the principles of 1789 and 1792 were thoroughly embedded in France.

Such was the drama and division of this great upheaval that historians – like the participants – have always been divided about its origins, outcomes and significance. Why was there a revolution in 1789? Why did it prove impossible to end it at that time? In what ways did it transform France, or fail to? Did the principles of 'liberty' and 'equality' become central to public life? Did the protracted political turmoil of these years disguise ongoing social continuities, or was society thoroughly transformed? What did it mean for priests, peasants, women, and slaves?

The story of the origins, course and significance of the French Revolution is as complex as it is hotly debated. One of the great merits of *Liberating France* is that it tells this story with great clarity and verve, recognising along the way that historians continue to disagree about crucial elements of the story. Jill Fenwick, Judy Anderson and Allan Kerr know that all revolutions have their moments of horror as well as grandeur, and have not shied away from confronting students with awkward questions about the capacity of humans for violence against their fellows. They have chosen documents from the period to illustrate the drama in the actors' own words. There are insights and details which enliven the story. These accomplished teachers also know the value of visual material, not only to further illuminate the story, but to remind us that artists too are participants with a particular message to convey. It is a pleasure to write this foreword to such an outstanding text and student resource.

Peter McPhee is an Emeritus Professor at The University of Melbourne. He is the author of many books on the French Revolution, including Living the French Revolution, 1789–1799 (London and New York, 2006) and Robespierre: a Revolutionary Life (London and New Haven, 2012). His most recent book is Liberty or Death: the French Revolution (London and New Haven, 2016).

HISTORICAL THINKING

The study of Revolutions at the senior level is guided by historical thinking concepts developed by Seixas, van Drie and van Boxtel, Levesque and others.

Historical knowledge comprises both **substantive knowledge**, which refers to historical content or subject matter (i.e. what happened in the past?) and **procedural knowledge**, which refers to the process or skills involved in understanding that subject matter (i.e. what do the sources of evidence say and what should I conclude from them?). Together, substantive and procedural knowledge give students the depth of understanding required to excel in history.

Historical inquiry begins with **historical questions**. Students ask and are asked substantial questions about people and events from the past, including their **significance** and contribution to what came later. Students assess **continuity and change** and the different types of change that occurred. They examine the relationship between **cause and consequence** and consider the **ethical dimensions** of history. As they do this, students should be aware that they bring a twenty-first-century perspective to their studies and that their values and beliefs are not necessarily the same as those who lived in the past.

The key part of historical thinking and practice is **analysing sources** – primary and secondary – to reach conclusions and **construct arguments**. Generally speaking, primary sources indicate the **historical perspectives** or viewpoints of people at the time, while secondary sources indicate the **historical interpretations** of historians or commentators who are looking back at past events.

Historical perspectives are a reminder that people rarely share the same experience or opinions at a given point in history, while historical interpretations show how historians have different views on the importance or meaning of past events. Understanding these contrasting experiences and viewpoints is an important part of appreciating the complexity and contestability of history – one should approach the evidence with an open mind and ‘listen’ to what a source is communicating before forming a conclusion.

In this book we have included many activities designed to develop and enhance students’ substantive and procedural knowledge in history. But above all, we hope students will get swept up by the story of the French Revolution, as it is story-telling that lies at the heart of history.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CAUSES OF THE REVOLUTION

SECTION

A

What were the significant causes of revolution?

How did the actions of individuals and popular movements contribute to triggering the revolution?

To what extent did social tensions and ideological conflicts contribute to the outbreak of revolution?

1774–October 1789

1 Social Inequalities

Summary: Burden on peasants through seigneurial system, privilege and corruption among nobility and upper clergy.

Evidence: The Marciilly Third Estate demanded: 'All financial privileges be abolished and the three orders no longer be exempt from responsibilities and taxes that the Third Estate alone endures.'

Historian: 'The rural population underwrote the costs of the Church, nobility and monarchy, which took a quarter to a third of peasant produce through taxes, dues and the tithe.' (Peter McPhee)

Summary: By 1786, France had a deficit of 160 million livres, partly from its involvement in the American War of Independence.

7 Bankruptcy

Evidence: 'It is impossible to tax further and ruinous to always be borrowing.' (Calonne, comptroller-general)

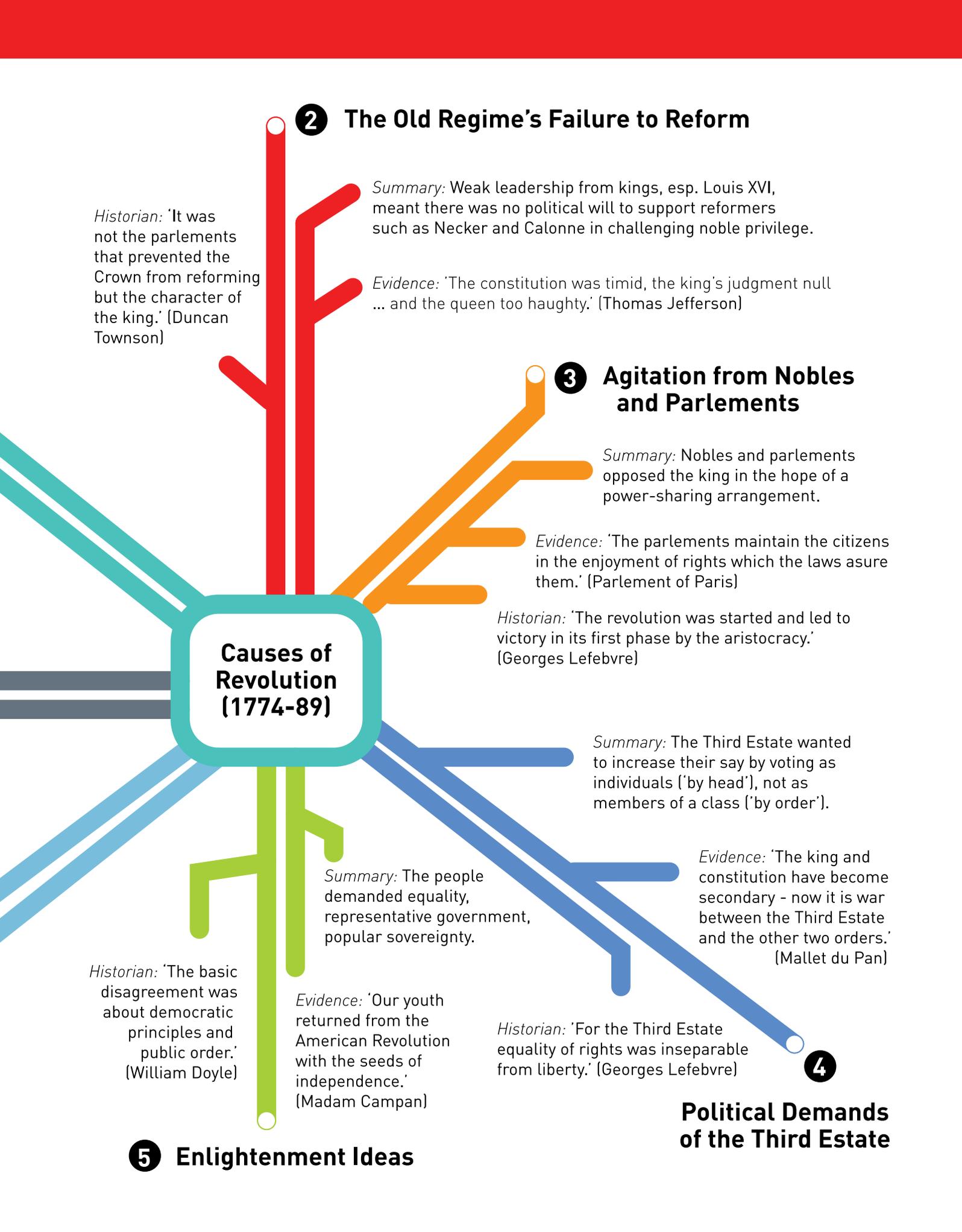
Historian: 'The standoff between the king and nobility over reform led to paralysis of government and bankruptcy by August 1788.' (David Andress)

Summary: Peasants and poor urban workers suffered from failed harvests (esp. 1787-88) and the free trade agreement with Britain (1786).

Evidence: By spring 1789, Parisian workers were spending up to 88 per cent of their wages on bread. (Rees and Townson)

6 Economic Suffering

Historian: 'The commercial treaty with Britain obstructed industry temporarily, since production had to modernise if it was to withstand foreign competition.' (Georges Lefebvre)



Causes of Revolution (1774-89)

2 The Old Regime's Failure to Reform

Historian: 'It was not the parlements that prevented the Crown from reforming but the character of the king.' (Duncan Townson)

Summary: Weak leadership from kings, esp. Louis XVI, meant there was no political will to support reformers such as Necker and Calonne in challenging noble privilege.

Evidence: 'The constitution was timid, the king's judgment null ... and the queen too haughty.' (Thomas Jefferson)

3 Agitation from Nobles and Parlements

Summary: Nobles and parlements opposed the king in the hope of a power-sharing arrangement.

Evidence: 'The parlements maintain the citizens in the enjoyment of rights which the laws assure them.' (Parlement of Paris)

Historian: 'The revolution was started and led to victory in its first phase by the aristocracy.' (Georges Lefebvre)

Summary: The Third Estate wanted to increase their say by voting as individuals ('by head'), not as members of a class ('by order').

Evidence: 'The king and constitution have become secondary - now it is war between the Third Estate and the other two orders.' (Mallet du Pan)

Historian: 'For the Third Estate equality of rights was inseparable from liberty.' (Georges Lefebvre)

4

Political Demands of the Third Estate

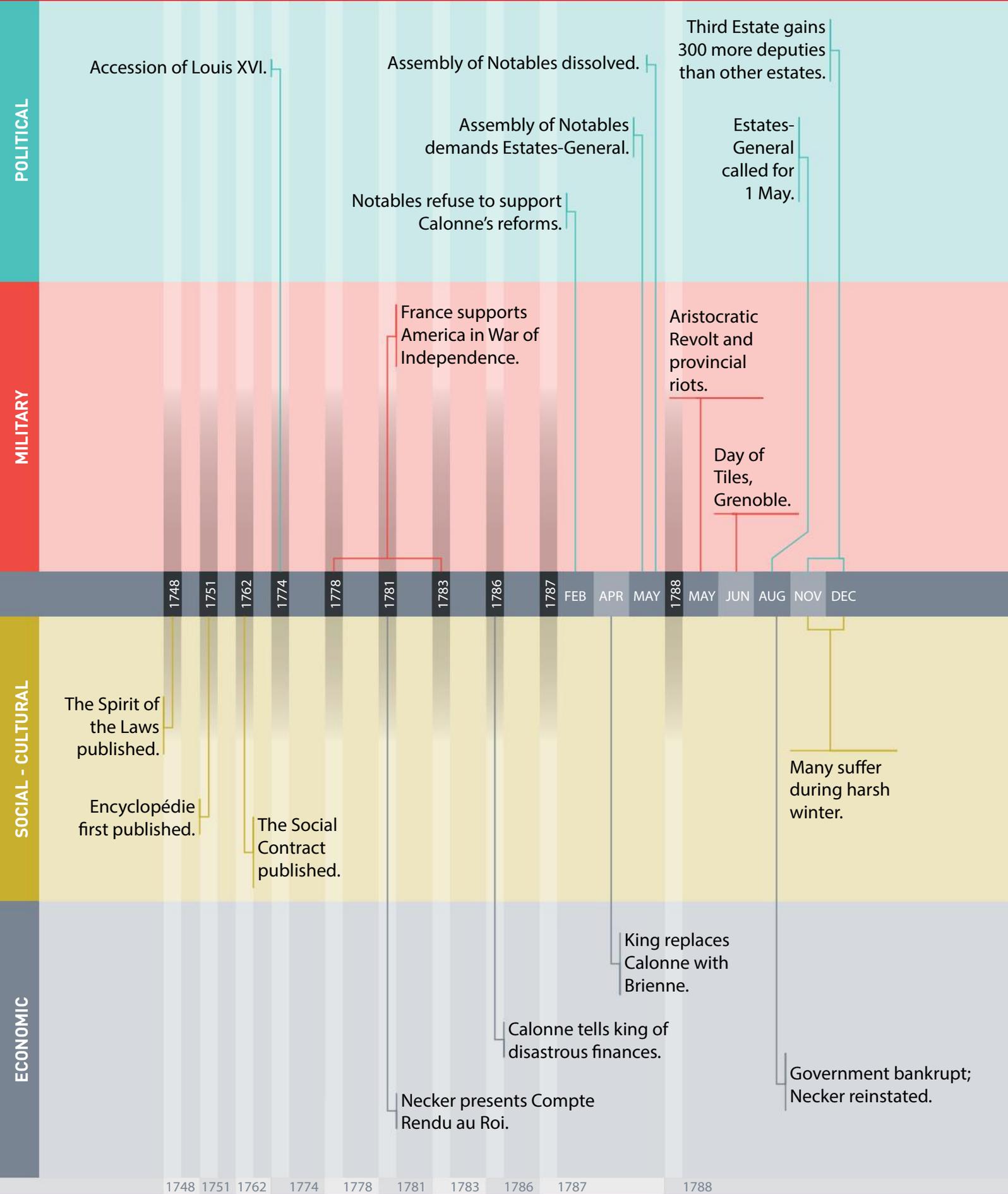
Summary: The people demanded equality, representative government, popular sovereignty.

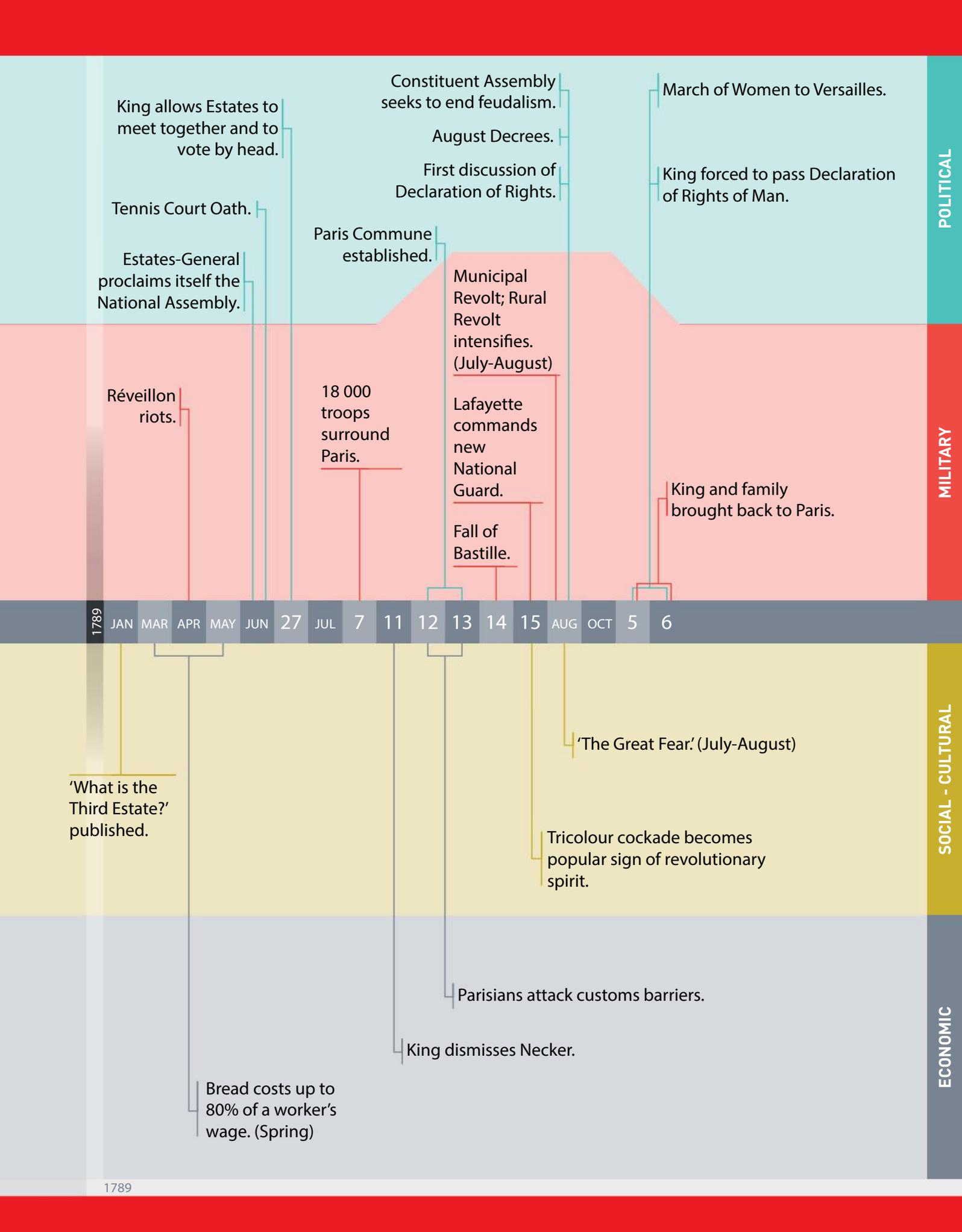
Evidence: 'Our youth returned from the American Revolution with the seeds of independence.' (Madam Campan)

Historian: 'The basic disagreement was about democratic principles and public order.' (William Doyle)

5 Enlightenment Ideas

SECTION A TIMELINE





POLITICAL

MILITARY

SOCIAL - CULTURAL

ECONOMIC

King allows Estates to meet together and to vote by head.

Tennis Court Oath.

Estates-General proclaims itself the National Assembly.

Réveillon riots.

Paris Commune established.

18 000 troops surround Paris.

Constituent Assembly seeks to end feudalism.

August Decrees.

First discussion of Declaration of Rights.

Municipal Revolt; Rural Revolt intensifies. (July-August)

Lafayette commands new National Guard.

Fall of Bastille.

March of Women to Versailles.

King forced to pass Declaration of Rights of Man.

King and family brought back to Paris.

'What is the Third Estate?' published.

'The Great Fear' (July-August)

Tricolour cockade becomes popular sign of revolutionary spirit.

Parisians attack customs barriers.

King dismisses Necker.

Bread costs up to 80% of a worker's wage. (Spring)

1789

JAN MAR APR MAY JUN 27 JUL 7 11 12 13 14 15 AUG OCT 5 6

KEY PEOPLE

LOUIS XVI (1754–1793)

- Decision to join American War of Independence sparked revolutionary ideas and led to 1780s financial crisis.
- Poor handling of Necker's audit (1781), Calonne's appointment (1783) and Assembly of Notables (1787).
- Failed to recognise public mood (1781) and insisted on registration of laws; led Parlement to issue remonstrance.
- Was authoritarian in dealings with Parlements (1788) and National Assembly (1789).
- Became virtual prisoner in Paris by October 1789.



MARIE ANTOINETTE (1755–1793)

- Excessive spender who often gave gifts and well-paid jobs to friends.
- Enjoyed lavish buildings and grounds, such as Petit Trianon and own hamlet.
- Innocent in Diamond Necklace Affair (1785) but on one occasion bought earrings for 400,000 livres.
- Became scapegoat for inequalities of old regime and was demonised for Austrian heritage.



DUC D'ORLÉANS (PHILIPPE EGALITÉ) (1747–1793)

- Early supporter of revolution.
- One of seven princes appointed to Assembly of Notables (1786).
- Challenged king's attempt to forcibly register loans at Royal Session (1787).
- Joined Society of Thirty (1788), group of liberal patriots.
- Marched with Third Estate at opening of Estates General (1789).
- Participated in 'pamphlet war' (1780s).



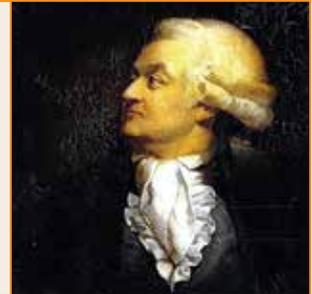
ABBÉ SIEYÈS (1748–1836)

- Though a member of the First Estate (clergy), his humble origins allowed him an understanding of common people.
- Influential pamphlet *What Is the Third Estate?* (1789) said common people were 'shackled and oppressed'.
- Member of Society of Thirty who lobbied for double representation of Third Estate at Estates-General.
- Deputy for Third Estate in Estates-General and member of National Convention.



COMTE DE MIRABEAU (1749–1791)

- Gifted orator with great charm and flaws; 'black sheep who became white knight of people'.
- Declared war on 'privileges and the privileged.'
- Member of Society of Thirty who lobbied for change in salons.
- Unofficial spokesperson for National Assembly (Jun 1789).
- Told of king's plan to close Assembly, he said, 'we shall yield to nothing but bayonets.'



MARQUIS DE LAFAYETTE (1757–1834)

- Dubbed 'a hero of two worlds' for leadership in America and France.
- A 'courtier against the court' and an 'aristocrat against privilege.'
- Member of Society of Thirty and vice-president of National Assembly.
- Tried to convince king to reform, pinning tricolour cockade on him (Jul 1789).
- Commander of National Guard and key drafter of Declaration of Rights of Man.



CAMILLE DESMOULINS (1760–1794)

- Best known for calling crowd 'to arms, to arms!' after Necker's dismissal by king (Jul 1789).
- Journalist and lawyer from bourgeois background; attended same school as Robespierre.
- Failed to get elected to Estates-General but active in calls to bring king to Paris (Oct 1789).
- Founding member of Cordeliers Club.



CHAPTER

1

ATTEMPTS TO REFORM THE OLD REGIME

THE OLD REGIME'S STRICT HIERARCHIES GAVE POWER AND LARGESSE TO THE ROYAL FAMILY AND THEIR ASSOCIATES WHILE MOST OF FRANCE'S 28 MILLION PEOPLE LIVED IN POVERTY. BY MAY 1789 THE ABSOLUTIST REGIME OF LOUIS XVI HAD SHOWED IT WAS HIGHLY RESISTANT TO CHANGE.

c.1774–MAY 1789

DID YOU KNOW?

Dauphin is French for dolphin. It was the title given to the heir apparent from 1350 to 1791, and from 1824 to 1830. Count Guigues VIII de la Tour-du-Pin (1309–1333) had a dolphin on his flag, and took the nickname ‘dauphin.’ In 1349 one of his successors sold the family lands known as the Dauphiné to Phillip VI on the condition that the heir to the throne be known as the Dauphin. The dauphin’s arms would contain both the dolphin of Dauphiné and the French *fleurs-de-lys*.

INTRODUCTION: THE OLD REGIME

Prior to the French Revolution – a period referred to as the ‘old regime’ or ‘*ancien régime*’ – France was an absolute monarchy. When the revolution began in 1789 the reigning monarch was King Louis XVI. Louis (1754–1793), who began life as Louis-Auguste, the Duke of Berry, was the third heir-in-line, but became heir-apparent (the *dauphin*) following the death of his father and his older brother. He was twenty when he came to the throne in 1774 as an absolute, divine right monarch, appointing his own ministers and unrestricted by a written constitution. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, France had become the most influential of the European monarchies; Louis ruled over a powerful and wealthy empire comprising France and islands in the Caribbean and Indian Ocean.

During the seventeenth century, Louis XIV (1638–1715) had strengthened the power of the monarch over his nobility and clergy. The nobility had wealth and privileges, but no real political power. Similarly, while Catholicism was the only recognised religion in France and the Church had spiritual authority and great wealth, the king claimed the power to appoint all the upper clergy and to rule by divine authority. Louis XIV’s great grandson, Louis XV (1710–1774) maintained this dynastic authority throughout his long tenure and thus when Louis XVI came to the throne it seemed as though his reign would be secure.

FEATURE



Louis XVI in Coronation Robes, painting by Joseph-Siffrein Duplessis.

KEY PEOPLE: LOUIS XVI

This is an idealised image of Louis XVI, representing him as vigorously able to rule his kingdom. He wears a lavish cloak with the royal blue ground and gold *fleur-de-lys* of the Bourbon dynasty, holding one symbol of his absolute royal power, the sceptre, with the crown on a stool behind him. The ermine trimming of his cloak is a reference to his role as supreme judge. In another engraving based upon this portrait, the artist Callet added the scales of justice on a medallion behind the king. Behind the medallion he also added the *fasces*, the rods and axe of the magistrates of ancient Rome. Copies of Callet’s engraving of the portrait by Duplessis would have adorned many official buildings and, for the majority of Louis’ subjects, this was the only image of their monarch that they might see.

Louis XVI

Personality poorly suited to office.
 Unable to make a decision.
 'The weakness and indecision of the King are beyond description' – Comte de Provence, eldest of royal brothers.
 Not respected by courtiers.

**The King's Government****Absolute Divine Right Monarchy**

Depended on personal qualities of ruler who was hereditary.
 'The power to make the laws belongs only to me' – Louis XVI.

Marie Antoinette

Became very unpopular.
 From Austrian background (traditional enemy of France).
 Extravagant.
 Totally out of touch with ordinary people's lives and ignorant of France.
 Determined to keep power of monarchy intact.

Administration

Incoherent and inefficient, leading to chaos.

Royal ministers

Ministers of police, justice, navy, army and finance.
 Directly responsible to the king.
 Appointed by king, forming his Council.

Intendants

Ran the provinces or *généralités* and supervised taxation, religion, law and order, public works, communications, commerce and industry.

Overlapping jurisdictions

e.g. 39 provinces with governors, 36 *généralités* with Intendants, *Ressorts* controlled by Parlements.
 Each authority would interpret laws differently.
 Internal customs barriers.
 Different customary taxes.
 Different weights and measures.
 French language not spoken throughout whole kingdom – many dialects.
 Administration took place in French or Latin.

Little or no consultation

Chambers of commerce and guilds could write to the royal Intendants or directly to the royal minister at Versailles.
 In extreme cases letters were addressed to the king.

Finance**Taxation**

Great inequality.
 Privileged orders paid little or no tax.
 Tax burden spread unevenly across Third Estate – varying by region, feudal and seigneurial custom.
 Taxes collected through venal offices, i.e. positions which were bought.
 Farmers-General collected indirect taxes, paid a lump sum to the government, kept the rest, often lending money to the Crown at interest, although it was the Crown's own money. Accountants collected direct taxes.

Treasury

No central treasury. Crown never received full amount collected in its name.
 System inefficient, subject to corruption.

Backward Economy

Agriculture: traditional methods and subsistence farming.
 Requirement to pay dues in grain or other crops therefore no diversification possible.
 Internal customs barriers discouraged development of national market.
 Technological advances not introduced: no money, no entrepreneurial instinct.
 Manufacture: still run on traditional guild system.
 Small workshops with masters and journeymen living and working together.
 'Outworkers' still used in spinning and weaving.
 No industrialisation of textiles as in Britain:
 Evidence: spinning jennies in Britain = 20 000, in France = 1000;
 Textile mills in Britain = 200, in France = 8.
 Overseas trade: only area of French economy still booming in 1780s.
 Marseilles – near monopoly on trade with Near East (Turkey, Greece, Syria, Egypt).
 Bordeaux, Nantes, Le Havre, La Rochelle – booming Atlantic trade – slaves bought in Africa, taken to West Indies, sold for colonial products – sugar, coffee, tobacco, cotton and indigo brought back to France.
 Atlantic merchants gained great wealth and lived in enormous opulence.

Justice**Judges**

The king was the supreme Judge of the Kingdom and the thus the final court of appeal.

Members of the legal profession purchased their office and usually a title to go with it, becoming *noblesse de robe*.

Differing jurisdictions

Parlements, ecclesiastical courts, military courts.

Roman code law in south, Germanic case law in north.

Justice arbitrary.

Lettres de cachet issued by king.

Perception of corruption and abuse of privilege in parlements.

Legislation

Laid down by the king in edicts.

The Estates-General, the only body which by custom had the power to authorise new taxes, had not met since 1614.

The Assembly of Notables had not been called since 1626.

Parlements

The parlements were law courts, which also had the duty of issuing and administering laws passed by the king. The most important was the Parlement of Paris. There were 2300 magistrates, all *noblesse de robe*. No law could be applied unless registered by the parlements. The parlements had the Right of Remonstrance, to criticise a law. It was then sent back to the king to be reviewed. The king could insist on registration through the *lit de justice*, forcing his decrees to become law.



THE FRENCH ECONOMY UNDER THE OLD REGIME

The lands of the kings of France covered some 277 200 square miles, with approximately twenty-eight million inhabitants, 24–26 million within France. (See map at end of chapter.) By 1789, Louis XVI was to be king over another million people. These lands had been built up since the Middle Ages by a process of conquest, intermarriage and dynastic inheritance and they were still being added to: in 1678, Louis XIV had acquired Franche Comté, on the border with Switzerland; in 1766, Louis XV inherited Lorraine; and in 1786, Louis XVI took over the island of Corsica. However, not all lands in France belonged to the French monarchy: the Pope, at that time Pius VI, owned Avignon and the surrounding area, while there were three self-governing German counties within Alsace.

France was divided into provinces, some extremely large, like Languedoc and Brittany, some very small, like Flanders. The exact number of provinces was uncertain, but in 1766 there were thirty-nine provincial governors. For administrative purposes, France was divided into thirty-six *généralités*, each governed by an *intendant*. The *généralités* were more uniform in size and were the means by which the provinces were governed.

The provinces near the borders, which had generally been acquired by war or inheritance, were called the *pays d'état* and were treated differently for tax purposes than other provinces. Similarly, the *villes franches*, or major towns of the provinces, had emancipated themselves from direct taxation, were free from service in the militia (local guard) and were excused from the *corvée* (the peasants' obligation to do unpaid service mending roads).

To add to the confusion, apart from general royal edicts which all had to obey, the king's domains did not have a common law or a common system of taxation:

- Southern provinces were governed by code law, a written collection of laws first set out by the ancient Roman occupiers of Gaul, but northern areas used case law, based on medieval Saxon practices;
- In isolated regions, like those close to the Spanish border, local laws took precedence over French law, including those relating to marriage, inheritance and property. There were also seigneurial laws pertaining to medieval feudal rights;
- Every district had its own system of weights and measures;
- There was no uniformity of tax, with northern and central France bearing a heavier burden than the south;
- The *gabelle*, a tax on salt, was levied at six different rates according to area, while six districts, including the whole population of Brittany, were exempt;
- The main direct tax, the *taille*, was levied on persons in central provinces, but on land in peripheral ones like Languedoc;
- Seigneurial dues, paid to local lords, ranged from three to twenty-five per cent;
- The whole country was also burdened with customs barriers at the gates of towns, on rivers and between provinces.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1789, Paris was the second largest city in Europe, with a population of about 650 000.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1790, the National Assembly concluded that one in ten French people could be classified as poor. Historians believe the figure was closer to one in five, maybe even one in three.

Markets, therefore, tended to be local and regional rather than national. Transport costs were too high to allow goods or foodstuffs to be moved from one area to another. As goods moved between districts there were local customs and excise duties to be paid, adding to the producer's or distributor's costs. William Doyle has noted that 'Goods shipped down the Saône and Rhône from Franche Comté to the Mediterranean, for example, paid duty at thirty-six separate customs barriers on the way, some public and some private.'¹ Furthermore, there was no common system of weights and measures throughout France.

The rural population was poor and extremely vulnerable. In times of good crops, such as from the period after 1750, the population increased as more babies survived. Crop failures due to disease or to poor weather conditions, however, meant disaster. Most peasant families lived a subsistence existence, with little or no surplus to sell. Thus, in bad seasons, there was nothing to fall back on. The poorest of all peasants were the daily farm labourers who owned nothing and had only a few crops and chickens behind their rented cottages to tide them over if the harvest failed.

FRENCH COLONIES: GROWING ECONOMIC INSTABILITY

In the mid-eighteenth century, France's overseas possessions were as widespread as those of Britain. In India, Britain's major trading area was around Calcutta, while France's was at Pondicherry further down the east coast. Both countries were involved in Africa and both traded with China at Canton.² France also had a direct influence in Indo-China (now Vietnam), although it was not fully claimed as a colony until the mid-nineteenth century. France claimed the Ile de France (Mauritius) and the Ile de Bourbon (La Réunion), which were islands in the Indian Ocean, and had trading interests in Madagascar. In America, there were French settlements around New Orleans. In Canada, France had a settlement in Quebec and a naval stronghold on Cape Breton Island located in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, named Louisburg after King Louis XIV. In the West Indies, France controlled the eastern part of Saint-Domingue (now Haiti) as well as Guadeloupe and Martinique. These islands were known as the Antilles and were considered to be the jewels of the French Empire.

However, when France finally lost the Seven Years' War with Britain (1756–63), much of this territory was ceded to Britain. In the peace settlement of 1763, France ceded all French territory on the North American mainland, that is, its territories in Canada and to the east of the Mississippi River, to Britain. To its ally, Spain, went the lands at the mouth and to the west of the Mississippi. In India, commercial interests remained, though France could not erect fortifications or in other ways mark a permanent government presence in India. France's Indian Ocean possessions, the Iles de France and Bourbon, were both retained. In the West Indies, France also retained Guadeloupe, Martinique and Saint-Domingue, largely because British sugar traders did not want added competition within the British Empire. France also retained its slave stations in Africa, which supplied the sugar and coffee plantations of the West Indies with labour.

DID YOU KNOW?

Between 1738 and 1745, some 55 000 African slaves were transported by ship from Nantes to the West Indies. Sugar and coffee from Saint-Domingue supplied most of northern Europe. By 1789 there were over 500 000 slaves in the French Empire.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1789 the French-controlled region of Saint-Domingue produced forty per cent of the world's raw sugar. The colony's 30 000 plantation owners and 28 000 free people of colour were armed to control the 465 000 slaves.

1 William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 4.

2 Now called Guangzhou (southern China).

SLAVERY AND THE CARIBBEAN

The West Indian islands, particularly Saint-Domingue, were France's greatest wealth-producing territories. Coffee, sugar and other tropical produce were shipped to France to distribute throughout Europe. The slave trade itself was lucrative and supported other trades, such as shipping. As a result, seaports in France flourished and overseas trade grew by 500 per cent over the eighteenth century. Merchants in Bordeaux and other cities grew wealthy as a result of this trade, with docks and warehouses, offices, housing and inns thriving. Merchants, shipping agents, lawyers and bankers profited from Europe's appetite for coffee and sugar. Colonial demand for other agricultural goods led to specialisation, such as in the hinterland

of Bordeaux (wine) and the plains outside Paris (wheat). William Doyle has commented that,

There were therefore two French economies, only tenuously linked. Coastal regions ... were integrated with international and intercontinental trading networks and shared in their benefits, which seemed destined to go on improving. But most of Louis XVI's subjects lived in the interior where communications were poor, economic life sluggish, and such improvements as good harvests had brought in mid-century were being eroded by climatic deterioration and an inexorably rising population.³

³ Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 113.

THE TAXATION SYSTEM

Perhaps the greatest grievance expressed by French peasants in the ancien regime was that the burden of taxation fell most heavily upon those who could least afford it. Indeed, taxation in the eighteenth century had numerous aspects. Direct taxes (on income) imposed by the king accounted for ten to fifteen per cent of the peasants' gross product; tithes, which were supposed to contribute to the upkeep of the local clergy, took another eight per cent on average; the *corvée*, fourteen days of forced unpaid labour on the roads, took labourers away from the fields for substantial periods of the year. The major tax placed on all French subjects was the *taille*, a tax on land, from which the Church and most of the towns and the nobility were exempt. In addition, all commoners paid the *capitation* or tax per head, and indirect taxes on goods: the *gabelle* or salt tax (salt was a necessity, used to preserve meat); the *aides* on food and drink; and the *octrois* on the goods brought into towns to sell at market. The *vingtième*, a direct tax of about a twentieth on income levied in times of war, was one of the few of the direct taxes which the nobility had to pay along with the commoners. Because France was at war, supporting the American Revolution between 1778 and 1783, the *vingtième* was levied for the third time in the century, to last for the duration of a war and three years after. The American War of Independence ended in 1783, so the tax went until 1786.

TAX COLLECTION

Taxes owed to the king were collected through agents called financiers who paid to hold the position – it was thus called a venal office. The agents made their living by handling public funds. There were 200–300 agents in France and

they made substantial profits from the office. Indirect taxes were collected by a syndicate called the Farmers-General (another venal office) which leased the monopoly under a six-year contract with the Crown. The profits from tax offices were spectacular; the officials lived luxuriously and had generally bought a title along with the office. They were, as a result, widely hated, being regarded as leeches on the ordinary taxpayer.

As there was no central treasury, there was no specific accounting of the money collected. The tax agents paid a sum set by the Crown and were free to keep the balance for themselves. In a bad year they had to draw on their reserves of funds, but in a normal or good year they had a surplus. Often they lent money to the Crown, loans on which the Crown paid interest. Thus, when Louis XVI borrowed for the American War of Independence (1778–83) and, before that, Louis XV for the War of Austrian Succession (1740–48) and the Seven Years' War (1756–63), they were literally borrowing their own money and paying interest on it.

DID YOU KNOW?

It is estimated that by 1777 France had sent five million livres of aid to the Americans in their war of independence from Britain.

THE TITHE TO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The French Catholic or Gallican Church was one of the largest land-owners in France and one of the chief employers of labour. The Church owned approximately ten per cent of the land and much of its income came from rent. The Third Estate paid a tithe to the Church, a tax on their produce of between five and ten per cent of their harvest. All church income was exempt from ordinary taxation. The Church paid only the *don gratuit* or voluntary gift to the king. This was given every five years and the amount varied according to the power of the king or the mood of the Church. In 1789, for example, with the clergy opposed to Louis XVI's plan to extend taxation, the *don gratuit* was much smaller than in previous years.

FEUDAL DUES

Land rental was cheap, with peasants paying rent in kind (produce) to their seigneurial lord. But the peasants had the additional burden of feudal dues, so that from three to twenty-five per cent of their produce was paid over to the local lord. There were few areas of land without a feudal lord who exercised his rights over the local peasants. Usually, a peasant had to grind his corn in the *seigneur's* mill, bake his bread in the *seigneur's* oven, press his grapes in the *seigneur's* wine press. These manorial dues were called *banalités*. In addition, the *seigneur* had hunting and grazing rights over the land the peasant farmed, meaning that his doves were allowed to eat from the peasant's crops, while the hunt could pass over peasant land. The peasant was not allowed to kill game for food or fish in the *seigneur's* streams, a crime known as poaching. When land changed hands, either from father to son or by direct sale, a tax called the *lods et ventes* had to be paid; there was the *champart* or harvest dues and, in addition, when a peasant took goods to the local town for sale he or she paid the *octrois* or customs duty. For the peasant, the honorific privileges of his feudal lord added to the onerous burden of royal and church taxes to make existence precarious. Thus, peasants remained impoverished. The poorest of all were the *métayers* or sharecroppers. With no land of their own to farm, up to eighty per cent of their produce was forfeit in rents, taxes and dues.

Taxation, from which the upper echelons were largely exempt, was, therefore, one of the greatest grievances of the common people. In 1789 the *cahier de doléances* (book of grievances) of the Third Estate of Berry asked that 'No tax be legal or collectable unless it has been consented to by the nation and that taxes

FEATURE

KEY PEOPLE: MARIE ANTOINETTE

The Archduchess Maria Antonia of Austria was fourteen when she married Louis XVI. Her bridal trousseau cost 400 000 livres, at a time when the annual income of a working family was about thirty livres. She travelled to the border with France in a cavalcade of fifty-seven carriages. At the river Rhine, a pavilion had been built on the Ile aux Épis, between the two kingdoms. Here Maria was stripped of all her garments and jewellery by her new French ladies-in-waiting and dressed in French clothing. She was only able to keep a small gold watch given to her by her mother, and her Austrian ladies-in-waiting were dismissed. Even Maria's dog, Mops, was sent back to Vienna. She had to formally renounce her homeland and adopt that of her husband-to-be. Only then was she married, by proxy, with her brother Ferdinand standing in for the bridegroom. She became Marie Antoinette, Dauphine of France.

Marie Antoinette with her Four Children, Elisabeth Louise Vigée-Lebrun, oil on canvas, 1787. Queen Marie Antoinette with her children: the dauphin or crown prince, the future Louis XVII on her left and Madame Royale, the eldest royal princess, on her right. While Marie Antoinette was severely criticised for her extravagant expenditure and lavish life at court, she was accounted a devoted mother. The dauphin gestures to the empty cradle, a reference to the Princess Sophie, who died of tuberculosis in 1787.

Once married to the heir to the throne, Marie Antoinette was given a key to a cabinet containing almost two million livres' worth of jewellery, including the famous necklace of large pearls once owned by Anne of Austria, mother of Louis XIV.



remaining or to be established be borne equally ... by all orders of the state.⁴ In its submission to the Estates-General, the *cahier* of the Third Estate of Marilly also submitted that taxation be extended to the privileged Estates, pleading that:

all financial privileges be abolished; consequently that the three orders no longer be exempt from any of the public responsibilities and taxes that the most unfortunate class of the Third Estate alone endures and pays, such as statute labour [*corvée*], lodging of soldiers and all incidental costs for the *taille* etc.⁵

Thus, as Peter McPhee points out,

It was the rural population above all which underwrote the costs of the three pillars of authority and privilege in France: the Church, the nobility and monarchy. Together the two privileged orders and the monarchy exacted on average one-quarter to one-third of peasant produce, through taxes, seigneurial dues and the tithe.⁶

CAUSES OF REVOLUTION

1. Explain the ideas, beliefs and attitudes that underpinned France's absolute, divine-right monarchy. How did this system affect ordinary people's lives?
2. Analyse the ways in which Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette contributed to social dissatisfaction and unrest prior to May 1789.
3. Explain how France's involvement in the American War of Independence and other international conflicts created economic instability.
4. Evaluate William Doyle's comment that there were two separate economies in France, one prosperous and one impoverished. In your answer, refer to examples of lavish royal or noble lifestyles.
5. Identify two or more reforms that needed to be made to the system of taxation by 1789.

ACTIVITY

DID YOU KNOW?

It is unlikely that the phrase associated with Marie Antoinette, 'Let them eat cake,' actually originated with her.

DID YOU KNOW?

Marie Antoinette's lady-in-waiting wrote that Louis was so short-sighted he couldn't recognise anyone standing more than three paces away.

DID YOU KNOW?

Louis XVI is said to have had a huge appetite, with his 'usual' breakfast including a chicken, a slice of ham, four chops and six eggs, all washed down with a bottle and a half of champagne.

SOCIAL INEQUALITY UNDER THE OLD REGIME

Eighteenth century French society was essentially corporate in nature. Each person had an assigned place in some part of the whole body of the kingdom, belonging to an estate or order, to a guild or a parish, to a military regiment or to a local *seigneur*.

French society was divided into orders or estates. The First Estate was made up of the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church. This estate was made up of a mixture of classes: the cardinals, archbishops, bishops and abbots were of noble birth, while the priests or *abbés* were often of common estate. Those who were born noble or had acquired nobility belonged to the Second Estate, the aristocracy of France. The Third Estate contained those of common birth. The social structure of pre-revolutionary France was thus rigid: birth determined status, opportunity and privilege. There were few avenues for upward mobility and those who did manage to move themselves and their families from the Third Estate into the prestigious Second Estate paid heavily for their advancement.

4 Philip Dwyer and Peter McPhee, eds., *The French Revolution and Napoleon: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2002), 10.

5 Dwyer and McPhee, *The French Revolution and Napoleon*, 12.

6 Peter McPhee, *The French Revolution 1789–1799* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002), 13.

FRENCH POPULATION STATISTICS

In considering the population of France in the eighteenth century, a warning note must be sounded about statistics. The reader will find contradictions in figures between almost every source. This problem becomes particularly acute when looking at the pre-revolutionary period, when details of population were chiefly recorded in parish registries and documents of ennoblement were in private hands. Estimations of the numbers in each estate differ considerably. For example, William Doyle wrote in 1989 that 'credible estimates [of the numbers of nobles] vary between 120,000 and 350,000,' while Peter McPhee commented in 2002 that 'recent estimates have suggested that there may have been no more than 25,000 noble

families or 125,000 individual nobles.'⁷ In this chapter, estimations of the size of each estate have been taken from McPhee's *The French Revolution 1789–1799*, but other figures come from Doyle's *Oxford History of the French Revolution* and the second edition of Rees and Townson's *France in Revolution*.⁸ The mixing of statistics from different sources is not ideal but the main point is to get an idea of the general proportions between groups.

⁷ Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 28; McPhee, *The French Revolution*, 16.

⁸ Dylan Rees and Duncan Townson, *France in Revolution*, second edition (Hodder & Stoughton, 2001).

RURAL LIFE

Another important thing to understand about eighteenth century France is the fundamentally rural nature of the society. This was a society of about twenty-eight million people, over eighty per cent of whom were peasants who drew a living from subsistence farming. Surpluses were tiny, perhaps just some vegetables or a few eggs or some butter that could be sold at local markets. Local economies were very vulnerable to crop disease and weather, so whole regions could be at starvation level even while other regions were prosperous. At any time, there were three to five million people so poor they were reduced to begging. Most peasants earned just enough for their own needs and to pay the dues they owed to the *seigneur* (lord), the Church and the king. Bad weather or crop failure meant the peasants went hungry and poverty was ever-present. Arthur Young, a prosperous British landholder who travelled through France in 1789, wrote in his diary that 'All the country girls and women are without shoes or stockings; and the ploughmen at their work have neither sabots nor stockings to their feet. This is a poverty which strikes at the root of national prosperity. It reminds me of the misery of Ireland.'⁹

TOWN DWELLERS

Town dwellers made up five to eight per cent of the population. While only one person in forty lived in Paris, France was dotted with small market towns based on a local economy. Approximately ninety per cent of French towns had fewer than 10 000 people, with only nine cities having more than 50 000. However, during the eighteenth century the population expanded markedly: Paris grew by more than 100 000, while the trading towns of Bordeaux and Nantes more than doubled in size.¹⁰ The merchant, often the best educated, richest and most

⁹ Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 14.

¹⁰ McPhee, *The French Revolution*, 8.

active of the king's subjects, lived well, but the most prominent feature of all cities and towns was the poverty of the unskilled workman. Over the century, prices had risen three times faster than wages and the result was a miserable underclass of labourers, porters, dockers, waiters and dealers. Jean-Marie Roland, Inspector of Manufactures in Picardy in 1777 wrote that 'Workmen today need twice as much money for their subsistence, yet they earn no more than fifty years ago when living was half as cheap.'¹¹ In 1772, a magistrate in Rennes recorded, 'Misery has thrown into the towns people who overburden them with their uselessness, and who find nothing to do, because there is not enough for the people who live there.'¹²

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

The French (Gallican) Roman Catholic Church dominated most substantial cities and towns, physically, economically and psychologically. The Church and religion dominated people's daily lives. The Church not only had the largest and most expensive buildings in the town, but often the local economy depended on it. In the town of Angers, for example, the Church owned seventy-five per cent of the town's property. There were thirty-four parishes to cope with the needs of the people. Most of the town's lawyers worked for the Church, as did many of the artisans and craftspeople: the carpenters, builders, glaziers, lace-makers, embroiderers and dressmakers. Many of the bourgeoisie (middle class) bitterly resented the power and wealth of the Church, particularly as the upper clergy were of noble birth.

The social system of France was, in theory, based on reciprocity, that is, interlocking obligations. The nobles were to provide military protection in times of war, but by the eighteenth century the king had a standing army and the nobles no longer maintained fighting forces of their own. The Church was to provide protection for the people, spiritual guidance, charity in time of need, services like baptism, marriage and burial. The priest was, in theory, the servant of the people but, again, this had eroded. While many parish priests did look after the people, the nobly born upper clergy often led very worldly and expensive lives which diverted funds from the work of the Church to the pockets of its elite. Thus, one of the major causes of tension was the system of privilege. Privilege, literally

DID YOU KNOW?

Louis Sébastien Mercier wrote, 'In the Faubourg of Saint-Marcel live the poorest, most restless common people of Paris ... One whole family lives in one single room. The walls are bare ... The inhabitants move every three months because they owe their rent and are thrown out.'

DID YOU KNOW?

Pope Pius VI was head of the Catholic Church during Louis XVI's reign. The pope is held to be the successor of St Peter and to be infallible (never wrong) on matters of doctrine.

¹¹ Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 14.

¹² Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 18.



Above: Coat of arms of Pope Pius VI.

Left: Sainte-Chapelle, Paris.

meaning special rights conferred by law on groups or individuals, related to every area of life, but for many it was symbolised by the taxation system.

A key part of the social structure of eighteenth century France were the three main social groupings, or 'estates'. These were the First Estate (clergy), the Second Estate (nobility) and the Third Estate (commoners).

ACTIVITIES

THE ESTATES

Read about the three estates below. Then respond to the following questions, using three or four points per topic:

- What were the three main social groups in pre-revolutionary France and what were the advantages and disadvantages experienced by people in each estate?
- To what extent was social mobility possible in France under the *ancien regime*?
- What role did the Catholic Church play in French society in the eighteenth century?
- To what extent did urban and rural people have similar experiences and daily life in pre-revolutionary France?

NOBLE PRIVILEGES

Referring to the diagram over the page, discuss the challenges faced by the less affluent nobles, such as nobles of the sword. To what extent did high social status provide material comfort and security?



Bishop Talleyrand.

DID YOU KNOW?

Bishop Talleyrand once said, 'Only he who has seen the years before 1789 knows what pleasure it can be to live.'

THE THREE ESTATES

THE FIRST ESTATE: CLERGY

Roman Catholicism was the only religion recognised by the state and therefore the only religion officially allowed to hold services. The Church in France was called the Gallican Church because it claimed it had certain privileges which were not permitted in other countries. In France, for example, archbishops and bishops were chosen by the king rather than the pope. By Louis XVI's time, all the upper clergy came from the nobility, creating a rift between upper and lower clergy.

The total number of clergy was about 169 500 or 0.6 per cent of the total population; nearly one-third of these were nuns. The Catholic Church had ownership of about ten per cent of the land, which was rented out to peasants in return for a proportion of the crop. Revenue was also derived from rental of church-owned properties and from the tithe, a tax on the income of parishioners amounting to six to ten per cent of produce.

The Gallican Church was excused from taxation because of the Church's role in poor relief, health care and education, paying only the *don gratuit* or gift to the monarch. The parish priest, the *curé* or *abbé*, often served as the authority for

the whole community on royal edicts and as the mediator between peasants and nobility on issues of importance. He also baptised, confirmed, married and buried the people of the parish, educated the children and looked after the poor. He was usually poor himself and lived in a very similar fashion to his parishioners as part of the local community. The resentment, therefore, was of the tax-exempt status and wealth of the Church itself, and of the upper clergy.

CHURCH PRIVILEGES

With a partner, make a list of grievances against the privilege of the French Catholic Church under the old regime.

ACTIVITY

THE SECOND ESTATE: NOBILITY

There were two kinds of nobility. The *noblesse d'épée* (nobility of the sword) were those who had been born noble, having had a hereditary title passed down through generations. This included the group known as the *noblesse de court* – in theory, the families of very ancient lineage which attended the king at his court at Versailles, but in practice those noble families which were wealthy enough to survive the financially ruinous lifestyle at the court. The second kind of nobility was the *noblesse de robe* or *anoblis*, who had been made noble for some service to the king or who had purchased nobility by venal office – buying a position which had a title attached. To be noble was highly desirable, because along with nobility came wealth, power and privilege.

Noblemen had both honorific (conferring prestige) and 'useful' privileges, that is, those which conferred a material benefit, specifically tax exemption. In exerting his honorific privileges a nobleman could:

- Take precedence over others on public occasions;
- Carry a sword and display a coat of arms;
- Have an enclosed pew at the front of the Church;
- Be sprinkled with holy water in a special blessing;
- Have the Church draped in black when he died;
- Be tried in special courts;
- Be executed by the sword if found guilty of a capital offence;
- Have special hunting and shooting rights;
- Keep doves;
- Be exempt from military service;
- Be excused from the *corvée*, conscription into the militia, or having to billet troops in his house.

Along with nobility came tax exemption, a remnant of the time when the nobility provided the defence of the kingdom and its monarch. By the eighteenth century, this responsibility, known as *noblesse oblige*, had lost the meaning it once had and nobles were no longer meeting their obligations. Nobles did not pay the main tax, the *taille*, placed on common people or on 'common' land. They were not subject to the *corvée*, which was for the upkeep of roads. However, they did pay smaller taxes like the *capitation* and the *vingtième* or twentieth tax. The bourgeoisie, particularly, resented what they saw as the arrogance of the tax-exempt Second Estate.

DID YOU KNOW?

Madame de Staël noted that 'The great noblemen of France were not particularly well informed, for they had nothing to gain by it. The best way of arriving at honours with the court was to have grace in conversation ... The superficiality of education was one of the causes of their ultimate defeat; no longer were they able to fight against the intelligence of members of the Third Estate whom they should have tried to surpass.'



Portrait of Madame de Staël by François Gérard c. 1810. From Renee Winegarten, *Mme de Staël*, Berg Publishers, Leamington Spa, 1985.

THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF PRE-REVOLUTIONARY FRANCE



King Louis XVI:

Before the French Revolution, the king of France was an absolute monarch, accountable only to God. He held the throne by 'divine right.' In theory, all the lands of France belonged to the king and the people were all his subjects. After Louis XVI was executed in 1793, his son died, so the throne passed to Louis' nephew, the Comte d'Artois (who became Louis XVIII).



The Royal Family:

Queen Marie Antoinette, sister of the Austrian Emperor, was executed in 1793. Her son, the Dauphin (heir to the throne), died in 1795. Louis XVI's brothers were the Comte de Provence, later King Louis XVIII (1814–1824) and the Comte d'Artois, later King Charles X (1824–1830). The king's cousin, the Duc d'Orléans, changed his name during the revolution to Philippe Egalité.



The First Estate – Clergy:

Clergy accounted for approx. 0.6% of the population. The French Catholic Church owned about 10% of land. 97% of the population was Roman Catholic, the official religion of France.

The clergy were exempt from most taxes. Instead of taxation, the Church gave the *don gratuit* (voluntary gift) to the monarchy at its discretion. The Church had ecclesiastical courts of law for clergy accused of crimes. It gained income from rents and tithe.

The Church controlled education, poor relief and hospitals, and kept the registers of births, marriages and deaths. It preached the laws of the country from the pulpit and was responsible for censorship, so that state and religion were intertwined. Monks lived in abbeys and nuns in convents.

The Second Estate – Nobility:

The nobility formed about 0.4% of population but owned about 33% of land.

Noblesse de court

Technically had to be able to trace noble birth back to 1399. In reality, distinguished by wealth which allowed them to live at Versailles.



Noblesse d'épée

The noblesse d'épée (nobles of the sword) were privileged because of military service to the crown many generations before. They were not always wealthy; around 60% were impoverished country nobility. Nobles of the sword fiercely guarded their privileges because these were often all they had to distinguish them from commoners.

Noblesse de robe

Noblesse de robe (nobles of the robe) had been recently ennobled, either by service to the monarch or by purchase of one of 50,000 venal offices. They served as magistrates in the Parlements and other administrative positions. These offices and titles could become hereditary upon further payment.

The Third Estate – Commoners:

Commoners constituted 99% of the population and controlled about half of the land. They ranged from the wealthiest bankers to the poorest sharecroppers. None had privilege. The Third Estate bore the burden of the other two estates; it produced nearly all the wealth of France and paid nearly all the taxes.

Bourgeoisie

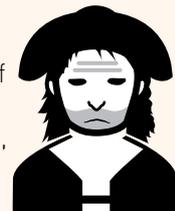
The bourgeoisie comprised 2–8% of the population. They included merchants, manufacturers, lawyers, bankers, doctors, writers and civil servants. As a group it was rising in numbers and wealth. Bourgeois French controlled about 25% of the land and owned 39 000 of 50 000 venal offices, reflecting their desire to move from 'common status' to the higher social ranks.

Urban workers

The urban (town) workers made up about 6% of the population. They were the tradesmen, shopkeepers, labourers and craftsmen working in small workshops. This group resented the 1786 Free Trade Agreement with Britain, which flooded France with cheaper imported textiles. Under guilds, workers were forbidden to go on strike. In 1789, urban workers spent up to 75% of their daily wage on bread. Urban workers demanded a living wage and better working conditions, particularly for servants, who were poorly paid, always on call, and could be prevented from marrying.

Peasants

Peasants made up about 85% of the population but controlled about 32% of the land. Many were independent landholders while others were renters, cottagers or itinerant labourers. They wanted tax relief, freedom from seigneurial dues and abolition of seigneurial rights.



Nobility was also highly desirable because of social status. Nobles owned a quarter to a third of all land and had feudal rights over much of the rest. Most of the valuable venal offices belonged to the nobility, awarded by the king or simply theirs by inheritance. Up to twenty-five per cent of the Church's revenues went into noble pockets, as the higher positions in the Church went to the nobility. The nobility also invested in trade and industry, mining and metallurgy, although they could not be directly involved. Thus, the growing wealth of the bourgeoisie also enriched the nobility. William Doyle put it like this: 'Nobility was a club which every wealthy man felt entitled, indeed obliged, to join. Not all nobles were rich, but sooner or later, all the rich ended up noble.'¹³

Nobility also meant influence and power. Technically, only those of noble birth could meet the king. All his ministers were noble, all the members of the administration were noble and all those who held important offices in the kingdom were noble, as were senior officers in the army and navy and most junior officers too. Most of the great financiers had become noble, along with the upper judiciary. In the Church, all the cardinals, archbishops, bishops, abbots and canons were noble. The reasons for this were two-fold: as France was the leading Catholic country of Europe, the pope had given the right to appoint these offices to the king, and successive kings favoured the nobility. Secondly, offices in the Church became a way of providing revenue for the poor nobility, particularly third sons, or for those whose physical disabilities made a career in the armed forces impossible. By the time of Louis XVI, noble appointments in the Church had become a matter of public policy.

The distance between the lives of the wealthy nobility and the majority of French people, who were part of the Third Estate, could breed bitterness and anger. In this extract, the journalist Louis Sébastien Mercier reflects his resentment as a member of the non-privileged Third Estate towards the nobility and the system of privilege itself; yet, alongside this can be seen the desperate search to maintain wealth and position – a search that must have bred, in its turn, resentment towards the absolute power of the monarchy:

The castles which bristle in our provinces and swallow up large estates possess misused rights of hunting, fishing and cutting wood: and those castles still conceal those haughty gentlemen who add their own taxes to those of the monarch and oppress all too easily the poor despondent peasant. The rest of the nobility surround the throne ... to beg eternally for pensions and places. They want everything for themselves – dignities, employments and preferences. They will not allow the common people to have either promotion or reward, whatever their ability or their service to their country.¹⁴

DID YOU KNOW?

The nobility of the court were unaware of the potential for violent revolution. 'Thinking people,' wrote Madame de la Tour du Pin, 'talked only of abolishing abuses. The word "revolution" was never uttered. Had anyone used it, they would have been thought mad.'



ACTIVITY ON LIBERAL NOBILITY

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Discuss the extent to which the journalist Mercier (see above) was correct in saying of the French nobility: 'They want everything for themselves – dignities, employments and preferences.'

CAUSES OF REVOLUTION

Discuss the following proposition: 'Having court-appointed nobles in almost every government post caused resentment among the common people of France.'

ACTIVITIES

¹³ Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 28.

¹⁴ Louis Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris 1783–89* (Amsterdam).

THE THIRD ESTATE: BOURGEOISIE, URBAN WORKERS AND PEASANTS

Bourgeoisie

The wealthiest group within the Third Estate was the *bourgeoisie*, a term used to identify those living in towns who made their money through a non-agricultural profession. The *haute* or high bourgeoisie – the financiers, bankers, industrialists and manufacturers – were often wealthier than the land-owning nobility. The *petite bourgeoisie* were lower down the scale: lawyers, accountants, master craftsmen, shop-owners.

Merchants were often the best educated, wealthiest and most active of the king's subjects. In 1783, Mercier commented that,

The distance which separates the rich from other citizens is growing daily and poverty becomes more insupportable at the sight of the astonishing progress of luxury which tires the view of the poor. Hatred grows more bitter and the state is divided into two classes: the greedy and insensitive and the murmuring malcontents.¹⁵

As soon as a merchant grew rich, he invested in land, the very wealthy acquiring country estates, often with a title attached, while successful tradesmen tended to buy houses within their town or patches of land just outside. The very wealthiest 'lived nobly,' on the proceeds of investments or revenues from land. Some acquired nobility through venal office: more than 3700 offices had titles attached and for these titles to become hereditary, a family had to hold it for more than two generations. The other way for a bourgeois family to acquire a title was through marriage. Daughters of wealthy financiers were often welcome brides for the sons of impoverished noblemen. George Rudé, however, points to a growing frustration within the upper bourgeoisie, particularly those engaged in manufacturing. Rudé argues that,

The cause of the conflict had its roots deep in the old regime: while colonial trade, land values and luxury spending had enormously increased ... capital investment and expansion of manufacture were everywhere impeded by restrictions imposed by privileged corporations, feudal landowners and government ... [affecting] the freedom to hire labour, the freedom to produce and the freedom to buy and sell.¹⁶

ACTIVITY

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

What does George Rudé (see above) suggest were the key causes of the French Revolution? What economic factors does he see as most significant?

Urban Workers

Urban workers were those who made their living working in the cities and towns as servants, labourers or industrial workers. Textile manufacturing was the largest industry: wool in Amiens, Abbeville, Sedan; cotton in Rouen and Elbeuf; silk in Nîmes and Lyon. Most of the spinning and weaving was done in peasant households around the town centres, with the towns serving as market places. Most urban workers were unskilled and therefore poor, forming a cheap labour force. It was difficult to become a skilled craftsman, because to acquire the skills

15 Mercier, *Tableau de Paris 1783–89*, 23.

16 George Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 33.

meant training under a master and most trades recruited from their own family or from families they knew. It took five years before an apprentice could become a journeyman (paid a daily wage) and enter a guild. Domestic servants were probably the largest single occupational group in towns and cities, making up five to seven per cent of the urban population. They appeared relatively well-off compared with the general population, receiving food, board and wages; on the other hand, they were not allowed to have romantic relationships or get married, they worked whatever hours were demanded by the family and lived almost totally within the household at the beck and call of their employers. Unskilled workers lived very poorly, particularly affected by the three-fold increase in prices over the century.

In the winter of 1788–89, poor harvests were followed by a particularly severe winter, leading to great economic hardship. The price of a two-kilogram loaf of bread rose to twelve sous on 8 November 1788 and was 14.5 sous by 1 February 1789.¹⁷ By July 1789 Arthur Young was writing,

Everything conspires to render the present period in France critical. The want of bread is terrible: accounts arrive every minute from the provinces of riots and disturbances, and calling in the military. The prices reported are the same as I found at Abbeville and Amiens – 5 sous a pound (500 grams) for white bread and 3 1/2 to 4 for the common sort, eaten by the poor: these rates are beyond their faculties, and occasion great misery.¹⁸

For those living in towns, it was also a subsistence existence; this relied, like the peasant economy, on the cheap labour of women and children. Death rates were high, because towns were unsanitary and children were poorly fed. To this misery was added the plight of thousands of peasants who came to the cities in the hope of finding work. In 1774 a parish priest in Normandy had described the results:

Day labourers, journeymen and all those whose occupation does not provide for much more than food and clothing are the ones who make beggars. As young men they work and when by their work they have got decent clothing and something to pay their wedding costs, they marry, raise a first child, have much trouble raising two and if a third comes along their work is no longer enough for food, and the expense. At such time, they do not hesitate to take up a beggar's staff and take to the road.¹⁹

For poor women, prostitution was often the only answer to destitution, although almost inevitably it led to disease or death. In the 1760s, it was estimated that there were 25 000 prostitutes in Paris alone. Prostitution often followed from a pregnancy brought about when the woman was a household servant, leading to her dismissal. Another consequence of poverty was abandoned children – by the 1780s, perhaps 40 000 per year.

The failure of crops brought additional misery to peasants and urban workers in the form of starvation: without grain, there was nothing to sell and no bread

17 Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution*.

18 Arthur Young, cited in Dwyer and McPhee, *The French Revolution and Napoleon*, 21.

19 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 14.

DID YOU KNOW?

Before the food crisis of 1788–89, a master craftsman would have spent thirty per cent of his income on flour or bread, a skilled worker forty per cent and an urban labourer up to sixty per cent.

Conduite des filles de joie à la Salpêtrière, Étienne Jaurat, oil on canvas, 1757. Depicts prostitutes being escorted to Salpêtrière hospital (prison).





to be baked by the peasants; for the urban workers, crop failures meant rises in prices for foodstuffs and unskilled peasant workers moving into towns and competing for employment. In the cities, bread riots led by angry women called on the king to control prices so that poor people could eat.

ACTIVITY

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

What were the major grievances of urban workers? How were they affected by the poor harvest of the winter of 1788–89?

Peasants

There were approximately twenty-two million peasants in France prior to the revolution, holding around thirty-two per cent of the land. They carried the bulk of the tax burden, including taxes paid to the king, the tithe to the Church and feudal dues to the lord (*seigneur*). For most peasants, life was a continual battle to gain a living from farming. In bad seasons, the battle was lost; good seasons would yield a small surplus. Bad harvests meant shortages of food for the peasants and their animals and in the very worst years, starvation. Most peasants did not own land or owned an amount too small to support a family. They usually worked land belonging to someone else – their *seigneur*, the Church or other local land-owner. Around seventy-five per cent of the rented land in France was leased to peasants, with the owner providing the seed grain and the peasant providing labour and tools and handing over a proportion of the crop. There was also some communal land, where animals could be grazed or wood gathered. Scarcity of food was a common feature of peasant life and it has been estimated that around 250 000 people were vagrants, shifting from one community to another in search of food. Even those working the land had to find additional sources of income, perhaps hiring themselves out seasonally as labourers, setting up a small cottage industry or sending some members of the family to places where work was thought to be more readily available.

The king's government was not indifferent to the position of the peasants. The grain trade was regulated and stocks of grain were kept to offset the effects of bad harvests. This could be distributed to the poor by the king's orders. The king was, in theory, the 'father' of his people and it was his duty to see that they were not over-taxed and were not exploited by their landlords. However, this duty was more of an ideal than a reality and the peasants' needs were usually subordinated to the needs of the state.

In addition, it was the peasant who bore the brunt of the taxation burden. In 1766, Turgot, the royal Intendant (royally appointed administrator) for Limousin, estimated that the peasants in his district were paying some fifty to sixty per cent of the gross value of their produce in direct taxation to the Crown. While this was heavier than in other areas, he did not believe that it was generally much lighter in the rest of France. No peasant was exempt from taxes unless he was destitute. Only peasants paid the land tax (*taille*) and laboured on the roads for the *corvée*. In addition they had to pay the salt tax (*gabelle*), the head tax (*capitation*), and the *vingtième* or twentieth tax. Added to these, of course, were all the feudal dues owed to the *seigneur* as well as tithes to be paid to the Church. While there were

some well-off peasants, for most life was extremely hard.

The feudal heritage of France was an increasing source of political tension by the late eighteenth century.

The system of laws and privileges governing the provinces made the development of a national market almost impossible, its inefficiencies frustrating the physiocrats (those encouraging wealth through farm labour) and the bourgeoisie who sought a more rational system of laws and taxes. The peasants were overtaxed and impoverished, resenting both the taxes paid to the monarch and feudal dues. The twin systems of heredity and privilege created a corporate society which

was, in itself, the source of growing conflict. Within the Church, the lower clergy were frustrated by a system which placed worldly men in positions of spiritual authority, as elevation into the clergy increasingly became a way of providing an income for the offspring of noble families. Moreover, the system of awarding multiple benefices to individuals made some clerics extremely wealthy while denying others the opportunity of promotion. Within the high nobility (the *noblesse d'épée*) the effort to maintain wealth became itself a burden. With the king as the dispenser of appointments, it was necessary to be within his circle to gain favour and this life involved high expenditure. Poor nobles saw rich merchants' lifestyles as insulting to their birth: the noble should be superior in wealth as well as status and without wealth, the nobleman could not maintain his superiority. The rich bourgeoisie was equally insulted to be ranked within the Third Estate, alongside the poorest peasant and worker. There was, overall, a lack of rationality in the system of privilege: nobles were lightly taxed because of their feudal role as defenders of the kingdom, yet the king now had a professional army. Moreover, regardless of their birth, intelligence or expertise, unless they were part of the king's ministry the nobles could influence the king's decisions only by influence or intrigue. Peasants, urban workers and the bourgeoisie bore the burden of supporting the kingdom, but with no control over how tax money was spent, no representation in any elected body and with no accountability from the king and his ministers as to how money was spent. New ideas were also shaping a vision of a society which would be different, a new start which would order society in a different and more egalitarian way: Enlightenment ideas and the 'American spirit' offered a glimpse of a new society without the inequalities and injustices of the old.



The Baker's Cart, oil on canvas, Jean Michelin, 1656. Image depicting French peasants.

PEASANT GRIEVANCES

What were the key problems facing peasants in France before the revolution? What proportion of their income went to taxes?

ACTIVITY

CAUSES OF REVOLUTION

Identify and explain the long-term causes of revolution in France by 1789, such as:

1. Political causes, e.g. Who had power, who wanted more power?
2. Social causes, e.g. Who belonged to which group? How much status did they enjoy? How were privileges conferred? To what extent could people improve their social status?
3. Economic causes, e.g. Which taxes applied to which group(s)? How did people create public and private wealth? What state were the agricultural and manufacturing sectors in?

Compare your responses with those of other students and create a master list of long-term causes of revolution.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL LIFE

After reading about the economy and social structure of France under the old regime, create a table like the one below and fill it in.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL LIFE UNDER THE OLD REGIME

	BY FIRST ESTATE	BY SECOND ESTATE	BY THIRD ESTATE
Benefits enjoyed	i) The Catholic Church ii) Upper clergy iii) Lower clergy	i) <i>Noblesse d'épée</i> ii) <i>Noblesse de court</i> iii) <i>Noblesse de robe</i>	i) Bourgeoisie ii) Urban workers iii) Peasants
Hardships faced	i) The Catholic Church ii) Upper clergy iii) Lower clergy	i) <i>Noblesse d'épée</i> ii) <i>Noblesse de court</i> iii) <i>Noblesse de robe</i>	i) Bourgeoisie ii) Urban workers iii) Peasants
Aspirations / grievances expressed by 1789	i) The Catholic Church ii) Upper clergy iii) Lower clergy	i) <i>Noblesse d'épée</i> ii) <i>Noblesse de court</i> iii) <i>Noblesse de robe</i>	i) Bourgeoisie ii) Urban workers iii) Peasants

CONSTRUCTING AN ARGUMENT

Write a 600–800 word essay on one of the topics below. Your essay should include an introduction, paragraphs supported by evidence from primary sources and historical interpretations, a conclusion and a bibliography.

Topics:

- 'Under the old regime, the Church divided, rather than united, the people of France.' Discuss.
- To what extent was social mobility possible within the rigid structures of the *ancien regime*?
- To what extent had France modernised – politically, socially and economically – by the 1780s? To what extent was the Bourbon dynasty in a position to address the difficulties facing France at that time?
- Compare and contrast two different historical interpretations on the long-term causes of the French Revolution.

BANKRUPTCY AND THE NEED FOR REFORM

THE FOREIGN DEBT

Over the eighteenth century, the French monarchy had consistently spent more than its annual income and the major cost had been foreign wars. From 1740 to 1748, France had been engaged in the War of Austrian Succession. This was followed by the Seven Years' War (1756–63) in which France suffered a bitter defeat by Britain. As a result of this war, France lost almost all of its empire, especially its territories in India and Northern America, while Britain had destroyed the French navy and merchant marines.

The Comte de Vergennes, foreign minister to both Louis XV and Louis XVI, reflected French feeling when he said,

The humiliating peace of 1763 shows the ascendancy which England has gained over France and ... how much that arrogant nation enjoys the pleasure of having humiliated us.²⁰

Thus, when in 1776 the American colonists rose in revolution against Britain in the War of Independence, France supported the colonists. From 1778, France sent soldiers and equipment to America, as well as providing financial support, and this added greatly to the burden of debt already carried by the French state.

One of Louis XVI's earliest decisions as a twenty-two-year-old monarch was to appoint Jacques Necker as Comptroller-General of the nation's finances. This was an unusual appointment because Necker was Swiss by birth, a commoner by estate and a Protestant. His passport to power, says William Doyle, was 'his opulence as a banker'.²¹ In February 1781, Necker, published the first public account of the financial situation of the French state. Produced with the consent of the king, the *Compte Rendu au Roi* sold as rapidly as a popular novel, with 20 000 copies sold within a few weeks. It was then translated into Dutch, German, Danish, English and Italian. Thus, the seemingly prosperous state of the finances of France became a matter of public knowledge, as Necker had intended. It was this reputation as a financial genius that led, in part, to the acceptance of the *Compte Rendu* as a true indication of France's financial state.

The *Compte Rendu* showed ordinary revenues to be exceeding expenditure by over ten million livres, even after three years of French involvement in the American War of Independence and no increases in taxation. Thus, France's accounts appeared to have a healthy surplus. The *Compte Rendu*, however, did not include a record of the extraordinary accounts, where the real cost of the war was recorded. Had it done so, France's bankers would not have been so eager to lend money for the war: the war account was in deep deficit. As it was, Necker's reputation for financial management grew even greater.

Necker certainly instituted some fiscal reforms in the attempt to balance the French budget. He reorganised central accounting procedures and began restructuring taxation, thus taking steps towards establishing a central treasury.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Marquis de Lafayette, a young French nobleman, was the first to volunteer to fight in the American War of Independence. His courage and idealism earned him the name 'George Washington's godson.' Just after the United States entered World War I in July 1917, Colonel Charles E. Stanton visited Lafayette's grave in Paris, saluted, and declared 'Lafayette, we are here.' The debt was thus repaid.



ASSESSMENT TASK: COMPTE RENDU

²⁰ Cited in Alberto Morales, *East Meets West*, Vol.1 (1760–1815) (Hong Kong: Macmillan), 160.

²¹ Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 29.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Italian priest Abbé Galiani said that 'All France's wealth is concentrated on its frontiers, all its big opulent cities are on its edges and the interior is fearfully weak, empty and thin.' While this was an exaggeration, those port cities trading with Europe and the French colonies grew rapidly in size and wealth during the eighteenth century.

He commissioned a nation-wide survey of venal offices, in order to determine how many there were and how much the Crown was receiving from them. Once this was accomplished venal officers could be replaced by salaried officials, who would be more accountable to the Crown. Necker also set up provincial assemblies of land-owners to offset the influence of the *parlements* (high law courts). However, the American War was a huge drain on France's resources and Necker had to finance it entirely by loans. Between 1777 and May 1781 he raised 520 million livres in loans, with generous terms and high interest rates. The interest on these loans was charged to ordinary expenditure.

After Necker's departure from office in 1781, his successor, Joly de Fleury, was forced to raise another 252 million livres in loans and to increase taxation. Then, between 1783 and 1787, Fleury's replacement, Charles-Alexandre de Calonne, borrowed another 653 million livres, much of it in short-term loans. By the time the American War of Independence ended in 1783, the conflict had cost France over one billion livres,²² and this did not include debts from the earlier Seven Years' War and War of Austrian Succession. In addition, the *vingtième* (twentieth) tax, levied for the duration of the war and three years after, would come to an end in 1786.

Thus, by 1786, France was facing bankruptcy. The income of the state in 1775 totalled 377.2 million livres, but expenditure was 411.4 million, making a deficit of some 34.2 million livres. Servicing of the debts was alone consuming 37.5 per cent of revenue.²³ In 1786, there would be a deficit of 112 million livres, almost a quarter of the total income. In addition, almost half of the income for 1787 had already been spent in advance, by taking out short-term loans in anticipation of tax revenue and, over the next ten years, there would also be a heavy burden of debt redemption from the American War. Calonne had no alternative but to institute major tax reform. In correspondence with Necker, for example, he noted that,

it is impossible to tax further, ruinous to be always borrowing and not enough to confine ourselves to measures of economy ... Ordinary ways are unable to lead us to our goal ... The only effective remedy, the only means of managing finally to put the finances truly in order, must consist in reviving the entire state by recasting all that is unsound in its constitution.²⁴

Like the former comptrollers-general, Necker and Fleury, Calonne recognised that a taxation system which exempted the wealthy aristocracy and the Church was not sustainable. Also, the privileges accorded to the *pays d'état* (border provinces) and the various other bodies had created an overly complex system which was prone to corruption. At the heart of the problem, Calonne believed, was the system of privilege.

CALONNE'S PLAN FOR A FAIRER TAX SYSTEM

On 20 August 1786, Calonne presented his Plan for the Improvement of the Finances to Louis XVI. He proposed that the three *vingtièmes* (the 'twentieth' tax imposed in time of war) be removed altogether, that the tax privileges traditionally held by various groups be abolished, and that a new direct tax be created, a 'territorial subvention,' or tax on all land-owners without any exemptions. This would be evaluated according to the land-owner's income and be paid

22 McPhee, *The French Revolution*, 35; Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 68.

23 Colin Jones, cited in Mark Fielding and Margot Morecombe, *The Spirit of Change: France in Revolution* (Australia: McGraw Hill, 2001), 20.

24 Letter to Jacques Necker, April 1787, cited in Fielding and Morecombe, *The Spirit of Change*, 18.

25 Cited in Fielding and Morecombe, *The Spirit of Change*, 18.

26 Doyle, *Origins of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 96.

27 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 69.

DOCUMENT

CHARLES-ALEXANDRE DE CALONNE, LETTER TO JACQUES NECKER, 1787

[The system of privilege] alone infects everything, harms everything and prevents any improvements ... a Kingdom whose provinces are foreign one to another; where multiple internal frontiers separate and divide the subjects of the same sovereign; where certain regions are totally freed from taxes, the full weight of which is borne by other regions; where the richest class is the least taxed; where privilege prevents all stability ... Such a state is inevitably a very imperfect kingdom, full of corrupt practices and impossible to govern well. In effect, the result is that general administration is excessively complicated, public contributions unequally spread, trade hindered by countless restrictions ... agriculture crushed by overwhelming burdens [and] the state's finances impoverished.²⁵

SOURCE ANALYSIS**ACTIVITY**

Read Calonne's letter to Necker and complete the tasks below.

1. Explain what Calonne means when he says, 'certain regions are totally freed from taxes, the full weight of which is borne by other regions.'
2. Describe how Calonne conveys the message that the system of privilege is unsustainable.
3. Find statistical support for the statement that agriculture was 'crushed by overwhelming burdens,' and for the description of state finances as 'impoverished.'
4. Using the source and your own knowledge, explain why increasing taxes on the Third Estate to raise revenue was not an option for Calonne.
5. Evaluate the significance of France's financial state as a cause of the revolution. In your response, refer to the source and to other views of the revolution.

in produce, thus moving the burden of tax from the Third Estate to a more uniform system which would also tax the wealthy, whatever their birth. Calonne anticipated that this tax alone would bring in revenue of around thirty-five million livres.²⁶ The tax would be assessed and collected through provincial assemblies comprised of land-owners, working in co-operation with the Intendants of the various provinces. In addition, the stamp tax on all documents would be extended and the *corvée*, the forced labour on the roads, would be replaced with a direct tax. The nobility were to be excused from the *capitation* and remained exempt from the *taille*.

Finally, Calonne attempted to stimulate trade within France by abolishing internal tax barriers and removing controls over the grain trade.²⁷ With the removal of internal customs duties and of fixed prices for grain, France would move towards the creation of a national market and this, in turn, would stimulate France's economy. The removal of the *corvée* and its substitution by a monetary tax would be another encouragement to the peasants to produce more. In the meantime, while these reforms were put in place, Calonne needed to borrow still more money until the new revenues began to flow in. The combination of the new tax, increased



Charles-Alexandre de Calonne, Comptroller-General of France (1783–1 May 1788), Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1784.

DID YOU KNOW?

Loménie de Brienne, Archbishop of Toulouse, was said to be a churchman for practical rather than spiritual reasons. When his name was put forward for a position in the capital, Louis XVI asked, 'But isn't it necessary that the Archbishop of Paris should at least believe in God?'

efficiencies in management and on-going debt redemption would, he believed, avert the looming financial disaster.

In order to borrow more, Calonne had to convince the bankers that his reforms would pass into law and to do this he needed to demonstrate that they had support from the most powerful groups in France. He knew that his plan would face formidable opposition from the nobility and the upper hierarchy of the French Catholic Church, both of which were financially and socially advantaged by the system of privilege. Thus, Calonne proposed that Louis XVI convoke an Assembly of Notables. As in 1626, the year the Notables had last been summoned by their sovereign, the members of the Assembly would be nominated by the king and would comprise:

the principal and most enlightened persons of the kingdom, to whom the king deigns to communicate his views and whom he invites to apprise [tell] him of their reflections ... People of weight, worthy of the public's confidence and such that their approbation [support] would powerfully influence general opinion.²⁸

Calonne's thinking was that if the hand-picked upper nobility and princes of the Church lent their support, the display of unity and loyalty to the monarchy would both reassure lenders that their money was safe and would persuade the Parlement of Paris that the plan should be registered without protest.²⁹ He also calculated that the status of the members of the Assembly of Notables would impress the Parlement of Paris, the high court whose responsibility it was to register the king's edicts. The nobles and prelates (churchmen of high office) chosen by Calonne would be unlikely to challenge the king's authority and thus the tax reforms should gain their support. With both Church and nobility endorsing the plan, the magistrates of the Parlement would give a smooth passage to it. Yet this was a risky procedure, as Peter McPhee has pointed out, because the nobility already felt its position to be under threat from two sources, the monarchy itself and the rising bourgeois class beneath it. More specifically McPhee observed that:

The entrenched hostility of most nobles towards fiscal and social reform was generated by two long-term factors: first, the long-term pressures of royal state-making, which reduced the nobility's autonomy; and, secondly, by the challenge from a wealthier, larger and more critical bourgeoisie and an openly disaffected peasantry towards aristocratic conceptions of property, hierarchy and social order.³⁰

On 29 December 1786, the list of Notables was announced. There were to be 144 nominated members: seven princes of the blood, fourteen bishops, thirty-six noblemen, twelve members of the Council of State and Intendants, thirty-eight magistrates, twelve representatives of the *pays d'état*, and twenty-five mayors.³¹ Among them was Queen Marie Antoinette's favourite, the ambitious Loménie de Brienne, Archbishop of Toulouse, and the Marquis de Lafayette, hero of the American War. Although over ninety per cent of the population belonged to the Third Estate, this group remained largely unrepresented, with fewer than thirty members drawn from the common people.³²

28 J. Egret, *La Prérevolution Française 1787–1788* (Paris, 1962), cited in Doyle, *Origins of the French Revolution*, 97.

29 The Parlement of Paris registered the king's laws. If magistrates were not happy with a law they could exercise their right of remonstrance by returning it to the king's ministers for redrafting (though they could not technically block it). They often cited the interests of the people when challenging a law.

30 McPhee, *The French Revolution*, 35.

31 Doyle, *Origins of the French Revolution*, 98.

32 A. Goodwin, *The French Revolution* (UK: Hutchinson University Library, 1970). Peter McPhee, by contrast, says that 'only ten were non-noble,' *The French Revolution*, 35.

ACTIVITY

BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

Discuss the beliefs and attitudes underpinning the nobility's opposition to social and fiscal reform in 1786.

REACTIONS TO CALONNE'S PLAN

THE ASSEMBLY OF NOTABLES

The success of Calonne's plan depended on two things: the support of the king and the compliance of the Notables. Neither of these proved to be reliable. When the Notables convened at Versailles in February, Louis XVI was personally distracted by the illness of his fourth child, Princess Sophie, who was to die of tuberculosis in the summer of that year, and Calonne himself was ill. Nor did the Notables come in a compliant mood, ready to approve whatever was suggested. Indeed, William Doyle has argued that 'in a controversial career Calonne had made many enemies and they were well represented in the Assembly ... The first president of the Parlement of Paris was ... a personal enemy.'³³ Doyle has suggested, therefore, that 'if Calonne's proposals had come from anybody else there is little doubt that the Notables would have welcomed them more warmly.'³⁴ In the wider community there was also much suspicion about Calonne's motives. In the attempt to reassure creditors that France's finances were healthy, he had spent lavishly on public works, including the beautification of royal residences. Then, there was the extravagant lifestyle of the court at Versailles – were the people being asked to pay for the entertainment of the rich? Finally, there were questions to be answered about Calonne's management of the finances: how was it possible that the surplus of ten million livres under Necker had become an enormous debt by 1787? Was it not due to poor management by Calonne?



The Palace of Versailles c. 1668. Oil on canvas. Pierre Patel

Calonne presented a persuasive argument. The new land tax would simplify the taxation system. Land-owners' liabilities would take into account fluctuations in the seasons and the personal wealth of the land-owner. The local provincial assemblies, representing the land-owners, would help assess and collect the taxes. The eradication of customs duties and the *corvée* and their replacement by a single tax on imports would help create a more efficient national economy.

THE ARISTOCRATIC REVOLT

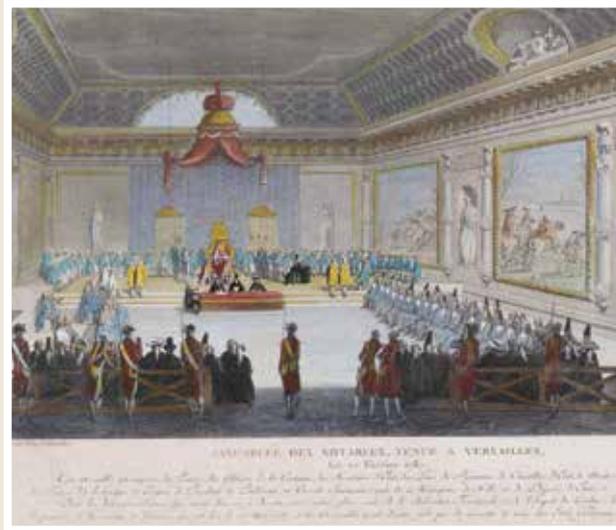
Most of Calonne's proposals met with the approval of the Notables, subject to some changes. The Notables accepted the idea of local assemblies, stating only that the nobility and clergy should be guaranteed a fixed proportion of seats and that the decisions of the assemblies should not be able to be overturned by the Intendant. They agreed to the changes to the *corvée* but went further than Calonne, suggesting that the tax be applied to all as a public works tax, not just to those who had been previously liable. They also agreed to the elimination of internal customs charges.

33 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 71.

34 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 71.

THE ASSEMBLY OF NOTABLES

Michael Adcock highlights the concept of representation in the French Revolution, as shown in the visual arts of the period. 'Representation' is the meeting of key people to represent the wishes of society.³⁵ Adcock has analysed this engraving of the Assembly of Notables to show how political representation under the old regime was 'a highly formalised and controlled process.'³⁶ The arrangement of those taking part was carefully worked out according to the precedent set in 1626 when the last Assembly had met. Simon Schama has included the floor plan used in 1787 in his account.³⁷



The Assembly of Notables, engraving by Berthault and Prieur, 1787.

35 Michael Adcock and Graeme Worrall, *The French Revolution: A Student Handbook* (Melbourne: HTAV, 1997), 40.

36 Adcock and Worrall, *The French Revolution*.

37 Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1989), 239.

However, when it came to the question of giving up their fiscal (taxation) privileges, there was widespread dissent. The bishops argued that they could not give up the Church's right to self-assessment of tax without first obtaining the assent of the Assembly of the Clergy. The magistrates said they had to consult their fellow magistrates in the courts. Some of the Notables wanted the new 'territorial subvention' to be assessed differently and paid as a monetary tax, rather than in produce. The largest impediment, however, was that the Notables, while declaring themselves in favour of tax reform, refused to approve the new tax unless they were fully informed of the state of the finances.

Lafayette wrote to America's George Washington,

We were not the representatives of the Nation but ... we declared that altho' we had no right to impede, it was our right not to advise unless we thought the measures were proper and we could not think of new taxes unless we knew the returns of the economy.³⁸

This demand to see the royal accounts put the Notables in conflict with Louis. As an absolute monarch, Louis was the sole authority in the state, as his predecessor Louis XIV had indicated when he said '*L'état, c'est moi*' ('The State, it is Me'). His authority was not subject to the consent of his people. The Notables, in demanding access to the full accounts, were effectively, claiming to be the 'representatives of the nation.' In March, Leblanc de Castillon from the Parlement of Aix claimed that the Assembly lacked the power to approve new taxation: this right belonged to an Estates-General representing the all of the people.³⁹

Louis XVI dismissed Calonne and appointed his rival, Archbishop Loménie de Brienne, as finance minister. Brienne, however, was not able to negotiate any agreement with the Assembly of Notables and it was dissolved in May 1787.

38 O. Browning, ed., *The Letters of Lafayette to George Washington 1777–1799*, cited in Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 72.

39 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 72.

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Why did the Notables challenge Calonne's plan?

Albert Soboul claimed that 'the Assembly of Notables, by definition a group of aristocrats, met ... and after criticizing the planned tax, demanded a statement of the Treasury's accounts.'⁴⁰ The paralysis of the monarchy that resulted from the quarrel between the King and the nobility led to revolution:

The bourgeoisie ... now took over. Its aim was revolutionary: to destroy aristocratic privilege and to establish legal and civic equality in a society that would no longer be composed of orders and constituted bodies. But the bourgeoisie intended to stay within the law. Before long, however, it was carried forward by the pressure of the masses⁴¹

Similarly, George Rudé wrote, 'The Notables refused to endorse ministerial reforms because their own cherished fiscal immunities were threatened.'⁴²

Simon Schama's interpretation is radically different. He has claimed that 'though they are usually dismissed as the tail-end of the old regime, with respect to political self-consciousness the Notables were the first revolutionaries.'⁴³ He based this assessment on three main points: that the Assembly was 'marked by a conspicuous acceptance of principles like fiscal equality,' that the 'social personality of the notables as landowners and agrarian businessmen gave them a strong sense of the redundancy of privilege,' and that they 'matched Calonne's radicalism step by step and in many cases even advanced beyond him.' In supporting this argument Schama used this analogy:

It was rather as though [Calonne] had set out to drive an obstinate mule with a very heavy wagon, only to find that the mule was a racehorse and had galloped into the distance, leaving the rider in the ditch.⁴⁴

In Schama's view, the nobility and clergy of France were not only willing to bring an end to their own privileges, but were more radical and egalitarian than Calonne could possibly have anticipated.

David Andress has struck a balance between these two positions. He has acknowledged that the Notables 'rejected both the methods of the past and the state's [monarchy's] solutions with almost one voice.'⁴⁵ While Calonne interpreted this as the continued resistance of 'privilege' to reform, Andress has claimed that 'much in the deliberations of the Notables suggested they, too, were finding new ways of thinking.'

Andress, like Schama, has suggested that the Notables were assessing matters in the practical terms of land-owners. The Notables spent much time raising the issue of excessive state expenditure, which in itself was a method of criticising the court and its excesses. This, Andress has asserted, became a method of expressing a new phenomenon in political life, public opinion, which by 1788, was to explode in a way that would have been unthinkable under a securely entrenched absolute divine right monarchy.⁴⁶

While the Notables' appeal to 'rights' and 'public opinion' against 'ministerial despotism' both accentuated the wider debate about citizenship and taxation, it finally exposed them once it became evident (in September 1788) that they had no intention of renouncing the privileges of a corporate social order.⁴⁷

40 Albert Soboul, *A Short History of the French Revolution 1789-1799* (University of California Press, 1977), 37.

41 Soboul, *A Short History of the French Revolution*, 38.

42 Rudé, *The French Revolution* (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 8.

43 Schama, *Citizens*, 245.

44 Schama, *Citizens*, 244.

45 David Andress, *French Society in Revolution 1789-1799* (Manchester University Press, 1999), 37.

46 Andress, *French Society in Revolution*, 39.

47 Andress, *French Society in Revolution*, 42.

Étienne Charles de Loménie de Brienne (1727–1794), Principal Minister and head of the Committee of Finance between May 1787 and August 1788.

ACTIVITY

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Compare and contrast the views expressed by Rudé, Soboul, Schama and Andress about the role and motives of the Notables. What might account for the different interpretations?



BRIENNE'S ATTEMPTED COMPROMISE

Regardless of the objections of the Assembly of Notables, the bankruptcy crisis meant the government could not abandon Calonne's reforms. In July 1787 Brienne proposed a new plan which would retain the land tax but which modified Calonne's other reforms. With the Notables dissolved, Brienne took the tax decrees directly to the Parlement of Paris for registration.

The Parlement of Paris was the sovereign court of appeal, one of whose roles was to register royal edicts so that they became law. It was the most important of the thirteen appeal courts. In the eighteenth century, the aristocracy monopolised all the highest offices in the land, from the

government and military to the Church and judiciary, so the magistrates of the Parlement of Paris were all members of the Second Estate, either by birth or because they had paid to acquire the office of magistrate (a venal office). While some of the provincial *parlements* insisted that only *noblesse de robe* could be appointed as magistrates, Sutherland states that this was not so with the Parlement of Paris. Rather, The Parlement of Paris, whose jurisdiction covered one-third of the country, never bothered to restrict its entry and remained amazingly open to the rich men of banking, high finance and government service, most of whom were noble already.⁴⁸

The role of the Parlement of Paris in registering edicts was also to scrutinise (verify) them, in order to determine whether they accorded with France's ancient constitution, that is, with previous laws. If difficulties appeared, the *parlementaires* had the right to remonstrate, that is to point out any defects in the new legislation and return it to the king for reconsideration and, perhaps, redrafting. However, they did not have the power to reject the king's edicts, only to delay them. It was, according to William Doyle, a significant power:

By deferring registration pending the king's reply, they were able to delay and obstruct government policy, and since the death of Louis XV, they had developed this technique into a major vehicle of opposition.⁴⁹

Furthermore, by publishing the remonstrance, the *parlementaires* could rally public opposition to the legislation and, as a last resort, go on strike or even make a mass resignation. In the end, however, the French king was an absolute monarch. In spite of any tactics the Parlement might use, he could, through a *lit de justice*, come to the court in person to witness the reading of a royal command to force the registration because, as the supreme source of justice, his presence

DID YOU KNOW?

The Parlement of Paris had jurisdiction over a third of French land and two thirds of French people, making it the most powerful court in the country.

DID YOU KNOW?

Louis XVI was in favour of inoculation against smallpox but as the Parlement of Paris opposed it, the public was swayed by the latter.

48 D.M.G. Sutherland, *France 1789–1815 Revolution and Counter-Revolution* (London: Fontana, 1985), 16.

49 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 17.

cancelled the authority of the magistrates. Increasingly, however, the *parlements* attempted to convert the right of remonstrance into a right to veto (disallow) royal legislation. This was based on the argument that the king held his throne and his legitimacy as a monarch from fundamental laws which were unchangeable. The function of the *parlements* was to ‘maintain the citizens in the enjoyment of rights which the laws assure them.’⁵⁰ This claim placed the *parlements* as guardians of the rights of the people, defenders of both their liberty and their money. Indeed, the *parlements* argued that they had a special right to scrutinise new taxes:

The infraction of the sacred right of verification [of laws] simultaneously violates the rights of the Nation and the rights of legislation; it follows that the collection of a tax which has not been verified is a crime against the Constitution.⁵¹

These claims were more strongly made in theory than in practice. For the most part, the *parlements* accommodated the monarch’s policies with little protest. Rabaut Saint-Etienne, later to be a deputy to the Estates-General, said the nation saw the *parlements* ‘as a barrier to despotism of which everyone was weary,’ while the Abbé Morellet wrote that they let the people ‘be overwhelmed [with taxes] for over a century [permitting government] all its waste and its loans which it knew all about.’⁵²

50 Sutherland, *France 1789–1815*, 23.

51 Sutherland, *France 1789–1815*.

52 Sutherland, *France 1789–1815*, 24.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Why would Calonne have expected difficulties in registering the tax edicts?

ACTIVITY

Lit de Justice Held in the Parliament at the Majority of Louis XV (1710–74), 22 February 1723, oil on canvas, Nicolas Lancret, Louvre, Paris.



THE PARLEMENT OF PARIS AS THE CHAMPION OF THE PEOPLE

Brienne's tax reforms were presented to the Parlement of Paris, sitting as a Court of Peers: that is, some of the dukes and peers of France sat alongside the magistrates of the Parlement, making it a much more self-confident body, especially as some peers had also been part of the Assembly of Notables. Instead of accepting the tax bills, on 2 July 1787 the Parlement rejected them, arguing that only the nation, assembled through an Estates-General, possessed the right to determine the need for tax reform. It was not, therefore, solely the prerogative of the monarch. Without the consent of the people, the Parlement would not consent to registration of the edicts. In the remonstrance presented by the Parlement, its position was clearly stated: 'The constitutional principle of the French monarchy was that taxes should be consented to by those who had to bear them.'⁵³

On 6 August 1787, Louis attempted to assert his absolute power through a *lit de justice*. The Parlement declared that such an action was invalid. The tension which emerged from this action was so great that on 15 August 1787 Louis exiled the

Parlement to Troyes. This decision encouraged popular uprisings against the monarchy, with many of the lower courts protesting against the king's action, supported by demonstrations in the streets and markets in support of the magistrates of the Paris Parlement. Ex-minister Guillaume de Lamoignon de Malesherbes, who supported the Parlement's stand, observed that:

The Parlement of Paris is, at the moment, but the echo of the public of Paris, and ... the public of Paris is that of the entire nation. It is the *parlement* which speaks, because it is the only body that has the right to speak; but let there be no illusion that if any assembly of citizens had this right, it would make the same use of it. So we are dealing with the entire nation; it is to the nation that the king responds when he responds to the Parlement.⁵⁴

What was at the heart of the dispute? The bankruptcy crisis and Calonne's decision to call on the Assembly of Notables demonstrated that the monarchy's power was, at least momentarily, weak. This allowed the aristocracy represented in the Notables and the Parlement of Paris to attempt to gain some of the power they had lost since the time of Louis XIV. The Parlement of Paris moved the struggle further along: while the Notables demanded the monarchy be responsible to the people

for the way it used taxation revenue, the Parlement was demanding that its right to register laws and edicts be recognised as the power to veto royal tax legislation if it did not have the consent of the nation. It claimed this power as the people's representatives in policy making. Thus, the Parlement appeared as the people's champions against the 'despotism' of the king's ministers. Absolute power was thus confronted by popular power.



Guillaume de Lamoignon de Malesherbes c. 1798.

53 Schama, *Citizens*, 264.

54 Malesherbes, cited in Doyle, *Origins of the French Revolution*, 107.

It was, perhaps because of this recognition that a truce was sought. In mid-September the magistrates and the king's minister reached a compromise: the Parlement would be recalled and Brienne's tax plan would be modified. The government withdrew the territorial subvention and the stamp tax, but retained the *vingtièmes*. This seemed to be a win for the Parlement. Certainly the magistrates' return to Paris was greeted as a triumph, although not by everybody.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Why was Brienne unable to register the tax reforms?
2. What was the fundamental issue in the dispute between Louis XVI and the Parlement of Paris? Who 'won' the dispute?

ACTIVITY

ABSOLUTISM IN ACTION: THE ROYAL SESSION

Among those who had hoped for political reform there was a sharp sense of disappointment. The provincial *parlements*, which had supported Paris, felt abandoned. Mirabeau and Lafayette, both peers who had supported the *parlements*, deplored the concessions to royal power and the Abbé Morellet wrote bitterly,

On whom would you have the nation rely today? The *parlements*, which defended it so badly, have again deserted it ... We need some bar to the repetition of abuses; we need an Estates-General or the equivalent. That is what people everywhere are saying.⁵⁵

Brienne was forced into a program of financial cutbacks and loans which, again, had to be authorised by the Parlement. He proposed borrowing 420 million livres between 1788 and 1792, to be used to pay off short-term debts due over the period, and promised in return that financial cut-backs would be imposed on the royal household, the military and the bureaucracy. In return for registration he made a series of concessions, including the calling of an Estates-General by 1792. The compromise, however, was doomed. Louis XVI's minister for justice, Chrétien François de Lamoignon, antagonised the magistrates by using the royal sitting (*séance royale*) on 19 November to reiterate the king's absolute authority. Lamoignon stated that,

Sovereign power in his kingdom belongs to the King alone ... He is accountable only to God for the exercise of supreme power ... The link that unites the king and the nation is by nature indissoluble ... The king is the sovereign ruler of the nation and is one with it ... Legislative power resides in the person of the sovereign, depending on and sharing with no-one.⁵⁶

Louis XVI then ordered that the loans be immediately registered, with discussion occurring only after the registration. William Doyle has reported that the Duc d'Orléans, head of the junior branch of the royal family and 'heir to a long tradition of obstructionism,' astonished everyone by protesting that this action was illegal.⁵⁷ Louis replied, 'That is of no importance to me ... It is legal because I will it.'⁵⁸

55 Morellet, cited in Sutherland, *France 1789–1815*, 30.

56 Lamoignon, cited in McPhee, *The French Revolution*, 36.

57 Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 80.

58 Sutherland, *France 1789–1815*, 31.

This led to outright rebellion. Doyle has written that ‘no reply could have been more catastrophic ... The king’s words turned what seemed destined to be a government triumph into a disaster.’⁵⁹ The next day, after three-and-a-half hours of debate, the Parlement of Paris refused to register the loan. D’Orléans and two of the leading magistrates were exiled to the country by *lettres de cachet*. Then the peers were refused the right to sit in the Parlement. It was, says William Doyle, ‘open war.’⁶⁰ The provincial *parlements* supported the magistrates, refusing in their turn to register the loans and condemning the use of *lettres de cachet* as illegal. In January 1788, Louis publicly stated the basis for his decision:

When I come to personally hold my *Parlement*, it is because I wish to hear a discussion of the law that I have brought with me and to learn more about it before I decide on its registration. This is what I did on November 19 last ... If, in my courts, my will was subject to the majority vote the monarchy would be nothing more than an aristocracy of magistrates, as adverse to the rights and interests of the nation as to those of the sovereign. Indeed, it would be a strange constitution that diminished the will of the King to the point that it is worth no more than the opinion of one of his officers, and requires that legislators have as many opinions as there are different decisions arising from the various courts of law in the kingdom.⁶¹

The split between the king and the Parlement of Paris widened. It was widely rumoured that the intention of the king’s ministers was to get rid of the Parlement altogether. Thus, the Parlement went on the offensive, condemning the forcible registration of the loans in November, forbidding tax collectors to apply the new taxes. On 3 May 1788 the Parlement issued a solemn declaration of what it regarded as the ‘fundamental laws of the realm,’ including ‘the right of the Nation freely to grant subsidies’ (taxes) through regular meetings of the Estates-General: ‘the right of the *Parlements* to register new laws; and the freedom of all Frenchmen from arbitrary arrest.’⁶² On 4 May it further responded to the king’s accusations by declaring,

The heir to the throne is designated by the law; the nation has its rights; the Peerage likewise; the Magistracy is irremovable; each province has its customs ... each subject his natural judges, each citizen his property; if he is poor, at least he has his liberty. Yet we dare to ask: which of these rights, which of these laws can stand up against the claims by your ministers in Your Majesty’s name?⁶³

Such a challenge to the king’s authority could not be tolerated. An order was made for the arrest of the magistrates involved, but when troops went to the Parlement, it refused to hand over the magistrates or to close its session. For eleven hours there was a stand-off. Finally, with soldiers surrounding the Palais de Justice (law court), the magistrates were arrested. On 8 May 1788, the king held another *lit de justice* where Brienne attempted to introduce a program of reforms, the most contentious of which was a proposal to replace the *parlements* with a new Plenary Court which would register royal decrees; this was designed to quell the rising tide of opposition to the monarchy. Although he also promised to establish a new central Treasury, introduce codification of the laws, reform the education system, extend religious tolerance to Protestants and Jews and develop a new and more efficient (but less costly) army, the message was clear. The Parlement of Paris and the provincial *parlements* were suspended. In the struggle between judicial power and the absolute monarchy, the monarchy had won, but only temporarily.

59 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 80.

60 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*.

61 Cited in M.J. Mavidal and M.E. Laurent, eds., *Archives Parlementaires de 1787 à 1860*, première série (1787–1799), second edition, 82 vols. (Paris: Dupont, 1879–1913): 1: 284.

62 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 81.

63 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*.

POPULAR MOVEMENTS: THE DAY OF TILES

Within a week the country was in uproar: the magistrates were hailed as defenders of the people's rights and there were protests and demonstrations demanding their recall. The provincial *parlements* refused to be dismissed and stood behind the Parlement of Paris. There were increasing demands for an Estates-General. In five provincial *parlements*, the magistrates were exiled through *lettres de cachet*. The *parlements* were supported in many places by craftsmen, wig and lace makers, domestic servants and other common people whose livelihoods would be threatened if the *parlements* were abolished. In Grenoble on 10 June 1788, the inhabitants of the town stood on the roofs of their houses to shower tiles on the soldiers below, who had come to arrest the magistrates. While one regiment of soldiers obeyed orders not to shoot, a second opened fire, killing two people. The governor's house was looted and the magistrates, in their red robes, were led back in triumph to the court. Simon Schama has described the Day of the Tiles as:

a three-fold revolution. It signified the breakdown of royal authority and the helplessness of military force in the face of sustained urban disorder. It warned the elite ... that there was an unpredictable price to be paid for their encouragement of riot and one that might very easily be turned against themselves. And most important of all, it delivered the initiative for further political action into the hands of a younger, more radical group.⁶⁴

Amongst this more radical group were Antoine-Pierre Barnave, a lawyer, and Jean-Joseph Mounier, the son of a draper, who were to make their mark upon the nation as deputies to the Estates-General in 1789.

There were riots in Paris, Rennes, Pau and Dijon, fuelled in part by the high price of food following crop failures. The nobility of Brittany sent a delegation to the king asking him to condemn his ministers as criminals, but they were arrested as they approached Paris and thrown into the Bastille. Hostile pamphlets – some 534 between May and September – were published, attacking the ministers. Even the clergy joined in the protests, refusing to pay more than a small *don gratuit* to Louis as a signal of their disapproval. On 5 July 1788, Brienne announced that the king would welcome submissions on the composition of an Estates-General. The 'aristocratic revolution' had succeeded.



Jean-Joseph Mounier.

BANKRUPTCY

The truth was, the king's government had little choice. There were only 400 000 livres left in the Treasury. This was, according to Simon Schama, 'enough money for the government to function for one afternoon.'⁶⁵ The government had already borrowed against 'anticipations' of future revenue and, on 13 July

⁶⁴ Schama, *Citizens*, 277.

⁶⁵ Schama, *Citizens*, 282.



1788, a massive hail storm had destroyed much of the grain harvest in the areas around Paris. Similar events around the country meant that tax revenues from the peasants would be much lower in the year to come.

Faced with an empty treasury and a tidal wave of protests, on 8 August Louis XVI announced the calling of an Estates-General for 1 May 1789 in an effort to initiate a return of confidence in the government. On 16 August, Louis' government was forced to suspend all payments to the bureaucracy and the army and for repayment of foreign debts. Brienne himself resigned on 24 August, having suggested that Necker be recalled as 'the only man I know who could restore the confidence of the people.'

ACTIVITIES

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. What had the Parlement of Paris hoped to achieve in refusing to register the tax reforms?
2. Why were tax revenues declining?

KEY IDEAS

Discuss the extent to which the people have rights in a state governed by an absolute monarchy. How is absolutism different from popular sovereignty?

THE HARVEST CRISIS

As unrest in the cities was unfolding, France's rural areas were experiencing turmoil of their own. France, essentially a rural society, had always been to some extent at the mercy of the elements, and the years leading up to 1789 were plagued by a series of natural disasters that culminated in a harvest crisis in the summers of 1788 and 1789.

Over a period of eight months in 1783 and 1784, Iceland experienced a series of volcanic eruptions, creating a dense ash cloud that hampered harvests across north-western Europe. In 1788 a severe hail storm destroyed apple crops in the north of France and olive crops in the south. However, it was wheat crops that sustained the greatest damage, as described by James Anderson:

Over vast regions of France, the storm was followed by drought, and the little that was left of the harvest was mostly parched and useless. The winter brought on the coldest spell in many years. It was said that birds froze in their nests. Rivers froze, watermills stopped working, and the little grain that remained could not be made into flour. Transportation came to a standstill in the deep snow that covered the ground in many areas as regions boiled down tree bark to make gruel. Provence was described by Mirabeau, in January 1789, as having been visited by the Exterminating Angel. Thousands of people froze to death, and many more died of hunger.⁶⁶

Worse still, the spring thaw that followed the bitter winter flooded fields and towns. Bread prices soared: in February 1789 a four-pound loaf of bread cost almost double what it had in 1787, with the new price of 15 sous constituting over half of an average labourer's wages for the week. Thus, a series of natural disasters turned into an economic and political crisis for the ancien regime.

⁶⁶ James M. Anderson, *Daily Life During the French Revolution* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2007), 198.

THE THIRD ESTATE DEMANDS CHANGE

Up to this point, the revolt against absolute government had been led by the nobility in the Assembly of Notables and the Parlement of Paris and, because they were seen to be fighting against new taxes, they were depicted in the popular press and in the streets as defenders of the rights of the people. However, the declaration by the Parlement on 25 September 1788 that the Estates-General should be constituted as it was in 1614 radically changed public opinion. Overnight, the Parlement of Paris lost the support of the bourgeoisie and common people. To this point, the Third Estate had supported the aristocracy in its challenges to the king. Now the Third Estate suspected that the First and Second Estates simply wanted to draw more power to themselves, not to fight for justice for the whole nation.

In 1614, when the Estates-General had last been called, each Estate had comprised a roughly equal number of deputies and had sat separately. They had discussed the issues presented to them and voted on them. Each Estate had voted as a whole on the issue: one vote for the First Estate; one vote for the Second Estate; and one vote for the Third Estate. As a result, the First and Second Estates could always outvote the Third and, as they had interests in common, they did.

Now the Third Estate demanded greater representation. As its members represented more than ninety per cent of the population, they demanded a doubling in the number of their deputies to the Estates-General, from 300 to 600. Furthermore, they wanted voting by head, not by chamber or estate; that is, that the deputies to the Estates-General should sit as one body, with majorities to be decided upon the basis of individual votes. On 5 December 1788, the king announced his decision: he would grant double representation to the Third Estate, but did not make a decision on the issue of voting.

A Swiss journalist, Mallet du Pan, recorded the political controversy that arose as a result of the king's indecision, stating that,

The public debate has assumed a different character. King, despotism and constitution have now become only secondary questions. Now it is war between the Third Estate and the other two orders.⁶⁷

The cobbler Joseph Charon had much the same memories of the time, observing that,

from men of the world of the highest rank to the very lowest ranks through various channels ... people have acquired and dispensed enlightenment that one would have searched for in vain a dozen years earlier ... and they have acquired notions about public constitutions in the past two or three years.⁶⁸

Not all voices were raised in support of change. A memoir to Louis XVI from the Princes of the Blood stated that,

the rights of the throne have been called into question; the rights of the two orders of the State divide opinions; soon property rights will be attacked; the inequality of fortunes will be presented as an object for reform; the suppression of feudal rights has been proposed ... May the Third Estate therefore cease to attack the rights of the first two orders; rights which, no less ancient than the monarchy, must be as unchanging as its constitution.⁶⁹

DID YOU KNOW?

In Notre Dame cathedral, clergy were expected to sit to the right of the aisle, nobility to the left, and commoners at the back. The more rebellious commoners, however, seized benches at the front.

DID YOU KNOW?

The king's brothers and male cousins were known as Princes of the Blood. In Louis XVI's case they acted as both advisers and critics.

67 Cited in Rees and Townson, *France in Revolution*, 22.

68 Cited in McPhee, *The French Revolution*, 38.

69 Rees and Townson, *France in Revolution*, 38–9.

DID YOU KNOW?

In its *cahier* the Third Estate of Bossancourt called for a law preventing horses and sheep from grazing together, on the grounds that horses needed 'healthy fodder, not infected by the bad breath of sheep and lambs.'

DID YOU KNOW?

In the 1780s, French newspapers reached up to 500 000 people; most papers added to calls for political change.

The princes asked that the Third Estate restrict itself to asking for changes to taxes and promised that, in return, 'the first two orders ... will, by the generosity of their sentiments, be able to renounce those prerogatives which have a financial interest.'⁷⁰ Thus, battle lines were being drawn between those who wanted their honorific privileges preserved, like the princes, and those who called for fundamental changes to the way in which France was governed. One of these voices was Abbé Sieyès.

THE PAMPHLET WAR

By January 1789, elections for the deputies had commenced, *cahiers de doléances* (books of grievances) were being drawn up all over France and a 'pamphlet war' had begun. Outpourings of complaint, advice, rhetoric, political theory and enlightened ideas were available to the public in the over 4000 pamphlets published between May 1788 and April 1789. The debate was everywhere, from the salons of the wealthy and powerful to the cafés and taverns where the poor drank, in the churches and in the streets, from the heart of Paris to the provincial towns, villages and farms. This had resulted from the relaxation of censorship, in order that the people of France could discuss freely the electoral procedure for the Estates-General. A flood of words and images swept over France, as the public debated the issues surrounding the Estates-General and the state of France itself.

Of all of these pamphlets, the most powerful was that of Abbé Sieyès in his challenge to royal absolutism and the established order: *What is the Third Estate?* Produced over the last months of 1788, the priest's 20 000 word article became the most powerful and influential attack on the social and political order of France.

70 Rees and Townson, *France in Revolution*.



The Pamphlet War 1788-89. New Pamphlets and Journals Poured from the Presses, Anonymous. Bibliothèque Nationale de France. An anonymous colour print showing one of the printing workshops which did enormous business in the early part of the Revolution. After the announcement in May 1788 that there would be an Estates-General called in 1792, custom decreed that Louis XVI should relax the strict censorship laws so that issues pertaining to the Estates-General could be generally discussed. On 5 July 1788 the king invited 'all erudite and educated people' to send their opinions on the convocation of the Estates-General to the Keeper of the Seals. The result was an explosion of activity. People sought to enlighten not just the king but the whole nation, and they did not feel restrained by a lack of 'erudition.' Over 4000 pamphlets were published between May 1788 and April 1789 and the number of newspapers in Paris had increased to 250 by December 1789.

WHAT IS THE THIRD ESTATE? A CALL TO REVOLUTION

Sieyès challenged the old order of Estates and, with it, the system of privilege. Under the old order, the clergy and nobility were deemed to be more useful to the state than the Third Estate, because the First Estate ministered to the spiritual needs of the people and the Second Estate defended the kingdom. Sieyès began with three powerful questions:

What is the Third Estate? Everything

What had it been before in the political order? Nothing

What does it demand? To become something therein.⁷¹

He followed with a comprehensive attack on the privileged orders, pointing out that it was the Third Estate which both engaged in private enterprise and fulfilled public duties. Members of the Third Estate were the people who farmed, manufactured, sold and traded goods; furthermore, it was the Third Estate which provided every type of public service ‘from the most distinguished scientific and liberal professions to the least esteemed domestic service.’ And what of the privileged orders? They took ‘only the lucrative and honorary positions,’ wrote Sieyès, claiming that the utility of the privileged orders to the state was a myth because ‘all that is arduous in such service is performed by the Third Estate.’ For Sieyès, the Third Estate *was* the nation:

Who, then, would dare to say that the Third Estate has not within itself everything that is necessary to constitute a nation? It is the strong and robust man whose one arm remains enchained ... Thus, what is the Third Estate? Everything, but an everything shackled and oppressed.⁷²

These statements were a call to revolution. The issue was privilege and the battle ground was to be the Estates-General. ‘Legalised privilege in any form,’ Sieyès thundered, ‘deviates from the common order ... A common law and a common representation are what constitutes one nation.’ Sieyès called on the deputies of the Third Estate to take their rightful place as representatives of the people of France:

What must the Third Estate do if it wishes to gain possession of its political rights in a manner beneficial to the nation? ... The Third Estate must assemble apart: it will not meet with the nobility and clergy at all; it will not remain with them, either by order or by head. I pray they will keep in mind the enormous difference between the Third Estate and that of the other two orders. The Third represents 25,000,000 men ... the two others, were they to unite, have the powers of only about 200,000 individuals, and think only of their privileges. The Third Estate alone, they say, cannot constitute the Estates-General. Well! So much the better. It will form a National Assembly.⁷³

The challenge issued by Sièyes is echoed in the *cahiers* from all Estates, asking for political representation, the end of privilege, government responsibility to the people through regular meetings of the Estates-General and personal liberties. Its strongest influence comes from the *philosophe* of the Enlightenment, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose ideas on the liberty of the individual, law by ‘general will’ and government with the consent of the governed had been widely discussed among the literate French. In particular, Sieyès reiterated Rousseau’s belief that ‘a law not made by the people is no law at all.’

After the announcement in May 1788 that there would be an Estates-General called in 1792, custom decreed that the king should relax the strict censorship



Abbé (Emmanuel Joseph) Sieyès, 1817, oil on canvas, Jacques-Louis David.



MORE ON ABBÉ SIEYÈS

71 Abbé Sieyès, *What is the Third Estate?*, cited in Herbert Rowen, ed., *From Absolutism to Revolution: 1648–1848* (London: Macmillan, 1968), 190.

72 Abbé Sieyès, *What is the Third Estate?*

73 Abbé Sieyès, *What is the Third Estate?*

DOCUMENT

ABBÉ SIEYÈS, *WHAT IS THE THIRD ESTATE?*

The Third Estate wishes to have real representatives in the Estates General, that is to say, deputies drawn from its order, who are competent to be interpreters of its will and defenders of its interest. But what will it avail to be present at the Estates General if the predominating interest there is contrary to its own! Its presence would only consecrate the oppression of which it would be the eternal victim. Thus, it is indeed certain that it cannot come to vote at the Estates General unless it is to have in that body an influence at least equal to that of the privileged classes; and it demands a number of representatives equal to that of the first two orders together. Finally, this equality of representation would become completely illusory if every chamber voted separately. The Third Estate demands, then, that votes be taken by head and not by order.⁷⁴

ACTIVITY SOURCE ANALYSIS

Read the extract from *What is the Third Estate?* and complete the tasks below.

1. Comment on the tone of the language used and its intended effect. For example, why might Abbé Sieyès have referred to the Third Estate as 'the eternal victim'?
2. In your own words, explain the danger facing the Third Estate at the Estates-General, as suggested in the source.
3. Identify two changes to voting procedures proposed by Sieyès.
4. Evaluate the extract as a source of evidence on the causes of the revolution in 1789.



CAHIERS OF THE
THREE ESTATES

laws so that issues pertaining to the Estates-General could be generally discussed. On 5 July 1788 the king invited 'all erudite and educated people' to express their opinion on the convocation of the Estates-General and to send these opinions to the Keeper of the Seals. The result was an explosion of activity. People sought to enlighten not just the king but the whole nation, and they did not feel restrained by a lack of 'erudition.' Over 4000 pamphlets were published between May 1788 and April 1789 and the number of newspapers in Paris had increased to 250 by December 1789.⁷⁵

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CAHIERS

In the spring of 1789, as the date for the first meeting of the Estates-General approached, *cahiers de doléances* or books of grievances were drawn up by the Estates in each electoral region to guide the deputies who would be sent to Versailles to advise the king. Some were conservative, like that of the First Estate of Bourges which asked that the Estates-General 're-establish the empire of morals, make religion reign, reform abuses, find a remedy for the evils of the state, be an era of prosperity for France and profound and durable glory for his Majesty.'⁷⁶ Others, like the *cahier* of the Third Estate of Paris were radical, enlightened and revolutionary. This *cahier* noted that:

In every political society, all men are equal in rights. All power emanates from the nation and may only be exercised for its well-being ... In the French monarchy, legislative power belongs to the nation conjointly with the King; executive power belongs to the King alone.⁷⁷

74 Cited in John Hall Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution* (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 42.

75 John Gilchrist and William Murray, eds., *The Press in the French Revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution in the Years 1789–1794* (Melbourne and London: Ginn & Cheshire, 1971), 5.

76 Dwyer and McPhee, *The French Revolution and Napoleon*, 7.

77 Fielding and Morecombe, *The Spirit of Change*, 37.

This idea provides the foundation for the reformed monarchy which many hoped would be the outcome of the Estates-General. The Third of Paris had closely followed the model *cahier* written by the Society of Thirty, which was circulated in the country and gave local commoners, often largely illiterate, a framework within which to express their grievances. Thus, many Third Estate *cahiers* were remarkably similar in stating fundamental political grievances and then identifying very local problems.

In the eyes of Rudé and Soboul, the revolution can be seen as a class struggle, where the Third Estate challenged the aristocratic order for power. Notice how Rudé saw the revolution proceeding in distinct phases and by separate classes:

As we saw, the aristocracy, including the *parlements* and upper clergy, made a bid for extension of power in the noble revolt of 1787–8 ... By 1789 ... the main thrust of the 'aristocratic revolt' was past and it was now time for the two main other contenders – the bourgeoisie and the common people (peasants and *sans-culottes*) ... to make their own distinct contribution to the revolution that now took place.⁷⁸

Similarly, Soboul attributed the revolution to the bourgeoisie, arguing that,

a rising class, with a belief in progress, the bourgeoisie saw itself as representing the interest of all and carrying the burdens of the nation as a whole ... But the ambitions of the bourgeoisie, grounded in social and economic reality, were thwarted by the aristocratic spirit that pervaded laws and institutions.⁷⁹

These interpretations differ significantly from that of Simon Schama, with his representation of the Assembly of Notables as 'the first revolutionaries,' intent on doing away with much of the old structure of France to bring about a more liberal political and economic regime.

The interpretations of Rudé and Soboul are also not supported by research into the *cahiers* themselves: of 282 *cahiers* from the nobility, ninety reflected liberal ideas. With regard to financial privileges, eighty-nine per cent were prepared to forego them and thirty-nine per cent supported voting by head. In general the noble *cahiers* showed a desire for change, were prepared to admit that merit rather than birth should be the determinant for high office and attacked the government for its despotism, injustice and inefficiency. In many cases they were more liberal than those of the Third Estate.⁸⁰

Overall, the *cahiers* were remarkable for the level of agreement shown between the three orders over the expectation that the Estates-General would thereafter meet in a regular cycle and in the demand that the king, after disclosing the level of state debt, should concede to the Estates-General, or *nation assemblée*, control over income (taxation) and expenditure. The *cahier* of the nobility of Crépy asked that 'no tax or subsidy may be consented to except by the three Orders, and then only until the following session of the Estates General.'⁸¹ There was general consensus that the Church should instigate reforms to stop abuses and to improve conditions for its parish priests. Surprisingly, it seemed to be generally accepted that there should be some form of fiscal equality – that the nobility and clergy would have to give up, to some degree, their exemption from taxation. It was to be expected that the Third of Paris would call for the replacement of current taxes with 'general taxes borne equally by citizens of all classes,' but the Clergy of Troyes agreed: 'Whatever the tax adopted, ... it shall be generally and proportionately borne by all individuals of the three orders,' although with the provision that there be 'consideration of the debts of the clergy.'⁸² Similarly, it was

DID YOU KNOW?

On 17 March 1789 the king's cousin, the Duc d'Orléans, sent a letter to parishioners asking them to write *cahiers* in favour of property rights, equal taxation and the abolition of hunting rights. He said he wanted to be able to support 'with all his authority the well-founded grievances of his good vassals.'

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1790 the king's personal accounts were made public. Between 1774 and 1789 Louis spent twenty-nine million livres on his brothers, eleven million on himself and the queen, two million on salaries and pensions, and 254 000 livres on charity.

78 Rudé, *The French Revolution*, 36.

79 Soboul, *A Short History of the French Revolution*, 5.

80 Rees and Townson, *France in Revolution*, 23.

81 Cited in Fielding and Morecombe, *The Spirit of Change*, 36–7.

82 Fielding and Morecombe, *The Spirit of Change*, 36–7.



recognised that the laws of the nation should be made uniform and more humane and that justice should be more freely available to all. Finally, the need to abolish internal customs barriers and to encourage internal free trade was widely agreed upon.

However, some clear differences emerged as indicators of the divisions to come. The clergy was not prepared to renounce the privileged position of the Gallican Church as the official church of the state: 'The Catholic, apostolic, and Roman religion shall be the only one taught, professed and publicly authorized; its services and teachings shall be uniform throughout the Kingdom,'⁸³ proclaimed the Clergy of Troyes. For the provincial nobles, Peter McPhee has claimed that 'seigneurial rights and noble privileges were too important to be negotiable, and from this came the intransigence of most of the 270 noble deputies elected to go to Versailles.'⁸⁴



Example of a *cahier* of the third estate, Corsica.

A high proportion of peasant *cahiers* were explicit in their targeting of absolutism, seigneurialism and taxation exemptions. Peter Jones, a specialist in the peasantry during the French Revolution, has alerted us to the problems this group faced in making its demands known. Meetings were often run by one of the peasants' major adversaries: the mayor or a seigneurial representative, or even the *seigneur* himself. Jones has given the example of the village of Pouillenay in the Auxois where two *cahiers* were submitted: the first called for constitutional and fiscal reforms in general terms, whereas the second, written later, contained a whole list of 'specific complaints' about seigneurial abuses. In the parish of Frenelle-la-Grande, the first *cahier* was written in advance and dated 8 March, a week before the meeting. On 26 March, twenty-five villagers signed a protest describing how they had been brow-beaten. Nevertheless, while model *cahiers* circulated in many rural districts, this does not imply that peasant grievances were necessarily watered down. Jones informs us that there is 'ample evidence to show that peasants were prepared to amend the documents submitted to them when they imperfectly coincided with local needs, and this notwithstanding the baleful presence of the seigneurial judge.'⁸⁵ In his study of a large number of parish *cahiers*, John Markoff has shown that over a third demanded the abolition of seigneurial rights without compensation. An additional forty-five per cent criticised the seigneurial system in either general or specific terms and over forty-two per cent wanted reform or abolition of various taxes. In comparing the peasantry's demands with those of the Third Estate in general, and those of the nobility, Markoff has observed that 'on the three great socio-economic issues of taxation, seigneurial rights and payments to the Church, the peasants were consistently the most radical and, unsurprisingly, the nobles the least.'⁸⁶

Thus, the *cahiers* are important to the historian because they give a detailed view of the grievances of all groups in society. In France in 1789 they raised expectations of reform, which contributed to the development of a revolutionary situation.

THE SOCIETY OF THIRTY

Significant numbers of nobility, from both the sword and the robe, played an active role in supporting the revolution. Of these, in 1789 the most prominent role belonged to the Society of Thirty, the so-called 'conspiracy of well-

83 Fielding and Morecombe, *The Spirit of Change*, 37.

84 McPhee, *The French Revolution*, 41.

85 Peter M. Jones, *The Peasantry in the French Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 63.

86 Cited in Andress, *French Society in Revolution*, 51.

intentioned men⁸⁷ whose goal was to design a new constitution for France based on principles of the Enlightenment.

In late 1788 and early 1789, this group, which later formed the Constitutional Club, met twice weekly at the house of the *parlementaire* Adrian Duport, to debate the nature of representation to the Estates-General. Originally comprised of thirty members, it grew to about sixty members, of whom only five were commoners. The members of the Society of Thirty included the Marquis de Lafayette, the hero of the American War; the Duke de Noailles; the Duke de la Rochefoucauld, who also had returned from the American War and was one of the highest members of the peerage; the Marquis de Condorcet, a noted *philosophe* and mathematician; Count Mirabeau, soon to be hailed as ‘the voice of the revolution’; from the clergy, Bishop Talleyrand, Abbé Sieyès and Pastor Rabaut Saint-Etienne; and, finally, the journalist and diarist Louis-Sebastien Mercier, and the young radical Adrian Duport. Schama says that they were ‘courtiers against the court, aristocrats against privilege, officers who wanted to replace dynastic with national patriotism.’⁸⁸



Portrait of the Marquis de Lafayette by Joseph-Désiré Court, 1791.

The Society of Thirty embraced three principles. First, they rejected outright that there was some ‘fundamental constitution’ of France that the *parlements* had been attempting to conserve. Second, they believed that the only fundamental law was ‘the welfare of the people.’ Finally, they believed that as France had no constitution it was necessary to write one. The majority of members also believed that the Third Estate should have double representation because, as the Comte d’Antraigues and Sieyès argued, the state and people were one and the same: ‘The Third Estate is not an order, but the nation itself.’ This statement strongly reflected the ideas of the Enlightenment, with its concepts of law by ‘general will’ and the division of the powers of government.

CONCLUSION

Paris in early 1789 was caught up in a political fervour and a belief that, in calling the Estates-General, Louis XVI was committed to political, economic and social change. The *cahier* of the flower-sellers of Paris reflected this belief when it began:

⁸⁷ Schama, *Citizens*, 299.

⁸⁸ Schama, *Citizens*, 298.

The freedom given to all citizens to denounce abuses that press on them from all sides to the representatives of the nation is doubtless a certain omen of impending reform.⁸⁹

From all sides in the political debate, great hopes were placed in the deputies who made their way, in the spring of 1789, to the Palace of Versailles.

ACTIVITY

SOURCE ANALYSIS

Look carefully at the representation (right) and complete the tasks below.

1. Identify two features of the representation that suggest criticism of social relationships in pre-revolutionary France.
2. Identify two revolutionary symbols or ideas (not identified above) evident in the representation.
3. Using the source and your own knowledge, explain the key events and developments that contributed to this perspective on the old regime.
4. Evaluate the significance of social divisions in causing revolution in France. In your response, refer to the source and to other views on the causes of the revolution.



France on the Eve of the Revolution.

NOTES ON IMAGE

Lowest figure on man's back: *Féodalité: Foi et homage du' au seigneur* – 'Feudalism: Loyalty and Homage owed to the Lord.'

Middle figure on man's back: *Inquisition; Dîme, Bien du Clergé*. 'Inquisition' was the universally hated and feared Church court set up by Pope Gregory IX in 1233 to try French heretics called Albigensians or Cathars. It became powerful throughout Europe during following centuries. 'Dîme': a tenth, or tithe – a tax payable to the Church. 'Bien du Clergé': the wealth and property of the Church.

Upper figure on man's back: *Parlement; Assemblée des grandes du royaume* – Assembly of the Notables of the Kingdom. Chains: reference to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's famous work *The Social Contract*, published in 1762. In it he said: 'Man is born free, and yet everywhere he is in chains,' i.e. chained up by the restrictions of government.

CHAPTER REVIEW

CAUSES OF REVOLUTION – DIAGRAM

Create a diagram showing the challenges faced by the government of Louis XVI by May 1789. Using colour, annotations, arrows and boxes, show the following elements:

- Long-term causes of revolutionary action, including economic and political crises
- Ideas that challenged divine right monarchy
- Public anger at entrenched social and economic inequalities
- The actions of key movements and individuals, including Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, the Society of Thirty, the Duc d'Orleans and Abbé Sieyès. (See Who's Who at the back of the book.)

CAUSES OF REVOLUTION – EXTENDED ANSWERS

Choose four of the topics below and write an extended answer of approx. 250 words on each one. They refer to the period c. 1774–May 1789.

Extended answers should commence with a strong topic sentence which answers all parts of the question. Explain your topic sentence with three or four separate points which contain strong factual information, consisting of precise names, dates, events and information about policies, proposals, decisions which escalated tensions and conflicts leading to a revolutionary situation by May 1789.

Topics: (choose four)

1. Explain why divine-right, autocratic monarchy was so unpopular in France by May 1789.
2. Explain the significance of the economic and fiscal challenges faced by France by May 1789.
3. Evaluate the harvest crisis of 1788–89 as a turning point in France.
4. Analyse the political consequences of the government's failure to reform by May 1789.
5. Explain how the Assembly of Notables and other French nobles influenced revolutionary events.
6. Evaluate the significance of the French clergy as contributors to social and political change by May 1789.

ANNOTATED MAP

Copy the map on the previous page and annotate it with the following information from this chapter:

- Population of France in the eighteenth century
- Size of area controlled by France
- Lands gained in 1678, 1766 and 1786
- Lands owned by the Catholic Church under Pope Pius
- The meaning of 'intendancy,' 'province' and 'pays d'états.'

KEY EVENTS – DISCUSSION

With a partner, read about the debates over establishing a new Estates-General and discuss the questions below.

1. In the Estates-General of 1614, what proportion of members came from each of the three estates? How had votes been conducted?
2. What changes to representation and voting were proposed for the new Estates-General? In your view, who would be most likely to benefit from these changes and why?

REVOLUTIONARY IDEAS

FRENCH REVOLUTIONARY IDEAS WERE BORN IN THE SALONS OF THE WELL-TO-DO, THE CAFÉS OF PARIS AND THE GENTEEL QUARTERS OF THE *PHILOSOPHES*. THE KEY THINKERS, MANY OF WHOM DIED BEFORE THEIR IDEAS CAME TO FRUITION, WERE INFLUENCED BY THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION.



INTRODUCTION

The contribution of ideas to the French Revolution is difficult to evaluate. First, there is the question of identifying the ideas and beliefs which influenced public opinion. Then, there is the question of how these ideas led to the growth of political ideologies which conflicted with existing political, economic and social structures. The transmission of ideas is also important. Which individuals and groups were aware of these ideas? How were they influenced by them? How did these ideas spread? In pre-revolutionary France, with its lively *salons* (social and intellectual gatherings in private houses), coffee houses and literary societies, with its wide range of reading matter and opportunities for debate, there were many opportunities to criticise the failures of the government. In the highly charged atmosphere created by the bankruptcy crisis and the struggle with the Assembly of Notables and the parlements, debate about monarchical power, political representation, citizenship and economic reform became the language of revolution. Ideas by themselves do not create revolutions; but revolutions depend on ideas to offer a vision of an alternative state.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT: A CHALLENGE TO ABSOLUTISM

DID YOU KNOW?

Although they strongly influenced the reforms adopted by revolutionary governments, the three great Enlightenment writers died before there was any thought of revolution in France: Montesquieu in 1755, and Voltaire and Rousseau in 1778.

The Enlightenment was an intellectual movement generally associated with eighteenth century France, but which emerged internationally out of the Europe-wide scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. English physical scientists such as Sir Isaac Newton (who published his *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* in 1686) and political thinkers such as John Locke (who developed theories of a social contract between the ruler and the ruled in 1690) provided the intellectual foundations for eighteenth-century critical thinkers (*philosophes*), who worked across Europe, from the Italian peninsula to Edinburgh (a major centre at the time), from England and across the Atlantic to the American colonies.

The *philosophes* of the Enlightenment were thinkers and writers such as Denis Diderot (1713–1784) and Jean le Rond d’Alembert (1717–1783), who together produced the *Encyclopédie*, the Baron de Montesquieu (1689–1755), François-Marie d’Arouet, known as Voltaire (1694–1778) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778). Enlightenment writings emphasised the use of reason in human affairs and logic based on empiricism (the observation of nature) and challenged the accepted ‘truths’ of earlier generations. The *philosophes* wanted to create a world in which reason prevailed and where people of every class could enjoy civil rights, personal liberty and freedom of religion. They were men of letters who were critical of government, religion and social structures such as privilege; they were preoccupied with ideas of reform of the old regime according to rational principles. They were often of noble background, the friends of kings and familiar with the courts of Europe. They did not necessarily envisage the destruction of the old regime, but rather its reform according to ideas of reason and natural laws.

MONTESQUIEU (1689–1755)

Charles de Secondat, Baron de la Brède and de Montesquieu was born into the aristocracy. He owned substantial manor houses and land and had inherited a seat in the Parlement of Bordeaux. Although a nobleman who shared many of the beliefs of the aristocracy, his concepts of political life reached far outside the interests of his Estate. In his greatest work, *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), he articulated two beliefs: that absolute government was suited only to large empires with hot climates, while democracy was only workable in small city-states, and that despotism emerged from systems of absolute government. Montesquieu's answer was that power should be divided between the monarch and other bodies in the state, for example the *parlements* and the provincial estates. He was an admirer of Britain's constitution, which limited the powers of the monarch, believing that the most effective form of government was one where there was a separation of powers between the executive, the judiciary and the legislative power.

THE SPIRIT OF THE LAWS

The Spirit of the Laws (*L'Esprit des Lois*) was written over a period of twenty years and followed from Montesquieu's study of various forms of government. In it he argued that there were three forms of government: republican, monarchical and despotic. A monarchy was where one man ruled, but according to a set of laws which were fixed and established over time. Despotism was also one-man rule, but without the constraints imposed by a set of laws. Thus, the despot ruled 'by will or caprice.' His state was inevitably corrupt 'because it is corrupt in its nature.' As the despot had full power, he believed that he was all-important and other people were worth nothing. This meant that he would grow increasingly 'idle, ignorant and pleasure-seeking.' If the despot entrusted his state to someone else or even several people, he would give up any pretence of ruling at all, while those he appointed would give themselves up to plotting to increase their individual power.¹

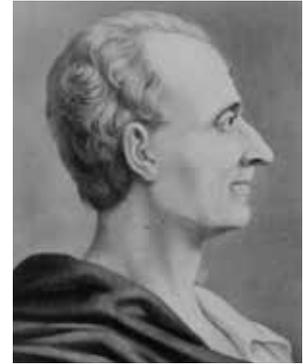
Montesquieu stated that there were two kinds of republic: one, where the whole people took part in government, was a democracy; the other, where only some of the people had power, was an aristocracy. Where the aristocracy became hereditary, passing its powers on from generation to generation, the inevitable outcome was 'extreme corruption.' Thus, Montesquieu argued, 'countries entrusting rule to an elite group will find that, over time, the group loses the impetus to serve the people.'²

If the government were democratic, then popular sovereignty constituted its best basis, but the people could not be involved in every decision. They needed to appoint ministers to carry out their will. These ministers had to be chosen by the people, and for Montesquieu this meant by lot, so that every citizen had the 'reasonable hope' of serving his country. But, he admitted, this was 'a defective measure' which needed to be refined by the legislators of the state.³

The best form of government was that in which power was divided. According to Montesquieu,

DID YOU KNOW?

Montesquieu wrote, 'To be truly great, one must stand with the people and not above them.'



Painting of Montesquieu, 1884.

DID YOU KNOW?

Montesquieu wrote, 'An author is a fool who, not content with boring those he lives with, insists on boring future generations.'

- 1 Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, cited in Mark Fielding and Margot Morecombe, *The Spirit of Change: France in Revolution* (Sydney: McGraw-Hill, 1999), 44.
- 2 Cited in Fielding and Morecombe, *The Spirit of Change*.
- 3 Cited in Fielding and Morecombe, *The Spirit of Change*.

It is based on a separation of the three powers found in every state – the legislative power, the executive power and the judicial power. The first is in the hands of the parliament, the second is in the hands of the monarch and the third is in the hands of the magistrates ... In this way, the balance of the constitution is preserved ... Liberty depends upon each of the three powers being kept entirely separate.⁴

Montesquieu was not, therefore, arguing for the abolition of monarchy, but for the end of absolutism. Indeed, his personal preference was for a constitutional monarchy following the English model.

ACTIVITY

KEY IDEAS

Give a real-life example of each of the following concepts:

Absolute government

Democracy

Separation of powers

Aristocracy

Despotism



Voltaire at age seventy, engraving published as the frontispiece to Voltaire's *A Philosophical Dictionary*. London: W. Dugdale, 1843.

VOLTAIRE (1694–1778)

Voltaire was the name perhaps most associated in the eighteenth century with the fierce championing of free speech and religious toleration, and the supremacy of reason over superstition. François-Marie d'Arouet, born in the heart of Paris on the Ile de la Cité, adopted the pen-name 'Voltaire' after he emerged from a period of imprisonment in the Bastille in 1717, having offended the court with his tragedy *Oedipe*. Voltaire came from a comfortable bourgeois background, and he had been made royal historian and a gentleman of the bed-chamber to Louis XV. Until the age of forty, Voltaire was largely known as an entertaining writer of dramas, tragedies and essays, celebrated for his incisive wit and, often, his ridicule of current events and personalities. His pieces were favourites in the salons of the aristocracy and, indeed, even in the royal court of France. He was said to have had 'a thin, skull-like smile that sneered at everything sacred: religion, love, patriotism, censorship.'⁵ In his later years, Voltaire took up the cause of freedom of religion and religious toleration. He deplored the power of the Catholic Church over people's lives, with its bigotry, intolerance and superstition, and argued that these should be replaced by 'natural religion' (Deism) and 'natural morality' arising from the exercise of man's reason. Voltaire established what were to become the 'crucial weapons of the intellectual critic over the next two hundred years: investigation, exposure, dispassionate argument, ridicule, and the oxygen of publicity.'⁶

Voltaire demonstrated these beliefs by his involvement in the case of Jean Calas (1698–1762). In 1762 Calas, a Protestant by religion, was executed on the decision of the Parlement of Toulouse, allegedly for murdering his son. Another such case was that of twenty-year-old Chevalier de la Barre, who in 1766 was condemned to death for blasphemy. He was tortured; he had his tongue pulled out and his right arm chopped off before being burned at the stake. For years Voltaire supported de la Barre's family and friends, seeking compensation. Voltaire's anger over the intolerance and bigotry of the verdict extended to the government itself, which controlled its people by such displays. He also conducted a public campaign to rehabilitate the reputation of Calas, portraying him as a martyr to the corrupt *tyranny* of Church and state. In his *Treatise on Toleration* (1763) he argued that:

4 Richard Holmes, 'Voltaire's Grin,' *The New York Review*, 30 November 1995, 49.

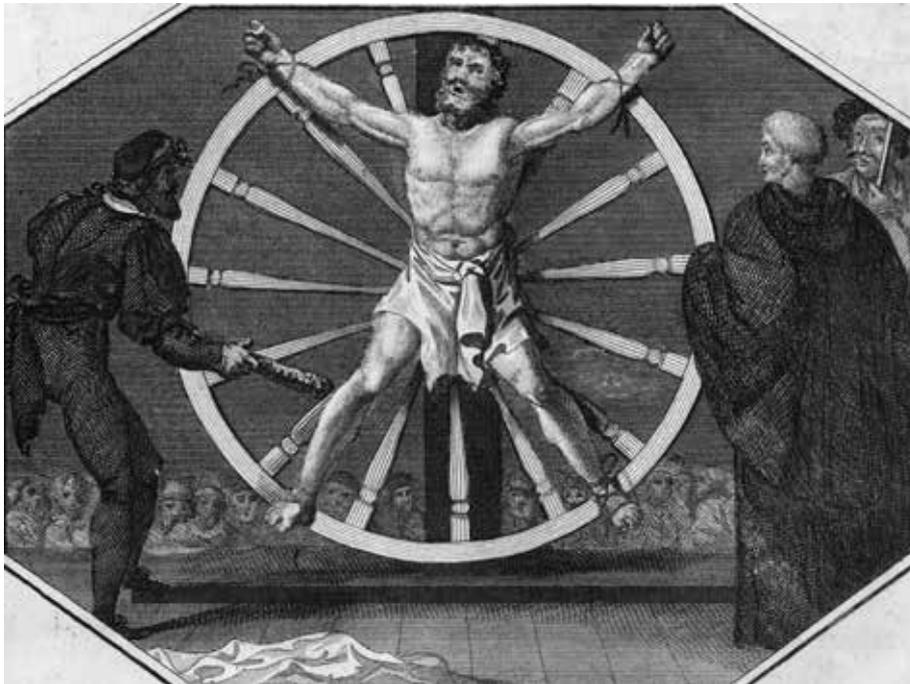
5 Holmes, 'Voltaire's Grin,' 54.

6 Cited in Fielding and Morecombe, *The Spirit of Change*, 44–5.

Tolerance has never brought civil war; intolerance has covered the earth with carnage ... What, is each citizen to be permitted to believe and to think that which his reason rightly or wrongly dictates? He should indeed, provided he does not disturb the public order; ... and if you say that it is a crime not to believe in the dominant religion, you accuse then yourself the first Christians, your ancestors, and you justify those whom you accuse of having martyred them.⁷

Voltaire had explored the notion of religious tolerance in a much earlier work, his *Letters Concerning the English Nation* (1733). His sketch of the English doing business, taken from the Sixth Letter, is particularly famous. In it he stated:

Go into the London Exchange ... There you will find representatives of every nation quietly assembled to promote human welfare. There the Jew, the Mahometan [Muslim] and the Christian deal with each other as though they were all of the same religion. ... There the Presbyterian trusts the Anabaptist, and the Anglican accepts the Quaker's bond ... If there were only one religion in England, there would be a risk of despotism; if there were only two, they would cut each other's throats; as it is, there are at least thirty, and they live happily and at peace.⁸



DID YOU KNOW?

Voltaire fought for three years to have Jean Calas declared innocent of murder. Calas was sentenced to being broken alive on the wheel. This involved tying the prisoner to a large cartwheel and beating him to death with an iron rod. The body was then exhibited to the public before being burnt to ashes. Calas died protesting his innocence. Following Voltaire's campaign, Calas was found not guilty in 1765.

Left: Jean Calas being broken on a wheel.

Voltaire did not totally endorse the principle of toleration in his writings; neither did he practise it himself entirely. The *Treatise on Toleration* contains a vital qualification of the universal principle – Chapter 18, entitled 'The One Case in which Intolerance is a Human Right.' Here Voltaire posed the question which has since challenged all *liberal* thinkers. How can society tolerate those groups which are themselves intolerant, thereby threatening the principle itself? Voltaire's answer was succinct: society cannot. For the individual, toleration is an absolute right and an absolute duty. But for society and its legislators, toleration must have a limit. Where intolerance becomes criminal, the laws of the liberal state cannot tolerate it.

More specifically, Voltaire noted that 'if men are to deserve tolerance, they must begin by not being fanatics.'⁹ For Voltaire, fanaticism was expressed essentially by religious or racial persecution, the two great curses of civilisation.¹⁰

7 Voltaire, *Treatise on Ecclesiastical Toleration* (1763), cited in Fielding and Morecombe, *The Spirit of Change*, 42.

8 Voltaire, 'Sixth Letter Concerning the English Nation' (printed 1735), cited in Holmes, 'Voltaire's Grin,' 51.

9 Voltaire, *Treatise on Toleration*, Ch. 18, cited in Holmes, 'Voltaire's Grin,' 55.

10 Voltaire, *Treatise on Toleration*, cited in Holmes, 'Voltaire's Grin.'

- 11 Voltaire, 'Juifs' (1765 and 1771) in *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, cited in Holmes, 'Voltaire's Grin,' 56.
- 12 Voltaire, *Lettres from Memmius to Cicero* (1771), cited in F. Krantz, ed., *History from Below: Studies in Popular Protest and Popular Ideology in Honour of George Rudé* (Montreal, Quebec: Concordia University, 1985), 226.
- 13 Voltaire, *Lettres from Memmius to Cicero*, cited in Krantz, *History from Below*, 227.
- 14 Voltaire, *Treatise on Toleration*, cited in Fielding and Morecombe, *The Spirit of Change*, 42.

Meanwhile, Voltaire himself was not above reproach in his personal application of the principle. On many occasions his writings exhibit anti-Jewish prejudices: over thirty of the entries in his *Philosophical Dictionary* contain anti-Semitic statements, while the entry on Toleration itself refers to the Jews as 'the most intolerant and cruel of all the peoples of Antiquity.'¹¹ Elsewhere he wrote, '[Jews are] born with raging fanaticism in their hearts, just as ... the Germans are born with blonde hair.'¹²

Voltaire's view of people of colour was no more charitable. There were several hundred thousand slaves on islands in the French Empire and perhaps about 800 of these could be found on the French mainland at any one time throughout the eighteenth century. In his *Metaphysical Treatise* (1734) Voltaire likened Africans to animals and suggested that 'abominable matings' with monkeys had created the 'monstrous species' described by the Ancients. He 'chastised' Christians for believing that Africans were made in God's image and he declared slavery, which he condemned elsewhere for its effects on the white masters, to be the condition which 'nature had reserved for Blacks.'¹³ The paradoxes inherent in some of the writings of the *philosophes* remind us that, as individuals, they were not always ethically consistent by today's standards.

ACTIVITY

BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

Compare Voltaire's beliefs and attitudes on Jewish and African people with current mainstream views. Discuss the extent to which historical figures can or should be judged by today's values.

Portrait of the Marquise de Châtelet (1706–1749), by Maurice Quentin de La Tour.



At a more practical and legalistic level, in the *Treatise on Toleration* Voltaire argued strongly for a separation between religious and civil laws, believing that the Church should have no influence on daily life, for 'it is not the business of priests to forbid men to cultivate their fields.' Church laws should have no influence in a state, unless they were specifically sanctioned. Non-working days should be decreed by the state, rather than the Church being able to prevent people from working on the feast days of saints; the legalising of marriages should be a civil ceremony, with priests restricted to blessing the married couple. Lending money at interest, something forbidden to Christians by the Church, should be purely a concern of civil law; churchmen should be taxed, like other citizens of the state, and should be subject to the civil law. Voltaire therefore sought to restrict the power of the Catholic Church over the lives of the people by separating what was religious from what was secular and giving the civil law pre-eminence over the laws of the Church.¹⁴

VOLTAIRE'S PERSONAL LIFE

Voltaire lived a colourfully amorous life, perhaps typical of his era. As a dangerously handsome young diplomat in Holland, he ran riot. His first mistress, a voluptuous Dutch woman named Pimpette, was followed by the woman who was to shape the experiences of the middle period of his life and career, the handsome, headstrong, twenty-seven-year-old Marquise du Châtelet. Voltaire made his life for a decade with her at the Château de Cirey, occasionally

entertaining the Marquise's husband, a soldier. On one occasion, Voltaire and the Marquise were driving back to Cirey on a freezing winter's night when their coach overturned and a servant had to be sent to fetch help. When help arrived the servants were astonished to find the two of them curled up together in piles of rugs and cushions, deep in a snow drift, carefully identifying the outlines of the constellations. In his later years Voltaire slept with his sister's daughter, to whom he wrote erotic letters.¹⁵ He lived with her in happy domesticity at Ferney for the last years of his life.

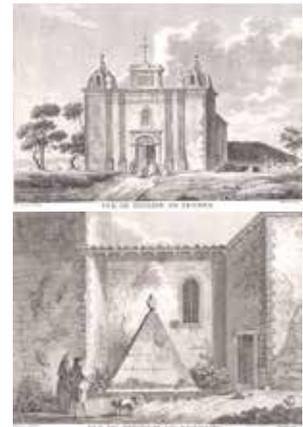
Despite all these preparations for reconciliation with his creator, Voltaire died as he had lived, a man of the Enlightenment. On his deathbed in Paris, he was asked by a priest to renounce Satan and turn to God. He is alleged to have replied, 'Now is no time to be making new enemies.'¹⁶ Refused burial on consecrated ground, his remains were spirited away to the Abbey of Champagne.

In 1791 Voltaire's body was brought in honour to the Panthéon in Paris. In 1814, his remains were stolen and dumped, never to be found again. His heart and brain, however, had been removed after death. His heart is kept at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris; his brain was auctioned a hundred years after his death. Its whereabouts are unknown.

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU (1712–1778)

While Voltaire emphasised the importance of reason, Rousseau emphasised emotion and the goodness of nature. Born in Geneva to Protestant lower-class parents, at sixteen Rousseau ran away from home, supporting himself by doing odd jobs. While living in Paris he seduced a servant, an illiterate country girl, Thérèse Levasseur, who became his life-long companion. They had five children, all of whom were sent to the foundling hospital (orphanage). Bizarrely, Rousseau seemed to believe that this was in their own best interests, arguing, 'I have very little money and believe that my own life will be short. The orphanage will raise my children to be good citizens and train them in one of the manual trades.'¹⁷ Indeed, Rousseau had no money and lived largely by the generosity of friends. It was not until he was forty that he achieved success as a writer. His most popular works were his novels. Yet he was to become the writer whose works had the greatest influence on the course of the French Revolution.¹⁸

Rousseau argued that modern society, which was both artificial and corrupt, could not make people happy. Civilisation itself was the source of the evil, for the more structured and legalistic a society became, the more it lost touch with the essential values which contributed to happiness. In a natural state, Rousseau argued, a man was spontaneous, honest and free; thus the idea of the 'noble savage' was born, the man untouched by the corrupting influences of civilisation, living at liberty in his world and in harmony with his environment. Rousseau believed that only such a man could be truly happy. Systems of laws, property ownership and 'civilised society' necessarily led to his corruption and from there to debasement and misery.



The church in Ferney, paid for by Voltaire, with the tomb he designed for himself.

15 A wonderful book to read is Nancy Mitford's *Voltaire in Love* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1957), which concentrates upon the 'menage à trois' at Cirey. Not only does it describe Voltaire's romps with the Marquise du Châtelet but it explores the great intellectual stimulation of this period of his life.

16 Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (Oxford University Press, 1996), 687.

17 Dave Robinson and Oscar Zarate, *Introducing Rousseau* (UK: Icon Books, 2001).

18. This is an extremely entertaining and accessible book which explains Rousseau's ideas very simply and is illustrated with amusing cartoons.

18 Robinson and Zarate, *Introducing Rousseau*, 25.



Jean-Jacques Rousseau in 1766, by Allan Ramsay, the eminent Scottish painter who completed a portrait of *philosophe* David Hume the same year.

DID YOU KNOW?

In *Emile*, Rousseau wrote that 'The noblest work in education is to make a reasoning man ... If children understood how to reason, they would not need to be educated.'

19 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Miscellaneous Works of Mr J-J Rousseau* (London, 1767), cited in Robinson and Zarate, *Introducing Rousseau*, 49.

20 Robinson and Zarate, *Introducing Rousseau*, 93.

21 Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, cited in Fielding and Morecombe, *The Spirit of Change*, 47.

Rousseau wrote that civilised people are wearers of masks and reality is always replaced by appearance. In modern societies, he believed, 'Man no longer dares to appear what he is. Cultured individuals appear superficially polite and charming, but underneath they are full of fear, suspicion, hatred, treachery and cynicism.'¹⁹

Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1755) developed these ideas further. He wrote that every variety of injustice found in human society is an artificial result of the control exercised by defective political and intellectual influences over the healthy, natural impulses of otherwise 'noble savages.' Rousseau's concept of the ideal 'state of being' – that enjoyed by the 'noble savage' – was supported in the public imagination by comments from French explorer Bougainville in 1768 that the simplicity of the newly-explored Tahiti made it similar to the Garden of Eden.

The native Tahitian was born equal under 'natural law,' enjoyed 'inalienable popular sovereignty' and shared property in common.

For Rousseau, there was nothing inevitable or natural about human-made institutions of property and social inequality. Rousseau viewed property as one of the 'chains' which imprisoned the 'civilised' person. He believed firmly that property was the root cause of all social ills. Rousseau's attitude was clearly expressed when he wrote, 'The first who enclosed a piece of ground and said, "This is mine", and found others simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civilized society ... Do not listen to this impostor; you are lost if you forget that the fruits of the earth belong to all and that the earth belongs to no-one.'²⁰

Rousseau argued that by legitimising and sanctifying property rights, the rich are able to seize most of the land and make the majority poor. Social relations become that of master and slave. Therefore, society needed to be governed by reason, representation and morally incorruptible leaders, who could assist the general population in discovering and achieving their true and 'general will.' What was the general will? If individuals at an assembly were to vote simply out of self-interest, then all that would result would be 'the Will of All.' Rousseau saw the general will as something purer, nobler, more patriotic and altruistic. If, however, on certain occasions differing opinions did arise, Rousseau believed they would inevitably cancel each other out.²¹ It was, quite literally, democracy: the expressed views of the people which became the laws by which the society was governed. In Rousseau's state of nature, humans initially had no understanding of either property or of 'rights.' But then a few greedy individuals who were cunning, articulate and persuasive suggested that everyone join a 'social contract' to ensure the rule of law, guaranteeing universal security. The 'social contract' then was corrupted by the powerful, who used the laws to restrict the freedom of the majority and entrench their own superiority.

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT (1762)

Rousseau's most influential work in terms of ideas of reform and revolution was *The Social Contract*, which began with the statement that 'Man is born free, and yet everywhere he is in chains,' that is, oppressed by laws imposed on him by government. In his argument, Rousseau repeated his belief that the original state of 'man' under natural law is one of liberty and equality. To protect this freedom and equality, men join together under a social contract and appoint governments to protect them. Thus, sovereignty or power resides in the people who have appointed the government to act on their behalf.

The main purpose of government must be to create a society in which every individual has real liberty and equality, which cannot be taken away, that is inalienable. In forming a social contract every citizen gives up their individual rights in order that all might enjoy civil liberty but, as citizens would voluntarily obey the laws out of a sense of obligation, they have not given up their sovereign powers to the government. However, Rousseau warned, 'A law not ratified by the people in person is no law at all.' He wanted a system where there were public votes on all issues of importance, not the English system of electing deputies to speak for the people, because, 'As soon as they are elected, [society] is enslaved.'²²

Once the people were assembled, Rousseau believed, the vote of the majority would determine the law. The sole function of legislation, then, is related to the achievement of 'the common good' and, said Rousseau, 'The greatest good of all, which should be the aim of all legislation, may ... be reduced to two main objects, – liberty and equality.'²³ Once these two values were achieved, the laws were serving man, rather than oppressing him.

Under the social contract, each citizen accepts the wishes of the majority, the general will, and the government implements this general will. If the government fails to implement the wishes of the citizens who have appointed it, the citizens can use their authority to overthrow it and appoint a new government. What of the minority who do not vote for a law? Rousseau did not see this as a difficulty, for 'The minority then, simply have it proved to them that they estimated the general will wrongly. Once it is declared, they are, as citizens, participants in it, and as subjects they must obey it.'²⁴

The social contract itself is not fixed, nor is it unable to be changed. Rousseau stated, 'there is in the State no basic law which cannot be repealed, not excluding the social contract itself; for if all the citizens assembled [wish] to break the contract, it is impossible to doubt that it would be very legitimately broken.'²⁵ This is the key justification for citizens to take revolutionary action.

In the last section of *The Social Contract*, 'On Civil Religion,' Rousseau argued that the social contract between citizens needed some kind of minimal religious sanction. This mild form of Deism would become the official state religion. It would encourage individuals to believe that a violation of state laws would be sinful as well as illegal.

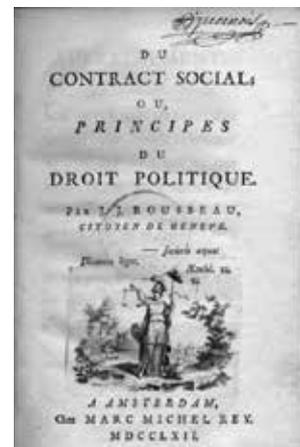
KEY IDEAS

Explain to someone in 60 seconds what Rousseau meant by the 'social contract' and the 'general will.'

ACTIVITY

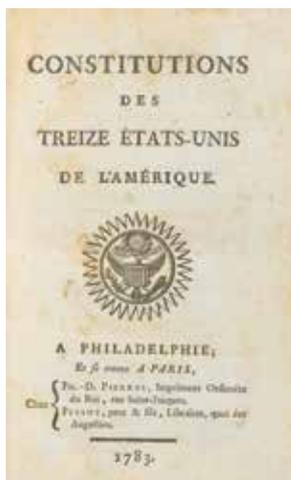
DID YOU KNOW?

Maximilien Robespierre is said to have slept with a copy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract* beside his bed.



Front page of first octavo edition of *The Social Contract*.

- 22 Rousseau, cited in Fielding and Morecombe, *The Spirit of Change*.
- 23 Rousseau, cited in Fielding and Morecombe, *The Spirit of Change*.
- 24 Rousseau, cited in Fielding and Morecombe, *The Spirit of Change*.
- 25 Cited in Fielding and Morecombe, *The Spirit of Change*.



French translation of *The Constitutions of the Thirteen United States of America*, Paris, 1783.

THE ‘AMERICAN SPIRIT’

The American Revolution or War of Independence (1775–83) transmitted Enlightenment ideas in a new form. America’s revolution seemed to many French thinkers to be based on ideas of personal liberty and freedom from despotism. The introduction of written constitutions in the thirteen colonies enshrined in law that the people had ‘inalienable rights,’ that these should be written down in a bill of rights as part of a constitution, and that government authority should be strictly limited through a separation of powers. As Alexander Hamilton, American politician, statesman, journalist, lawyer and soldier, wrote,

the sacred rights of man are not to be rummaged for among old parchments or musty records. They are written as with a sunbeam, by the hand of the Divinity itself and can never be erased or obscured by mortal power.²⁶

Where a government failed to protect these rights, then the people had the right to remove it and replace it with a new government which would protect their safety and happiness. To Hamilton, as to many other supporters of the American Revolution, the people’s rights were inalienable and came from God.

For those who had read Rousseau and Montesquieu, America seemed to be a new enlightened world of liberty, equality and popular sovereignty, the three words which would become the maxim of the early French revolutionaries. In 1778, the Duc de la Rochefoucauld translated and published America’s 1776 Declaration of Independence in France. It was widely sold and discussed in Paris. Eight thousand French soldiers had served in the American War; those who returned home were often advocates of this new and exciting society across the Atlantic. Foremost among them was the Marquis de Lafayette, the so-called ‘foster son’ of the great George Washington, who was leader of the American revolutionary forces and the first American president. Brissot de Warville, Thomas Paine, the Duc de la Rochefoucauld and others were champions of this new ‘American spirit.’ To Madame Campan, they represented a new energy in France. She wrote,

Our youth flew to the wars waged in the new world for liberty and against the rights of thrones. Liberty prevailed; they returned triumphant to France, and brought with them the seeds of independence.²⁷

These men, and the soldiers who served under them, saw in the American spirit and colonial society a personal liberty which was unachievable under the oppression of an absolute monarchy, a powerful Church and a privileged aristocracy. They were enthused by the new spirit of the common good. Even Arthur Young, the British journalist and agrarian reformer who travelled through France in 1788, wrote, ‘The American Revolution [has] laid the foundation for another in France, if the government does not take care of itself.’²⁸

THE PHYSIOCRATS: WEALTH THROUGH AGRICULTURE

These new, radical ideas in politics were matched by equally fresh developments in economic thought. The physiocrats were a group of French Enlightenment thinkers of the 1760s who were concerned with the inefficiencies of the French

DID YOU KNOW?

France sent eighty-seven officers, ships of the French Navy and 8000 troops to help the Americans fight the War of Independence.

MADAME CAMPAN’S
MEMOIRS OF COURT
LIFE



26 Alexander Hamilton, cited in R.R. Palmer, *A History of the Modern World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 330.

27 J.H. Rose, ed., *Memoirs of Madame Campan*, Vol. 2 (1917), cited in R. Ergang, *Europe from the Renaissance to Waterloo* (Boston: D.C. Heath and Co., 1954), 333.

28 Cited in Ergang, *Europe from the Renaissance to Waterloo*, 333.

economy. Their leader was François de Quesnay (1694–1774), the French court doctor whose *Tableau Economique* (1759) was a leading text. The circle also included the Marquis de Mirabeau, father of the Comte de Mirabeau, the revolutionary citizen-noble.

The central idea of the physiocrats was that only agriculture produced a true surplus (*produit net*). Manufacturing balanced out inputs to production (the raw materials) with the finished product and consequently produced no surplus. Yet the *produit net*, according to the physiocrats, was where the wealth of the nation lay. Thus, they argued, manufacturing should not be protected by tariffs, the granting of monopolies or any government intervention which protected the sector. The government should focus on its productive sector, agriculture. This must be done by freeing agriculture from laws restricting its growth.

The physiocrats had some things in common with other Enlightenment thinkers. They believed there was a social order determined by natural law and created by God. However, they also believed in a social order which was determined by human ideals; how society ought to be organised, rather than how nature had designed it. Human reason should determine changes to the natural order which would benefit all, through laws which coincided with nature at its best. The goal of statesmen should then be to harmonise with the natural order by abolishing those institutions which interfered with it. The state should withdraw its support from any attempts by special interest groups to bolster industry artificially.

The physiocrats believed that the best economic system came from a *laissez-faire* policy, meaning a system that allowed the economy to grow freely according to its capacity. Those things which interfered with the growth and trade of agriculture should be removed: the *corvée*, which took peasants away from their land; internal customs duties, like the *octrois*, on goods entering a city or passing down a river; the poor state of public works; guilds and corporations which had monopolies over grain purchasing, thus preventing farmers from selling to the highest bidder; and trading privileges granted to individuals. The viewpoint of the physiocrats can be summed up in their slogan: ‘He governs best who governs least.’

Mirabeau proposed that the whole range of taxes and tariffs be removed; instead there should be a single tax imposed on land-owners. This would be more efficient, less difficult and expensive to collect than the present system of multiple taxes, and would help to create a national market in agricultural products.

The physiocrats were wrong about trade and manufacturing, which do produce surpluses and create wealth; in the late eighteenth century the mercantile system proved this convincingly. However, because of the physiocrats, serious studies of how economies worked and prospered were developed, and they called attention to the weaknesses in the economy of France and particularly to the poor state of agriculture. ‘*Laissez-faire*’ was a useful concept, in that ministers under both the old regime and the revolutionary government did attempt to simplify and reform the taxation system. The finance ministers (comptrollers-general) Turgot, Necker, Calonne and Brienne, in seeking to reform the tax system of the old regime, were influenced by physiocratic thinking. For example, Calonne’s ‘territorial subvention’ was an attempt to replace a range of taxes with a single tax on land. Attempts to have free trade in grain also came from the work of the physiocrats. Many of the economic reforms from 1789 onwards were the result of their work: the provisions for free trade in grain; the introduction of a single system of weights and measures;

DID YOU KNOW?

Physiocracy means ‘rule by nature.’

DID YOU KNOW?

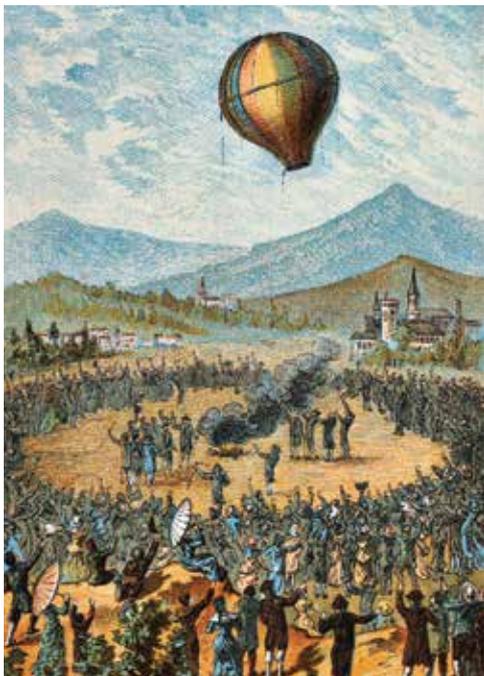
The physiocrats were disliked for their pride and disdain for others. David Hume, the Scottish philosopher and economist, wrote to a friend, ‘I hope that in your work you will thunder them, and crush them, and pound them, and reduce them to dust and ashes. They are, indeed, the set of men ... most arrogant that do exist.’

DID YOU KNOW?

Adam Smith, the great moral philosopher who examined the rise of industry and commerce in eighteenth century Europe, was dismissive of physiocratic theories, concluding that the physiocratic system ‘never has done, and probably never will do, any harm in any part of the world.’

DID YOU KNOW?

In the spirit of discovery of the late eighteenth century, the Montgolfier brothers launched an unmanned hot-air-balloon flight at Annonay in June 1783. In September, in front of Louis XVI and the court, they launched a sheep, a duck and a rooster in another balloon. The animals were brought down unharmed. The first manned flight took place from Paris in November 1783.



The first flight at Annonay, 4 June 1783.

29 Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond D'Alembert, *The Encyclopédie*, cited in Marshall Davidson, *The World in 1776* (New York: Heritage, 1975), 126.

30 *The Encyclopédie*, cited in Davidson, *The World in 1776*, 127.

31 *The Encyclopédie*, cited in Davidson, *The World in 1776*.

the abolition of internal tax barriers and their replacement by a single tariff on goods entering France; and the 'Chapelier' Law (June 1791), which abolished guilds, corporations and associations of workers.

ACTIVITY

ECONOMIC CHANGE

Note down three or more new economic ideas that sought to change society in the eighteenth century. What was 'enlightened' about these ideas at the time?

A 'DREAM OF PROGRESS': THE ENCYCLOPÉDIE

The *Encyclopédie*, which first appeared in 1751, was the greatest publishing enterprise embarked upon to that point. The aim of the publication, edited by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, was to organise all useful human knowledge. The seventeen volumes of text and eleven volumes of engravings (published between 1751 and 1780) issued from 'underground' (illegal) presses operating in defiance of the authorities, and more specifically against the orders of the Church, which was regarded by many enlightened thinkers as the guardian of superstition and the divinely ordained authority of the old regime.

The preface of the *Enclopédie* declared its aim thus:

In truth, the aim of an encyclopaedia is to collect all the knowledge scattered over the face of the earth, to present its general outlines and structure to the men with whom we live, and to transmit this knowledge to those who will come after us, so that the work of the past centuries may be useful to the following centuries, that our children, by becoming more educated, may at the same time become more virtuous and happier, and that we may not die without having deserved well of the human race.²⁹

A critic described it as 'the great affair of its time, the goal to which everything preceding it was tending, the origin of everything that has followed it, and consequently the true centre for any history of ideas in the eighteenth century.'³⁰

The *Encyclopédie* sought to give information on a multitude of subjects ranging from handicrafts to philosophy, statecraft to theology. It set out to guide opinion on social inequities, religious bigotry, political injustice and corruption, and backward economic practices: 'In its entirety it held a mighty dream of social progress and advancement.'³¹

The editor of the *Encyclopédie* was Denis Diderot and the contributors were all leading enlightened thinkers of the age: the sub-editor, Jean d'Alembert, was a mathematician; Turgot was a physiocratic economist; Voltaire, a writer who argued for religious and social tolerance; Rousseau explored the idea of the natural goodness and equality of man in nature, the general will and the social contract;

Baron von Holbach wrote on atheism; Montesquieu was a political thinker who argued for the separation of powers; Antoine Lavoisier, a chemist; the Comte de Buffon, a naturalist who envisaged all of God's creatures as being part of a Great Chain of Being; and the Marquis de Condorcet, who argued for the rights and education of people of all races and – something rare for the times – both sexes. This stellar group was the greatest assembled ever to write in a single text.

REVOLUTIONARY IDEAS

After reading about the thinkers and innovators in pre-revolutionary France, create a table like the one below and fill it in.

	KEY IDEAS / INNOVATIONS	KEY TEXTS / SPEECHES
Montesquieu		
Voltaire		
Jean-Jacques Rousseau		
Diderot and le Rond d'Alembert		
Marquis de Lafayette		
De Quesnay and the physiocrats		

ACTIVITY

CENSORSHIP OF THE *ENCYCLOPÉDIE*

Despite the calibre of its contributors, the *Encyclopédie* was not greeted with acclaim throughout France. The absolutist regimes of Louis XIV, Louis XV and Louis XVI had survived partly because of their strict systems of censorship.

Anything which attacked the teachings of the Gallican Church or the divine right monarchy of the Bourbons was to be rigidly repressed. The *Encyclopédie* presented a direct challenge to this authority. In 1752, the Marquis d'Argenson wrote in his journal,

This morning appeared an *arrêt de conseil* [official edict] ... It suppressed the *Dictionnaire encyclopédie*, with some appalling allegations, such as revolt against God and the royal authority [and] corruption of morals ... It is said ... that the authors of the dictionary must be shortly put to death.³²

All Diderot's working materials were confiscated. After the intervention of Madame de Pompadour (mistress of Louis XV) they were returned and Diderot was allowed to continue under the watchful eye of censors. In 1758 the work was again suppressed and this time the 'enlightened despots' King Frederick the Great of Prussia and Empress Catherine the Great of Russia offered Diderot asylum. Diderot, however, persevered in his Paris attic, the French officials relented, and the work was finally completed in 1780.

The *Encyclopédie* was costly to produce but nevertheless it ran to forty-three editions, with separate editions in Switzerland, Italy, Germany and Russia. Its impact was tremendous and widespread: it called for 'Liberty of all peoples, without which happiness is banished from states.'³³ This call for freedom of the

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1749, Diderot was imprisoned for publishing a book that challenged the existence of God. He later wrote of religion: 'from fanaticism to barbarism is only one step.'

³² *The Encyclopédie*, cited in Davidson, *The World in 1776*, 128.

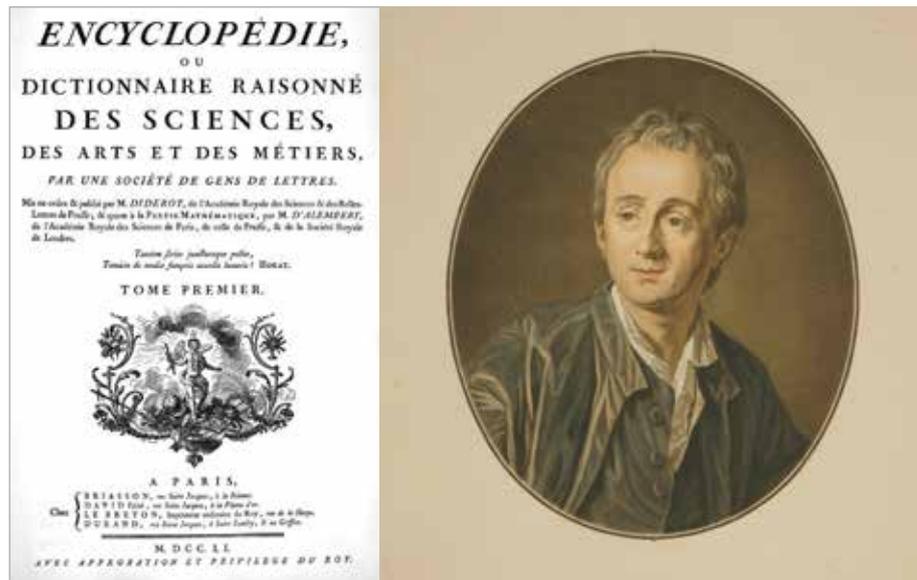
³³ *The Encyclopédie*, cited in Davidson, *The World in 1776*, 129.

Right: Frontispiece of the *Encyclopédie*, Volume 1, published in Paris in 1751. Although the *Encyclopédie* was frequently suspended by Church censors, Louis XVI had a full set of volumes in his library.

Far right: Portrait of Denis Diderot by Pierre-Michel Alix, 1793.

DID YOU KNOW?

Diderot sold his library to his patron, Catherine the Great of Russia, who included it in her daughter's dowry.



individual and, thus, the end to absolutism, became a rallying cry for the French Revolution: 'Liberty, equality and popular sovereignty.'

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PHILOSOPHES

The significance of the French Enlightenment thinkers or *philosophes* in the late eighteenth century has been widely debated. Did their work prompt the outburst of revolutionary energy of 1788 and 1789? How many French people had read these works and to what extent were they empowered by the ideas and ideas expressed? While it is not known how many French people read widely, around a third were literate and there was a variety of reading matter available, from 'cheap popular literature such as almanacks and traditional tales of wonder ... to expensive journals.'³⁴ And while these journals were far too expensive for most people, there were subscription rooms, literary societies and academies that had their own libraries. Beyond these were the *salons*, where fashionable people gathered to talk over the latest scandals, fashions or, perhaps, art, theatre and literature. Doyle sees the reading classes as made up of 'nobles, clerics and bourgeoisie ... magistrates, lawyers, administrators and army officers.'³⁵ Similarly, R.R. Palmer has written:

The reading public had greatly expanded. The educated middle class, commercial and professional, was much larger than ever before. Country gentlemen were putting off their rustic habits and even noblemen wished to keep informed. Newspapers and magazines multiplied, and people who could not read them at home could read them in coffee-houses or reading rooms organised for that purpose. There was great demand also for dictionaries, encyclopaedias and surveys of all fields of knowledge. The new readers wanted matters made interesting and clear. They appreciated wit and lightness of touch ...³⁶

34 William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (UK: Oxford University Press, 1989), 47.

35 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 48.

36 Palmer, *A History of the Modern World*, 291.

George Rudé has expressed similar views:

The ideas of Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau and many others were widely disseminated and were absorbed by an eager reading public, both aristocratic and plebeian [common]. It had become fashionable, even among the clergy, to be sceptical and irreligious ... Such terms as 'citizen', 'nation', 'social contract', 'general will' and 'the rights of man' – soon to be followed by 'Third Estate' – were entering into a common political vocabulary ...³⁷

Albert Soboul makes no specific reference to readers, but points to the Enlightenment's effect on the bourgeoisie, saying it 'undermined the ideological foundations of the established order and strengthened the bourgeoisie's consciousness of itself as a class.'³⁸ However, he presumes that, by the late eighteenth century, the bourgeoisie saw themselves as a distinct class. This is not a position accepted by all historians, with some arguing that ideas of 'class' and 'class consciousness' had not yet developed. David Garrloch, in his 1996 study of the formation of the Parisian bourgeoisie, has asserted that 'there was no Parisian bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century,' that is, that bourgeois people 'did not define themselves as a class with similar interests and outlook.'³⁹

Simon Schama looks at length at two examples of Enlightened nobles, the worldly bishop Talleyrand and the 'hero of two worlds,' the Marquis de Lafayette. Talleyrand, according to Schama, had 'a library of works by the most sceptical Enlightenment philosophers,'⁴⁰ while Lafayette's service in the American War of Independence imbued him with those ideas of 'Liberty, Equality and the pursuit of happiness' which were founded in Enlightenment philosophy. Thus, the 'citizen-nobles' who fought in the War of Independence brought back with them the 'spirit of America' and these ideas made them the 'first revolutionaries' in the struggle to limit the absolute powers of Louis XVI.

Peter McPhee maintains that the 'high' Enlightenment was a reflection of a wider crisis of legitimacy in the control of the public sphere:

The real significance of the Enlightenment, then, is as a symptom of a crisis of authority and as part of a wider political discourse. Well before 1789, the language of 'citizen', 'nation', 'social contract' and 'general will' was articulated across French society, clashing with an older discourse of 'orders', 'estates' and 'corporations'.⁴¹

A dissenting voice comes from Robert Darnton, who has studied the lists of books sold illegally through Swiss book-sellers in the 1770s and 1780s. Darnton's research found that readers certainly bought Rousseau's novels and cheap versions of the *Encyclopédie*, but overall they preferred works of scandal and pornography, particularly those concerned with recognised public figures. The queen, Marie Antoinette, was one such figure prominently represented. Priests who had affairs with their parishioners or who were dishonest with church funds, nuns who engaged in sexual activity and scandals to do with marriage or birth all amused the reading public, much as they do today. Perhaps, Darnton has suggested, such literature undermined the aura of royalty and the faith of the public in the institutions of the *ancien régime*.

In 1993, Sarah Maza published her influential *Private Lives and Public Affairs*, in which she re-examined the nature of popular interest in court trials prior to the French Revolution. Maza concluded that the writing and reading of sensational courtroom literature contributed to the birth of public opinion and of a new



LAFAYETTE AND THE AMERICAN WAR

DID YOU KNOW?

In July 1790, an American magazine reported that 'The key of the French Bastille has been sent over by the Marquis de Lafayette to Mr. Payne, an American, in order to be transmitted by him to General Washington, as a glorious token of triumphant liberty over despotic oppression.'

37 George Rudé, *The French Revolution* (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 7.

38 Albert Soboul, *A Short History of the French Revolution* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), 5–6.

39 See Peter McPhee, *The French Revolution 1789–1799* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002), 25.

40 Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1989), 21.

41 McPhee, *The French Revolution*, 31.

public sphere. The most sensational trials of the 1770s concerned conflicts between humble, oppressed members of the Third Estate and powerful men. Maza suggests that these provided emotive examples of the tendency of tyrannical power to oppress the weak. In the 1780s, the emphasis shifted to family and matrimonial disputes, which again seemed to have a symbolic dimension as a personalisation of relationships between the ruler and the ruled.

Another dissenting voice comes from the German sociologist Jürgen Habermas, who has pointed to the growth of institutions outside of the privileged aristocratic world of the nobility. Freemasonry grew rapidly after 1760 and by the 1780s there were some 600 Masonic lodges. In these 'spaces' ideas were debated and theories expounded, leading to the growth of ideas which challenged earlier 'truths.' This world of freemasonry, Habermas has claimed, was masculine, bourgeois, literate, often wealthy and free thinking.⁴² As such, it promoted the growth of a robust intellectual climate among the rapidly increasing world of trade and commerce.

CONCLUSION

The late eighteenth century gave rise to a great ferment of ideas. The works of the Enlightenment *philosophes*, of the physiocrats, of scientists, scandal-mongers and pornographers gave birth to public opinion. People became more aware of and concerned about the state of the nation, the ordering of society, the distribution of power, justice and injustice, personal rights and grievances. There was an openness of debate and a public airing of opinion in *salons* and clubs, Masonic lodges and private establishments.

It was not that the people rejected monarchy or wished for revolution, but there was a steady erosion of confidence in the regime which affected perceptions of the legitimacy of established political and social structures. As the financial crisis of 1786 brought the monarchy to the point of reform, it also undermined confidence in both the monarchy and the social system. At a time when crisis weakened and exposed the workings of government, Enlightenment ideas provided a vocabulary of dissent, a means of envisaging a better world out of the weaknesses of the old.

⁴² For a more detailed account of the work of Habermas, see Peter McPhee's *The French Revolution*, 31.

CHAPTER REVIEW

KEY IDEAS – DIAGRAM

Look again at the diagram of The King's Government at the start of Chapter 1. Make a new diagram based on Montesquieu's idea of how government power *should* have been exercised in France.

CONSTRUCTING AN ARGUMENT:

1) PRESENTATION

In a format of your choice, give a presentation to your class on one of the following topics:

- Explain the features of absolute, divine-right monarchy. What beliefs and attitudes underpinned this system of government?
- Why were members of the First and Second Estates deemed to be of higher status than those of the Third? How was such a view challenged during the Enlightenment?
- To what extent did Enlightenment thinkers seek rights and equality for all people? Were there any exceptions?
- To what extent did the French revolutionaries work off a 'template' derived from the American Revolution?
- Compare and contrast two or more of the following Enlightenment ideas and explain how they influenced the French Revolution:
 - The general will
 - The social contract
 - Religious toleration
 - Reason and empiricism
 - Laissez-faire economics.

2) EXTENDED ANSWER

Using evidence from this chapter and your own research, write an extended answer on the following question: *Using three or four points, explain how Enlightenment ideas constituted a long-term cause of the French Revolution.*

3) ESSAY

Write an essay of 600–800 words on the topic below. Your essay should include an introduction, paragraphs supported by evidence from primary sources and historical interpretations, a conclusion and a bibliography.

Topic: *Why were members of the First and Second Estates deemed to be of higher status than those of the Third Estate under the old regime in France? How was this system challenged by the Enlightenment?*



EXTENSION

Watch Episode 1 of the documentary *Heroes of the Enlightenment* (Renegade Pictures and BBC Worldwide, 2011). It can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=07DhMaOgDNs>.

As you view the episode, note down the key ideas and political influence of:

- Voltaire
- Denis Diderot
- The Marquis de Condorcet
- Thomas Jefferson.



MORE ASSESSMENT TASKS
ON REVOLUTIONARY IDEAS

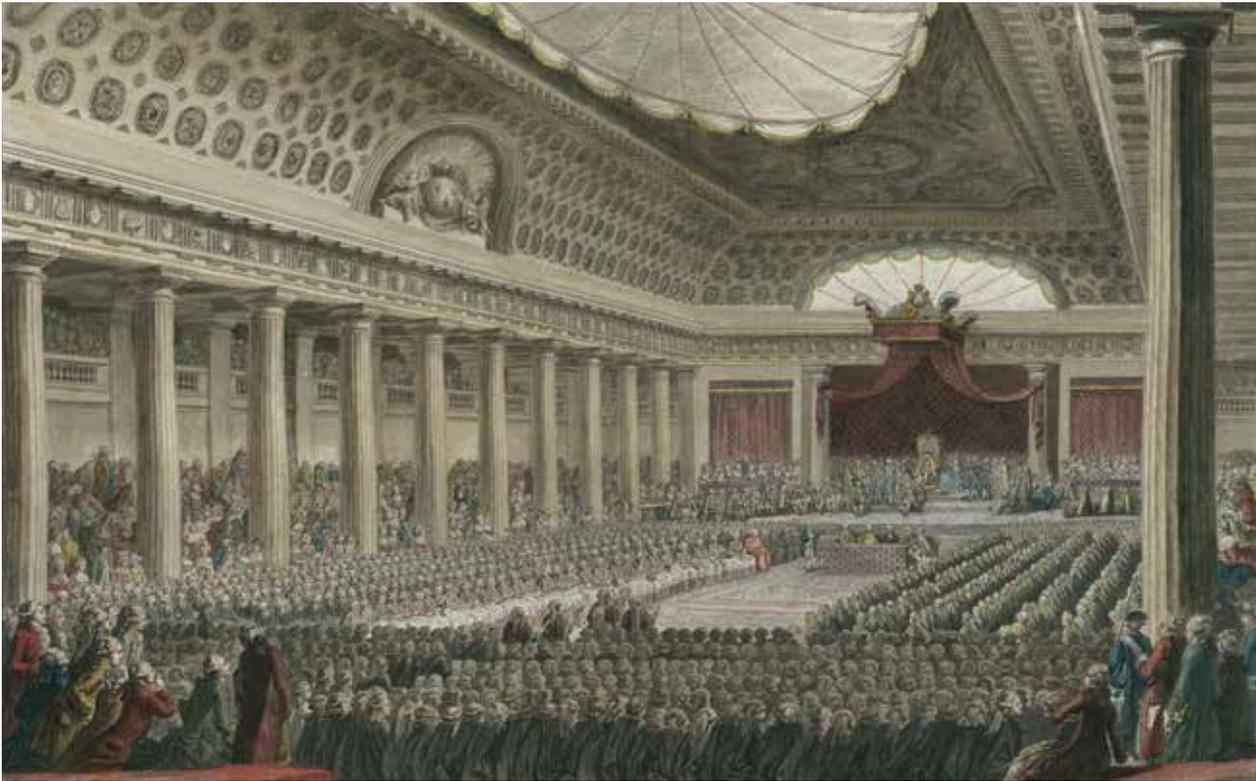
CHAPTER

3

THE REVOLUTION TAKES SHAPE

REVOLUTIONARY FERVOUR GREW AS MEMBERS WERE ELECTED TO THE ESTATES-GENERAL, PUBLIC GRIEVANCES WERE AIRED AND PARISIANS STORMED THE BASTILLE. AMID GROWING SIGNS OF UGLY MOB VIOLENCE, REVOLUTIONARIES CREATED A DECLARATION OF RIGHTS AND LIMITED THE POWER OF THE KING.

MAY-OCTOBER 1789



The opening of the Estates-General, 5 May 1789, in the Salle des Menus Plaisirs in Versailles.

INTRODUCTION: THE ESTATES-GENERAL

At the end of April 1789, the delegates to the Estates-General began arriving at the great palace of Versailles. The representatives of the nobility had been chosen by a direct vote (all male nobles over twenty-five had voted for their representatives), those of the clergy by a mixture of direct and indirect voting and those of the Third Estate indirectly. In the case of the Third Estate all males over twenty-five were entitled to vote for electors, who then met in district conventions to elect their representatives. David Andress has estimated that some four to five million Frenchmen were eligible to participate in these elections.¹ Most of the Society of Thirty became deputies: the young bourgeois Target, the de Lameth brothers, Lafayette, Lally-Tollendal, Clermont-Tonnerre, the Archbishop of Bordeaux, Champion de Cicé, Bishop Talleyrand and Abbé Sieyès. The Marquis de Mirabeau, like Sieyès, was elected for the Third Estate. Of the Third Estate deputies, almost half were lawyers, including Target, Mounier, Barnave and Robespierre. There were some noblemen and a few priests, but of the 600 deputies, fewer than twenty were from the lower orders.

Social distinctions were strictly observed. On 2 May, Louis XVI received all the delegates in the Hall of Mirrors. The clergy were received first. The double doors leading to the Hall of Mirrors were opened but once the delegates were inside they were closed, giving them a private audience with the king. The nobility were next. The doors were opened, but not fully closed behind them. In contrast, the deputies for the Third Estate were made to wait for over three hours for their

¹ David Andress, *French Society in Revolution, 1789-1799* (UK: Manchester University Press, 1999), 50.

audience with the king and were not admitted to the Hall of Mirrors; they were taken to a lesser *salon*. Here, in the words of Simon Schama, they passed in single file before Louis ‘like a crocodile of sullen schoolboys’ and were then dismissed.²

On 4 May, the deputies to the Estates-General walked in procession to the Church of St. Louis for the celebration of mass. Here, again, social differences were made apparent. The Third Estate led the way immediately behind the guard, wearing costumes of plain black broad-cloth, with white ruffs and tricorne hats. Then followed the nobility, colourful in satin suits, with lace ruffs and silver waistcoats. Their hats had decorative plumes and swords hung from their belts. The Marquis de Ferrières had grumbled in a letter to his wife that his hat would cost him, at the very least, 180 livres, which was about a third of the yearly income of the lower clergy who made up the majority of the First Estate.³ Last came the clerical deputies, the parish priests in their plain soutanes (cassocks) and the bishops resplendent in their scarlet and purple episcopal regalia. The deliberate division into higher and lower orders was resented and, as Simon Schama has noted, ‘The more brilliantly the first two orders swaggered, the more they alienated the Third Estate and provoked it into exploding the institution altogether.’⁴ The king’s arrival was greeted with shouts of ‘Long live the King,’ but, wrote the American observer Gouverneur Morris, ‘The Queen received not a single acclamation.’⁵

DID YOU KNOW?

It was noted that the queen looked sad as she passed by in the procession. She knew her seven-year-old son, the dauphin, was dying of tuberculosis. Unable to take part, he watched from a balcony. Reportedly the queen ‘could scarcely hold back her tears as he smiled valiantly at her.’



The Deputies of the Three Orders of the Estates-General in their Ceremonial Dress. The strict hierarchical order of the old regime was visually expressed through rigid distinctions in dress. The Third Estate deputies bitterly resented the plain dress they were obliged to wear to mark them out from the upper orders.

LOUIS FAILS TO OFFER REFORM

The next day, 5 May, was the date of the opening ceremony for the sitting of the Estates-General. Delegates met at the Hôtel des Menus Plaisirs, normally used for storing theatrical costumes and props for royal entertainment. The king wore cloth-of-gold and a large diamond glinted in his hat, which he carried in his hand.

2 Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (UK: Penguin, 1989), 346.

3 Schama, *Citizens*, 336.

4 Schama, *Citizens*, 339.

5 Christopher Hibbert, *The French Revolution* (UK: Penguin, 1980), 50.



Marie Antoinette with a Rose, Louise Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, oil on canvas, 1783.

The queen wore a white dress with silver spangles and a heron plume in her hair. As Louis sat down, he put on his hat, a signal to the privileged orders that they could now place their hats on their heads. The Third Estate deputies, either not understanding the court protocols, or 'led by calculating mischief makers,'⁶ took it as a symbol that they could replace their own hats. The king, therefore, took his hat off again, and again, all the deputies copied him. Finally, Louis waited until the queen was seated and replaced his hat on his head. The American representative, Gouverneur Morris, was consumed with mirth, but the queen, Simon Schama has reported, 'was white with rage.'⁷

What followed was greatly disappointing to the assembled deputies, who were hoping that Louis would lead them in a program of reform. The king made a short speech of welcome. In it, he referred to the 'much exaggerated desire for innovations' and expressed the hope that those present would work with him for the welfare of France. The next speech was made by Barentin, the king's Keeper of the Seals, who talked also of 'dangerous innovations.'

The final speaker was Jacques Necker, who made a three-hour speech on the state of the finances. Having bored the whole audience, including the king (who fell asleep), the ceremonial welcome was over, with no firm plans or policies emerging from the speeches. The sole directive coming from the government of the king was that the finances must be stabilised and put in order.

DISPUTE OVER CREDENTIALS

On 6 May 1789, the deputies met in their separate estates or chambers to verify their credentials, with the whole question of voting by estate or by head still not settled. The nobility and the clergy, in their separate halls, began the process of checking the credentials of their deputies. The representatives of the Third Estate, however, demanded that every deputy should present his credentials to the full body of deputies, assembled in one place. Until this was conceded, they refused to undertake the process of verification. The result was a stalemate. For a full three weeks, the deputies of the Third Estate met, talked and debated but, so that they did not appear to have accepted their separate status, would neither organise themselves, elect leaders, nor adopt any rules of procedure. The only appointment that was made was the election of Jean-Sylvain Bailly, an astronomer, to control the debates. As the person who had overseen the elections of the 407 deputies of the Third Estate from Paris, he was a well respected and popular figure.



Jean-Sylvain Bailly.

ACTIVITY

BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

1. How did the beliefs and attitudes of Louis XVI and Jacques Necker about the purpose of the Estates-General differ from those of the Third Estate representatives?
2. What evidence is there to suggest that the Third Estate deputies were not satisfied with the process of verifying deputies' credentials at the Estates-General? Why did the process matter so much to them?

⁶ Schama, *Citizens*, 346.

⁷ Schama, *Citizens*.

DOCUMENT

COMTESSE D'ADHÉMAR ON 'THE KING'S ATTITUDE'

We [the queen's friends] never ceased repeating to the King that the third estate would wreck everything – and we were right. ...

The King, deceived by [Necker] ... paid no attention to the Queen's fears.

This well-informed princess [the queen] knew all about the plots that were being woven; she repeated them to the King, who replied, 'Look, when all is said and done, are not the third estate also my children – and a more numerous progeny? And even when the nobility lose a proportion of their privileges and the clergy a few scraps of their income, will I be any less their king?' This false perspective accomplished the general ruin.⁸

SOURCE ANALYSIS

ACTIVITY

Read the comments from the Comtesse (Countess) D'Adhémar and complete the tasks below.

1. According to the source, what were the queen's views of the demands of the Third Estate? What was the 'everything' that would be 'wrecked' by accepting their demands?
2. To what extent did Louis XVI have a 'false perspective' on the situation facing him in early 1789?
3. Analyse the Comtesse's perspective on the Third Estate. Find a contrasting perspective from this book and compare it with the Comtesse's view.
4. Evaluate the significance of Louis XVI's political beliefs and actions in causing revolution. In your answer, refer to other views of the revolution.

AN APPEAL FOR UNITY AMONG DEPUTIES

The deadlock was broken at the end of May 1789 by the decision of the deputies of the Third Estate to send a delegation to the First Estate, hoping to encourage the more liberal deputies amongst the clergy to join the Third. The delegation was led by Gui-Jean-Baptiste Target, the deputy from Dauphiné, who announced that:

The gentlemen of the Commons invite the gentlemen of the clergy, in the name of the God of Peace and for the national interest, to meet them in their hall to consult upon the means of bringing about the concord which is so vital at this moment for the public welfare.⁹

This was an astute political move, because the First Estate deputies were already divided, with the upper clergy favoring separate voting, and many of the lower clergy identifying with the Third Estate. Simon Schama has pointed out that 'it was in the Church, more than any other group in France, that the separation between rich and poor was most bitterly articulated.'¹⁰ While the wealthiest bishops may have had an annual income of 50 000 livres, the standard stipend for a village priest was only 700 livres per year. These priests were not only impoverished, but they lived within their communities, as many of the upper clergy did not, and were well aware of the sufferings of the poor. Almost two thirds of the 303 clerical deputies elected were ordinary parish priests, and of these, around half had addresses in Paris where they lived for most of the year.¹¹ Many of them were liberal in their thinking and eager to join the Third Estate. The majority, however, were more reluctant to join with the 'Commons,' as the Third Estate deputies now called themselves, and so the delay continued. On 7 May, the nobility voted to proceed with separate verification. The clergy followed, but not without dissent: 133 deputies voted for separate representation, while 114 voted against.¹²

8 Comtesse d'Adhémar, *Souvenirs sur Marie-Antoinette, Archiduchesse d'Autriche, Reine de France, et sur la Cour de Versailles* (4 vols, 1836), III, 156–7, cited in Leonard W. Cowie, *The French Revolution: Documents and Debates* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 45.

9 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 54.

10 Schama, *Citizens*, 348.

11 William Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1980), 99; Timothy Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture* (USA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 29.

12 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 102.

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Read George Lefebvre's interpretation below and complete the tasks that follow.

GEORGE LEFEBVRE, *THE GREAT FEAR OF 1789: RURAL PANIC IN REVOLUTIONARY FRANCE*, TRANS. JOAN WHITE (LONDON: NLB, 1973), 35-36.

The aristocracy was a violent critic of despotism, it was said, and wanted to force the king to promulgate a constitution so that henceforward no laws could be made or taxes imposed without the consent of the Estates-General. This is true. But they nevertheless intended that the Estates-General should stay divided into three, each order having one voice, the clergy and the nobility being thus assured of a majority. ... The idea of a nation in which every citizen had exactly the same rights horrified them; they wanted to retain their honorific prerogatives, keep their rank and, with even greater reason, preserve the feudal servitudes. [As] Masters of the state, they would have instituted a formidable aristocratic reaction

1. According to Lefebvre, what did the aristocracy want to win from the king?
2. What ideas does Lefebvre suggest most horrified the privileged orders?
3. What do Lefebvre's comments add to an understanding of the nature of the privileges accorded to the First and Second Estates up to 4 August 1789?
4. Evaluate Lefebvre's account in light of other evidence and interpretations. To what extent does it fully explain the motivations of the nobility?

POPULAR MOVEMENTS: THE RÉVEILLON RIOTS

The events at Versailles were taking place against a backdrop of increasing unrest in Paris. As food prices continued to rise and place pressure on the urban workers, political and economic issues fused into resentment of the government and of the privileged estates. By April 1789, tensions in Paris had reached a peak. The 4 pound loaf of bread which had cost 9 sous in August 1788 had risen to 14-15 sous by February 1789 and would stay at this level until after the fall of the Bastille, while it was rare for an unskilled worker to earn more than 20 sous a day.

DID YOU KNOW?

Madame de la Tour du Pin's memoirs state that the early spring of 1789 followed a terrible winter, with much suffering amongst the poor. She notes the Duc d'Orléans' charity towards the poor, but observes that this was absent from the royal family.

In addition, there was considerable anger amongst the labourers of Paris that they had been excluded from voting in electoral districts because of changes in voting qualifications.

By the end of April 1789, serious civil disorder had broken out. On 23 April, a wallpaper manufacturer, Réveillon, speaking at his local electoral assembly, had argued for a decrease in the price of bread, 'to levels that wage-earners on 15 sous a day could afford.' A saltpetre manufacturer, Henriot, had made similarly misunderstood statements, and when both tried to deny the rumours, they were not believed. The crowd carried a mock gallows and a placard which read 'Edict of the Third Estate, which Judges and Condemns the Above Réveillon and Henriot to be burned and Hanged in a Public Square.'¹³ Shouting 'Death to the Rich, death to the Aristocrats,' they marched on Réveillon's mansion. Prevented by the local militia from reaching the house, they attacked Henriot's mansion, looting

¹³ Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 328.

and destroying his possessions.¹⁴ The next day, now several thousand strong, the rioters stormed Réveillon's house and factory and destroyed everything in them. As the *Gardes Françaises* (elite royal household troops) tried to restore order, casualties occurred, perhaps twenty-five dead and a similar number wounded. Beyond the Réveillon Riots, however, was the wider fear of the urban poor that the rich were plotting to find ways to retain their privileges at the expense of the poor. Rumours spread of a 'grain plot' either by the government itself, or by noble and clerical interests. The bookseller Hardy recorded that even the monarchy was under suspicion:

Some say the princes have been hoarding grain the better to overthrow M. Necker ... Others said the Director-General of Finances was himself the chief and first of all the hoarders, with the consent of the King, and that he only favoured and supported such an enterprise to get money more promptly for His Majesty.¹⁵

Food shortages thus became associated in the people's minds with the taxation crisis and with plots to dismiss the Estates-General: if the king could not get the money he needed from the Estates-General, he would dismiss them and sell the grain in order to relieve his financial problems.

THE THIRD ESTATE GAINS MOMENTUM

The growing unrest in Paris led to attempts to settle the question of representation. On 4 June 1789, Necker suggested that each estate should verify the credentials of its own members, but that the other estates should be able to challenge the results. However, Sieyès proposed to the Commons that it should summon the privileged estates to either join with them or to forfeit their rights as representatives of the nation. This was a revolutionary move, because Sieyès was not asking the deputies to join the Third Estate, but to recognise themselves as the representatives of the French nation, a complementary but rival power to the monarchy. Louis XVI's authority had not only been challenged, but rejected by a group which saw itself as representing a different authority – that of the people.

THE REVOLUTION TAKES SHAPE: DECLARATION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

On 12 June 1789, the Commons began the process of verification, beginning with the privileged orders, but the deputies were not verified on the basis of their order, but as representatives of the nation. On 13 June, three clergymen joined them. They were greeted with thunderous applause and shouts of approval. More followed on 14 June and, on 17 June, the Commons declared themselves the National Assembly of France:

The Assembly, deliberating after the verification of powers, recognizes that this assembly is already composed of deputies sent by at least ninety-six per cent of the nation ... The name of NATIONAL ASSEMBLY is the only one which suits the assembly under the present circumstances ... Because they are sent directly by almost the entire nation ... none of the deputies, from whatever class or order, has the right to perform his duties apart from the present assembly.¹⁶

DID YOU KNOW?

According to Dylan Rees, by the spring of 1789 a Parisian worker could have been spending 88 per cent of his or her wages on bread.



INTERACTIVE TIMELINE
ON REVEILLON RIOTS

14 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*.

15 D.M.G. Sutherland, *France 1789–1815 Revolution and Counter-Revolution* (London: Fontana, 1985), 61.

16 John Hall Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1951), 87.

DID YOU KNOW?

The dauphin's funeral was said to have cost 600 000 livres, at a time when many of Louis XVI's subjects were unable to pay for bread. The Marquis de Ferrières commented to his wife, 'You see, my dear, the birth and death of princes is not an object of economy.'

Michael Adcock points out that in this text, Sieyès 'both conceptualised the idea of the nation, and actually facilitated the momentous transfer of sovereignty from the King to the Nation.'¹⁷

The decision marked the beginning of the real revolution and it was largely a result of the indecision of Louis XVI. He had failed to rule on the question of voting by head or by estate in December 1788 and thus made the issue a dispute. He had not intervened over the six weeks from May to June 1789, partly because he was in mourning for the death of his eldest son, the seven-year-old dauphin, who had died of tuberculosis on 4 June, after two years of illness. The king and queen were suffering deep personal grief throughout this critical period of public responsibility. As a result of the indecision of the king, the Commons gradually hardened their position. If he had agreed to common verification and voting by head, then the deputies for the Third Estate would have had a meaningful political voice within an assembly representing all three estates. However, Louis' inaction had inflated the issue and gradually the Commons moved towards challenging his authority. In this they were urged on by the growing crowd of spectators from Paris who had little sympathy for the noble orders.

The voice of public opinion was firmly on the side of the rebels and popular journals and pamphlets in Paris made the political situation a matter of common debate. The Englishman Arthur Young wrote,

I went to the Palais Royal to see what new things were published ... Nineteen-twentieths of these productions are in favour of liberty and commonly violent against the clergy and nobility ... The coffee houses ... are not only crowded within, but other expectant crowds are at the doors and windows, listening ... to certain orators, who from chairs and tables harangue each his little audience. The eagerness with which they are heard, and the thunder of applause they receive for every sentiment of more than common hardness against the present government cannot be believed.¹⁸

On 19 June, the clergy voted to join the National Assembly, endorsing the declaration of 17 June. The spectators applauded them, calling out 'Long live the good Bishops! Long live the priests!'¹⁹ On 20 June, however, when the new National Assembly arrived at the *Salle des Menus Plaisirs* to begin their discussion, they found the doors locked and placards announcing the calling of a *Séance Royale*, a royal session presided over by the king, to be held on 23 June in order to announce the formation of a National Assembly to be illegal.

ACTIVITY

CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE

1. From 1787, how did the actions of Louis XVI help to cause the revolution?
2. What might have been the consequences if Louis had allowed voting by head prior to the meeting of the Estates-General?

17 Michael Adcock, 'The Role of Leaders in the French Revolution', HTAV Conference Paper, February 2007.

18 Arthur Young, cited in Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 104.

19 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 59.

THE TENNIS COURT OATH

Indignant at what seemed to be an act of royal despotism and led by Parisian deputy Dr. Joseph Guillotin, the deputies moved to a nearby indoor tennis court. There were no seats, only a single armchair, and a bench. Two of the deputies stayed at the door to keep out the crowds that tried to follow. Sieyès wanted them

to move the whole Assembly to Paris, but then Jean-Joseph Mounier, the young deputy from Grenoble, intervened. He called on the deputies to swear an oath between them never to separate until France had a constitution. The oath was taken individually by each deputy in front of Jean-Sylvain Bailly, who stood on a table made from a door pulled from its hinges. Arms raised in a Roman salute, the 600 deputies swore the ‘Oath of the Tennis Court.’ Only one man dissented, Martin d’Auch of Castelnau. The oath said:

The National Assembly, considering that it has been summoned to establish the constitution of the Kingdom, to effect the regeneration of public order, and to maintain the true principles of monarchy; that nothing can prevent it from continuing its deliberations in whatever place it may be forced to assemble; and finally, that wherever its members are assembled, *there* is the National Assembly, decrees that all members of this Assembly shall immediately take a solemn oath not to separate and to reassemble wherever circumstances require, until the constitution of this kingdom is established and consolidated upon firm foundations; and that the said oath taken, all members and each one of them individually shall ratify this steadfast resolution by signature.²⁰

The deputies then lined up to sign the document. Against his name, Martin d’Auch signed ‘*opposant*.’²¹

Who was responsible for the Oath of the Tennis Court? It had been suggested by Mounier and drafted by Target, Barnave and Le Chapelier, all lawyers. It is historically significant because it was the first formal act of disobedience to the monarchy and was signed even by those members who had opposed adopting the name of ‘National Assembly’ on 17 June. A notable absentee was the Marquis de Lafayette. This dramatic moment was to take on iconic status in the revolution. It was immortalised by Jacques-Louis David, the revolutionary painter, in several different versions which have been analysed in extensive detail by Michael Adcock.²²



The Oath of the Tennis Court, Jacques-Louis David, 1791.



KEY PEOPLE IN DAVID'S ‘OATH OF THE TENNIS COURT’

DID YOU KNOW?

Royal tennis, played indoors with solid balls and small racquets, is still played today by enthusiasts.

THE ROYAL SESSION

At the Royal Session of 23 June 1789, Louis XVI, as expected, announced that the decision to form the National Assembly was annulled and that the estates should meet separately, unless he permitted them to meet together. He then announced some concessions: that the question of equal taxation would be considered and that new taxes would only be levied with the consent of the Estates-General. All feudal dues, manorial dues and church tithes were to be left intact, but privileged tax status could be surrendered, if it were done so voluntarily. Finally, Louis promised to extend the system of provincial assemblies to the whole of his kingdom, to abolish censorship of the press and arbitrary arrest and imprisonment (*lettres de cachet*). He then ordered the deputies to disperse and to meet the next day in their separate orders. After this he withdrew, followed by the nobility and the majority of the clergy, who were not willing to challenge royal authority.

20 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 88.

21 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 60.

22 Michael Adcock's outstanding analysis of the way in which the representation of this key historical event changed during the course of the revolution may be found in Michael Adcock and Graeme Worrall, *The French Revolution: A Student Handbook* (Melbourne: HTAV, 1997), 42–5.

DID YOU KNOW?

Jean-Sylvain Bailly was guillotined on 12 November 1793, on the false grounds that he had aided the royal family to flee Paris. He was brought to the place of execution with his hands bound behind his back, half-naked and freezing. For three hours the crowd abused him, hit him with sticks, threw stones at him and spat in his face.

DID YOU KNOW?

Mirabeau died a natural death in April 1791, perhaps the only major revolutionary figure other than Sieyès to do so. He suffered from an inflammation of the heart. The great orator's last word was 'sleep.'

The Third Estate deputies and their clerical supporters remained seated. When de Brézé, the Master of Ceremonies, ordered them to go, Mirabeau rose to his full height and pronounced, 'Go and tell those who have sent you that we are here by the will of the nation and we will go only if we are driven out by bayonets.'²³ He was immediately supported by Bailly and Sieyès: the former stated, 'The assembled nation cannot be given orders.'²⁴ In the vote that followed, 493 deputies vowed to stay, while only thirty-four voted to obey the king.²⁵ Thus, the new National Assembly rejected royal authority over it, confirmed the Tennis Court Oath and proclaimed its members free from arrest. When the king was told of the deputies' resistance, he is reported to have said, 'They mean to stay! ... Well, then, damn it! Let them stay!'²⁶

For the Third Estate, it was a huge victory which was soon to be followed by another. On 24 June the soldiers sent to deny the National Assembly entry to its meeting hall crossed to support the Assembly, telling Bailly, 'We too, are citizens.'²⁷ On 25 June, forty-seven liberal nobles, including the king's cousin, the Duc d'Orléans, the very highest of the peerage, joined the National Assembly. By 27 June, forewarned that a mob of thirty thousand was about to march on Versailles from Paris, King Louis XVI capitulated and ordered the estates to meet in common and to vote by head. The nobility, the Marquis de Lafayette amongst it, with the rest of the clergy, now joined the rebel deputies within the National Assembly. Arthur Young, commenting in his diary on the events to 27 June, concluded, 'The whole revolution now seems over and the business complete.'²⁸

In the eyes of the king and his ministers, however, the business was far from complete. The failure of the Royal Session on 23 June was, they concluded, the fault of Necker. Although he had originally proposed it as a solution, he had absented himself on the day. Now that royal authority had failed, Louis' ministers advised him to quell the reform movement by sacking Necker and using armed force. On 26 June, six regiments were ordered to Versailles and on 1 July, another ten regiments were moved from the provinces to the outskirts of the city of Paris.

ACTIVITY

CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE

What might have been the consequences if Louis XVI had decided to use the army to dissolve the Estates-General? Identify two or more possibilities.

23 Robert Ergang, *Europe from the Renaissance to Waterloo* (Boston: D.C. Heath and Co., 1954), 655.

24 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 62.

25 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*.

26 Ergang, *Europe from the Renaissance to Waterloo*, 655.

27 Schama, *Citizens*, 364.

28 Arthur Young, *Travels in France during the Years 1787, 1788 and 1789* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 179.

29 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 64.

ESCALATING TENSIONS IN PARIS

This counter-manoeuve by the monarchy was not unexpected by the people. Even as Louis XVI made concessions to the Third Estate, the fear that he would seek reprisals against the population increased. What if he reversed his decision? What if the troops which were arriving at Versailles and Paris were to be used against the people? The government, meanwhile, protested that the 18 000 troops massed around the city were there 'to protect Paris from disorder, not to overawe it.'²⁹

The Assembly itself was not sure of the king's intentions. It requested that the troops be withdrawn. On 8 July 1789, Mirabeau voiced the fears of those present when he declared, 'A large number of troops already surround us. More

are arriving each day. Artillery is being brought up ... These preparations for war are obvious to anyone and fill every heart with indignation.³⁰ The decision was made to petition the king to withdraw the troops, but on 10 July, Louis refused, suggesting that the troops were there to protect the Assembly and that, in the event of street-rioting, it might be necessary to move the deputies further away from Paris. As fears grew, so did the determination of the Assembly and the people of Paris to resist.

NECKER'S DISMISSAL

On 11 July 1789, Jacques Necker was summarily dismissed. It felt to some like a declaration of war on the part of the king.

Louis' letter of dismissal arrived at 3 o'clock in the afternoon and ordered Necker to leave Versailles secretly and to return to Switzerland. By 5 o'clock, Necker and his wife had departed. The dismissal was politically disastrous, as Gouverneur Morris perceived. In his diary entry for 12 July, he wrote of his alarm and his efforts to urge the Maréchal de Castries to point out the dangers to Louis XVI:

I tell him it is not too late to warn the King of his Danger which is infinitely greater than he imagines. That his Army will not fight against the Nation, and that if he listens to violent Counsels the Nation will undoubtedly be against him. That the Sword has fallen imperceptibly from his hand, and that the Sovereignty of this Nation is the National Assembly.³¹

In Paris, frenzied crowds of people spilled onto the streets, looting shops, particularly those which sold arms. Shouts of 'Necker and the Third Estate!' rang through the air. Soldiers found themselves retreating under a hail of stones. Groups of men marched through the streets armed with pitchforks, swords or whatever weapon they could find or steal. At the Palais Royal, converted by the Duc d'Orléans into a place of cafés, shops and recreational gardens, Necker's dismissal brought a crowd of several thousand to listen to speakers condemning the king's actions and calling for action.

One of the most vocal was the twenty-six-year-old Camille Desmoulins, who urged those assembled to take up arms against the treachery of kings. He urged the crowd to identify themselves as patriots by pulling leaves from the trees: green was to be the identifying mark of patriots and revolutionaries:

To arms, to arms and let us take a green cockade, the colour of hope ... Yes, yes, it is I who call my brothers to freedom; I would rather die than submit to servitude.³²

Desmoulins was loudly cheered. On 12 July, the monastery of St. Lazare, used as a prison and a grain and arms store, was looted. Crowds released the prisoners, stole the grain and flour and looted the building. The *Gardes Françaises*, the local militia which should have maintained law and order, joined them. Faced with armed and angry crowds, the king's troops had two choices: engage in battle or retreat. They retreated, but rumours spread swiftly through the city that the king's guards were slaughtering the people. Either on the authority of those at the Palais Royal or on their own initiative, mobs attacked the royal customs houses at the entry points to Paris and demolished them one by one. Their stones went into the growing pile to be used against the troops. Simon Schama has written,



Camille Desmoulins calls the people to arms at the Palais Royal on 12 July.



KEY PEOPLE:
CAMILLE DESMOULINS

30 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 63–4.

31 Georges Pernoud and Sabine Flassier, *The French Revolution* (London: Secker and Warburg, London, 1961), 24.

32 Schama, *Citizens*, 382.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Marquis de Sade (after whom the term 'sadism' was coined) was a prisoner in the Bastille in 1789. Having heard news of the unrest in Paris from his wife, he began to shout out to the crowd (through a funnel) that prisoners were being killed and that 'the people' should save them before it was too late. Sade was sent to an insane asylum just before the Bastille was stormed. The play *Marat/Sade* deals with his time in the asylum and includes an imagined discourse between him and Marat.

During that single night of largely unobstructed riot and demolition, Paris was lost to the monarchy. Only if Besenval was prepared to use his troops the following day to occupy the city ... was there any chance of recapture [but] ... told by his own officers that their own soldiers, even the Swiss and German, could not be counted on, he was unwilling to take the offensive.³³

On the morning of 14 July, crowds invaded the Hôtel des Invalides, which was an arms depository and home to soldier-pensioners. From the Invalides, they removed more arms. Finally, they attacked the great prison of the Bastille.

THE FALL OF THE BASTILLE

The grey Bastille prison loomed over central Paris as a visible symbol of royal authority. It housed those prisoners confined as a result of *lettres de cachet* and was thus representative of royal absolutism. On 14 July 1789, it held only seven prisoners: four counterfeits, two 'lunatics' and one *débauché*, or person of abandoned moral values. Only one prisoner was there as a result of political offences. To the increasingly unruly mob, however, it was a potential source of weapons and, more particularly, gunpowder with which to feed the muskets taken from the Invalides.

Armed with two pieces of cannon taken from the Invalides, the crowd marched on the Bastille. Once there, they raised a flag of truce and sent a deputation to demand that the governor, the Marquis de Launay, hand over the arms and ammunition they wanted. He refused, but made the concession that the cannon which directly overlooked the Rue Saint Antoine would not be fired, unless the Bastille itself came under attack. Compromise being thus reached, the delegation withdrew. The crowd, in the meantime, fearing that Launay had detained their representatives, had succeeded in lowering the drawbridge that led into the inner courtyard; as the delegation departed, around forty members of the crowd rushed across and into the courtyard of the prison. Whether by accident or order, whether from the crowd or from the soldiers, shots were fired. In the resulting action, ninety-eight civilians died and



The Taking of the Bastille, engraving.

³³ Schama, *Citizens*, 387.

³⁴ Rudé's figures. Schama places the number of civilian dead at eighty-three, with fifteen more wounded, and only one defender dead. Doyle says 'almost a hundred.'

another seventy-eight were wounded, while six soldiers were killed.³⁴ The *Gardes Françaises* then marched to the fortress to join in the battle. With five cannon taken that morning from the Invalides and supported by a few hundred armed civilians, they positioned the guns to fire on the main gate.

At first, Launay threatened to blow up the fortress rather than surrender it. However, he was persuaded by his men to surrender. At the same time, a delegation from the Hôtel de Ville (Town Hall) arrived under a flag of truce to

persuade the crowd to stop firing. A white handkerchief was raised on one of the towers, indicating surrender. Launay ordered the main drawbridge lowered and was taken prisoner. Six members of his garrison had died in the defence of the Bastille. Lieutenant Louis Deffle, one of a contingent of thirty-two Swiss guards who had been sent to reinforce the Bastille, was one of those made prisoner.

He later recalled:

They disarmed us immediately. They took us prisoner, each of us having a guard. They flung our papers out of the windows and plundered everything. The streets through which we passed and the houses flanking them (even the rooftops) were filled with masses of people shouting at me and cursing me. Swords, bayonets and pistols were being continually pressed against me. I did not know how I should die, but felt my last moment had come. Stones were thrown at me and women gnashed their teeth and brandished their fists at me.³⁵

Launay himself was murdered on his way to the Hôtel de Ville. An out of work cook named Desnot attempted to stab him. Launay responded with a kick to the man's testicles, whereupon Desnot shouted, 'He's done me in!' Launay was then stabbed with a bayonet and attacked by the crowd, which mutilated his body as he lay on the ground. His head, severed by Desnot with a pen knife, was mounted on a pike and carried in triumph through the streets. An English doctor, Edward Rigby, was in Paris that evening and recorded the scene:

The crowd passed on to the Palais Royal, and in a few minutes another succeeded it. Its approach was announced by loud and triumphant acclamations, but as it came nearer ... the impression made by it on the people was of a very different kind. A deep and hollow murmur at once pervaded them, their countenances expressing amazement mingled with alarm ... We suddenly partook of this general sensation, for we then, and not till then, perceived two bloody heads raised on pikes, which were said to be the heads of the Marquis de Launay, governor of the Bastille, and of Monsieur Flesselles, *Prêvot de Marchands* [chief magistrate] ... who had tried to prevent the people from arming themselves. It was a chilling and horrid sight.³⁶

WHO STORMED THE BASTILLE?

While many thousands had taken to the streets on 14 July 1789, according to George Rudé most of the crowd of about 600 strong directly involved in the action at the Bastille were 'residents of the Faubourg [District] Saint Antoine and its adjoining parishes; their average age was thirty four; nearly all were fathers of families and most ... were members of the newly formed citizens militia.'³⁷ (This was the *Gardes Bourgeois*, which was to become the National Guard.) In terms of occupations, they were generally craftsmen, joiners, cabinet-makers, locksmiths, cobblers, shopkeepers, jewellers, manual workers and labourers. The largest occupational group was the cabinet-makers, of whom there were ninety-seven. Eighty were soldiers. One, Antoine Santerre, owned a brewery. The oldest was seventy-two, the youngest only eight. There was only one woman, a laundress. It was this group of people which was recognised by the National Assembly as the *vainqueurs de la Bastille* – the conquerors of the Bastille. They were issued special certificates and assigned a place of honour at the *Fêtes de la Fédération* (Festivals of Federation), the public ceremonies held annually on 14 July to mark the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille in 1789.

Miniature Bastille carved from a fragment of stone. Musée Carnavalet, Paris.



DID YOU KNOW?

Stone from the Bastille made into jewellery became a popular way for women to demonstrate their support for the revolution.

35 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 8.

36 Reay Tannahill, *Paris in the Revolution: A Collection of Eye Witness Accounts* (London: The Folio Society, 1996), 28.

37 George Rudé, *The French Revolution* (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 55.



THE SYMBOLIC POWER OF THE FIRST *JOURNÉE* (14 JULY)

The activities of the crowd of Paris on the *journée* (day) of the Fall of the Bastille had a far wider significance than just the demolition of a symbol of royal tyranny and the immediate protection of the National Assembly from the threat of foreign troops. The crowd itself took agency for the first time in the French Revolution. Henceforth it saw itself as having ‘saved’ the revolution, of having protected the work of the National Assembly from destruction by the king. Initially, the crowd was content and proud of its actions, but it came to expect benefits from the revolution. It began to understand that it had power if it acted as one; from July 1789 the Paris ‘crowd’ began to take on an identity and a potency which was to intervene at crucial moments in a series of revolutionary *journées*. In particular the radicalisation of this crowd was to drive the revolution forward during 1792–94.

38 Rudé, *The French Revolution*, 45.

39 In some versions of the story, the Duke warns Louis earlier, on the night of 12 or 13 July. This robs the story of its dramatic significance, though not perhaps the prescience of Liancourt.

40 Schama, *Citizens*, 420.

Louis XVI, Roi d’un Peuple Libre, en Uniforme de la Garde Nationale, R. Duchemin. The king, invited by Bailly and urged on by Lafayette, accepts the revolutionary cockade, thus acknowledging the validity of the events of 14 July.

ACTIVITY

REVOLUTIONARY TRIGGERS

Using a graphic organiser or infographic, show how social, economic and political crises (including hunger/poverty, Necker’s dismissal and the king’s attempts to dismiss the Estates-General) constituted short-term triggers to revolution by July 1789. Your graphic organiser should also show the influence of significant individuals in the crisis.

REACTIONS TO THE FALL OF THE BASTILLE

In the diary of Louis XVI, written in his own hand, can be read the entries for July: ‘13th, Nothing. 14th, Nothing.’³⁸ As Louis was a keen hunter, these entries are more likely to refer to his lack of sporting success on those days than to political events. On the night of the storming of the Bastille, Louis was woken from his sleep by his Grand Master of the Wardrobe, the Duc de Liancourt, who informed him of events in Paris that day. ‘It is a revolt,’ Louis is reported to have said, to which the Duke replied, ‘No, Sire, it is a revolution.’³⁹ These two anecdotes present a picture of a man unaware of the dangers posed to his throne by the fall of the Bastille, but this is worth thinking about in context. Louis XVI was a divine right monarch, believing he was appointed by God to rule. He would not have seen the fall of the Bastille as challenging his own position or his royal authority. It is more likely that he viewed it as yet another working class disturbance, like the bread riots, rather than the prelude to a great revolution. Nevertheless, after the king’s visit to the National Assembly on 15 July, which was ‘so astonishing, so disconcertingly naked, that it amounted to abdication,’⁴⁰ his nobility was less confident about its fate. According to Schama, the king had arrived at the Assembly on foot, with no retinue and not even a single guard. He had been flanked by his brothers, the



Comte de Provence and the Comte d'Artois. Louis had confirmed to the Assembly the withdrawal of the remaining royal troops from Paris and expressly denied any design against the safety of the deputies of the Assembly.⁴¹ This capitulation acted as a strong signal to first the conservative nobility. Over the next few months, around 20 000 passports were issued to people departing from France, including d'Artois, who left on 16 July. Nor were the deputies of the National Assembly without concerns. Rioting mobs meant attacks on property and they, for the most part, were property-owners.

DID YOU KNOW?

A man calling himself 'Patriote Palloy' began demolishing the Bastille on 15 July 1789. The base of the Liberté pillar can still be seen in the Square Henri-Galli.

THE MUNICIPAL REVOLT: PARIS

In an attempt to stabilise the near anarchy of Paris, on 13 July the Electors of the city of Paris had decided to form a new municipal government at the Hôtel de Ville. Of the 407 Electors who had chosen the Third Estate deputies for Paris, 180 were lawyers, giving the new 'permanent committee' an overwhelmingly bourgeois character. The head of this committee, which became known as the First Paris Commune, was Jacques de Flesselles (who was murdered on the same day as Launay for refusing to issue rifles to the crowd). Jean-Sylvain Bailly, who had been the first President of the new National Assembly, was appointed Mayor of Paris, presiding over this new local government. The day after the Bastille fell, a national guard was formed from the *Gardes Bourgeois* to keep order and, if need be, to defend Paris from attack. It was placed under the command of General Lafayette, the hero of the American War. The guards wore tricolour cockades

41 Schama, *Citizens*.

SOURCE ANALYSIS

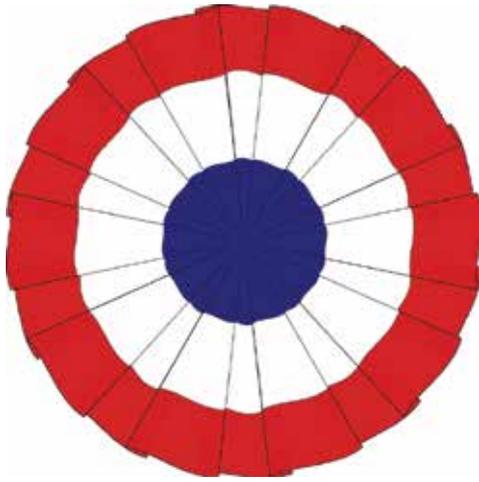
Examine 'The Awakening of the Third Estate' and complete the tasks below.

1. Identify the origin and context of the representation (i.e. when was it created, and by whom? What was happening at the time?)
2. Analyse the use of symbols/objects such as manacles, chains and weapons to convey a message.
3. Using the source and your own knowledge, explain how the Third Estate came to be abolished between January and 4 August 1789.
4. Evaluate the extent to which the source provides a complete and accurate depiction of the causes of revolution to 4 August 1789. In your answer, refer to other views of the revolution.



The Awakening of the Third Estate (French: *Reveil du Tiers Etat*), unknown artists, etching, hand-colored, 1789.

ACTIVITY



The revolutionary tricolor cockade.

(ornamental ribbons), combining the red and blue of Paris with the white of the monarchy. On 17 July the king, escorted by the new commander of the National Guard, came into Paris to reaffirm to the people his promises of 15 July to the National Assembly. These had been to confirm the withdrawal from the city of the remaining royal troops to the Champ de Mars and to reassure the deputies of the National Assembly of their personal safety. He was greeted on the steps of the Hôtel de Ville by Bailly and accepted the revolutionary cockade offered to him. After formally endorsing the appointments of Lafayette and Bailly, he was persuaded to appear on the balcony, wearing for the first time the new revolutionary cockade of red, white and blue. The crowd cheered: 'Vive le roi! Vive la nation!' It was at this moment that the constitutional monarchy of France was born.

KEY EVENTS OF 1789:
TIMELINE ACTIVITY



THE MURDERS OF DE SAUVIGNY AND FOULON

The day after the Storming of the Bastille, contracts were let for its demolition. A thousand workmen began the task. Satisfying as it was for people to see it wrecked and empty, perhaps to take away a stone, a door stop or some other souvenir, the violence did not end with this popular triumph. Nine days after the Bastille, on 23 July 1789, the heads and hearts of Ferdinand de Bertier de Sauvigny, the Intendant of Paris, and the king's minister, Joseph François Foulon, became victims of popular outrage. Foulon was, rumour suggested, responsible for the famine plot and was reputed to be hoarding food. De Sauvigny was stopped as he was trying to emigrate. When their heads were mounted on pikes, Foulon's mouth was stuffed with grass, a reference to his supposed comment that, failing bread, the people could eat hay. These murders provoked strong protest, but by now some of the bourgeoisie, roused by the obvious danger, joined the people in their fury. Most deputies of the National Assembly were horrified at such violence. Robespierre, however, regarded the selective killings as punishment administered by the people, which would continue if there were not political, legal and social reforms.⁴² Lafayette offered to resign his command of the National Guard, feeling that he had failed his commission to prevent violence. The young politician from Grenoble, Antoine Barnave, however, was not so squeamish. When he was asked whether the deaths were necessary in the pursuit of freedom he is said to have replied, 'What, then, is their blood so pure?'⁴³

ACTIVITY

POPULAR MOVEMENTS

Discuss the following questions.

1. To what extent was the direct action taken by the Paris crowds responsible for the continued existence of the National Assembly?
2. Was the Paris crowd an ally of the Estates-General or a potential threat to its existence?
3. To what extent were the murders of de Sauvigny and Foulon a sign that the character of the revolution had changed?

⁴² Georges Lefebvre, *The French Revolution from its Origins to 1793* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 125.

⁴³ Schama, *Citizens*, 406.

THE RURAL REVOLT

Popular unrest was not confined to Paris. People living in the provinces watched events in Paris with close interest, read the broadsheets and newspapers, met and discussed the issues, followed the actions of their deputies and sent protests to royal authorities about such things as the movement of troops to the capital and the attempts to dismiss the Estates-General. As in Paris, food scarcity had led to inflation in prices and there was general discontent with the actions of royal authorities. As tensions grew in Paris, they were matched by unrest in the provinces. In some towns, such as Nantes and Lyons, crowds invaded the tax offices. At Rennes, the armoury was invaded and weapons stolen, forcing royal troops to surrender. At Bordeaux, Le Havre, Marseilles, Nantes and Dijon, royal citadels were seized. Local committees were set up and National Guard units were established to support the revolution against the monarch. Aristocrats were forced to give up their posts or risk attack. As in Paris, there were attacks on grain stores and grain transports and those who dealt in grain were under threat. Everywhere, people refused to pay taxes, tithes and feudal dues and the king's officers were unable to restore order because their own troops were sympathetic to the rebels. As a result, there was no means of enforcing the law or of punishing those responsible.

THE GREAT FEAR

In March and April of 1789, the peasants began to revolt against the age-old rules of honorific privilege. From late 1788 and the writing of the *cahiers*, many peasants had simply refused to pay tax. The bad harvests of 1788, the threat of starvation and the increased burden of feudal dues set off peasant unrest and the breakdown of old rules. As food became more scarce, there were more local uprisings and more disregard for the honorific privileges of the nobility. Starving peasants grazed their stock on common land, broke down enclosures and refused to pay their tithes and feudal dues.

During the weeks after the fall of the Bastille, there arose a new phenomenon in the revolutionary mix. People in the countryside became possessed by what the French historian Georges Lefebvre identified as 'The Great Fear,' the belief that the nobility were plotting to destroy the revolution. This was partly engendered by the fear of retaliation for their own actions, partly by the rapidly increasing numbers of beggars and the arrival in country districts of soldiers redeployed from the capital. According to rumours, the nobility were going to hire bands of 'brigands' who would seek out rebellious peasants and kill anyone who had supported the revolution. The flight of the *émigré* nobles to neighbouring countries added to the fear, because this was seen as the first action before their return with foreign troops. In towns and villages, people began to form into groups and to arm themselves.

Georges Lefebvre has done extensive and ground-breaking work on the Great Fear. He has commented that,

The Great Fear arose from the fear of the brigand ... There had always been great anxiety at harvest time, [but in the climate of the] conflict between the Third Estate and the aristocracy (supported by royal authority) [these fears escalated] ... Every beggar, every vagrant and rioter seemed to be a 'brigand' ... No-one doubted that the aristocracy



KEY EVENTS: THE HARVEST CRISIS



HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS: THE GREAT FEAR

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1973, George Rudé wrote of the Great Fear: 'Whole villages went on the march and hundreds of châteaux went up in flames ... But there was no indiscriminate destruction and only three landlords are known to have been killed. ... The marchers ... were single-minded and knew perfectly well what they were doing.'

had taken the brigands into their pay ... and this allowed alarms which began by being purely local to spread swiftly through the country. The fear of brigands was a universal phenomenon, but the Great Fear was not, and it is wrong to confuse the one with the other.⁴⁴

Other rumours of invasion by the foreign armies abounded. People claimed to have seen battalions of Austrians within the French borders.⁴⁵ These rumours were just as unfounded as those of the aristocratic-brigand plot. Interestingly, work done on the specific path of the Great Fear shows it manifested itself in pockets, with news travelling from village to village at several kilometres an hour – i.e. at walking pace.⁴⁶ When the promised brigands and foreign troops did not arrive, armed peasants instead struck out at their local nobility.

TARGETS OF PEASANT VIOLENCE

The peasants' goal was to seize the manorial rolls or terriers, on which were recorded the feudal dues owed by each peasant. In the 1780s a French lord could collect a variety of monetary and material payments from his peasants, could insist that nearby villages grind their grain in the seigneurial mill, bake their bread in the seigneurial oven and press their grapes in the seigneurial wine press. He could set the date of the grape harvest, could have local cases tried in his own court, could claim favoured benches in church for his family and proudly point to the family tombs below the church floor. He could also take pleasures forbidden to the peasants, such as raising rabbits or pigeons, or hunting, in the pursuit of which the peasants' fields were sometimes devastated.

Honourific privileges had become deeply resented by peasants who were struggling to survive. They looked with anger on the pigeons and rabbits which devoured their crops, while they were forbidden to either stop them or use them for food. Feudal dues and manorial rights kept peasant families in poverty. The *corvée* took men away from their farms and their crops. When the revolt came, according to Simon Schama, 'The first heavy casualties of the French Revolution were rabbits.'⁴⁷ He has written that:

hobnailed boots trampled through forbidden forests or climbed over fences and stone walls. Grass was mown in grain fields to reveal the nests of partridge and pheasant, snipe and pheasant, snipe and woodcock; eggs were smashed ... Pit traps were even set for the most prized game, which was also the most voracious consumer of green shoots: roe deer.⁴⁸

As well as the game, dovecots, wine presses and ovens were destroyed, symbols of an exploitation that would no longer be tolerated. Such actions might be considered minor crimes but it should be noted that in the late eighteenth century the punishments for these activities were sentences of flogging, branding and banishment, which would separate the peasant from his family, his farm and his neighbourhood and, in all probability, condemn his family to starvation. The game riots are evidence of the deep anger and perhaps desperation of the peasants in 1789.

Groups of peasants also attacked the châteaux and manor-houses of the wealthy. Their goal was to destroy the manorial rolls on which were recorded the dues they owed to feudal lords. By destroying the records, they hoped to avoid payments in future. In some cases, the houses were burnt down. Resistance was sometimes met with violence, but there were remarkably few fatalities recorded as a result of the

44 Georges Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789* (New Left Books, 1973), 210.

45 Schama, *Citizens*, 429.

46 Peter McPhee, *The French Revolution 1789–1799* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2002), 57.

47 Schama, *Citizens*, 322.

48 Schama, *Citizens*, 323.

Great Fear. It was the system, rather than the master, which was the cause of anger. The significance of the Great Fear was that it armed the people of the countryside and created pressure on the nobility for reform. In Lefebvre's words,

There is no trace of plot or conspiracy at the start of the Great Fear. The aristocrat-brigand was a phantom figure [the image of which] the revolutionaries had helped spread ... It provided an excellent excuse to arm the people against royal power ... and this reaction in the countryside gathered the peasants together to turn against the aristocracy ... It allowed the peasantry to achieve a full realization of its strength and ... played its part in the preparations for the night of 4 August. On these grounds alone, it must count as one of the most important episodes in the history of the French nation.⁴⁹

TURNING POINTS

Evaluate the Municipal Revolt, Rural Revolt and Great Fear as a combined turning point in the revolution. To what extent did these events limit the king's options and 'secure' the revolution?

ACTIVITY

THE NIGHT OF 'PATRIOTIC DELIRIUM'

When news reached Paris of the attacks on the châteaux, the first response of the National Assembly was to appoint a committee to investigate its causes and offer a solution. The Committee's spokesman reported back to the deputies that:

By letters from every province it appears that properties of whatever sort are falling prey to the most disgraceful brigandage; on all sides, castles are being burned, monasteries destroyed, farms given up to pillage. Taxes, payments to lords, all are destroyed: the law is powerless, the magistrates without authority, and justice a mere phantom sought from the courts in vain.⁵⁰

Most Committee members were in favour of quelling the riots by force if necessary, and demanding that taxes, feudal dues and tithes should continue to be paid until the Assembly could consider the necessary reforms. But it was all too late, as the more radical members of the Assembly had deduced. The more progressive members of the nobility had determined that, to save anything, they needed to concede their privileged status voluntarily. A similar conclusion had been formed by the Third Estate deputies from Brittany, who had formed the 'Breton Club' in order to present a united front in National Assembly debates. The young Duc d'Aiguillon, one of the original Society of Thirty, was encouraged to move for the total abolition of the system of privilege.

The group chose the evening of 4 August, when attendance at the Assembly would be thin. However, before d'Aiguillon could move the motion, the Viscount de Noailles, cousin to Lafayette and one of the veterans of the American War, spoke ahead of him. D'Aiguillon could only support de Noailles' motion.

At that stage something like an auction began. Nobleman after nobleman rose to forfeit rights which had been sacred for hundreds of years. A bishop proposed an end to hunting rights; a nobleman responded by calling for the abolition of tithes. Country nobles were deprived of manorial rights; courtiers were stripped of their

49 Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789*, 211.

50 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 115.

pensions. Parish priests lost their fees for church services; bishops were told they could no longer have multiple parishes. Towns gave up municipal privileges and magistrates declared that justice should be free. Venal offices were swept aside and in their place came jobs and public offices open to men of talent. The principle of equal taxation was introduced and accepted. The Marquis de Ferrières, lost in admiration of this orgy of self-dispossession called it 'a moment of patriotic drunkenness.'⁵¹

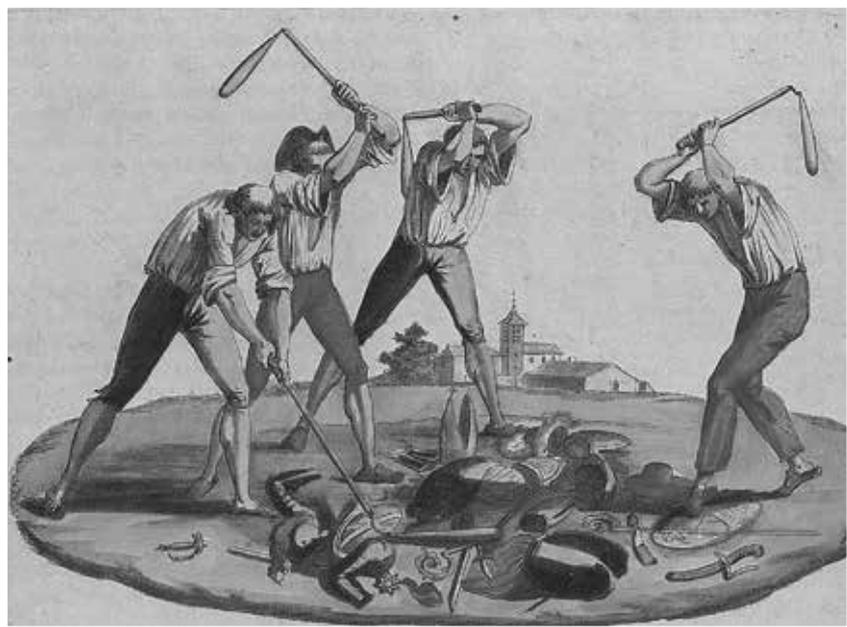
It seemed that the old regime was to be swept away overnight, and as news of the so-called Night of Patriotic Delirium became known in the countryside, many peasants certainly believed this. The realities were a little different, however – another three years passed before the National Convention abolished the last vestiges of the feudal regime.

ACTIVITY

SOURCE ANALYSIS

Examine the representation *Destroying the Vestiges of Feudalism* (and its caption) and complete the tasks below.

1. Identify the point of view expressed by the representation.
2. What is symbolic about the objects being destroyed?
3. Using your own knowledge and the representation, explain the historical significance of the Night of Patriotic Delirium, 4 August 1789.
4. Explain what the figure of the 'common man' adds to our understanding of the forces for revolutionary change that emerged in France from January 1789. In your response, refer to the source and to other views of the revolution.



Destroying the Vestiges of Feudalism. A symbolic representation of the events of 4 August 1789: The three estates on the left and the new common man on the right destroy the emblems of feudalism.

51 Schama, *Citizens*, 439.

THE AUGUST DECREES

Six days after the events of 4 August 1789, the draft legislation was presented to the Assembly:

1. The National Assembly abolishes the feudal regime in its entirety. It decrees that, as regards feudal rights and dues ... those relating to personal *serfdom* are abolished without compensation; all others are declared to be redeemable in the manner to be decided by the National Assembly. Any rights which are not abolished by this decree will continue to be collected until their owners have been compensated ...
4. All seigneurial courts are abolished without compensation.
5. All forms of the tithe are abolished, subject to making alternative provision for the expenses of divine worship, payment of priests and poor relief ...
7. Venality of judicial and municipal offices is abolished with immediate effect. Justice is to be administered without charge ...
9. Financial privileges, whether relating to persons or land, in matters of taxation are abolished for all time. Payment will fall on all citizens and all lands, in the same manner ...
11. All citizens, without the distinction of birth, are eligible for all offices and dignities, whether ecclesiastical, civil or military.⁵²

The decrees signalled that the old regime was gone and in its place was a new France. Liberty, equality and popular sovereignty would replace the old structures of absolute monarchy, the corporate society and the system of privilege. The revolution which had begun with the ‘aristocratic revolt’ of the Assembly of Notables and the Parlement of Paris now placed power firmly in the hands of the National Assembly, whose major task was to begin the drafting of a constitution for France. What of Louis XVI? The Decrees of 5–11 August proclaimed him to be ‘Louis XVI, Restorer of French Liberty’⁵³ and, on one level, although his power was reduced, his monarchy was untouched. Monarchy was the common form of government in Europe and few could envisage a society without a king. Louis himself was widely loved, although his ministers were often the objects of deep suspicion. The National Assembly itself was not committed to continuing revolution. While there were radical deputies, equally there were conservatives and moderates; moreover, the deputies represented all three Estates, and both country and city. Indeed, now that the Assembly’s major objectives had been met, most deputies believed that once the constitution was written, the revolution would be over. It was Robespierre who declared, ‘The Revolution is finished,’⁵⁴ as the National Assembly gave way to the Constituent Assembly.

DID THE DECREES FULFILL THEIR PROMISE?

Merlin de Douai, the jurist who had to convert the concessions of the Night of 4 August into the practical politics of the Decrees of 5–11 August, described Article 1 as an ‘embarrassing text.’⁵⁵ The grand and sweeping statement, ‘The National Assembly destroys *in its entirety* the feudal regime’ was, in practice, highly ambiguous. As time went on it became clear to the peasants that harvest dues had



VIDEO ON THE
AUGUST DECREES

52 John Hall Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1951), 107.

53 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 110.

54 Robert Ergang, *Europe from the Renaissance to Waterloo* (Boston: D.C. Heath and Co., 1954), 666.

55 Peter Jones, *The Peasantry in the French Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 82.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1790, Abbé Grégoire found that in up to 80 per cent of departments, local dialects were predominant, meaning that Assembly decrees would not have been understood by many local people.



Abbé Grégoire (1750–1831).

56 Jones, *The Peasantry in the French Revolution*, 85.

57 Jones, *The Peasantry in the French Revolution*.

58 Jones, *The Peasantry in the French Revolution*, 92.

59 Jones, *The Peasantry in the French Revolution*, 93.

not been abolished after all, that tithes would remain in force until 1791 and that ultimately all the National Assembly was offering was a chance to buy out feudal dues. The former privileged orders did not abandon their seigneurial claims and, from late 1789–93, the courts were choked with claims and counter-claims from *seigneurs* and rural communities. The compensation payable to the *seigneur* was to be to the value of twenty-five to thirty per cent of the year's dues. This was, in almost all cases, an impossible amount for any peasant or rural community to raise. Non-redeemed dues were to continue for the foreseeable future and, in fact, now had greater legitimacy. The social historian Peter Jones thinks it is unlikely that the 'generous sacrifices' of 4 August did much to pacify the countryside in the short term, but on the contrary, dissatisfaction with the legislation actually nurtured the spirit of rebellion in the south-west of France. In the countryside, a long period of manoeuvring began between *seigneurs* who attempted to retrieve what they could from the wreckage and peasants who resisted paying dues. Peter Jones has warned us against being deceived by this 'reflex resistance'.⁵⁶ He has identified modified transactions in which each side gave some ground to the other, based upon a desire for arbitration rather than outright conflict. He has characterised these transactions as 'a partial and grudging recognition that the feudal regime had not been destroyed in its entirety after all'.⁵⁷

It was only two years later that the Assembly took further action against seigneurialism. In its last days, on 25 August 1792, the Legislative Assembly abolished seigneurial dues without compensation (unless these could be proved to be derived from a legally valid contract).⁵⁸ By 17 July 1793, even these contracts were no longer considered redeemable, and former *seigneurs* were left with only those 'rents and charges which are purely on land and non-feudal'.⁵⁹

In the short term, however, the satisfaction of political objectives did not fill the bellies of the poor nor stem their deep resentment of the aristocracy and the monarchy. It would be the popular movement and the Commune of Paris and their leaders, both within and outside the Assembly, which would radicalise the Revolution and the peasants in the countryside who would nurse their grievances against it.

FEATURE

1789: HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Historians such as George Rudé and Albert Soboul have seen the French Revolution as a struggle between classes based on changes in the distribution of wealth. Thus, Soboul's judgement on the period up to the Decrees of 5–11 August 1789 was that the peasant revolution 'ruled out any possibility of compromise with the feudal aristocracy and forced the bourgeois revolution

onwards'.⁶⁰ While George Rudé came to a different conclusion, he, like Soboul, used a class-based analysis to conclude that 'having won its victory over "privilege" and "despotism", the bourgeoisie now wanted peace and quiet in order to proceed with its task of giving France a constitution'.⁶¹ Both have ignored the vital role played by the liberal nobility and the radicalised clergy.

William Doyle has indicated that Louis XVI's acceptance of advice to abandon the use of armed force to restore order as the turning point in the Revolution, pointing to the loss of power suffered by the monarchy as a result. His further conclusion was that, as a result, the people of Paris involved in the popular movement now defined themselves as having a clear political role. Doyle demonstrates this by stating,

Louis XVI's acceptance of that advice marked the end of royal authority. The monarch recognized that he no longer had the power to enforce his will. He was therefore compelled finally to accept all that had been done since mid-June. The Estates-General had gone. They had been replaced by a single National Assembly with no distinctions of order, claiming sovereignty in the name of the nation and a mission to endow France with a constitution ... The storming of the Bastille marked the climax of the [popular] movement. Challenged by it, Louis drew back, leaving the people of Paris convinced that they alone had saved the National Assembly ... Henceforth, they would see themselves as guardians of the liberty won that day.⁶²

Peter McPhee also sees the politicisation of popular protest as a result of the events of mid-1789, arguing that:

The Revolution of the bourgeois deputies had only been secured by the active intervention of the working people of Paris; the deputies' misgivings were expressed in the temporary proclamation of martial law on 21 October.⁶³

Here McPhee has made the distinction between the background of the deputies and that of the citizens involved in protests. Where the working people used popular protest and violence to achieve their ends, most of the deputies viewed such actions with horror. Differences in beliefs and values were not only to affect the relationship between the Assembly and the politically active urban workers, who were to call themselves the *sans-culottes* by 1792, but to lead to sharp divisions within the Assembly and between Paris and the provinces.

Simon Schama has focused directly on the outcomes of 1789, noting that:

Suddenly, subjects were told they had become Citizens; an aggregate of subjects held in place by injustice and intimidation had become

a Nation ... [but] ... Before the promise of 1789 could be realized ... it was necessary to root out Uncitizens. Thus began the cycle of violence which ended in the smoking obelisk and the forest of guillotines. However much the historian ... may be tempted to see that violence as an 'unpleasant' aspect of the Revolution, it would be [naïve] to do so. From the very beginning – from the summer of 1789 – violence was the motor of the revolution.⁶⁴

Schama concluded that there was a direct link between the events of 1789 and the institution of the Terror: the revolution began with bloodshed and this became its means of progression. Thus, what started with the murders of Launay and Flesselles, de Sauvigny and Foulon, was to reach a bloody climax in the Terror of 1793–94.

François Furet has focused on what was gained by the early revolutionaries:

The decrees of August 4–11 number among the founding texts of modern France. They destroyed aristocratic society from top to bottom, along with its structure of dependencies and privileges. For this structure, they substituted the modern autonomous individual, free to do whatever was not forbidden by law.⁶⁵

The outcomes of revolutions are never simple. In destroying one form of government and social hierarchy, they create different structures, but although individuals and groups can find unity in opposition to oppression, splits emerge from different visions of the new society. As power passes from one group to another, many of the problems of the old regime remain and many new challenges emerge.

60 Albert Soboul, *A Short History of the French Revolution 1789–1799* (Berkeley: University of Southern California, 1965), 65.

61 George Rudé, *The French Revolution* (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 58.

62 William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1980), 111.

63 Peter McPhee, *The French Revolution 1789–1799* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002), 62.

64 Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (UK: Penguin, 1989), 859.

65 J. Markof, cited in G. Kates, ed., *The French Revolution: Recent Debates and New Controversies* (London: Routledge, 1998), Chapter 8 'Violence, Emancipation and Democracy,' 244.

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Write an extended answer of approx. 250 words on the topic below. Support your argument with evidence from primary sources and historical interpretations.

Topic:

Georges Lefebvre has maintained that, 'Four revolutions had already taken place in France by the end of August 1789.' To what extent do you agree with Lefebvre's assessment of the period from 1787 to August 1789?

SOURCE ANALYSIS

Examine the representation and complete the tasks below.

NB. The words that appear above the image are '*Vive le roi: Vive le nation*' – 'Long live the King: Long live the Nation.' The label in the old man's pocket reads 'peace and concord.' The sword he carries is labelled 'Full of courage' and the digging tool reads 'tireless.' Labels on the man in front state the areas where reform is needed: land taxes and relief of the people. The scales are marked 'Equality and Liberty.'

1. Describe what is depicted in the representation.
2. Identify features of the peasant's appearance which indicate changes to his status and lifestyle.
3. Using your own knowledge, explain the effects on each estate of the night of 4 August 1789.
4. Evaluate the extent to which the source is a useful illustration of the achievements of the revolution by the end of 1789. In your response, refer to different views on the significance of the Night of 4 August.



We just Knewed we'd 'Ave our Turn.
Displayed in the National Library of
France, Paris.

THE DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF MAN AND CITIZEN

With the passing of the August Decrees, many of the inequalities of the old regime had been redressed. People were no longer subjects of the king, nor part of a rigid social order determined by birth. Now they were citizens of a new state, with equal rights that were to be guaranteed by the Assembly. The deputies set to work to enshrine permanently the gains won by revolution, values of liberty, equality and popular sovereignty through legislation. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen became the foundation document of the new society, establishing the ideology of the new state as the legal basis of the new society.

The document reflected the ideas of the Enlightenment, in particular Rousseau's insistence on personal liberty and law by the general will, Voltaire's belief in the value of religious freedom and Montesquieu's ideas of the separation of powers.

The Declaration read:

All men are born and remain free and equal in rights ... The aim of every political association is the preservation of the natural and inalienable rights of man; these

rights are liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression ... The source of all sovereignty lies in the nation ... Liberty consists of the power to do whatever is not harmful to others ... Law is the expression of the General Will; all citizens have the right to concur personally or through their representatives in its formation ... No man may be accused, arrested or detained except in cases determined by law ... No man may be accused, because of his opinions, even religious, provided their manifestation does not disturb public order ... Free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious rights of man ... General taxation is indispensable for the upkeep of the public force and for the expenses of government. It should be borne equally by all the citizens in proportion to their means ... Every citizen has the right, in person or through his representative, to establish the necessity for a tax, and freely to consent to it ... Society has the right to require of every public agent an accounting of his administration ... The separation of powers guarantees the rights of the constitution ... The right to property is inviolable and sacred.⁶⁶

The declaration also borrowed from the American Declaration of Independence of 1776, with its insistence on the 'self-evident truth' that 'all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.'⁶⁷ The drafters of the document, primarily Lafayette and Mounier, were, however, more concerned with political freedoms than economic ones. They anticipated the involvement of all citizens in the determination of laws, but there were no clauses determining who was a citizen of France and who was not. Were women, for example, to be equal with men or were they not 'created equal'? Did the poor have the same political rights as the wealthy? Were the slaves of France's colonies citizens?

The emphasis on the rights of property and security reflected the bourgeois nature of the Assembly. Ownership of property was declared to be 'a sacred and inviolable right' in the seventeenth clause. This raised several questions: what about the peasants, the sharecroppers, the rural and urban labourers who had no property? Did they have a right to own property too? What about the monarchy, the Church, the aristocracy and wealthy bourgeois who had so much property? There was no indication that they were to be deprived of some of it or that there was to be any redistribution of land, although the property of the Church was already under consideration by the new state. Property also involved the question of slavery. Neither an end to the slave trade nor the question of whether people could be seen as simply another form of property were raised in the Declaration, perhaps because the slave trade was the basis of the economic wealth of many of the port cities and of the French Empire itself.

In spite of these questions, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, which was to form the preamble to the new constitution, defined and made law the principles for which the Revolution had been fought. George Rudé, Peter Jones and Peter McPhee have all agreed that the Declaration was, 'above all, a statement of bourgeois idealism.'⁶⁸ McPhee has seen it as 'the revolutionary proclamation of the principles of a new golden age ... universal in tone, resounding in optimism and a great statement of liberalism and representative government.'⁶⁹ It was a 'blueprint' for the new society.

The Constitution itself was to prove a much more difficult issue on which to reach consensus. Conservatives, known as the *monarchiens*, wanted the king to have the power of veto over legislation and to restrain radicalism in the Assembly through the creation of an upper house representing the nobility. This would ensure the rule of law and restrain the unruliness of the lower orders. The moderates,

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1790, the Marquis de Condorcet published an essay 'On Giving Women the Right to Citizenship.' In it he argued that 'Either no member of the human race has any true rights or else they all have the same ones.'



MORE ON THE
DECLARATION OF THE
RIGHTS OF MAN

66 Cited in Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 114.

67 Preamble to The American Declaration of Independence, 4 July 1776, cited in R.R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America 1760–1800* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1959), 212.

68 McPhee, *A Social History of France 1789–1880*, first edition (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 37.

69 McPhee, *A Social History of France*, 36.



70 With over 1200 deputies, the numbers here fall short. Presumably some deputies were not in attendance and perhaps some had already dropped out of the Assembly.

including Duport, Barnave, Target and Mounier, were prepared to accept a two-house (bicameral) legislature, but in return demanded that the power of the king to veto legislation should not include the right to dismiss the Assembly. As negotiations dragged on, the crowds at the Palais Royal increasingly spoke about marching on Versailles. Again, popular ferment in the capital threatened both the monarch and the deputies of the Assembly.

The vote on 10 September 1789 saw the defeat of the *monarchiens* and the defection of the moderates. The Assembly voted for a one-house legislature, 849 votes to eighty-nine.⁷⁰ The deputies were not prepared to hand power to the nobility through an upper house. Nor did they show trust in the king. On 11 September, they voted in favour of Lafayette's proposal that the monarch should have only the power of suspensive veto over legislation. This meant that he was unable to do more than delay legislation; he could not veto it. Nor did the suspensive veto apply to laws relating to the Constitution or taxation. Again, the vote was overwhelmingly in favour, 673 to 325 with eleven deputies abstaining. Louis also lost his power to appoint judges, a venal office under the old regime. He no longer had the authority to declare war or negotiate and sign treaties without the permission of the National Assembly. Finally, instead of having access to tax revenue, Louis XVI was awarded a royal allowance of twenty-five million francs maximum per year.

FEATURE

THE DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF MAN AND CITIZEN



This anonymous painting of the Declaration is a triumphant celebration of the universal principles of liberty and equality enshrined in the legislation passed by the National Constituent Assembly on 27 August 1789.

The painter draws heavily on the vocabulary of classical iconography known through the Paris Salon. He uses the laurel wreath of victory to festoon the tablets of the text, thus emphasising their shape, which is similar to common depictions of the Twelve Commandments given to Moses at Sinai. The two columns of text are separated by the Roman fasces and the Phrygian bonnet and are surmounted by the snake biting its tail, a symbol of national renewal.

The regal figure wearing the cloak of the Bourbon dynasty holds the broken chains of despotism in her hands while the angelic figure gestures with her sceptre to the triangle of equality and the all-seeing eye of wisdom, both Masonic symbols.

The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

SOURCE ANALYSIS

Read the extract from the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen on p. 94–95 and complete the tasks below.

1. Identify the origin and purpose of the source. (Where, when and by whom was it created, and what was it trying to achieve?)
2. Analyse the ideas and beliefs expressed in the source, citing examples.
3. Using the source, explain the significance of the Declaration of the Rights of Man in France up to October 1789.
4. Evaluate the significance of the Declaration in creating a new society in France after the revolution. In your response, refer to other views of the revolution.

ACTIVITY

DID YOU KNOW?

A new version of snakes-and-ladders was created during the French Revolution. Players aimed to win a new constitution for France. Along the way they climbed ladders to achievements like the abolition of *lettres de cachet*, or slid down snakes to old-regime evils like the *parlements*.

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNMENT

On 1 October, the Assembly passed the Fundamental Principles of Government. These reflected the deliberations of the deputies and foreshadowed the Constitution of 1791.

The Fundamental Principles read:

1. All powers emanate essentially from the nation ...
2. The French government is monarchical; there is no authority in France superior to the law; the King reigns only thereby and only in the name of the law may he exact obedience.
3. The National Assembly has ... declared as fundamentals of the monarchy that the person of the King is sacred and inviolable ... that the crown is hereditary ... from male to male ...
8. Legislative power resides in the National Assembly ...
9. No act of the legislative body may be considered as law if it is not made by ... representatives of the nation and sanctioned by the monarch.⁷¹

The monarchy therefore remained as a hereditary office, descending through the male line. However, the king was no longer the supreme power, which was now to be the laws of France organised in a constitution. The National Assembly was given both legislative power and control over taxation and expenditure. The king could choose his ministers, who must not be part of the Assembly, but he could not propose laws, although he could 'invite the National Assembly to take a matter under consideration.'⁷² Judicial power belonged to the courts alone, as Montesquieu had wanted. Justice was administered in the name of the king, but neither he nor the Assembly could interfere with the justice system.

KEY IDEAS

Make a copy of the extract from the Fundamental Principles of Government above. Highlight phrases in the extract that express the idea of popular sovereignty. In a different colour, highlight phrases that confirm the authority of the king. What was the new status of Louis XVI? Was he a citizen like everyone else, or was he still above the law?

ACTIVITY

71 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 115–6.

72 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*.

REVOLUTIONARY SYMBOLISM

This engraving is one of the many congratulatory salutations received by the National Assembly early in the revolution.

This image is complex and rich with symbolism. The King, as constitutional monarch, is placed in the centre, sword of justice raised, and bathed in the rays of enlightenment emanating from the writings of the philosophes. Liberty, clad in a rich cloak trimmed with ermine, towers behind him saluting those ideas with one hand, while in the other she holds the thunderbolts of freedom⁷³ which smite the demonic privileged of the old regime, the monarchs, priests and lawyers, and the tyranny of absolutism symbolised by the fortress crashing to the ground.

The altar of the nation is inscribed with the Rights of Man. Cherubs play with the broken chains of despotism at the feet of Liberty. There are many

references to the wealth of France derived from overseas trade with its colonies: the merchants were indeed pleased with the Constituent Assembly for the Decree on the Colonies in March 1790 which did not interfere with their lucrative overseas monopolies, nor with their slave trading practices. From the New World, shown to the left, it seems that the King is supplicated by those in the Nation who are not yet free – the African slave and the American Indian are still fettered, even though they, too, are part of France. Across the water are the scales of justice, evenly balanced, and the sword and musket laid down in peace beside the French rooster suggest that even if all is not fully resolved in the colonies, on the land of France herself, the Mother of Liberty, the Revolution is over, that harmony, justice and liberty are reigning.

⁷³ Schama gives a fascinating account of the link between lightning and liberty (*Citizens*, 43–4). See entry on *lightning bolt* in the Glossary of this book.



The Regeneration of the French Nation in 1789, engraving, ca. 1789–90, dedicated and presented to the National Assembly 13 July 1790. Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

THE OCTOBER DAYS

By October 1789, there were deep suspicions about the king's acceptance of the Revolution. Louis XVI had not been to Paris since 17 July, when he had been welcomed by his people and had attached the new tricolour cockade to his hat. Since then, the king had failed to ratify the new legislation, including the Decrees of 4 August and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. This left both pieces of legislation in limbo, meaning that they did not have the status of laws. The Assembly demanded that the king publicly confirm its decrees. These demands were met by silence, leading to the general belief that Louis, influenced by Marie Antoinette, was planning to move against the Revolution. The rumours gained credibility when Louis summoned the Flanders regiment to Versailles.

The troops were welcomed with a banquet given by the Household Guards. The visit of Louis and Marie Antoinette to the celebration encouraged the expression of loyalist sentiments and calls for the overthrow of the Revolution. Soldiers tore off their red and blue cockades, grinding them underfoot, while the ladies of the court, wearing white lilies in honour of the monarchy, handed out white cockades to the (by this time drunk) soldiers.

When the news reached Paris, it precipitated a response: while Versailles feasted, the people of Paris were hungry. Bread prices were high and there were shortages of other foodstuffs. News that the military had insulted the emblem of the Revolution aroused anger. On 5 October, the crowds gathered in the market place: the king must be brought back to Paris where, among his loyal subjects, he could be removed from the corrupting influence of the court. Neither Lafayette and his National Guard, nor Bailly, as Mayor of Paris, could control the determination of the crowd to march to Versailles.

THE WOMEN'S MARCH TO VERSAILLES

The demonstration originated at the Hôtel de Ville, where women had come to demonstrate against the high price of bread. Here, a soldier of the National Guard and 'veteran' of the taking of the Bastille, Stanislaus Maillard, told the women that the Commune was powerless and that 'as they only wanted to go to the National Assembly to demand justice and bread, they should go without arms' to Versailles.⁷⁴ This having been deemed a satisfactory solution, the women began to march. From the Hôtel de Ville, the demonstration moved to the Champs Élysées, where the marchers were joined by other groups of women.

The fishwives, powerful women who could gut and fillet a fish with quick strokes of their knives, abandoned their trade as the bell tolled for the march to begin. The owners of market stalls, shopkeepers, prostitutes and passers-by swelled the crowd until finally there was a force of some 6000 people, the majority of them women. Armed with knives, pikes, swords and some muskets, they demanded bread, the passing of the decrees of the Assembly and access to the monarch in person. Amongst the crowd, agitators paid by the Duc d'Orléans urged them on. Lafayette and his National Guards could do little more than follow the crowd in the hope of gaining control when emotions had been worn out by the long walk. By five o'clock, they had reached Versailles and by half-past-five, they had entered



POPULAR MOVEMENTS:
THE OCTOBER DAYS

DID YOU KNOW?

Dislike of Marie Antoinette was widespread in Paris. She was characterised by cartoonists and pamphlet writers as a spendthrift and an unfaithful wife, as in this verse:

*Louis, si tu veux voir
Bâtard, cocu, putain,
Regard ton miroir
La Reine and le Dauphin.*

Translation: 'Louis, if you want to see a bastard, a cuckold and whore, look in your mirror, at the queen and the dauphin.'

⁷⁴ Reay Tannahill, *Paris in the Revolution: A Collection of Eye Witness Accounts* (London: The Folio Society, 1996), 31.

In 1789, Théroigne de Méricourt was an affluent courtesan, a strong supporter of the revolution and a warrior for women's rights. She was a dramatic character, notorious for being well-armed and for wearing a man's riding habit. Popular myth had her riding flamboyantly at the head of the women on their March to Versailles. Méricourt herself, however, claimed in her *Confessions* (1791) that she was already at Versailles, living there through the summer in order to better attend the sittings of the National Assembly.⁷⁵ Lafayette, hastily summoning some 20 000 of the National Guards, set out after the women. Unable to turn them back, he and the Guard accompanied them in the hope of maintaining some sort of order.



Théroigne de Méricourt leading the March of the Women to Versailles. Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

⁷⁵ Frank Hamel, *A Woman of the Revolution: Théroigne de Méricourt* (New York: Brentano's, 1911), 94.

DID YOU KNOW?

It took two to three hours for carriages to get to Versailles from Paris. It would have taken the women who marched there on 5 October 1789 about six hours to get to Versailles.

QUIZ ON THE WOMEN'S MARCH TO VERSAILLES



the hall of the National Assembly. Here the new president of the Assembly, Jean Joseph Mounier, attempted to keep peace, with little effect.

Calls for order went unheeded. The crowd would not withdraw until it had been heard. Mounier went to consult the king, who agreed to meet the women provided Mounier accompanied them. A deputation of twenty went to meet him, but only six were allowed in for the audience. The meeting went well, as Christopher Hibbert has recorded:

The King walked into the room, looking rather nervous, to ask the women what they wanted. 'Sire,' replied one, a pretty girl who sold flowers at the Palais-Royal, 'We want bread.' 'You know my heart,' the King told her. 'I will order all the bread in Versailles to be collected and given to you.' At these words the girl fainted. Revived by smelling salts, she asked to be allowed to kiss the King's hands. 'She deserves better than that,' His Majesty said, and took her into his arms.⁷⁶

The women outside were not convinced. While good King Louis might be sincere, his wife and her circle were not. The delegates returned and received a written declaration from the king. This satisfied many and the demonstration broke up, some women staying at Versailles, but many making the long journey back to Paris. The arrival of Lafayette with 20 000 National Guardsmen and some representatives of the Commune of Paris seemed to mark the end of the matter.

It was now eleven o'clock and the king had been hunting that day. Although his ministers had advised him to leave Versailles for his own safety, he chose to stay. He received Lafayette and the Commune delegates and agreed that he would ratify the August Decrees and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen and other decrees passed by the Assembly. However, when they asked him to return to Paris, he made no response. Then he made his way to bed. The queen also retired to her bedchamber.

⁷⁶ Christopher Hibbert, *The French Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1980), 99.



Women's March on Versailles, 5-6 October 1789.

At two o'clock in the morning, a crowd of women invaded the palace and found the queen's bedchamber, shouting 'Death to the Austrian! Where is she? Where is the whore? We'll wring her neck! We'll tear her heart out! We'll fry her liver!' On their way through the palace, one of the bodyguards tried to prevent their entry. He was decapitated with an axe. At the door of the queen's bedchamber, as she hastily escaped through a secret door leading to the king's apartments, another guard was killed by a blow to the head. Outside, a larger crowd called for the king to show himself to his people.

Lafayette's rather self-satisfied account demonstrates the extreme danger facing the royal couple. Writing in the third person he recounted the events of the day:

'Madame' said he [Lafayette] to the Queen, 'what is your personal intention?' 'I know the fate that awaits me,' she replied nobly. 'But my duty is to die at the feet of the King and in the arms of my children.' 'Very well, Madame, come with me!' 'What, alone on the balcony? Did you not see the gestures they made at me?' 'Yes, Madame. Let us go.' And appearing with her in the face of those waves which still roared ... Lafayette – unable to make himself heard – had recourse to a gesture which was hazardous but decisive. He kissed the Queen's hand. The multitude, struck by this act, cried '*Vive le Général! Vive la Reine!*' ... From that moment, peace was restored.⁷⁷

CONSEQUENCES OF THE WOMEN'S MARCH

The 'March of the Women' was a significant turning point in the revolution. The next day, escorted by Lafayette and the National Guard, the royal family left Versailles for Paris. In front of and behind them rode the National Guard, with Lafayette personally escorting the royal carriage. Behind them came the royal ministers and the deputies of the Constituent Assembly; then the Flanders regiment and the Household Guards, escorting wagon-loads of grain and flour. Along the route, crowds accompanied them and shouted into the carriage, 'Long live the baker! Long live the baker's wife and son!' Loaves of bread were brandished on the tip of pikes and bayonets. Lafayette estimated that there were

⁷⁷ Tannahill, *Paris in the Revolution*, 33.



Tuileries Palace

DID YOU KNOW?

Jules Michelet, a nineteenth-century historian, wrote of the March of the Women to Versailles: 'Men made the 14th of July; the 6th of October was the day of the women. Men took the royal Bastille, women took royalty itself.'

KEY PEOPLE: THE COMTE DE MIRABEAU



78 Schama, *Citizens*, 470.

79 McPhee, *The French Revolution*, 62.

60 000 in all. The crowd carried on pikes the heads of the guards who had been killed, in full view of the royal carriage. When Bailly met them at the gates of Paris at Passy to present the keys to the city, a man fired four rifle shots over the queen's head. The royal family was now to be lodged at the Tuileries Palace in the heart of Paris, prisoners of the people they once ruled. A new wave of emigration by the nobility and officers in the royal army followed. Mounier, too, though President of the National Assembly, left Paris and returned to his native Dauphiné.

The next day, Gui Target suggested that the king's title be changed. Instead of 'King of France and Navarre,' he would become 'The King of the French.' But, as Simon Schama observed, 'the condition on which he would be hailed as King of the French was his own virtual imprisonment.'⁷⁸ Louis was not the only prisoner, however. The people of Paris were convinced that they had once more saved the Revolution with this second revolutionary *journée* because, in Peter McPhee's words, 'The Revolution of bourgeois deputies had only been secured by the active intervention of the people of Paris.'⁷⁹ After the removal of the king to Paris, the deputies of the National Constituent Assembly unwillingly followed, setting up their meeting place in the Manège, a former riding school of the Tuileries Palace. Thus, the March of the Women made the deputies equally captives of the people. There were, in fact, now three sources of power within Paris: the king, whose position was increasingly weak; the deputies of the Constituent Assembly, who were the representatives of the people; and the *menu peuple*, the ordinary people of Paris, whose capacity for violence had now been twice demonstrated and who were increasingly a force to be reckoned with. Accordingly, on 21 October 1789, the Assembly passed the Decree on Martial Law. Proposed by Mirabeau, it stated that 'while liberty strengthens empires ... licence destroys them,' and ordered that if the public order was disturbed, a red flag was to be hung from the window of the Hôtel de Ville or displayed by the National Guard. If the crowd then failed to disperse immediately, it would be committing a criminal act and armed force could be used to restore order.

The Declaration of Martial Law was the first indication of the deputies' desire for the Revolution to end and for a restoration of law and order, as opposed to the crowd's determination to achieve its goals by direct action. By mid-1791, these people of the crowd would even have a new name, the *sans-culottes*, which reflected both their social class – men without the knee breeches and stockings of the middle class – and their role as armed and active defenders of the people's revolution.

ACTIVITY

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Why were the deputies now, to some extent, prisoners of the people?
2. What division between the Assembly and the *menu peuple* is revealed by the Declaration of Martial Law?

DOCUMENT

GEORGE RUDÉ, *THE CROWD IN THE FRENCH REVOLUTION*, 1959

The march to Versailles on 5 October [1789], by ending in the King's return to the capital, completed the Paris revolution of July ... The King's refusal to give his assent to the Declaration of the Rights of Man and to the Assembly's famous resolution of 4 August, which eventually led to the abolition of the feudal system of land-tenure, the long struggle over the 'veto', and the constant intrigues to abduct the King to a safe distance from Paris, showed how precarious as yet were the gains of the July revolution.

[The result of] the October insurrection was to consolidate these gains. By placing the King under the watchful eye of the majority in the National Assembly, the Paris city government, and Districts ... it established the ascendancy of the constitutional monarchists which, in Paris, found its reflection in the long rule of Bailly as mayor and of Lafayette as commander-in-chief of the National Guard. It must, of course, be added that by placing the Assembly itself under the equally watchful eye of the Parisian *menu peuple*, whose more active elements began to crowd the tribunes and, often, to influence its debates, it opened the way for further developments that were neither foreseen, nor in the event welcome, by the victors of October; but this, of course, lay still in the future.⁸⁰

Menu peuple: The ordinary people of Paris. (Note that Rudé does not yet refer to them as *sans-culottes*.)

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS**ACTIVITY**

Read the extract from George Rudé and complete the tasks below.

1. Why, according to Rudé, were the gains of the July revolution 'precarious'?
2. How did the constitutional monarchists, such as Bailly and Lafayette, establish their 'ascendancy' once the Louis XVI returned to Paris?
3. Identify one or more other political consequences of the king's return to Paris, as suggested by Rudé.
4. Evaluate Rudé's view that the October insurrection had unforeseen consequences that the revolutionaries would come to regret. What signs were there in October 1789 that 'the people' might themselves pose a danger to France?

CONCLUSION

What had the revolution achieved by October 1789? Royal authority had been limited by the creation of a National Assembly, bringing an end to royal absolutism. Legislative authority had been placed in the hands of elected representatives of the people. Privileges, both fiscal and honorific, had been removed. Serfdom, where it continued to exist in France, had been abolished. Feudal and seigniorial dues had been abandoned by the privileged order; by the monarchy in the case of the *corvée*, by the Gallican Church in the form of tithes and by the land-owners in the form of *banalités*. In the two years that followed, the National Constituent Assembly, as it became known, would give France a new constitution, reorganise the taxation system and eradicate internal customs barriers, bring in a more rational administrative system, reform the justice system and introduce juries, make laws affecting labour, restructure the army, and determine a common system of weights and measures. Even language

⁸⁰ George Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1959), 61.

was reformed, as efforts were made to replace local dialects with French as the common mode of communication.

For all these advances, problems inherited from the old regime remained. Suspicions were high that there would be a royalist reaction to the new order. The queen, particularly, was seen as a malign influence on Louis XVI. The new government was to be always chronically short of money. Personal taxation, once people had ceased to pay it, became almost impossible to reinstate and efforts to improve the situation through the issue of paper currency, the assignats, proved futile.

CHAPTER REVIEW

POPULAR MOVEMENTS – DIAGRAM

Create a diagram or graphic organiser showing how the following popular movements helped to cause the French Revolution between May and October 1789:

- The Revéillon Riots
- The Storming of the Bastille
- The Great Fear
- The October Days 1789.

VIDEO ON THE
STORMING OF THE
BASTILLE



KEY PEOPLE AND IDEAS – PARAGRAPHS

Write a paragraph on each of the topics below, citing evidence.

Topics:

- What were the direct ‘triggers’ of the October Days 1789?
- What were the long-term causes of the revolution?
- Discuss the contribution of a significant individual (the Comte de Mirabeau / Louis XVI / Marie Antoinette / Camille Desmoulins / the Marquis de Lafayette) to the revolutionary events of May–October 1789.
- Discuss the contribution of the liberal nobility to the revolutionary events of May–October 1789.
- Discuss the extent to which the ideas of popular sovereignty and equality had been implemented in France by October 1789.

KEY EVENTS – MEMORY TASK

Make a copy of the Section A Overview and Section A Timeline and memorise the key events in the period 1774–1789.

CONSTRUCTING AN ARGUMENT – ESSAY

Write an essay of 600–800 words on one of the topics below. Your essay should include an introduction, paragraphs supported by evidence from primary sources and historical interpretations, a conclusion and a bibliography.

Topics:

- ‘The Great Fear, Revéillon Riots and murders of civilians in 1789 showed that the so-called revolutionaries were merely exploiting public anger and ignorance.’ Discuss.
- Evaluate the significance of food in the French Revolution of 1789.
- How significant was the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen as an expression of revolutionary ideas?

CHAPTER

4

CHALLENGES FOR THE NEW REGIME

IN THE 'LIBERAL' FIRST STAGE OF THE REVOLUTION, THE CHURCH WAS STRIPPED OF LAND, WEALTH AND POWER, PROMPTING THE IRE OF THE POPE AND OTHER EUROPEAN MONARCHS. LOUIS XVI'S ATTEMPT TO FLEE PARIS CREATED DEBATE AND DIVISION OVER HOW TO DEAL WITH THE DEPOSED KING.

OCTOBER 1789–1791

INTRODUCTION: CHANGING FRENCH SOCIETY

DID YOU KNOW?

Nature seemed to echo the mood of optimism in the new society. Baron Frénilly wrote, 'The revolution appeared to come to a halt this year ... The spring of 1791 was superb and hot, masses of people showed themselves off in the Champs Elysées and in the Tuileries Gardens.'

DID YOU KNOW?

New customs were adopted after the revolution. Citizens addressed each other with the familiar *tu* (you) instead of the more formal *vous*. Hats were no longer raised in greeting. 'A hat,' it was decreed, 'should be raised only when the head is too hot.' Men no longer kissed ladies' hands because, in bowing, 'a man loses that proud and masculine posture which should be that of all good patriots.'

Louis XVI's enforced return to Paris on 6 October 1789, following the March of the Women to Versailles the day before, was symbolic of the shift in power brought about by the revolution. The National Assembly now embarked on a wholesale program of reform. In December, the new municipal governments (communes), which had emerged as the old regime broke down, were made permanent. Municipal officers, including the mayor, were to be elected by the 'active citizens'¹ sitting as a single assembly. Guidelines were set as to the length of their tenure, their duties and their procedures. This was immediately followed by the Decree Establishing Electoral and Administrative Assemblies, reorganising the electoral and administrative systems. These primary assemblies, in addition to their responsibility for local administration, also chose the deputies for the National Assembly and were responsible for the collection of taxation, public works, maintaining educational and clerical institutions and the maintenance of law and order. John Hall Stewart has claimed that in the haste to replace the structures of the old regime, the Assembly built in new faults: 'Too many officials, too brief tenures, too frequent elections, too much self-government for a politically inexperienced people, too great a degree of decentralisation and the absence of adequate intermediate agencies between local and central authorities.'² The reforms, however, gave a degree of local autonomy which was asked for in many of the *cahiers*.

In February 1790, the reform continued with the reorganisation of France into eighty-three departments for the purposes of administration. These replaced the confusing and often overlapping borders of the old regime, made up of provinces, *pays d'état*, *généralités* and bailiwicks. The departments were sub-divided into districts, cantons and communes. Each department was administered by local officials elected through the municipal assemblies, a system that proved extremely popular. (See departments on page 300.)

In March 1790, the Assembly abolished 'all honorary distinctions ... deriving from the feudal system.'³ This was followed on 19 June with the abolition of all the hereditary and noble titles. Henceforth, citizens could only use their family name and could not display coats of arms, nor have servants who wore livery. All other titles were swept away, including clerical titles. All were now equal and all were addressed as 'citizen' or 'citizeness'.

LEGAL CHANGE

Under the old regime, the executive, legislative and judicial powers were vested in the monarch. Judicial offices were venal, that is, they were purchased from the monarchy. In addition, there were courts and systems of justice for each class. Clerics were tried by a clerical court and nobles were given differential sentences from commoners. Under the revolutionary government, the organisation of the judiciary was simplified and followed from the ideals of the Enlightenment. Qualified judges, who had to have at least five years of legal experience, were now elected and held their offices for a period of six years; they could then be re-elected. A very popular legal innovation was the replacement of the seigneurial

1 The term 'active citizen' meant a taxpayer, excluding the poorer classes from the vote and favouring land-owners.

2 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 127.

3 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 143.



court with elected Justices of the Peace who could arbitrate on minor matters. The Public Prosecutor, however, was appointed by the king and held his position for life. Like the judges, he could only be removed if a panel of judges determined that his office must be forfeited.

The Assembly introduced a system of juries for criminal cases; punishments were made less cruel and torture was abolished. Ironically, in view of later events, Robespierre attempted to have the death sentence removed from French law, but this was defeated. However, capital punishment was to be inflicted only by decapitation. Previously, this swift form of death had been reserved for the nobility, but now all citizens were equal in the sight of the law, tried under the same system and condemned to the same punishments for transgressing it. In 1792, the guillotine replaced the sword as the most rational and humane way of taking life.

The King Fulfilling his Promise to Educate his Son in the New Principles of Constitutional Monarchy and the Rights of Man, a contemporary print.



MILITARY CHANGE

The same principles of rationality and equity applied to the reorganisation of the military. The Ségur ordinance of 1781, which had prevented all those not of noble birth on the father's side over four generations from becoming officers, was swept aside, as was the sale of positions in the army. Now, the army was open to men of talent who could climb as high as their abilities took them. The most notable example of a revolutionary military career was, of course, that of Napoleon Bonaparte. Although he came from a Corsican family of minor nobles, Bonaparte's rapid promotion from a simple corporal to Commander-in-Chief of the French Army would have been inconceivable in non-revolutionary times. The same conditions of promotion by merit applied to the public service, the professions and the trades. Pay was raised for common soldiers. The tricolour now became the national flag, the white lilies of the Bourbon monarchy giving way to the red, white and blue of the revolution. Yet the new army was just the old one under a new flag and, as William Doyle has pointed out, 'officered by nobles known for their unquestioning loyalty to the King.' As a result, 'the very idea of calling on the army to maintain public order remained far too dangerous for all but the most conservative of deputies to contemplate.'⁴

ACTIVITY

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Identify continuity and change in the French government, military and justice systems between 1789 and 1791. Give one or more examples of each.

⁴ Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 127.

ECONOMIC CHANGE

The peasant revolt and the subsequent Decrees of 4 August had led to massive tax evasion throughout France. Liberty and equality were taken to mean freedom from supporting the state. Citizens simply did not pay tax and municipal and city authorities were often helpless to make them do so. In Picardy, a land agent named ‘Gracchus’ Babeuf led a movement to abolish indirect taxes altogether and, though he was sent to gaol, the deputies themselves were intent on reform of the old, cumbersome and inequitable taxation system. On 31 October 1790, the jumble of internal customs duties, the *aides*, *octrois*, *traits*, and *consummation* (placed on wine), royal salt and tobacco monopolies, were abolished in the Decree Providing for a Uniform Tariff, which declared them harmful to trade and commerce, restricting the growth of national wealth and affecting individual liberty. They were replaced by a single uniform tariff on imports and exports, a policy which Stewart sees as ‘the most important contribution of the Constituent Assembly.’⁵ In May 1790, a preliminary decree was issued to introduce a common

5 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 163.

THE NEW CURRENCY: ASSIGNATS

FEATURE

Assignats were paper money used in France between 1789 and 1796.

Initially, in December 1789, they were issued as bonds carrying interest in order to avoid bankruptcy. They were to be secured by the sale of Church lands or *biens nationaux* which had been nationalised on 2 November 1789. The merchants and clergy distrusted them, and in April 1790, Abbé Maury and Bishop Talleyrand expressed anxiety at the inflationary situation in France. Their fears were well-founded – by 23 September 1795, 100 livres in assignats equalled 1.4 livres in coins. The assignats were discontinued on 19 February 1796.

Not only were there fears about inflation, but people were not used to carrying around paper money and often lost their assignats. Newspapers carried personal notices like this one, which appeared in Bordeaux:

*Dropped in the Fosses de Chapeaux Rouges an assignat to the value of 1,232 livres. Please return to M. Pierre Desclaux, Quai des Chartrons 53.*⁶

6 *Journal Patriotique et de Commerce de Bordeaux*, Archives Départementales de la Gironde, SU 67 (7), 9 March 1790, 4.



TOP: A 1792 assignat for 400 livres. BOTTOM: A 1791 assignat for five livres. Images courtesy of National Numismatic Collection at the Smithsonian Institution.

DID YOU KNOW?

In October 1790, Brissot published advice on suitable hairstyles for patriotic Frenchmen. Hair should be kept short, straight and without the powder used by aristocrats before the evolution. 'This coiffure,' he advised, 'is the only one which is suited to republicans: being simple, economical and requiring little time, it is care-free and so assures the independence of the person; it bears witness to a mind given to reflection, courageous enough to defy fashion.'

system of weights and measures across France, something that would be of great advantage to all commerce. However, in spite of work done at the time by the Academy of Sciences, it was not until August 1793 that the National Convention would finally pass the Decree Introducing Uniform Weights and Measures, something which had been demanded in the original cahiers and which the Convention was convinced would be 'one of the greatest benefits that it could offer to all French citizens.'⁷

In addition, the old direct taxes, the *taille*, the *capitation* and the *vingtième*, were replaced by three new direct taxes: a tax on land (*contribution foncière*) such as Calonne had failed to have accepted by the Assembly of Notables, a tax on movables (*contribution mobilière*) and a tax on commercial profits (*patente*). There were no exemptions or allowances made for circumstances. However, the reforms, which simplified the taxation system and recognised the growing wealth from trade and industry, could not, by themselves, solve the financial problems of the state.

To provide revenue, on 2 November 1789, the Assembly (by a vote of 568 to 346) passed the Decree Confiscating Church Property, stating that 'all ecclesiastical property is at the disposal of the nation, upon condition of providing in a suitable manner for the expenses of worship, the maintenance of its ministers, and the relief of the poor.'⁸ As the lands of the Church constituted some ten per cent of all the lands of France, their acquisition and sale brought considerable benefits to the state. This also substantially reduced the Church's wealth and power in France.

Under the old regime, the Gallican Church controlled education, was the disseminator of information via the pulpit, controlled the registers of births, deaths and marriages and was the main source of assistance to the poor; it was also a vital source of employment for a variety of trades. Without its major source of revenue, the ability of the Church to continue in its various roles was severely jeopardised.

The sale of Church lands began in December 1789. Now identified as the *biens nationaux*, or national property, the sales were accompanied by assignats or bonds, issued by the state. The state sold the bonds for cash, which it desperately needed, or paid its creditors with them. The assignats were declared to be legal tender and the equivalent of the coin of the realm. They paid an interest rate of five per cent and were redeemable in land as soon as the state had acquired one million livres through the sale of the Church lands. By April, the interest rate was lowered to three per cent and more assignats were issued to cover the state's deficit. Between April and September 1790, another six issues were produced, leading to a rapid decrease in their value.

ACTIVITY

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. What were the *taille*, the *capitation* and the *vingtième*, and what were they replaced by?
2. What was the purpose of introducing a uniform tax system for all French people?

7 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 504.

8 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 158.

CELEBRATING UNITY: THE FESTIVAL OF FEDERATION

In spite of what some saw as increasing hostility between the Church and the revolutionary state, the unity of the monarchy, the Church and the people was celebrated throughout France on the first anniversary of the Storming of the Bastille, on 14 July 1790. It was, said Simon Schama, 'a coming together of individual wills in a fresh sense of community.'⁹ Across France, communities celebrated with public meetings, patriotic speeches, *tableaux vivants* ('living pictures' of still and silent people arranged to represent scenes from the revolution) and oaths of loyalty to the new state. Trees were planted to symbolise the liberty won by revolution. In Paris, Lafayette and Talleyrand organised the *Fête de la Fédération* at the Champ de Mars, the parade ground for cadets from the military school. Here, citizens of Paris gathered in front of the King to watch a procession of National Guards from all over France:

Forty-two departments, in alphabetical order, the deputation of ground and sea troops, [then] the forty-one remaining departments made up the federal army; a detachment of grenadiers and guards on horseback closed the parade ... A great spectacle greeted the



General Federation in Paris.

The first Festival of Federation took place on the Champ de Mars just one year after the fall of the Bastille. A great ball was held that evening on the site where the Bastille had stood.

eyes of the federates as they arrived; 300,000 spectators, men and women, all of them decorated with ribbons *à la nation* were seated on benches, which, extending from a triple triumphal arch, form a sloping boundary whose top blends with the branches stretching from the trees like wings and whose bottom dominates an immense platform, in the middle of which an arch had been raised ... A moment later, the National Assembly swore an oath; there was a cry of 'Long live the King!' ... Finally the King stood up ... and from his place he said out loud, and with a highly satisfied look, the oath decreed by the National Assembly.¹⁰

It was the moment when Louis was, in the eyes of his people, truly as Bailly had addressed him in February: 'Louis the Just, Louis the Good, Louis the Wise ... Louis *le Grand*,'¹¹ citizen-king of the French people.

As the people cheered and shouted their loyalty, Marie Antoinette rose and presented her son, the crown prince, to the crowd. Again the people cheered and, in this atmosphere of mutual goodwill, the festivities continued until six in the evening and then for the rest of the week.

DID YOU KNOW?

After saying the Mass at the *Fête de la Fédération*, Bishop Talleyrand went to a party hosted by the Comtesse de Laval, where he played cards for high stakes all evening. He broke the bank and ended the night 'carrying off more money than my pockets or purses could hold.'

⁹ Schama, *Citizens*, 502.

¹⁰ Philip Dwyer and Peter McPhee, eds., *The French Revolution and Napoleon: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2002), 32.

¹¹ Schama, *Citizens*, 503.

THE FIRST CHALLENGES FOR THE NEW REGIME

RESPONSES TO THE LE CHAPELIER LAW

In March 1791, the Assembly passed the d'Allarde Law, which dissolved all guilds. This was followed in June by the Le Chapelier Law, which abolished all associations of workmen and employers, and arose from two main concerns. One was the physiocratic desire to free up trade and to create a more open system of commerce. As the guilds strictly limited their numbers through the system of apprenticeships, they were restricting the opportunities for entry into their craft or trade. As this limited the number of master craftsmen or tradesmen, they were able to negotiate for higher wages. This provoked other concerns because, by mid-1791, many of the trade groups, among them the building workers, carpenters, typographers, hatters and journeymen, were all agitating for higher wages. The Le Chapelier Law forbade associations or meetings of workmen, who were told that they 'may not, when they find themselves together, name a president or secretary, nor keep registers, make decrees or form regulations on their supposed common interests.'¹² Peter McPhee has seen the law as demonstrating a 'commitment to economic liberalism' and creating a free market in labour throughout France.¹³ However, Simon Schama has presented a different justification for the Le Chapelier Law, saying it was 'enacted less out of ideological fixation with free trade than out of a desire to protect the citizen's common interest ... against the particularism (individual interest) that strikes were held to represent.' Citizens were now protected by national institutions and had no need for their own associations.

The reality of the Le Chapelier Law, however, was that it advantaged employers over employees. Because it forbade the right to organise or strike, and fined those involved in such actions heavily – 500 livres, deprivation of citizenship rights and admission to primary assemblies for a year – the Law proved a backward step for employees. Clause 8 declared that 'all assemblies composed of artisans, workers, journeymen, day labourers or those incited by them ... shall be considered as seditious assemblies, and ... shall be punished according to the rigor of the laws.'¹⁴ As industries grew, workers could only organise as mutual benefit societies right up to the middle of the nineteenth century, lacking the power to strike or withdraw labour on an organised basis. Thus, whatever the original intent of the Le Chapelier Law, the deputies of the National Constituent Assembly left the workers, as Stewart has stated, 'at the mercy of their employers.'¹⁵

12 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 165.

13 Dwyer and McPhee, *The French Revolution and Napoleon*, 32.

14 Dwyer and McPhee, *The French Revolution and Napoleon*, 166.

15 Dwyer and McPhee, *The French Revolution and Napoleon*, 165.

ACTIVITY

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

1. How did the Le Chapelier law change life for workers?
2. To what extent was the change consistent with revolutionary ideas?
3. In what sense did the new law demonstrate a 'commitment to economic liberalism'?

THE FIRST TWO YEARS: HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

The two years from August 1789 to July 1791 are seen by historians as years of achievement for the new regime. William Doyle has pointed to the immense array of changes made to France since the end of the old regime: the deputies, he has written, 'sought to endow France with a constitutional monarchy, decentralised and representative institutions, civil and fiscal equality, and guarantees for civil liberty,' all of which had been called for in the *cahiers* of 1789. In addition, they made unplanned changes such as the abolition of feudalism, venal offices, the *parlements* and Church property.

For the most part, these changes were willingly accepted, evidence Doyle has suggested of 'a broad national consensus':

In the country at large millions welcomed the end of feudalism and indirect taxes, while hundreds of thousands of bourgeoisie eagerly seized the opportunity offered by the new regime to participate in public affairs.¹⁶

However, Simon Schama has claimed that the early French Revolution 'produced no significant transfer of social power' but simply 'accelerated trends

that had been taking place over a longer period of time.'¹⁷ This trend was the acquisition of positions in government and the professions by the bourgeoisie. As appointed positions gave way to elected offices, new men succeeded in entering public life.

And what of the old elite? Schama has claimed that their fate depended on their political convictions, rather than their former social position. Those who clung to the old system of orders and status became, he has argued, 'uncitizens, forced into emigration or armed rebellion.'¹⁸ Those nobles and clergy who were able to change themselves into 'citizen-tribunes, servants of the state, and who were able to see their fortunes in terms of property rather than privilege, were able to make the crucial metamorphosis from nobles to notables.'¹⁹ The revolutionary elite from all orders were the winners of the revolution, for, Schama has pointed out, 'they constituted a knot of influence and power that would effectively dominate French society for the next century.'²⁰

¹⁶ Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 135.

¹⁷ Schama, *Citizens*, 520.

¹⁸ Schama, *Citizens*.

¹⁹ Schama, *Citizens*.

²⁰ Schama, *Citizens*.

CONFLICT WITH THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

In 1789 the National Assembly began to reform the Church. In the Decrees of 5–11 August 1789, tithes were abolished along with other feudal dues:

Tithes of every kind and dues which take the place thereof, under which denomination they are known and collected ... are abolished, subject to the devising of means for providing in some other manner for the expenses of divine worship, the maintenance of ministers of religion, the relief of the poor, repairs and rebuilding of churches and parsonages and for all establishments, seminaries, schools, colleges, hospitals, communities and others ... Meanwhile, until such provision is made and the former possessors are furnished with their equivalent, the National Assembly orders that collection of the said tithes shall continue according to law and in the usual manner.²¹

With the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, religious freedom was guaranteed, thus breaking the virtual monopoly of the Catholic Church. On 2 November 1789, church property held for the purposes of revenue was confiscated and became the *biens nationaux*, or property belonging to the nation.

DID YOU KNOW?

A Boston magazine valued Church possessions in France at around 180 million pounds sterling, stating: 'When these enormous sums are paid into the public treasury, ... France will [be] almost a new country, ... without debts, and without oppressive taxation.'

²¹ Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 108.



The Assembly decreed that 'all ecclesiastical property is at the disposal of the nation, upon condition of providing in a suitable manner for the expenses of worship, the maintenance of its ministers, and the relief of the poor.'²² Church lands were then sold, benefiting mainly the bourgeoisie because they had the ready money to buy.

The sale of Church lands was followed by other legislation. On 13 February 1790, monastic vows were forbidden and all religious orders and congregations were dissolved, except those orders involved with teaching children or ministering to the sick. The Assembly declared that:

1. The constitutional law of the Kingdom shall no longer recognise solemn monastic vows of persons of either sex. Accordingly, the regular orders and congregations in which such vows have been taken are and shall remain suppressed in France, and no similar ones may be established forthwith.
2. All individuals, of either sex, at present in monasteries and religious houses may leave them by making their declaration before the local municipality, and they shall be provided for immediately by a suitable pension.²³

Then, on 19 April 1790, all other church property was transferred to state ownership and the state assumed responsibility for paying clerical salaries.

22 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 158.

23 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 168.

FEATURE

REFORM OF THE CHURCH

Reform of the Catholic Church accompanied other changes brought about by the new regime. One contentious issue was the tithe, which was collected in parishes and often diverted from priests to their bishops who used them to fund extravagant lifestyles (while parish priests lived in poverty).

Because, under the old regime, the king had personally chosen the recipients of clerical benefices, these payments often went to noblemen who needed an income rather than to men who would be spiritual leaders of their communities. Talleyrand, for example, was made Bishop of Autun before he had been ordained as a priest, primarily because of the accident in childhood that had left him with a crippled leg, thus precluding him from a career in the army. The Church became, in effect, a career for younger sons, and this led to abuses. Often, the upper clergy held multiple benefices and preferred to live away

from their parishes in more congenial social circles, instead of attending to their duties.

The Catholic Church was also one of the major land-owners in France and drew revenues from rents and dues. Church lands constituted ten per cent of the land in France. The Church owned huge amounts of property in the towns, including cathedrals and churches, monasteries and convents, schools, hospitals, seminaries for the training of priests, presbyteries (houses for priests) and other properties. Its wealth and its corruption were therefore revolutionary issues.

Under the old regime, the Church and state had been intertwined. The 1682 Declaration of the Clergy gave the king the power to appoint the upper clergy and to make laws affecting the organisation of the Church. As a result, by the reign of Louis XVI, the upper clergy were all nobles. The new regime sought to end this system of entrenched privilege.

THE CIVIL CONSTITUTION OF THE CLERGY

The Civil Constitution of the Clergy represented the last step in the state's attempt to reform the abuses of the old Gallican Church. The deputies of the National Assembly did not intend to attack religion itself, but saw the Civil Constitution as a reorganisation of the clergy. The legislation came before the Assembly for discussion on 29 May 1790. It proposed that the dioceses (districts) of the Church be changed and have the same extent and limits as the new departments. This would reduce the number of bishops from 130 to eighty-three. Each diocese would have a bishop and parish clergy, to be called vicars. The number of parishes within each diocese would be reduced. Each diocese would have a single seminary for the training of priests. All titles other than Bishop and Vicar (priest) would be abolished. These reforms were generally acceptable, although they meant that some people would lose their parish church and parish priest. This meant that the organisation of the Catholic religion in France would echo that of the state.

There were two major problems with the legislation and these led, in the long term, to the alienation of loyal Catholics, including King Louis XVI. The first was that the pope's role as head of the Church was removed and replaced by state control. In Clause 4, the Pope's right to appoint clergy was removed and replaced by a system of popular election:

As soon as the departmental *procureur-general-syndic* [public prosecutor or senior legal officer] receives notice of a vacancy in an Episcopal see, owing to death, resignation or other cause, he shall ... convoke the electors who effected the last election of members to the administrative assembly ... He shall indicate the day on which the election of the bishop shall take place, which shall be no later than the third Sunday after his letter of notification.²⁴

The legislation demanded not only that all appointments of bishops and parish priests were to be made by election, that is by ballot and counting of votes, but also that non-Catholics, as well as Catholics, have the vote. In theory, as Peter McPhee has pointed out, 'by applying the practice of "active" citizenship to the choice of clergy, the Assembly excluded women and the poor from the community of the faithful, and theoretically included Protestants, Jews, and non-believers who were wealthy enough to vote.'²⁵ Thus, clerical appointments became a civil rather than a religious matter.

The role of the Pope was also altered. In Article 19, the Civil Constitution stated that

The new Bishop may not apply to the Pope for confirmation, but shall write to him as the Visible Head of the Universal Church, in testimony of the unity of faith and communion which he is to maintain therewith.²⁶

Traditionally, the Pope, as the inheritor of his office from the Apostle Peter, was the only person who could appoint the bishops and cardinals. Even though the kings of France had been given the right to nominate a candidate, the actual appointment still lay in the hands of the Pope. The Civil Constitution of the Clergy made such an appointment a civil matter.

OPPOSITION TO THE CIVIL CONSTITUTION

The Civil Constitution of the Clergy provoked debate and criticism in the Assembly. The Archbishop of Aix expressed the concerns of many of the clergy and church faithful when he protested on 30 May 1790 that:

DID YOU KNOW?

After the revolution, many trades which had served the Church and the court found their skills no longer in demand. Gold and silver smiths, lace-makers, silk weavers, embroiderers, candle-makers, wig-makers, dancing teachers, musicians, builders, carpenters, and makers of glass, ceramics and pottery all suffered economically from the rise of revolutionary activity and the decline of the court and the Church.

24 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 174.

25 Emmet Kennedy, *A Cultural History of the French Revolution* (London: Yale University Press, 1989), 149.

26 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 174.

DID YOU KNOW?

Bishop Talleyrand recognised how destructive to national unity the Civil Constitution of the Clergy would be. He identified it as 'perhaps the biggest blunder of the Assembly.'

27 Dwyer and McPhee, *The French Revolution and Napoleon*, 23–4.

Jesus Christ passed on his mission to the apostles and their successors for the salvation of the faithful; he entrusted it neither to the magistrates nor the king; we are speaking of an order which magistrates and kings must obey. The mission we have received through ordination and consecration goes right back to the apostles.²⁷

The difficulty is apparent in his statement: the appointment of clerics was something that belonged to the Church, not the state. Yet, although clerical deputies, including leading revolutionary figures like Abbé Sieyès, demanded changes to the legislation, the Assembly went ahead with its reforms. A crisis emerged between the Church and the state: while the deputies of the Assembly saw themselves as reforming an old regime institution which had become corrupted, the Civil Constitution challenged some of the most basic beliefs of the Catholic Church, such as the belief in the descent of clerical authority from Christ to the Pope, with the upper clergy being the spiritual descendents of the first Apostles.

ACTIVITIES

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Which abuses of the pre-revolutionary Church were removed by the reforms made under the Civil Constitution of the Clergy?
2. Why did practising Catholics like the Bishop of Aix see the Civil Constitution as an attack on religion?

SOURCE ANALYSIS

Examine the engraving (right) and complete the tasks below.

1. Identify the tone of the source.
2. Analyse the use of symbols and visual techniques to convey a message.
3. Using your broader knowledge, explain how the new regime sought to change the Catholic Church after the revolution.
4. Evaluate the extent to which the source gives a complete and accurate depiction of the consequences of the revolution. In your answer, refer to historical interpretations.



The Froc to the Wind and Liberty to Monks and Nuns, engraving, c. 1790–92. Bibliothèque Nationale de France. The print depicts nuns leaving convents to fall into the arms of National Guardsmen. In fact, few nuns left voluntarily. One mother superior, shocked at the prospect of expulsion, argued that 'the caprice (whims) of legislators disrupted the nuns' charitable occupations.'²⁸ The poor suffered badly from the new regime's removal of Church charity.

28 McPhee, *The French Revolution 1789–1799*, 76.

THE CLERICAL OATH

On 27 November 1790, the Assembly introduced a further piece of legislation, the Clerical Oath. Article 1 decreed that all bishops, former archbishops and priests who were absent from their parishes return to them within a fortnight. Article 2 demanded that all clerics swear ‘to be faithful to the nation, the law and to the king, to maintain the Constitution decreed by the National Assembly and accepted by the King.’ Article 7 said that any cleric who did not swear the Oath would be deprived of his salary, his French citizenship and his office as a priest. Finally, Article 9 threatened that any citizen who publicly opposed the decree ‘will be pursued and punished for having disrupted the public peace.’²⁹ Thus, those priests who refused to take the Oath were to be allowed to retire quietly on a pension, but not to continue in their priestly duties; those who protested publicly were to be punished. The Oath widened the divide between traditional Catholicism and the state, forcing Catholics to choose between support for the government and support for the Church. It therefore alienated loyal Catholics like King Louis XVI, many of the clergy who had previously supported the revolution and ordinary citizens who saw their faith as compromised by the state or who were threatened with the loss of their parish priests.

Abbé Baude, the parish priest of Quesques and Lottinghen, voiced the views of many others when he wrote to his parishioners:

I declare that my religion does not allow me to take such an oath as the National Assembly requires; I am happy and I even promise to watch over as well as one possibly can the faithful of this parish who are entrusted to me, to be true to the nation and the King and to observe the Constitution ... but where the government and the laws of the Church are concerned, I recognise no superior and other legislators than the Pope and the bishops.³⁰

However, it was not until 13 April 1791 that Pope Pius VI officially responded with the Papal Bull *Charitas*. In it he made clear that French Catholics could not condone the Assembly’s legislation regarding the Church.

THE POPE’S RESPONSE: THE PAPAL BULL *CHARITAS*

The issuing of *Charitas* increased tensions between the Church and the revolutionary state. Pope Pius was speaking *ex cathedra*, that is, as head of the Church and the representative of Christ on Earth. He told French Catholics:

We ... urge you not to abandon your religion, inasmuch as it is the one and only true religion which bestows life eternal ... Shun all invaders, whether they be called archbishops, bishops or parish priests ... There can be no relations between you and them ... No one can be in the Church of Christ unless he is one with its visible head and established in the Chair of Peter.³¹

The Pope’s directive was clear. Catholics could not compromise with the state and remain as members of the Church. They must make a choice between their religion and the revolution.

REFRACTORY AND NON-REFRACTORY CLERGY

The terms ‘refractory’ and ‘non-juring’ clerics refer to those who would not take the Clerical Oath. Within the National Assembly, only two bishops and 109



THE REVOLUTION AND
THE CHURCH

DID YOU KNOW?

Abbé Pottier was Superior of the seminary (training college for priests) at Rouen. He swore the clerical oath, but a week later, retracted it publicly. His students, however, refused to acknowledge him, declaring ‘Sir, we no longer acknowledge you as our Superior. You left the fold of the Church and we cannot pray with you.’

DID YOU KNOW?

A papal bull (decree) always begins with the name of the pope, followed by ‘*episcopus servus servorum Dei*’ or ‘bishop, servant of the servants of God.’

29 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 169.

30 Dwyer and McPhee, *The French Revolution and Napoleon*, 48–9.

31 Dwyer and McPhee, *The French Revolution and Napoleon*, 50.

32 François Furet and Mona Ozouf, *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Bellknapp Press, 1989), 454.

33 Adapted from Dwyer and McPhee, *The French Revolution and Napoleon*, 45.

priests, one-third of the clerical deputies, took the Oath. Of the bishops, only seven chose the state over the Church. Within the lower clergy, fifty-four per cent took the Oath; thirty-six per cent would not. In radical Paris, there was pressure on priests to swear the Oath, with one parish priest being threatened by his parishioners with the cry 'the oath or the gallows.'³² The mood was very different in the countryside, with many people opposed to arbitrary rule from Paris and the attempt to alter their traditional religious practices. The publication of the decree led to riots in western France, because, as Timothy Tackett has shown, it challenged the fundamental basis of community life: the parish, which was the heart of both social and religious life.

ACTIVITY

BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

1. What were the beliefs and attitudes underpinning Abbé Baude's objection to the Clerical Oath?
2. To what extent did people in Paris and in the countryside have similar attitudes to the Clerical Oath?
3. Why was it so difficult for the new regime to change religious institutions?

DOCUMENT

PHILIP DWYER AND PETER MCPHEE ON THE CIVIL CONSTITUTION OF THE CLERGY

The deputies of the National Assembly believed that the Civil Constitution of the Clergy concerned itself only with the worldly or secular organisation of the Church (hence the term 'civil'); there was therefore no need to consult the Church. Most parish priests were to be financially advantaged by the new salary scales. However, the Assembly reallocated diocesan and parish boundaries, eliciting a chorus of complaints from small communities and urban parishes whose churches had been closed and who were now required to worship in a neighbouring church. Most important, in applying the revolutionary idea of popular sovereignty to the choice of priests and bishops, the Assembly crossed the narrow line separating worldly, secular and spiritual life. In the end, it proved impossible to reconcile a Church based on divinely ordained hierarchy and dogma and a certainty of one true faith with a Revolution based on popular sovereignty, tolerance and the certainty of earthly fulfilment through the use of secular reason.³³

Diocese: the area controlled by a bishop.

Divinely ordained hierarchy: the ranking in order of authority of vicars, curés, bishops, archbishops and cardinals appointed and approved by the Pope, the spiritual supreme leader of the Church. These clergy were ordained – undergoing a solemn sacrament which involved receiving the laying of hands on the head, and making solemn promises to God and to the pope.

Dogma: unchallengeable principles laid down by the Church.

ACTIVITY

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Read Dwyer and McPhee's comments on the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and complete the tasks below.

1. Which Assembly introduced the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and why did the deputies believe there was no need to consult the Church about its terms?
2. According to Dwyer and McPhee, what were the objections of the faithful Catholics?
3. What does the extract identify as the ideological conflicts inherent in the Civil Constitution of the Clergy?
4. How do Dwyer and McPhee's interpretations of the political consequences of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and the Clerical Oath differ from those of Furet, Boshier, Doyle and/or Cobban?

THE CIVIL CONSTITUTION: HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Historians of the French Revolution are united in seeing the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and Clerical Oath as the moment that fractured the Revolutionary consensus. François Furet has written,

It is clear that refusal to take the oath was the first sign of popular resistance to the Revolution ... The religious element was immediately transformed into a political issue because both the monarchy and the Revolution had turned the Catholic Church into an auxiliary of the state.³⁴

William Doyle has stated that

The French Revolution had many turning points; but the oath of the clergy was, if not the greatest, unquestionably one of them. It was certainly the Constituent Assembly's most serious mistake. For the first time, it forced fellow citizens to choose: to declare themselves publicly for or against the new order.³⁵

J.F. Boshier wrote that the Civil Constitution 'aroused the determined hostility of at least half the French clergy and of the entire Church establishment abroad.'³⁶ He concluded,

This was fated to divide the nation more than any other single measure ... The clergy in general objected to a reorganisation on which the Church had not been consulted.³⁷

Peter McPhee has argued that the Assembly had 'crossed the narrow line separating spiritual and temporal life'³⁸ and that 'in the end, it proved impossible to reconcile a church based on divinely ordained hierarchy ... with a revolution based on popular sovereignty.'³⁹

Alfred Cobban, perhaps most revealingly, explained:

The anti-clericalism of Voltaire and the *philosophes* had bitten so deeply into the minds of those who represented the Third Estate at Paris that the extent of opposition that their reorganisation of the Church was to provoke was hidden from them. Unknowingly, they added religious schism to other causes of political and social unrest.⁴⁰

The widespread nature of resistance to these attempts to bring the Church under state and community control forced the Assembly to compromise. In January 1791, the Assembly decided to let refractory priests who had not been dismissed to remain in their parishes.

On 7 May, a further decree gave permission for refractory priests to officiate in 'constitutional' churches. In the end, however, revolutionary France had two Catholic churches: the constitutional church, representing those who had chosen to conform to the law and the 'refractory' church, where traditional religious beliefs and practices remained.

The Vendée Rebellion of early 1793 was to emerge from the dispute over religion and the desire of the peasants to keep to the old church. In 1793–1794, the attempt to 'de-Christianise' religion and eradicate altogether the influence of the Catholic Church would be a final attempt to assert the dominance of revolutionary values over those of the old regime.



A representation of the Battle of Cholet during the Vendée Rebellion, 1793.

34 Furet and Ozouf, *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, 455.

35 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 144.

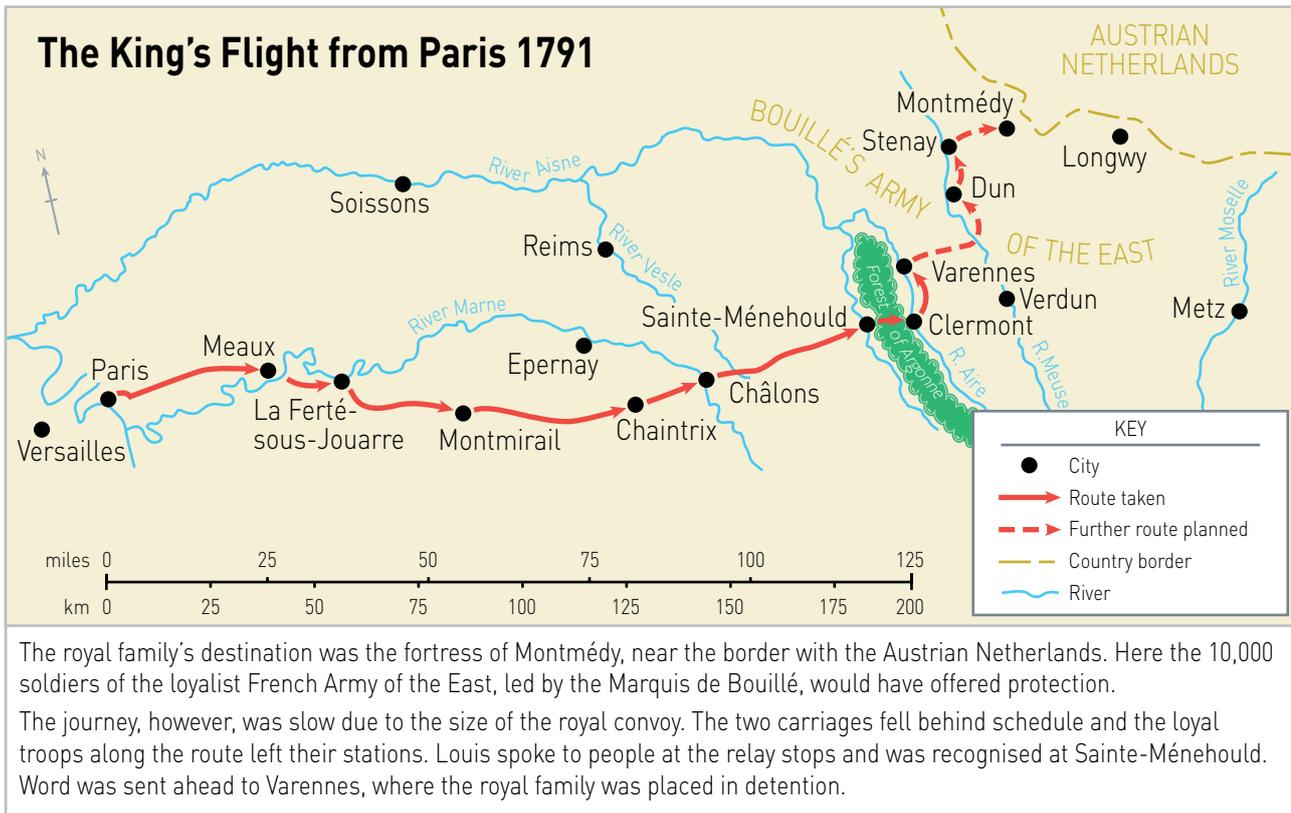
36 J.F. Boshier, *The French Revolution* [Canada: Penguin Books, 1988], 146.

37 Boshier, *The French Revolution*.

38 McPhee, *The French Revolution*, 76.

39 McPhee, *The French Revolution*.

40 Alfred Cobban, *A History of Modern France*, Volume 1 (1715–1799) [Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1957], 173.



THE KING'S FLIGHT FROM PARIS

By 1791, Louis XVI and his family saw themselves as prisoners of the revolution and, from the end of 1790, had been making plans to leave France.

The king's desire to leave France was based on a mixture of political and religious factors. If Louis were able to escape France and reach Austria, then he would be in a position to ask the other monarchs of Europe for help in restoring France to monarchical rule. His brother-in-law, the Austrian Emperor, Leopold II, and the King of Spain, Charles IV, had both said they would act only if he was in a place of safety outside France. Even if they did not agree to invade France, Louis would be in a much stronger, and safer, position to negotiate his status with the Constituent Assembly.

His other reasons were religious. Louis had been crowned as a monarch by divine right and, as such, had a duty to rule France. He was a genuinely religious man and, although he had signed the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, was privately opposed to it.

Despite the secrecy with which such plans were discussed, it was widely accepted that at some stage he would attempt to escape. When, in April 1791, the royal family attempted to attend the Easter Mass at Saint-Cloud, where a non-juring clergyman was to preach, crowds prevented the family from leaving the Tuileries Palace, shutting the gates so the royal carriages and their escort could not leave.

DID YOU KNOW?

In the attempt to flee Paris, Marie Antoinette took along a hairdresser, jewellery, a set of new clothes and a jade manicure set.

Even when the Marquis de Lafayette and Bailly arrived at the Tuileries, the crowd could not be persuaded to let the carriage pass and the king was forced to return to the palace. From this time on, it was clear to the royal family that they were prisoners.

During May and June 1791, the conspirators, led by the Swedish special envoy to the French Court, Count von Fersen, made their plan. The royal family was to leave the Tuileries Palace in two carriages on the night of 19 June and head for the town of Montmédy, on the border with Luxembourg. There they would be met by troops, who would escort them over the border. This plan was frustrated by a cleaning woman who was meant to be on holiday that night, but had postponed it. The royal family could not get out of the palace while she was there, so the plan was postponed until the next night, 20 June 1791.

When Louis fled the Tuileries Palace on 20 June, he left behind a memorandum justifying his departure. He wrote that he was willing to sacrifice his power and status while he was able to hope that the National Assembly would re-establish order and act for the welfare of the people. However, he wrote,

Today, when his sole recompense for so many sacrifices consists of seeing the monarchy destroyed, all powers disregarded, property violated, personal security everywhere endangered, crimes unpunished and total anarchy taking the place of law. While ... the new Constitution is insufficient to repair a single one of the ills afflicting the Kingdom ... the King deems it his duty to place before Frenchmen ... the picture of his conduct and that of the government.⁴¹

In the document Louis argued that his only recourse was to leave France until such time as a new constitution should be written that 'shall cause our holy religion to be respected, the government to be established on a firm foundation and made useful by its functioning.'⁴²

As it was, the royal family's escape lasted only twenty-four hours. In spite of disguising themselves, they were recognised and captured at the town of Varennes and brought back to Paris on 25 June 1791. Pétion, one of the commissioners sent to meet the royal party, recorded the people's reaction to the king's return, stating that:

The participation of the people was immense. It seemed that all Paris and its environs had come together. The roofs of the houses were covered with men, women and children, the fences bristled with them, the trees were filled. Everyone wore hats, and the most majestic silence reigned.⁴³

Denis Richet has commented that 'By fleeing, one king had renounced his sovereignty, while another king, the people, grimly looked on.'⁷³ Louis' actions had dramatically illustrated that he was not prepared to be king over a revolutionary state, nor renounce his religious beliefs.

Timothy Tackett has identified the attempt to flee Paris as a turning point in the direction of the revolution:

The night the King suddenly appeared in a small town in north eastern France is arguably one of the most dramatic and poignant moments in the entire French Revolution. For the local inhabitants the experience was unforgettable and in some cases it would entirely reshape their lives ... Beyond [their] effect on the inhabitants of Varennes, the events of that night would prove a turning point in the history of the Revolution and of the French monarchy, with an enormous immediate impact on Paris, on the National Assembly, and indeed on the whole of France and of Europe.⁴⁴



PODCAST ON
LAFAYETTE

DID YOU KNOW?

During the failed escape attempt, Marie Antoinette's diamond jewellery was given to a common soldier at Varennes, instead of to the loyalists at Montmédy. The next day the soldier was found murdered and without the diamonds.

41 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 205.

42 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 210.

43 Pétion, cited in Furet and Ozouf, *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, 128.

44 Richet, cited in Furet and Ozouf, *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*.

DID YOU KNOW?

Just as Louis was being placed under arrest at Varennes, the nobleman Charles de Damas asked the Queen to allow him to take the dauphin up on his horse. He could then have taken the child over the border to safety. However, the queen refused to be parted from her son and the whole royal family was returned to Paris as prisoners.



THE KING'S FLIGHT FROM PARIS

DID YOU KNOW?

Napoleon believed that the National Assembly should have helped the royal family escape from France. He said that Varennes gave the National Assembly the chance to rid France of royalty without cruelty. The deputies could then have got on with the work of creating a republic, without burdening the state with a sovereign they had no reason to destroy. What do you think?

45 Tackett, *When the King took Flight*, 2.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LOUIS' FLIGHT

As Tackett has suggested, Louis XVI's flight from Paris (sometimes known as the 'flight to Varennes') was one of the most significant crises of the revolution, leading to a variety of consequences. The monarchy was doomed and never again had any influence on affairs in France. The 1791 Constitution, which established the king as the executive power with the right of veto over legislation, became obsolete before it even came into action. The Assembly moved from being the legislative power to assuming full control of government. It was the question of Louis XVI's fate that split the Assembly into factions and led eventually to the downfall of many of the original 'men of 1789' who, in defending the constitution they had written, became seen as monarchists and traitors to the revolution. Like the Assembly, the country came to be divided between those who wanted Louis tried and executed and those who believed the revolution should come to an end. Finally, Louis' imprisonment forced Austria and Prussia to act to protect him and his family.

Tackett has also highlighted these long term consequences:

A full explanation of the origins of the Terror must also reflect on the impact of a single event: the attempted flight of the reigning King of France on 21 June 1791. The dramatic effort of Louis XVI and his family to escape the capital and abandon the new government established in his name set in motion an extraordinary chain of actions and reactions with profound effects on all elements of society and virtually every corner of the nation.⁴⁵

How could Louis' escape attempt be connected to the Terror of 1793? What Tackett has pointed to is the extraordinary erosion of faith in the monarchy and beyond it the clergy and aristocracy. Anyone now connected with or in any way sympathetic to, the old regime would, in future years, be seen as someone who could betray his own country.

ACTIVITY

ETHICAL DIMENSIONS

Discuss the following questions.

- What happened when Louis tried to flee France in 1791?
- What other options were open to Louis and Marie Antoinette at that time? What might you have done in their position?
- What signs were there in people's behaviour that they no longer adored and respected the king?

THE RESPONSE OF THE NEW REGIME

What were the choices facing the Assembly? Some people believed that the best solution was to pretend that Louis had been kidnapped. This would allow him to stay on the throne and would therefore preserve the new Constitution of 1791, not yet published. Others wanted Louis tried for treason and executed if found guilty. Some wanted him deposed and replaced by one of his brothers, who would act as regent until the dauphin was of age; others demanded an abdication and the creation of a French republic. Many saw his flight as evidence of an international conspiracy designed to destroy the revolution. Thomas Paine, the American, wrote a placard which he pinned to the door of the Assembly, calling for an end to monarchy:



The nation can never give back its confidence to a man who, false to his trust, perjured to his oath, conspires a clandestine flight, obtains a fraudulent passport, conceals a King of France under the disguise of a valet, directs his course towards a frontier covered with traitors and deserters, and evidently meditates a return into our country, with a force capable of imposing his own despotic laws.⁴⁶

Many influential men, however, believed a compromise was necessary. Antoine Barnave, the brilliant deputy from Dauphiné, tried to find a way by which the monarchy, and the 1791 Constitution, could be saved. His views were supported by Adrien Duport, the Abbé Sieyès, the de Lameth brothers, Jean-Sylvain Bailly and Lafayette, all of whom became identified as *monarchiens* and conservatives as a consequence. Initially, they kept the backing of the majority of deputies and the conservative approach to the question of the king's fate prevailed.

On 15 July, the Assembly declared its belief that Louis XVI and his family had been kidnapped, thus exonerating him from responsibility for his flight. The Assembly then issued a document that set out the grounds by which a king might forfeit his position. This Decree Determining Abdication gave Louis another chance, but suspended his power, Clause 4 stating:

The effect of the decree of the 25th of last month, suspending the exercise of the royal functions and of the executive power in the hands of the King shall prevail until, the Constitution completed, the entire constitutional act has been presented to the King.⁴⁷

Under the Decree Determining Abdication, then, Louis XVI was neither a constitutional monarch nor a prisoner of the revolution, but rather was held in his position by a fiction that no-one believed.

Under Heavy Guard, the Royal Family Re-entered Paris. Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

An eye-witness to the royal family's return to Paris reported: 'Everyone wore hats, and the most majestic silence reigned.' This image is cropped so that we see just a battalion of the National Guard marching beside the carriage, but in the full version the upper bodies of the crowd can be seen, all with their hats upon their heads.

⁴⁶ Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 215.

⁴⁷ Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 217.

DOCUMENT

TIMOTHY TACKETT ON THE KING'S FLIGHT FROM PARIS

[I]n opting to flee from Paris ... the King greatly contributed to the destabilisation of the state ... For a great many people the shock was brutal ... They experienced a profound sense of desertion and betrayal. ... Louis was denounced as a liar, a coward, a traitor ...

... Wielding the logic of expediency, the need to save the Revolution at all cost from the enemies ..., patriot leaders readily violated the very laws and the 'rights of man' that they themselves had only just proclaimed. For the first time, they crossed the threshold of state-sponsored violence, vigorously promoting the armed repression of the demonstration at the Champ de Mars. ... Freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, habeas corpus, judicial due process – rights guaranteed in the Constitution – were all set aside ... In this sense, the weeks following the flight to Varennes marked an anticipation, a pre-figuration of both the psychology and the procedures of the Terror.⁴⁸

ACTIVITY

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Read Timothy Tackett's views on the king's flight from Paris and complete the tasks below.

1. Had Louis been able to give his whole-hearted support to the revolutionary project in the spring of 1791, what hopes might have been held for the Revolution?
2. In the short term, how did the king's capture at Varennes contribute to the destabilisation of the state and society?
3. According to Tackett, how did the people of France react to the king's attempted escape?
4. What type of political reconceptualisation took place amongst a minority of French people after the king's attempt to flee?
5. In which two respects did the king's attempt to flee mark the anticipation of the Terror?
6. As you proceed through the book, note the ongoing consequences of the king's escape attempt to the unfolding of events up to 1795.

DID YOU KNOW?

Danton attempted to negotiate with Francis II, the Holy Roman Emperor and Marie Antoinette's nephew. Danton wanted Marie Antoinette released from captivity and sent to Austria; in return concessions would be made by Austria to France. Francis refused and Marie Antoinette remained a prisoner.

THE THIRD REVOLUTIONARY JOURNÉE: THE CHAMP DE MARS

If the deputies of the Assembly could tolerate this fiction, the radical Jacobins and *sans-culottes* would not. On Saturday 16 July 1791, crowds assembled at the Champ de Mars demanding a referendum on the king's fate. They had come to sign a petition drawn up by the leaders of the Cordeliers Club. This radical and populist club had been founded in 1790, charged low subscription fees and was one of the few that admitted women. It had as its mission saving the people from the abuses of authority. It was the champion of the *sans-culottes* and of democracy won on the streets. The members of the Cordeliers Club were opposed to the attempt by the Assembly to shut the common people out from voting or becoming deputies. 'But what is this much repeated word, active citizen, supposed to mean?' asked Cordelier leader Camille Desmoulins. 'The active citizens are the ones who took the Bastille.'⁴⁹ Thus, the Cordeliers supported direct democracy, the participation of the people in the electoral and legislative process, the accountability of the deputies to the people and the right to protest through the *journées*.

⁴⁸ Tackett, *When the King Took Flight*, 222–3.

⁴⁹ McPhee, *The French Revolution*, 68.

The Cordeliers approached the Jacobin Club for support in organising the petition. Indeed, most of the leaders of the Cordeliers, Danton, Hébert, Desmoulins, Brissot and Marat, were also members of the Jacobins. Robespierre had actually convinced the Jacobins not to support the abdication petition, but nevertheless, the club still split over the crisis. On 16 July, Antoine Barnave led approximately 1000 constitutional monarchists, including 300 deputies from the Constituent Assembly, in their resignations from the Jacobin Club to form the Feuillant Club, in protest against the petition to remove the king from his throne. The Feuillants did not trust the king but they did want to maintain stability and see the Constitution of 1791 implemented. In doing so, they tied their fortunes to Louis XVI and as he lost favour with the people, so did they. Robespierre was left to lead what remained of the Jacobin Club – a small rump of about 100 members.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1789, deputies of all shades would meet at the Jacobin Club, along with wealthy (male) Parisians, to discuss current issues. The club tended to reflect the dominant opinion in Paris at a given time.

FEATURE

PUBLIC RESPONSES TO THE KING'S FLIGHT



The People Destroy the Symbols of Monarchy and the Statue of Former Kings.

This rather confusing image dates from late June or early July 1791, as the French tried to come to terms with the king's flight from Paris.

The female figure of France, gowned in the royal cloak of the Bourbons but representing the interests of the people, is shown bludgeoning the bust of Louis XVI with a cudgel

embellished with the *fleur-de-lys*. The pedestal from which the king has toppled is seen in the background, and his crown, triumphantly aloft, is being held in place by the armed power of the people, represented by various members of the National Guard, the *Fédérés* and the *sans-culottes*.

Between 21 June and the end of July, the National Assembly received over 650 letters from people

from a range of provincial clubs, towns and villages who wished to affirm their support for the National Assembly in the crisis and to express their ambivalent feelings about the monarchy.

Many letters contained intensely moving statements expressing deep disillusionment with the king. The Jacobins of the village of La Bassée in northern France grieved a king who had deserted his people, saying they had 'always worshipped their kings as idols, loving them in spite of their vices.'⁵⁰ Timothy Tackett comments that the image of the king as an idol, 'now smashed and destroyed forever, appeared again and again in the rhetoric of the provincial correspondence.'⁵¹

About a quarter of correspondents urged the National Assembly to take action against the king. Of this group, about half again expressed their support for the present constitution, some suggesting that Louis XVI be replaced. The citizens of Nantes, remembering that in 1688 the English Parliament had dethroned James II and replaced him with William and Mary of Orange, wrote that, 'The English taught us that to dethrone a king who is faithless to the laws of his country is not to overthrow the monarchy itself.'⁵²

⁵⁰ Tackett, *When the King Took Flight*.

⁵¹ Tackett, *When the King Took Flight*, 191.

⁵² Tackett, *When the King Took Flight*, 192–3.



Triumphant Entrance, anonymous contemporary engraving.

An example of the many contemptuous representations of the king which circulated after his return from Varennes. Here he is not only bestialised as a pig but demonised. In other images, the royal family was portrayed as a cartload of farm animals being led back to the stable by loyal citizen guardsmen of France.

53 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 218.

54 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*.

55 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 219.

56 Hibbert, *The Days of the French Revolution* (UK: Quill, 1981), 134–5.

The petition was laid out on an altar recently erected to celebrate the second anniversary of the Storming of the Bastille. The petition demanded Louis' abdication:

His perjury, his desertion, his protest, to say nothing of all the other criminal acts which have preceded, accompanied and succeeded them, entail formal abdication of the constitutional crown entrusted to him.⁵³

Furthermore, the petition declared that the nation was 'outraged' by the Assembly's decision to 'entrust the control of the realm henceforth to a perjurer, traitor, and fugitive.'⁵⁴

The next day, a further petition was presented, but the 50 000-strong crowd rejected it and a third was then written. It was even more

radical than the previous ones, stating that:

A monstrous crime was committed; Louis XVI fled; he infamously abandoned his position; the realm was on the brink of anarchy. Citizens stopped him at Varennes; he was brought back to Paris ... You, Gentlemen, have judged in advance that he was innocent and inviolable ... Legislators! This was not the will of the people, and we had thought that your greatest glory, even your duty, consisted in being agents of the public will.⁵⁵

The petition demanded that Louis XVI abdicate and that he be put on trial for his crime; then the Assembly could move towards creating a new executive power in France.

Christopher Hibbert, a master of anecdote, has told us that as the signatories filed past to write their names on the petition, many with considerable difficulty, two men, one a hairdresser and the other an *invalidé* (pensioned-off soldier) with a wooden leg, were discovered under the platform, possibly with the intent of peeping up the women's skirts. However, at the time, the crowd thought they were spies for counter-revolutionaries, intending to set fire to the altar of liberty, and they were dragged out and hanged on the spot.⁵⁶

At the Hôtel de Ville, the numbers of people at the Champ de Mars provoked fears of a riot. Bailly, still mayor of Paris, declared martial law and the National Guard, led by Lafayette, was called out to disperse the crowd. When the militia arrived at the Champ de Mars and demanded that the people go home, the crowd responded with boos and a hail of small stones. The troops were ordered to fire off a few guns as a warning; then Lafayette, trusting to his own popularity with the crowd, personally addressed them and demanded that they go home. When nothing happened, he ordered the troops to fire on the crowd, killing perhaps fifty demonstrators and wounding another twelve.

The 'massacre' of the Champ de Mars was highly significant. At first, the forces of law and order prevailed. Letters poured in to the Assembly, supporting Bailly and Lafayette's actions and condemning the protesters. The elections to the Legislative

Assembly in September 1791 returned almost purely bourgeois legislators, many of whom saw the *sans-culottes* as a dangerous force. The Feuillants were the largest group in the Assembly. Extremists like Desmoulins and Santerre, both from the Cordeliers Club, were forced to go into hiding to avoid arrest. Danton went into the country and Robespierre quietly moved his lodgings and kept a low profile. Martial law was kept in place and newspapers which had supported the *sans-culottes* were closed.

Yet the Champ de Mars Massacre was to mark a turning point. While, initially, the broad community supported the attempt to impose law and order, the forces of radicalism triumphed as war with Austria was declared and the fear of traitors within France grew. The result was the decline in popularity of the ‘men of 1789.’ Bailly’s political career was ruined and Lafayette lost his popularity with the people of Paris, because they were held responsible for the massacre. More significantly, however, the Champ de Mars marks a division of power and the beginning of a struggle for supremacy: moderate deputies in the Legislative Assembly, then the National Convention, would find themselves helpless to restrain the *sans-culottes* and the politicians who urged them on. Radical political leaders like Danton, Marat and Robespierre would come to prominence as a result of their support for the *sans-culottes*.

DID YOU KNOW?

Membership of the Cordeliers was open to both men and women of lower social status. The cost of membership was one penny a month, or a shilling a year. Members would learn the Declaration of Rights, hear the case against the government of the day and keep an eye on the deeds of the city officials. The official badge of the Club was the Eye of Vigilance. The Cordeliers tended to be the club of the oppositional political groups.

DOCUMENT

GEORGE RUDÉ, *THE CROWD IN THE FRENCH REVOLUTION*

The violent affray that took place on the Champ de Mars in July 1791 marked an important stage in the struggle for power between constitutional monarchists [Feuillants] and Jacobins, between liberal bourgeoisie and revolutionary democrats. In Paris it led directly to the eclipse of Bailly and Lafayette as the leaders of the city administration; yet, in the National Assembly, the defeat of the ‘constitutionalists’ was delayed by the outbreak of war and was not completed until the fall of the monarchy in August 1792. In terms of the social history of Paris the Champ de Mars affair both represented the first bloody clash within the Third Estate ... and the culmination of several months of social upheaval and of revolutionary agitation, at the end of which the democrats organised in the Jacobin and Cordeliers Clubs appear as the undisputed leaders of the Parisian *sans-culottes*. In the course of this movement the tradesmen, artisans and wage-earners of the capital emerge more clearly as elements which the main protagonists in the struggle for power cannot afford to ignore, and whose interests the revolutionary democrats, at least, must affect to espouse [pretend to believe in]. In this sense, then, the Champ de Mars demonstration itself should be seen as the culmination of a process and ... treated in the context of the varied social and political movement that preceded it.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ George Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution*, 80.

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

ACTIVITY

Read George Rudé’s comments on the role of the crowd in the revolution and complete the tasks below.

1. How does Rudé characterise the the power struggle that formed the backdrop to the Champ de Mars affair?
2. Identify two social consequences of the violent affray at the Champ de Mars.
3. What does Rudé identify as the political significance of the tradesmen, artisans and wage-earners of the capital during this period?
4. Compare Rudé’s interpretation of the French ‘crowd’ or *sans-culottes* involved in the Champ de Mars massacre with that of another historian. To what extent was the Champ de Mars a turning point in the radicalisation of the *sans-culottes*?



VIDEO ON CHAMP
DE MARS PROTEST

ACTIVITY

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

In a diagram or graphic organiser, compare and contrast the perspectives of the *sans-culottes* protesting at the Champ de Mars with those of the deputies of the Constituent Assembly regarding what should be done with Louis XVI.



The Austrian emperor, Leopold II.

THE BREWING WAR WITH AUSTRIA AND PRUSSIA

While the rulers of the other European states were opposed to the French Revolution, they had not taken any positive action to overthrow it, in spite of the appeals of the increasing numbers of French nobles who had left France. Nor had they responded with action to the pleas for aid made by Louis XVI and the Court Party.⁵⁸ However, when the new Austrian Emperor, Leopold II (1790–1792), was informed of the plans of the French royal family to leave France, he decided to act. He called a conference of the leading European states in the spring of 1791. The Mantua Conference resulted in a general agreement to come to the aid of Louis XVI, but without a definite plan of action. When Louis was recaptured at Varennes, the situation was much more acute and Leopold again acted, issuing the ‘Padua Circular’ (6 July 1791) calling on the heads of European states to form a union ‘for counsel, co-operation and measures to restore

the liberty and honour of the Most Christian King and his family, and to limit the dangerous extremes of the French Revolution.’⁵⁹ His plan was that the states would ‘unite to avenge in a forceful manner any future outrages which may be committed against the security, the person and the honour of the King, Queen and the Royal Family.’⁶⁰

THE DECLARATION OF PILLNITZ

On 27 August 1791, following the Padua Circular, the Declaration of Pillnitz was issued by Emperor Leopold of Austria and Frederick William, King of Prussia. In it, they stated that Louis XVI’s position was ‘a matter of common concern to all the sovereigns of Europe.’⁶¹ They threatened that unless Louis’ power was restored they were ‘resolved to act promptly ... with the forces necessary to attain the proposed common objective.’⁶² The document, however, did not mention what precise actions the monarchs were committed to, nor did it mention the timing of their intervention. There was not much hope that other European countries would join with Austria and Prussia, nor that there would be much enthusiasm for war. Within France, the Declaration of Pillnitz, instead of intimidating those who desired that Louis be tried and executed, encouraged greater efforts to force the issue and to insist on Louis’ removal from office.

58 The Court Party was also sometimes called ‘The Austrian Faction’ and comprised the Queen and a number of courtiers who, either because they were Austrian themselves, or through personal loyalty to the monarchy, viewed an Austrian invasion as a desirable event.

59 Hibbert, *The Days of the French Revolution*, 221.

60 Hibbert, *The Days of the French Revolution*, 223.

61 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 223.

62 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 224.

THE 1791 CONSTITUTION: A LIBERAL BOURGEOIS VISION OF SOCIETY

The Constitution was prefaced with a list of fundamental freedoms which echoed The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. These included civil liberties such as the admission of all citizens to offices and employment by talent; taxation of all citizens in proportion to means; similar punishments for all people for similar offences; freedom of speech and of the press; freedom of worship; government responsibility for public relief (charity) and instruction; the right to assemble peacefully without arms and to present petitions to government.⁶³

The essentially bourgeois values of the Constitution were highlighted by the way it defined active and passive citizenship and enshrined the principle of property:

The Constitution guarantees the inviolability of property, or a just and previous indemnity for that of which a legally established public necessity requires the sacrifice.⁶⁴

Property was to be untouchable, except when it was needed for the public good, in which case it could not be seized without payment. The government was bound to pay the true worth of the property in advance to the owner before making use of it, and only for the public good:

Sovereignty is one, indivisible, inalienable, and imprescriptible. It appertains to the nation; no section of the people and not any individual may assume the exercise thereof.⁶⁵

Sovereignty (power) resided in the whole of the nation, it was intrinsic to the nation and could not be taken away from the nation – it was inalienable. No individual or faction could seize power:

The legislative power is delegated to a National Assembly, composed of temporary representatives freely elected by the people, to be exercised by it, with the sanction [consent] of the King, in the manner [set out in the rest of the Constitution].⁶⁶

The government is monarchical: the executive power is delegated to the King, to be exercised, under his authority, by ministers and other responsible agents in the manner [set out below].⁶⁷

The judicial power is delegated to judges who are elected at stated times by the people.⁶⁸

In order to be an active citizen it is necessary:

To have been born, or become, a Frenchman

To be fully twenty-five years of age

To pay ... a direct tax equal to at least the value of three days' labour ...

Not to be a servant for wages

To be inscribed upon the roll of the National Guard ...

To have taken the civic oath.⁶⁹

The person of the King is inviolable and sacred; his only title is King of the French ...

There is no authority in France superior to that of the law; the King reigns only thereby, and only in the name of the law may he exact obedience.

63 The Constitution of 3 September 1791, Title 1: Fundamental Provisions guaranteed by the Constitution, cited in Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 231–2.

64 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 232.

65 Title III, Of Public Powers, Clause 1, cited in Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 234.

66 Clause 3.

67 Clause 4.

68 Clause 5.

69 Title III, Of Public Powers, Section 2: Primary Assemblies – Selection of Electors, Clause 2, 235.



On his accession to the throne ... the King, in the presence of the legislative body, shall take oath to the nation *to be faithful to the nation and to the law, to employ all the power delegated to him to maintain the Constitution decreed by the National Constituent Assembly in the years 1789, 1790 and 1791, and to have the laws executed.*⁷⁰

In the light of the king's attempted flight from France, the Constitution was very specific about the circumstances under which the king may have been 'deemed to have abdicated the throne.' These clauses were to form a key part of the charges laid against the king at his trial in 1792–93. These were:

If the King ... has not taken the [above] oath, or if, after having taken it, he retracts it, ...

If the King places himself at the head of an army and directs the forces thereof against the nation, or if he does not, by a formal statement, oppose such an undertaking carried out in his name, ...

If the King, having left the Kingdom, does not return after invitation has been made by the legislative body ... within less than two months⁷¹

After much debate in the Constituent Assembly about whether the veto to be granted to the king should be full or merely suspensive (i.e. whether he could reject outright, and permanently, the Assembly's legislation, or whether he could only stall legislation), the Constitution proclaimed that:

In the case that the King refuses his consent [to decrees presented to him by the legislative body] such refusal shall only be suspensive. When the two legislatures following the one in which the decree was introduced have again successfully presented

70 Chapter II, Of Monarchy, the Regency and the Ministers, Section 1: Monarchy and the King, Clauses 2, 3 and 4. Original italics.
71 Chapter II, Section 1, Clauses 5,6 and 7.

ACTIVITY

SOURCE ANALYSIS

Examine *Louis le Faux* ('Louis the False') and complete the questions below.

1. Identify the historical context in which the source was created.
2. Analyse how the context of the source would have affected its meaning and purpose.
3. Using the source and your own knowledge, explain how the people of France responded to Louis XVI's attempt to flee Paris.
4. Evaluate the significance of the king's attempt to flee Paris as a consequence of the revolution. In your response, refer to the source and to other views of the revolution.

Louis le Faux. This drawing, created on 21 June 1791, reflects the suspicion with which Louis XVI was viewed after his capture at Varennes. It appeared a month before the Champ de Mars incident. Two popular and irreverent characters, Le Père Duchèsne on the left and Jean-Bart on the right, assess Louis' loyalty to the Constitution, which was in preparation. Le Père comments: 'All men who do not keep their word are losers,' and Jean-Bart replies, 'He is John-Loser.' Later, at his trial, Louis would argue that he was not bound by the Constitution because he had agreed to it under duress.



the same decree in the same terms, the King shall be deemed to have given his sanction [consent].⁷²

In 1792, the king was to use his power of suspensive veto to great effect during the Legislative Assembly, stalling key pieces of legislation needed to safeguard the revolution, thus rendering the government of France increasingly unworkable.

At first, all seemed calm. On 3 September 1791, the Constitution was completed. On 13 September, Louis signed it. It must have seemed as though the revolution was drawing to an end and that the Constituent Assembly had achieved all it set out to do: the old regime was no more; feudalism had been ‘abolished in its entirety’ by the Decrees of 5–11 August 1789; the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen had established a new egalitarian and liberal order. France had been reorganised in a rational fashion and many of the old practices, which hampered trade and commerce, had been abolished. On 30 September, the Constituent Assembly came to an end and on 1 October, the new Legislative Assembly was elected. Yet France was not united, but remained in conflict over major issues.

CONCLUSION

Under the 1791 Constitution, France became a constitutional monarchy. The single chamber of the National Assembly was the legislative power and controlled finance. The king held the executive power, with the right to name diplomats and ministers, to declare war and peace and to block temporarily the passing of legislation. He did not have the power of absolute veto. The courts would apply and determine the law.

Voting favoured those who were well-off, dividing citizens into ‘active’ and ‘passive’ for the purposes of voting and standing for election. Those who paid less than the equivalent of three days’ labour in direct taxes were decreed passive and were unable to vote. This provision excluded many adult males, including many peasants, urban workers and household servants.

Only those who paid a silver mark in tax could stand for office. The choice of deputies was made by electors who had to be active citizens and property-owners, or tenants paying a substantial rent. Women did not have the vote, nor did males under twenty-five.

As Peter McPhee has pointed out,

The ambiguity about the meaning of citizenship in the Declaration of the Rights of Man was resolved by excluding women and ‘passive’ male citizens – perhaps 40 percent of adult men – paying less than three days labour in taxes and by imposing sharp property qualifications on those eligible to be electors and deputies. While there were at least four million ‘active’ citizens, only about 50,000 of them paid enough taxes to be electors; the 745 deputies in the Legislative Assembly had to pay a silver mark, equivalent to fifty-four days labour in taxes.⁷³

Finally, because of Robespierre’s ‘Self-Denying Ordinance’ (May 1791), no deputy in the Constituent Assembly could stand for election to the Legislative Assembly. This meant that the nobility and clergy who had formed half of the original number of deputies to the Estates-General were excluded, as were the old

DID YOU KNOW?

Olympe de Gouges (1748–1793) was a French playwright and political activist. She attended meetings in the home of another well-known advocate for women’s rights, Sophie de Condorcet. In her *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* (1791), Gouges challenged the notion of male-female inequality. In Article 10, she asserted that ‘Woman has the right to mount the scaffold; she must equally have the right to mount the rostrum [speaker’s platform].’

⁷² Chapter III, Of the Exercise of the Legislative Power, Section 3, Clause 2.101 Chapter II, Section 1, Clauses 5,6 and 7.

⁷³ McPhee, *The French Revolution*, 68.



Third Estate deputies. With the changed political environment, virtually no-one other than the bourgeoisie stood for election. Of the 745 new deputies, only twenty-three were clergy. The 745 new men who were elected had no experience in national government, although many had been active in their local Assemblies.

William Doyle has described the new deputies:

Mostly they were men of property, and above all, lawyers. To the departing Constituents, who had deliberately barred themselves from election to the new body, they seemed obscure, inexperienced and (given the relative youth of most of them) callow. Few, certainly, were nationally known, although the journalist Brissot and the mathematician and publicist Condorcet were men of reputation. But most of the new deputies owed their election to prominence in their home localities, a prominence won in the new circumstances of revolutionary clubs.⁷⁴

This group would have to deal with war and counter-revolution and seek a solution to the violence of the *sans-culottes* in adopting terror as an arm of government.

74 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 175.

FEATURE

THE QUEEN AND THE CONSTITUTION

This is a contemporary drawing lampooning Queen Marie Antoinette's attitude to the 1791 Constitution.

The caption reads:

Je digère l'or, l'argent avec facilité, Mais la constitution, je ne puis la valer.

This translates as:

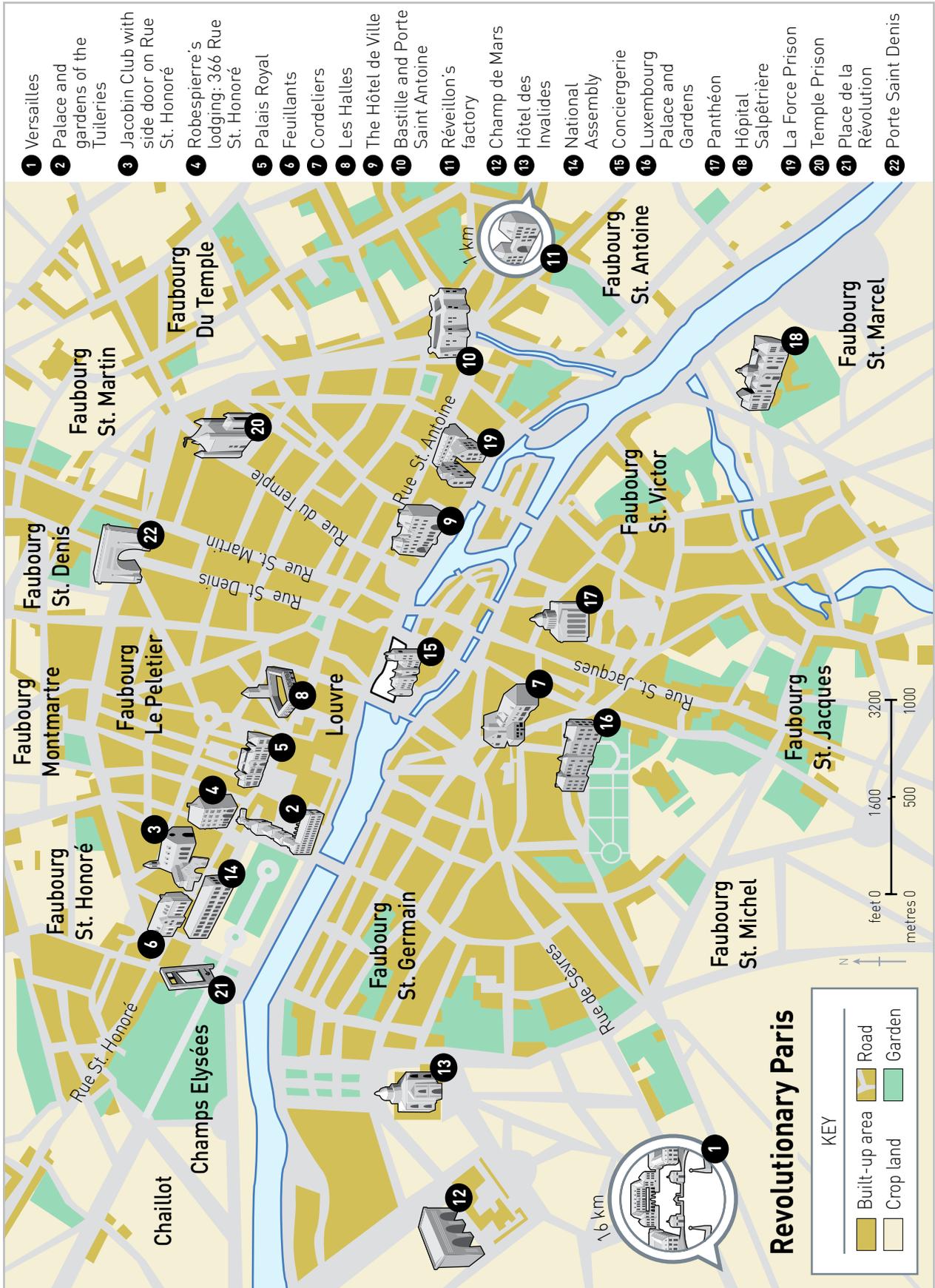
I digest gold and silver with ease, but I cannot accept the Constitution.

Marie Antoinette said that the Constitution was 'so monstrous, it cannot survive long.'⁷⁵



La Poulle d'Autriche.

75 Dylan Rees and Duncan Townsend, *France in Revolution*, 2nd ed (Hodder & Stoughton, 2001), 48.



CHAPTER REVIEW

CONSTRUCTING AN ARGUMENT – EXTENDED ANSWER

Choose one of the topics below and write an extended answer of approx. 250 words.

Topics:

- Explain the ideas and objectives underpinning the 1791 Constitution. Why did it fail to bring an end to the French Revolution? Use evidence to support your response.
- Explain who was entitled to vote following the 1791 Constitution and what it meant to be an 'active' citizen in France. Use evidence to support your response.
- Explain why there was deep social discord in France following the Civil Constitution of the Clergy (1790) and other reforms to the Church. Use evidence to support your response.

CONSEQUENCES OF REVOLUTION – TABLE

Create a table showing the main 'winners' and 'losers' from the French Revolution by the end of 1791. List in order of how much was won or lost, and cite specific examples.

KEY MOVEMENTS – DIAGRAM

Create a diagram showing the membership and objectives of three or more political clubs operating in France between 1789 and 1791.

KEY CHALLENGES – DISCUSSION

Evaluate France's relations with other countries between April and August 1791. Which religious and political tensions emerged in this period?

KEY EVENTS – MAPPING

Examine the map of revolutionary Paris on the previous page. Choose three or more key locations and explore them via Google Maps.



CONSEQUENCES OF THE REVOLUTION

SECTION

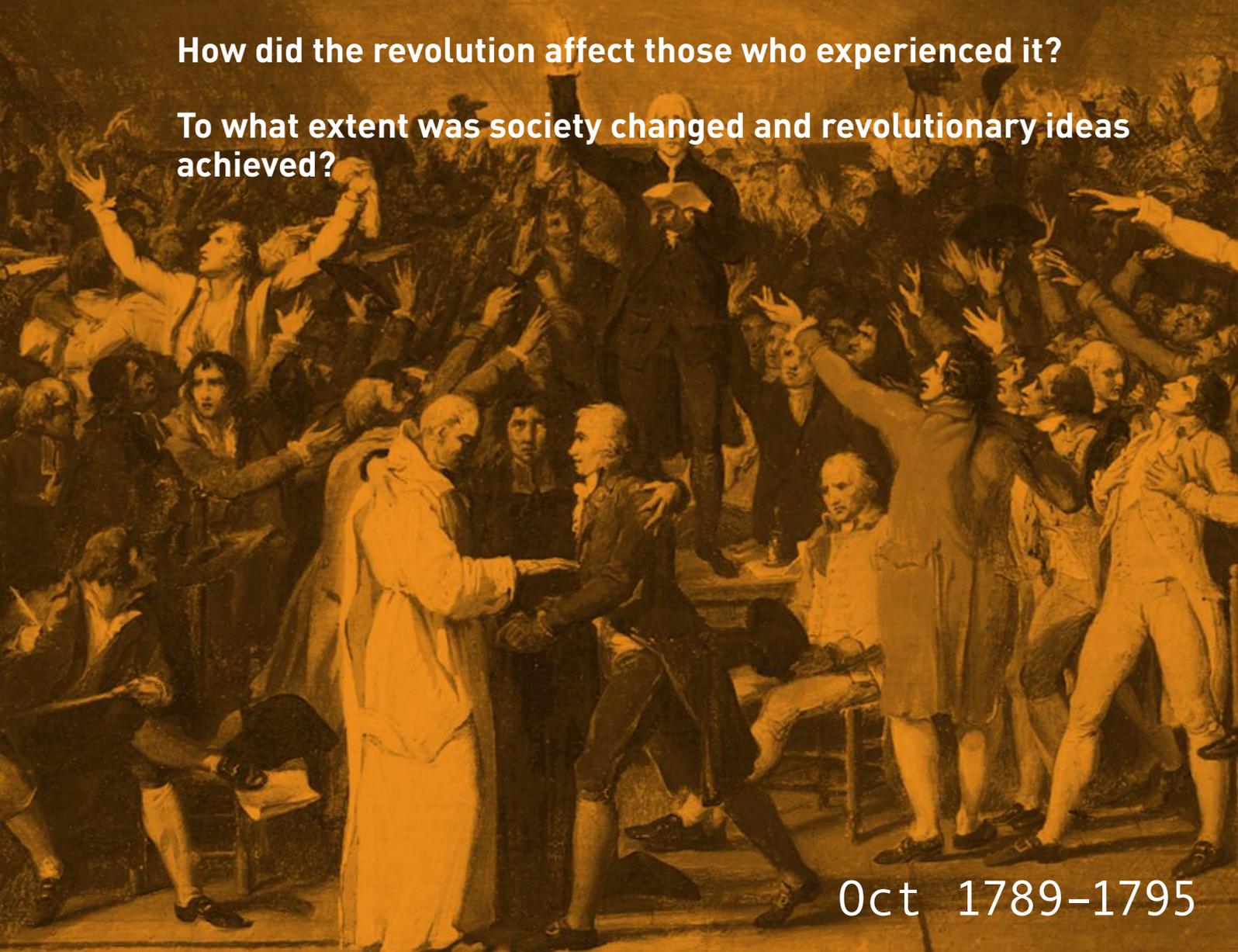
B

How did the consequences of revolution shape the new order?

How did the new regime consolidate its power?

How did the revolution affect those who experienced it?

To what extent was society changed and revolutionary ideas achieved?



Oct 1789–1795

1 The Introduction of Popular Sovereignty

Summary: The new regime established a new system based on popular sovereignty, reason, uniformity, merit and decentralisation. These enduring reforms were the great achievement of the French Revolution.

Evidence: The new government nationalised Church lands, ended seigneurialism and introduced free trade, a uniform system of weights, the election of judges and trial by jury.

Historian: 'The extent of change in public life cannot be understood except in a context of mass optimism and support.' (Peter McPhee)

Summary: The Thermidorian Reaction (1794-95) marked the triumph of bourgeois moderation over radicalism, and a return to 1789 goals such as representative government and free trade.

7 The Thermidorian Reaction

Evidence: 'We should be ruled over by our best citizens, who are those with some property and education.' (Boissy d'Anglas on the 1795 Constitution)

Historian: 'The revolution retraced its steps, finally bringing 1789 to an end with a republic governed by reason and property ownership.' (François Furet)

Summary: The Terror (1793-94) was a brutal method of social control that used intimidation and execution to protect the Republic from enemies within and without.

Evidence: 'Terror is only justice that is prompt, severe and inflexible; it is thus an emanation of virtue.' (Maximilien Robespierre)

6 The Terror

Historian: 'A tightening spiral of repression, persecution, and the pursuit of ideological purity, ending with a procession of innocents to the guillotine.' (David Andress)

Consequences of Revolution (1789-95)

2 The Civil Constitution of the Clergy

Historian:
'It was a serious mistake. It forced citizens to declare themselves for or against the new order.'
(William Doyle)

Summary: Under the new Civil Constitution (Jul 1790), the clergy were elected by the public, and were forced to swear the Clerical Oath. This prompted resentment and counter-revolution.

Evidence: 'They shall swear to be faithful to the nation, the law and the king and to maintain with all their power the Constitution.'
(Clerical Oath)

3 The King's Attempt to Flee

Summary: Anticipating the new Constitution, Louis tried to flee France (Jun 1791) and join the émigrés.

Evidence: Louis wrote that he would leave France until it had a constitution that would 'respect our holy religion' and place government 'on a firm foundation.'

Historian: 'In fleeing when the Constitution was almost complete, the king greatly contributed to the destabilisation of the state and the society.'
(Timothy Tackett)

Summary: After the Champ de Mars massacre, the common people of Paris (*sans-culottes*) became a radical force that had great influence in 1792-94.

Evidence: 'A *sans-culotte* always has his sword ready to cut off the ears of the malevolent. He can be seen leaving for the Vendée.'

Historian: 'The *sans-culottes* made possible the Revolutionary Government (1793) and the defeat of the counter-revolution.'
(Albert Soboul)

4

The Rise of the *Sans-Culottes*

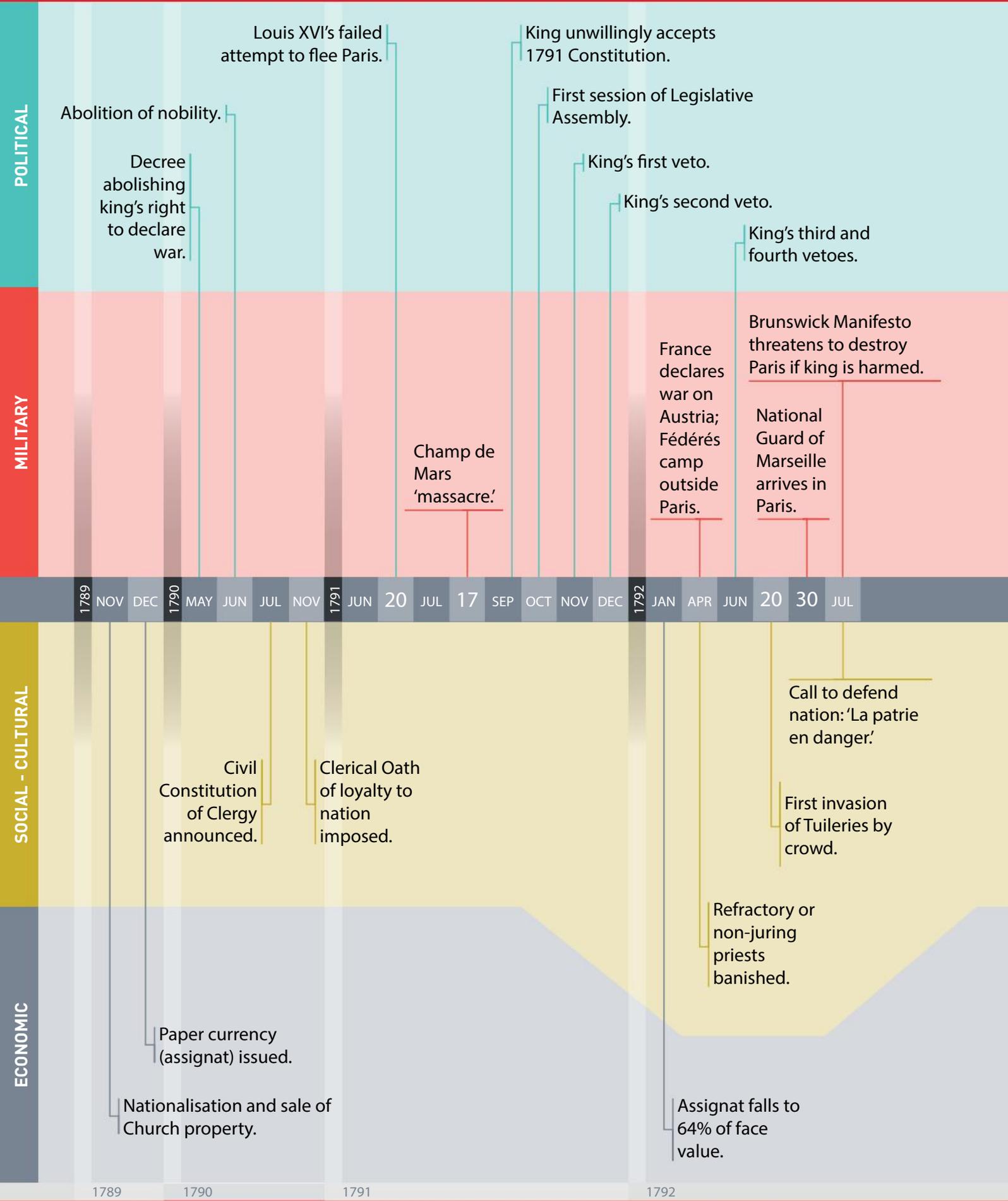
5 Rebellions and Foreign Wars

Historian:
'The war was a major turning point that affected France for 23 years.'
(Peter McPhee)

Summary: After the king's execution (1793), France fought on five fronts in Europe and faced rebellion in the Vendée.

Evidence: 'I would rather die for God and King than be dragged to prison by criminals.'
(Sapinaud)

SECTION B TIMELINE



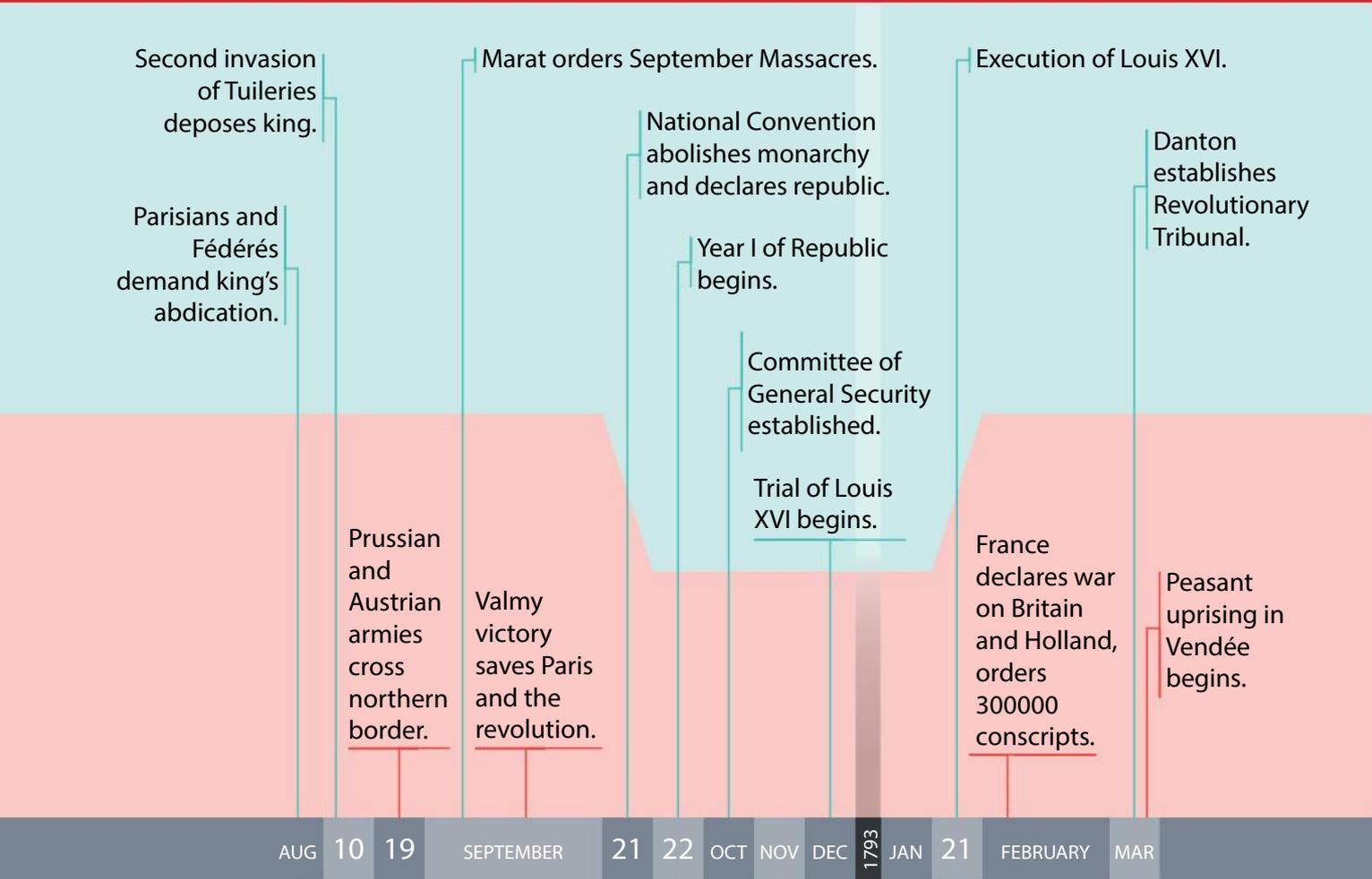
POLITICAL

MILITARY

SOCIAL - CULTURAL

ECONOMIC

1789 NOV DEC 1790 MAY JUN JUL NOV 1791 JUN 20 JUL 17 SEP OCT NOV DEC 1792 JAN APR JUN 20 30 JUL



POLITICAL

MILITARY

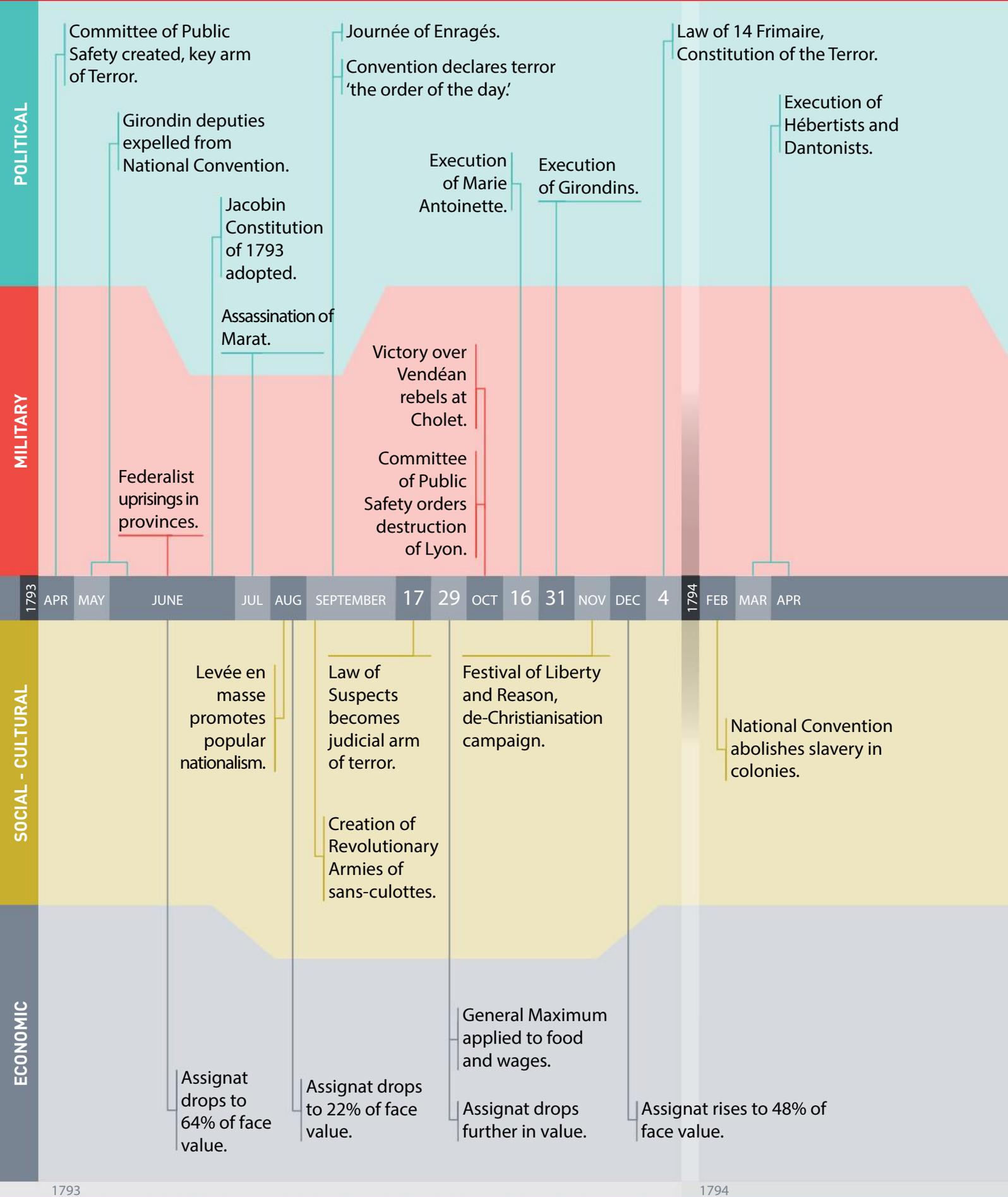


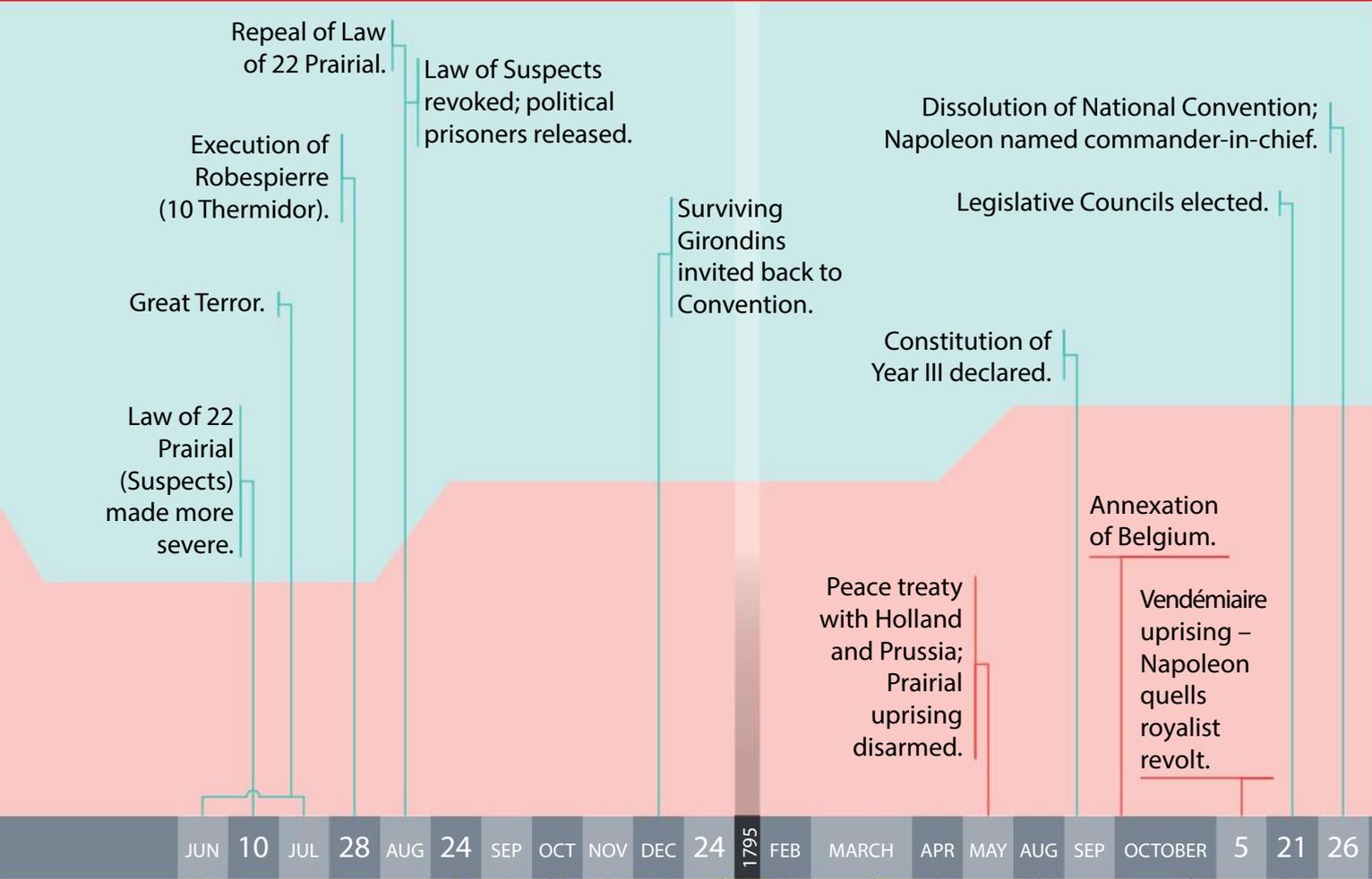
SOCIAL - CULTURAL



ECONOMIC

SECTION B TIMELINE, cont.

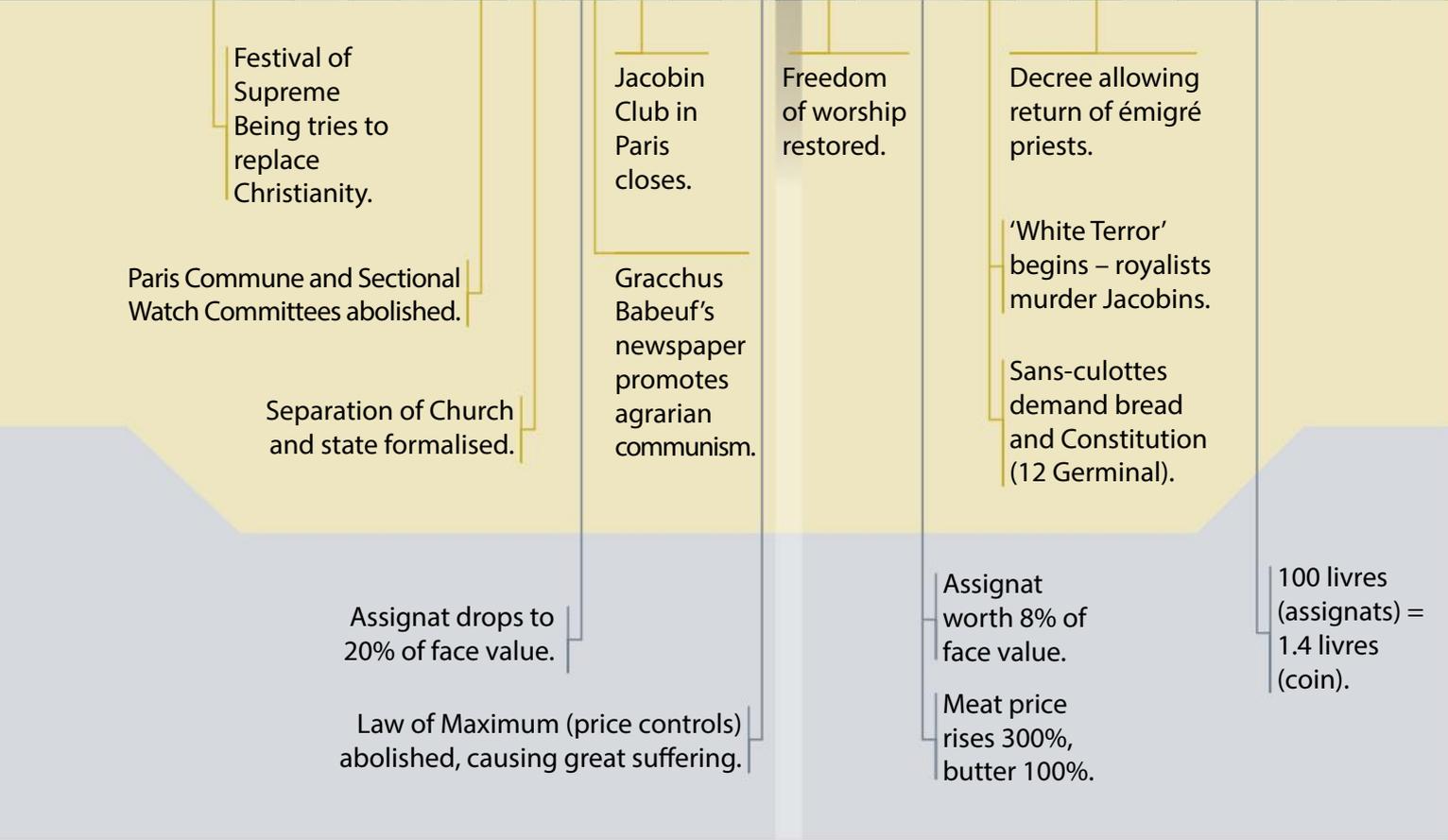




POLITICAL

MILITARY

JUN 10 JUL 28 AUG 24 SEP OCT NOV DEC 24 1795 FEB MARCH APR MAY AUG SEP OCTOBER 5 21 26



SOCIAL - CULTURAL

ECONOMIC

MARQUIS DE LAFAYETTE (1757–1834)

- Tried to steer middle ground after revolution, as 'bridge' between monarchy and people.
- Popularity waned after he supported king after the Flight from Paris and when his National Guard fired on crowd at Champ de Mars (1791).
- Danton put out warrant for Lafayette's arrest (1792) but he escaped to Austrian Netherlands.



GEORGES DANTON (1759–1794)

- Trained as lawyer, then joined National Guard (1789).
- Founding member of Cordeliers Club with Desmoulins.
- A gifted orator who recognised that crowd power had to be curtailed to save revolution.
- Believed machinery of Terror would replace need for crowd to take law into its own hands.
- Beheaded with Desmoulins and others in April 1794.



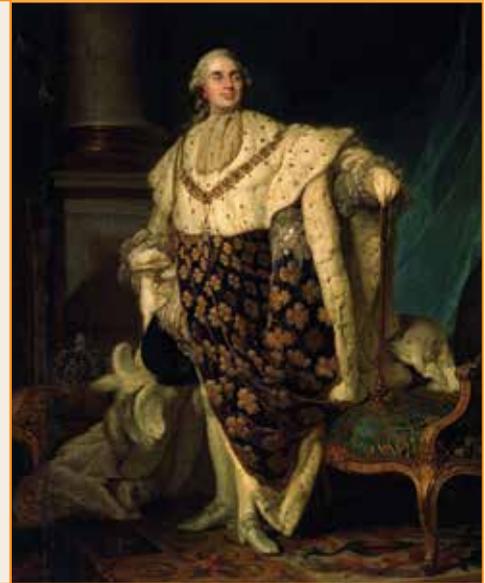
JEAN-PAUL MARAT (1743–1793)

- Radical editor of *L'ami du Peuple* ('friend of the people') newspaper.
- Incited violence which led to September Massacres (1792).
- Girondins' attack on him led to their expulsion from Convention (1793).
- Assassinated in his bath by Charlotte Corday, a Girondin supporter (1793).
- Popularised by David's painting of his murder in bathtub.



LOUIS XVI (1754–1793)

- Forced by crowd to move from Versailles to Tuileries in Paris (Oct 1789).
- Forced to sign Civil Constitution of Clergy (1790) despite devout Catholicism.
- Attempted to flee Paris with family (1791) but was caught at Varennes and returned.
- Virtually imprisoned at Tuileries Palace, was at mercy of mob and under attack from Jacobins and Cordeliers who wanted to try him for treason.
- With family, fled Tuileries after 10 August journée (1792) and lived rest of life in Temple.
- Said to have been intelligent, with interest in technology, naval warfare and exploration.
- Approached his execution with courage; was guillotined in January 1793.



MAXIMILIEN ROBESPIERRE (1758–1794)

- Highly contentious figure, arguably the most radical revolutionary.
- Founding member of Jacobin Club and a key architect of Terror.
- Elected to National Convention (1792) and Committee of Public Safety (1793).
- Known as 'The Incorruptible' on account of his intense moral code and championing of 'revolutionary virtue.'
- Convinced Convention to recognise existence of 'the Supreme Being and the immortality of the soul' (1794).
- Argued for continuation of Terror as late as 1794 on grounds that it was a way to rebuild society, with Civic Virtue at its centre.
- Sent to guillotine (1794), thus ending period of Terror.
- Subject of contrasting historical interpretations, e.g. Peter McPhee, Ruth Scurr, Jonathan Israel, David Jordan.



THREATS FROM WITHIN AND WITHOUT

THE REVOLUTIONARY ACCORD HAD DIMINISHED BY 1792. BAILLY AND LAFAYETTE WERE TARNISHED AFTER THE CHAMPS DE MARS MASSACRE AND PARISIANS WANTED MORE RIGHTS. 1792 MARKED THE RISE OF THE SANS-CULOTTES, FEARS OF TRAITORS, ECONOMIC CRISIS AND THE START OF THE AUSTRIAN WAR.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Café Procope, founded in 1686, is the oldest restaurant in Paris and was at the heart of the revolution. It was here that, following the Night of 4 August, customers donated their silver shoe buckles to the cause of the revolution. It was there that Danton, Robespierre, Marat and Cordeliers Club members set up their unofficial headquarters and the Phrygian cap (symbol of liberty) was first displayed. Later, Napoleon would leave his hat there as a pledge for an unpaid bill. The café is still operating today in the Rue de l'ancienne Comédie.



Café Procope plaque.

INTRODUCTION

After issuing the Declaration of Pillnitz in August 1791, Austria and Prussia made no sign that they meant to mount an immediate invasion of France. This was fortunate for the French army, which, though well equipped, had lost many of its (nobly-born) officers in the exodus of *émigrés*. The deputies in the Assembly had agreed to overlook Louis XVI's attempt to flee Paris in July 1791, and the king had accepted the 1791 Constitution.

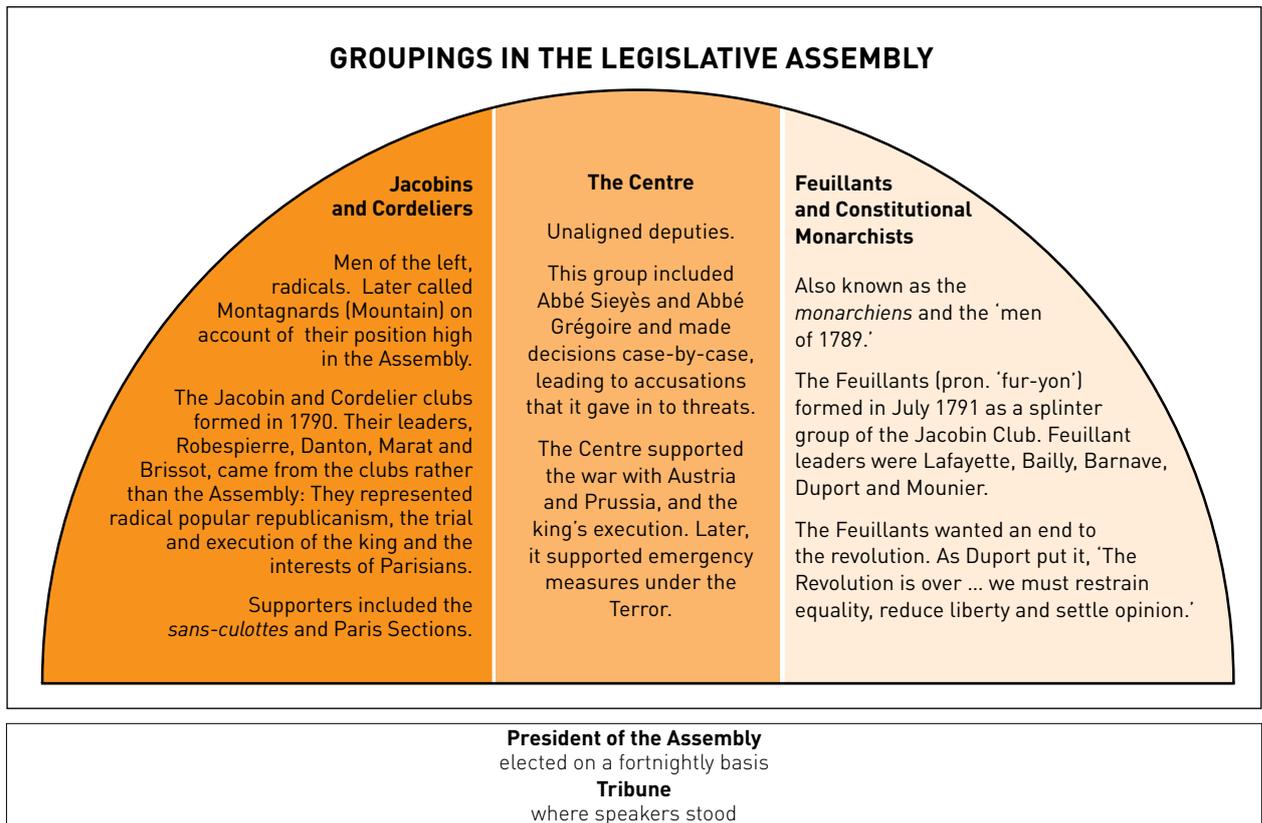
Yet foreign relationships remained tense in 1792. Foreign monarchs saw Louis XVI as an example of their own possible fate if revolution spread throughout Europe. French *émigrés* within their courts were demanding that they act to restore Louis' position. And, from Paris and within their own states, there were radical voices calling for the spreading of revolutionary principles through war and conquest.

Within France, the political climate was moving further to the left, as fears of conspiracies to overthrow the revolution spread. In the 745-member Legislative Assembly, the supporters of the king, Feuillants, still held power, represented by 264 deputies. However, there was no single powerful Feuillant leader in the Assembly, with Lafayette probably its most prominent source of ideas. The radical group of Jacobins and Cordeliers made up the 'Left,' with approximately 136 members. They distrusted Louis XVI, wanted greater political democracy in France, and gained support from the *sans-culottes* and the Paris Sections. At the Jacobin Club itself, new men were rising to prominence: Pétion, who was chosen to replace Bailly as Mayor of Paris in November 1791; Jacques Brissot, now a member of the Legislative Assembly, and Maximilien Robespierre. In the centre were the 345 unaligned members, with no definite policies or defined leadership. They voted for either side on an issue-by-issue basis.

BRISSOT AND THE RISE OF THE GIRONDINS

By early 1792, Jacques-Pierre Brissot de Warville had come to prominence. A member of the Jacobin Club, he was convinced that war would unite the French people and spread the flame of revolution throughout Europe. Brissot argued that France's problems came from two sources: enemies outside France determined to restore the power of the monarchy and enemies within France who were conspiring to bring down the revolution. 'We cannot be calm,' Brissot argued, 'until Europe, all Europe, is in flames.'¹ Increasingly, the deputies of the Legislative Assembly supported him. On 9 November 1791, the Assembly had passed a decree ordering *émigrés* to return to France. Frenchmen living outside France were suspected of conspiracy and failure to return meant they would be 'declared guilty of conspiracy ... prosecuted as such, and punished with death.'² Anyone who failed to return by 1 January 1792 was guilty of conspiracy, sentenced to death in their absence and their income forfeited 'for the benefit of the nation.'³ Military officers who left their troops and went over the border were declared guilty of desertion, which was punishable by death. The *émigré* nobility living in

- 1 William Doyle, *The French Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), 52.
- 2 John Hall Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1951), 272.
- 3 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 273–4.



Koblenz, Worms and other border cities were seen as representing a direct threat to the revolution, massing across the border in preparation for a war to restore the monarchy.

The people who gathered around Brissot were known as Brissotins during the period of the Legislative Assembly. They became known as Girondins during the National Convention, drawing their name from the department of the Gironde, from which many of them came. They were moderate left-bourgeois republicans who represented the interests of the provinces. In early 1792, they split from the Jacobin Club, moving into separate premises and meeting at the political *salon* of Madame de Roland, wife of Jean-Marie Roland de la Platière, one of the writers of the 1791 Constitution and Royal Minister for the Interior in 1792. The most prominent members, after Brissot himself, were Vergniaud, a powerful orator and President of the Legislative Assembly, Roland, Gensonné, a lawyer from Bordeaux, Gaudet, Isnard, Pétion, Condorcet (the last surviving *philosophe*), Buzot and Barbaroux. As fears of war increased, their argument that France needed to strike first to achieve victory against its enemies grew in popularity.

Brissot demanded, 'Do you wish at one blow to destroy the aristocracy, the refractory priests, the malcontents?' If so, he said, 'destroy Coblenz ... the head of the nation will then be obliged to reign in accordance with the Constitution.'⁴ Similarly, Madame Roland had declared that war 'would be a great school of public virtue. Peace will set us back ... We can be regenerated by blood alone.'⁵

The call for war was greeted with enthusiasm. The speeches of Brissot and his supporters encouraged people to believe that the French nation was under attack, that France's honour and glory as a free nation were in jeopardy and that patriotic Frenchmen must come to the support of the nation they loved. 'I tell you that

4 Christopher Hibbert, *The French Revolution* (UK: Penguin, 1980), 138.

5 Norman Hampson, *A Social History of the French Revolution* (Great Britain: Routledge, 1963), 134.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Black Legion was a counter-revolutionary group of exiled nobles formed in Baden (south-west Germany) in September 1790. Similar units were formed by the Duc de Condé and the Duc de Bourbon. Problems arose when the volunteers insisted on being officers, being paid their previous salaries and refusing to take orders. The units were dissolved by the Duke of Brunswick in 1792.

you must avenge your glory or condemn yourself to eternal dishonour,' Brissot declaimed in the Assembly.⁶ His rhetoric convinced the deputies of the Centre and led to the dismissal of the Feuillants from the king's ministry.

THE KING'S SUPPORTERS LOSE POWER

War meant the decline in popularity and power of the Feuillants. Barnave and his colleagues were increasingly seen as royalists and, in the heady atmosphere of a country preparing for battle, both the Court and public opinion were against them. Barnave retired from politics and went home to Dauphiné; of the three de Lameth brothers, one stayed in the Assembly while the other two rejoined the army, ultimately fleeing to the Austrian side. Lafayette was appointed one of the three generals in charge of the French war effort, but, like his colleagues, would emigrate after the fall of the monarchy in August 1792. Mounier left for Switzerland. Bailly stayed in Paris, but was to be imprisoned and executed on 11 November 1793 for his part in the Champ de Mars Massacre. On 9 March 1792, Louis dismissed his Feuillant ministers, who were increasingly being accused of treason by the Assembly, and replaced them with members of Brissot's faction: Roland became minister for the interior, Clavière, minister for finance and Dumouriez, minister for foreign affairs.

THE JACOBINS AND CORDELIERS



Georges Danton (1759–1794).

Most Jacobins supported a war, but Robespierre and his colleagues Couthon, Desmoulins, Danton, Hébert and Marat opposed it. Robespierre feared that victory in war might give power to the generals, especially Lafayette. If defeated, then the French would find that all the gains of 1789 had been overthrown and the monarchy restored by foreign forces. Robespierre's major argument, however, was that the real danger was not from the *émigrés* or foreign armies, but from counter-revolutionaries within France:

You propose to give supreme power to those who most want your ruin. The only way to save the state and to safeguard freedom is to wage war in the right way, on our enemies at home, instead of marching under their orders against their allies across the frontiers.⁷

Robespierre called on the Assembly to 'restore order at home before taking liberty elsewhere ... Restore order in the finances, put an end to corruption.' Popular opinion was against him, however, and supported Brissot's call that 'the time has come for a new crusade, a crusade for universal liberty.'⁸ On 20 April 1792, with the support of the majority of Legislative Assembly deputies, France declared war on Austria, encouraged by the Brissotins, the Court Party, the Feuillants and most of the non-aligned deputies. When Louis appeared before the Assembly on 20 April 1792, to propose formally that France declare war on Austria, the vote in favour was almost unanimous; only seven deputies voted against. Yet this war, which was supposed to be a swift and conclusive victory for France, was to last more than twenty years.

6 Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (UK: Penguin, 1989), 593.

7 Dylan Rees and Duncan Townson, *France in Revolution* (Access to History Series), second edition (Hodder & Stoughton, 2001), 55.

8 Schama, *Citizens*, 597.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Compare the political fortunes of the Feuillants and Brissotins in 1792.
2. To what extent did the Legislative Assembly heed Robespierre's opposition to the war?

ACTIVITY

THE WAR WITH AUSTRIA AND PRUSSIA

France's declaration of war in April 1792 accused Austria of granting open protection to French rebels and of colluding with other European nations against the independence and security of France. Austria and its allies were accused of making hostile preparations to invade France and of arming French citizens against their nation. As a consequence,

The National Assembly declares that the French nation, faithful to the principles consecrated by its Constitution not to undertake any war with a view to making conquests, and never to employ its forces against the liberty of the people, takes arms only to maintain its liberty and independence ... The war which it is forced to undergo is not a war of nation against nation, but the just defence of a free people against the unjust aggression of a king.⁹

France went to war with hopes that the oppressed peoples of other nations would revolt against their rulers and that the Austro-Prussian alliance would dissolve under the pressure of war. The French hoped for a short, victorious campaign to unify the people and consolidate the gains of the revolution. Yet, with untrained officers and volunteer soldiers, and much of the army command defecting to the other side, the French armies had, from an objective view, little hope against the trained Austrian and Prussian troops.

Louis XVI supported France's war against Austria. At first, this seems strange. Why would a man who saw in Austria his greatest hope of survival now support his own country's quest to defeat his brother-in-law's state?

In fact, this was exactly Louis' thinking, but the other way around. If France lost, the revolution would come to an end and he would be restored to the throne. If Austria lost, he would have shown himself to be a true French patriot and his attempt to flee Paris would cease to be an issue. Accordingly, he plotted with the Austrians and publicly supported the war. Simon Schama has commented that,

Given his plight, he had hardly anything to lose (or so he imagined). Should a war go well, it would be a means to concentrate power in his hands as commander in chief and might even give him the military force he needed to restore power at home.¹⁰

Marie Antoinette agreed. 'The imbeciles!' she wrote. 'They cannot see that this will serve us well, for ... if we begin it all the Powers will become involved.'¹¹

KEY PEOPLE

Summarise Louis XVI's position in relation to the war with Austria. What did Louis stand to gain and/or lose in the event of a French victory in the war?

ACTIVITY

DID YOU KNOW?

When war was declared against Austria, the Assembly pronounced that it was being made 'on behalf of the King and in the name of the nation,' in spite of the fact that Louis was then a prisoner.



KEY BATTLES IN
REVOLUTIONARY WARS

9 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 287.

10 Schama, *Citizens*, 587.

11 Schama, *Citizens*.

DID YOU KNOW?

War brought the slave trade to an abrupt halt, destroying the livelihoods of traders and the economies of some ports and towns. In 1786, twenty-two slave fleets had been sent out from La Rochelle; in 1792, only two such fleets left port.

DID YOU KNOW?

At least forty women are known to have fought in the Revolutionary Army from 1792–94, including Rose Bouillon, who enlisted alongside her husband, 'wishing to contribute to the strength of the Republic.' Anne Quatresols became a cavalry trooper at the age of thirteen and won several honours in battle, while Ursule Alby became an officer.



Armed revolutionary woman, Theroigne de Mericourt. Gouache on paper, Lesueur Brothers.

Initially, the French declared war against Austria alone, naming Francis II, Austria's new Emperor, 'King of Hungary and Bohemia.' In this way, it was hoped that Austria's ally, Frederick William II, King of Prussia, would not join the conflict. This was an error: the French army, ill-equipped and supplemented by poorly-trained volunteers who were unready to fight, faced two professional armies. The major strategy was to move across the French borders, attacking the enemy within its own territories.

The beginning of the war was disastrous. Under the command of General Dumouriez, three armies had been formed, one to guard the Swiss border, one at Metz, commanded by Lafayette, and one under General Rochambeau at Valenciennes. The armies lacked trained officers, because over 3000 officers, or a third of the whole officer corps, had emigrated, many leaving after Louis' capture at Varennes. In addition, the French Army had only 140 000 troops, many of them recent volunteers, enthusiastic but lacking in training and experience. They were not well-disciplined, their equipment was often defective and ammunition was in short supply. Far from respecting their officers, they were suspicious that they were covert traitors and might be deliberately betraying the troops to give victory to Austria.

In March 1792, a division of General Rochambeau's force, under the command of General Dillon, marched from Lille to Tournai with the intention of retaking it, then proceeding over the border into the Austrian Netherlands. Here the division was attacked by Austrian troops and many of the French troops fled from the battle, so that the army had to fall back. General Dillon was murdered and his body mutilated by his troops because they believed him guilty of treason:

The troops under M. Dillon were routed and chased into Lille in the most horrific circumstances, [with] half of the men and horses killed and wounded on the road. The verbal report of an officer to the commanding officer, M. Rochambeau, estimates the losses at between 200 and 500 men dead or wounded. It seems that M. Dillon, who had matched his belief in the constitution with his ardour in its service, was killed near the town which should have protected his retreat, and that he died at the hands of the men for and with whom he had been fighting.¹²

ACTIVITY

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Explain General Dillon's death in your own words. Why did it occur and why was it significant?
2. Why would the volunteers have been suspicious of their officers?

The Duc de Biron was further north engaging Austrian troops who had come over the French border. At Mons, he found that no-one would obey his order for a bayonet charge, his men voting against it. Although his troops outnumbered the Austrians, he was forced to order them to fall back. Fearing the same fate, Lafayette refused to advance into battle, while Rochambeau offered his resignation.

In May, the entire regiment of the Royal-Allemands, a cavalry unit which had been stationed in Paris in July 1789 when the Bastille was captured, defected to the Austrians. The Austrian and Prussian armies were marching into France and it seemed as though nothing would stand in their way. By the end of June, the

capital itself was under threat and popular opinion blamed Louis XVI and the Court for betraying their country.

THE FEAR OF TRAITORS

By mid-1792 the French army was capitulating at a rapid rate. Many officers, previously of the Second Estate, joined the flood of émigrés departing France. Prior to the revolution, approximately sixty-five per cent of officers were nobles and those above the rank of captain were almost all nobles. The departure of many of these officers saw the opportunity for new people to rise through the ranks on merit; however, in the short term it caused a degree of panic in the army and throughout France.

Economic problems added to fears of military defeat. The 1791 harvest had been poor, leading to inflation of prices. Deregulation of the grain trade had added to price problems and there were attacks by desperately hungry people on grain wagons, barges and depots. In Paris, grocers' riots erupted in January 1792, as women forced grocers to sell essential goods at 'fair' prices. The assignat had lost value – 100 livres in notes were worth only sixty-three livres in coins – and all this seemed to point towards deliberate actions by people within the French nation to bring down the revolution.

Marat's journal, *L'Ami du Peuple* (Friend of the People), and the leaders of the Cordeliers Club led the attack on the 'traitors,' accusing the Court of sabotaging the war and the king of plotting with Austria. Speculators and rich members of the bourgeoisie came under attack for hoarding their wealth and depriving of food those who had won the revolution. René Hébert's newspaper, *Le Père Duchesne*, called on the *sans-culottes* to attack those in power as a patriotic duty, while the radical priest Jacques Roux, leader of the *Enragés*, demanded that those who deprived the poor of food be brought to justice. Mob violence was equated with patriotism, the *sans-culottes* seeing themselves as defenders of the nation against the traitors within, who would hand over France to the invading Austrian and Prussian forces.

DID YOU KNOW?

Jean-Nicolas Houchard was appointed General of the North in the Revolutionary Army in April 1793. He had a number of victories against the British forces before being forced to retreat. Despite this, he was arrested and charged with mollesse, softness or feebleness, and with treason. Houchard replied to the charges by taking off his clothes and showing the many battle scars he had suffered. He was guillotined on 16 November 1793.

WAR TIMELINE

Create a timeline of armed hostilities between France and Austria-Prussia in 1792.

DIVERSE EXPERIENCES

Find out about the experiences of an émigré who left France after the revolution and fought on the side of the Austrian-Prussian forces, such as Louis-Joseph, the eighth Prince of Condé.

ACTIVITIES

THE ROYAL FAMILY IN DANGER

As a consequence, by the summer of 1792, the royal family's safety was increasingly in jeopardy. The family was lodged in the Tuileries Palace right in

¹² Richard Cobb and Colin Jones, ed., *The French Revolution: Voices from a Momentous Epoch 1789–1795* (London: Guild Publishing, 1988), 142.



the heart of Paris, which was becoming more hostile to them. The *sans-culottes* who formed the Paris Sections were increasingly vocal in their attacks on the monarchy. Pétion had now replaced Bailly as Mayor of Paris and the atmosphere was becoming more tense. In the Assembly, the *sans-culottes* supported the radical Jacobins and Cordeliers, who were pressing for the trial of the king and the establishment of a republic. Pétion's distribution of pikes to the *sans-culottes* added to the threat of popular violence, as can be seen by the call of the Cordelier leader, Hébert, in his newspaper *Le Père Duchesne*: 'To your pikes, good *sans-culottes*, sharpen them to exterminate aristocrats.'¹³ Military patriotism, symbolised by the wearing of the bonnet rouge (the red cap or Phrygian bonnet, symbol of the freed slaves of ancient Rome) and the *tricolore*, the colours of the revolution, turned ordinary men and women into vigilantes. In addition, the National Guard had been opened up to 'passive citizens,' making it less of an armed bourgeois force to protect property and more of a militant fighting force drawn from the workers of Paris. Here, too, there was a new leader, the brewer Santerre, one of the *vainqueurs* of the Bastille.

DID YOU KNOW?

As the influence of the *sans-culottes* grew in Paris, people dressed deliberately shabbily for fear of being labelled aristocrats. Philippe-Egalité, the former Duc d'Orléans and cousin of the King, wore short unpowdered hair, a short jacket and pantaloons, and shoes without laces. Robespierre was one of the few who continued to powder his hair and dress fastidiously in the tailored costume of the *ancien régime* lawyer.

THE RISE OF THE SANS-CULOTTES

The *sans-culottes* (meaning people not wearing the knee-breeches favoured by wealthy men) were drawn from the workers of Paris. According to George Rudé they were 'the small shopkeepers, petty traders, craftsmen, journeymen, labourers, vagrants and city poor.'¹⁴ These groups found a common identity in the French Revolution, partly economic and partly socio-political. Because they were poor, fluctuations in the price of foodstuffs bound them together. Pétion, Mayor of Paris in 1792, described them as 'the have-nots [*les hommes qui n'ont pas*] as distinct from the haves.'¹⁵ There was more to the *sans-culottes* than a shared economic experience, however. The *sans-culottes* saw themselves as citizens with rights and these rights included a prompt remedy for whatever was wrong, achieved by direct action on the streets. They were, as historian Norman Hampson has said, 'straightforward men, accustomed to rough living and brutal treatment by authority, used to planning on a short-term basis and advocates of simple solutions ... At once credulous and suspicious, they tended to see everything in black and white ... and to believe any rumour against a man who had fallen from popular favour.'¹⁶ To some extent their political views came as a response to their own experiences, but they were also formed by the revolutionary leaders.

Cartoons, public speeches and popular journals (such as Marat's *L'Ami du Peuple* and Hébert's *Père Duchesne*) were influential in shaping public opinion and giving identification to the *sans-culottes* as a political force. The Cordeliers Club was also important, because its low entrance fee allowed a much broader membership than the Jacobins. Then there was the recently opened membership of the National Guard, the Section Committees and the Commune itself. Finally, the location of the *sans-culottes* within the central city of Paris gave them greater access than other groups to public meeting places – wine shops, markets, workshops, public buildings – where information was transmitted.

13 Schama, *Citizens*, 604.

14 George Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 12.

15 Hampson, *A Social History of the French Revolution*, 159.

16 Hampson, *A Social History of the French Revolution*, 140.

Sometimes, the *sans-culottes* acted independently in response to a crisis, for example with the Storming of the Bastille. At other times, like the Champ de Mars demonstration on 17 July 1791 (organised by the Cordeliers) or the attack on the Tuileries on 10 August 1792 (ordered by the new radical Commune), they responded to the call of leaders. They did not represent the majority of urban workers in Paris, with Rudé estimating that perhaps ten per cent of this population was committed to revolutionary action. Some were literate, the majority probably not. Where the *journées* involved the price of food, as in the October Days of 1789, women were likely to be present in substantial numbers; when the *journée* was overtly political and organised, as on 10 August 1792, the mob was largely male. As the revolution radicalised, the *sans-culottes* exerted much more power: direct democracy through the *journées* forced the Legislative Assembly and then the National Convention to adopt more extreme policies and brought Robespierre and the radical Jacobins to power.



Male and female *sans-culottes*. Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

Note that both man and woman are armed. The man wears long striped trousers rather than knee breeches, as suggested by the term *sans-culottes*, as well as the *bonnet rouge* or red Phrygian bonnet. Both man and woman sport the revolutionary cockade in their headwear.

DOCUMENT

JEAN-BAPTISTE VINTERGNIER, 'REPLY TO THE IMPERTINENT QUESTION: WHAT IS A *SANS-CULOTTE*?' APRIL 1793

A *sans-culotte* is a man who goes everywhere on his own two feet, who has none of the millions you are all after, no mansion, no lackeys [servants] to wait on him, and who lives simply with his wife and children, if he has any, on the fourth or fifth storey. He is useful because he knows how to plough a field, to handle a forge, a saw and a file, to cover a roof, to make a pair of shoes, and to shed the last drop of his blood to save the Republic. And since he works, you are sure not to find him at the Café de Chartres [a favourite of the Duc d'Orléans and associates] ... In the evening, he goes to the meeting of his Section, not powdered and perfumed and dressed up in the hope of being noticed by all the citizenesses ... but in order to support the right sort of resolutions with all his power and to smash ... vile factions ...

For the rest, a *sans-culotte* has always his sharp sabre ready to cut off the ears of the malevolent. Sometimes he marches with his pike. But at the first sound of the drum, he can be seen leaving for the Vendée, for the Army of the Alps or for the Army of the North.¹⁷

SOURCE ANALYSIS

Read Vintergnier's account and complete the tasks that follow.

1. Identify the author's perspective on the *sans-culottes*, as suggested by his use of language.
2. Analyse the depiction of nobility in the source, citing key phrases.
3. Explain the meaning and significance of the references to the 'Vendee', 'the alps' and 'the north'.
4. Evaluate the significance of the *sans-culottes* in the new society. In your response, refer to the source and to other views of the consequences of the revolution.

ACTIVITY

¹⁷ Vintergnier cited in Leonard W. Cowie, *The French Revolution, Documents and Debates* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 98.

DID YOU KNOW?

Philippe-Egalité had early on established his revolutionary credentials, selling much of his private art collection in 1788 to feed the poor during the harsh winter of 1788–89. Nevertheless, he was vastly wealthy and had schemed to take the throne for his own family; his son became King Louis-Philippe (1830–1848). In 'What is a *Sans-culotte*?', Vintergrnier was scorning this 'royal revolutionary' and his followers.



Philippe Egalité.

18 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 292.

19 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 296.

THE FÉDÉRÉS

As the danger to Paris increased, the Assembly took measures to deal with the supposed traitors within France. Decrees were issued to deport non-juring priests (those who refused to swear an oath of loyalty to the state) and to supplement the National Guard with men from the countryside. On 8 June 1792, the Assembly published a decree to enlist a further 20 000 men to defend the capital. This army of *Fédérés* or provincial National Guards would be stationed within the districts of Paris, enabling soldiers to be released to fight at the front. The decree was enacted because the Assembly considered 'that it is important to discourage the enemies of the commonwealth who are conspiring in the interior [and] ... to draw still closer in the bonds of fraternity the National Guards of other departments with those of Paris who have served the country.'¹⁸ For the Brissotins/Girondins, the *Fédérés* represented a strongly armed force that would not only defend Paris but also the government. To Louis XVI, however, they represented a force which might be used against him and he used his constitutional power of suspensive veto to delay both decrees.

On 13 June, an open letter to Louis from Roland, Minister for the Interior, was read to the Assembly. Roland's warning was clear:

Two important decrees have been passed; both essentially concern public peace and the safety of the State. Delay in sanctioning them creates distrust; if it is prolonged, it will cause discontent; and, I must say, in the present ferment of feelings, discontent may lead to anything.

There is no longer time to withdraw, there is no longer even means of temporising. The Revolution is accomplished in men's minds; it will be completed at the price of blood and will be cemented with blood, unless wisdom anticipates misfortunes which it is still possible to avoid.¹⁹

Louis' response to Roland's threat was to dismiss him and two other Girondin ministers that same day. General Dumouriez resigned on 15 June to go to the front, completing the collapse of the Brissotin/Girondin ministry. Louis replaced them with a new Feuillant ministry, which he felt was more trustworthy.

Then, on 18 June, a letter came to the Assembly from General Lafayette, demanding that the Jacobins be restrained and that the revolutionary clubs be suppressed. People feared a military coup led by Lafayette, in the name of the king. Thus, the division widened between the moderates within the Assembly, who feared that popular violence would overcome the forces of law and order, and popular leaders who increasingly feared counter-revolution from traitors within France.

In September 1789, the National Assembly had granted Louis XVI the right to issue a suspensive veto. This power, confirmed in the 1791 Constitution, allowed the king to effectively block or soften legislation. By June 1792, the perception of the king's use of the suspensive veto was decidedly toxic, with many accusations of treachery being levelled against him.

THE *SANS-CULOTTES*

The *sans-culottes*, or working people of Paris, were proud of their role as the 'saviours' of the revolution in 1789. On the Day of the Bastille they had safeguarded the existence of the fledgling National Assembly, and as a consequence of the March of the Women to Versailles they had forced the king to pass the August Decrees and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen.

By 1792, the *sans-culottes* were demanding benefits from the revolution; in particular, a direct voice in the elected assembly and an end to the distinction between passive and active citizens. Their actions in the

journées of 1792 and 1793 prompted the National Convention to accept a program of direct democracy and to control the economy through fixed maximum prices and minimum wages.

Sans-culottes carrying the Bastille model.



THE PROTEST OF 20 JUNE

On 20 June 1792, the anniversary of the Tennis Court Oath and the king's Flight from Paris, the *sans-culottes*, encouraged by the Cordeliers leaders, held an armed demonstration. In the morning about 8000 demonstrators marched to the Hôtel de Ville and then to the Legislative Assembly. Who were the demonstrators? Their leaders were associated with the Cordeliers Club: the brewer, Santerre; the butcher, Legendre; Fournier, known as 'the American'; Varlet, a postal clerk; and Théroigne de Méricourt, Etta Palm and Pauline Léon, all members of the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women, whose goal was to gain equal citizenship for women. The crowd was a mixed group of men and women, mostly urban workers and therefore 'passive citizens' excluded from voting. They were armed with pikes, pitchforks and scythes. They entered the Assembly peacefully and presented petitions demanding the recall of the Brissotin/Girondin ministry and condemning the king's power of veto over legislation. Even so, they presented a direct threat to the legislators in their petition:

What a misfortune ... for the free men, who have delegated all their power to you, to see themselves reduced to the cruel necessity of imbruing [staining] their hands in the blood of conspirators! ... The plot is discovered; the hour is at hand. The tree of liberty that we are about to plant will flourish in peace, or blood will flow. Who then, can stop us in our course? ... Since the cause is a common one, action should be universal; if the first defenders of liberty had thus temporised, would you be sitting in this august chamber today?²⁰

From the Assembly, the crowd moved on to the Tuileries and, with little resistance from the National Guard, invaded the Palace. Once inside the gates, they were able to reach the *salon* where the king was and demand that he listen to a petition

²⁰ Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 300.



read by Legendre, while the crowd in the courtyard below shouted in unison, 'No aristocrats! No Veto! No priests!' and 'Long live the nation!' Louis remained calm. He put on a *bonnet rouge*, the emblem of revolutionary patriotism, and drank a toast to the revolution. The crowd further demanded that he retract the dismissal of the Brissotin/Girondin ministers and give up his power of veto. Louis continued calmly and would not make any commitment, although no help came from the Assembly nor from Pétion, the mayor of Paris, until six hours had passed.

The king's courage and steadfastness won him much support in the days that followed, while the Assembly faced criticism for its failure to protect the royal family. A petition with 20 000 signatures, condemning the demonstration at the Tuileries, was presented to the Assembly. Lafayette made a speech in which he condemned the protest and this was loudly supported. Pétion was suspended from his post. Pro-royalist members of the National Guard volunteered for duty at the Tuileries Palace. Yet the reality was that Louis' days as king were numbered; he was now only one step away from imprisonment as a traitor.

ACTIVITY

COMPROMISED IDEALS

To what extent did the new regime's response to the Tuileries protest indicate a compromise of its revolutionary ideals?

'LA PATRIE EN DANGER'



By 13 July 1792, public opinion had swung in favour of the radical leaders. Pétion was returned to office and the Legislative Assembly proclaimed a state of emergency. As the war situation became more critical, the threat to Paris had increased. Even by the end of June, the Jacobin leader Carnot had demanded that the Assembly issue pikes to citizens to protect themselves and their families against the invading forces. By 11 July, the Assembly was declaring that France was in danger and that all citizens must sacrifice themselves for its defence. In its decree *La Patrie en Danger*, the Assembly stated that:

A league of kings has been formed in order to destroy it [the Constitution], their battalions are advancing, they are numerous, subject to rigorous discipline and trained long ago in the art of war ... Our armies are barely yet brought to completion, an imprudent sense of security moderated the spirit of patriotism too early; and the recruitment which was ordered did not have as much success as your representatives had hoped. Interior agitation increases the difficulty of our position ... Make haste, citizens, save liberty and avenge your glory.²¹

On 1 August, the Assembly issued the order for the pikes to be made and distributed to citizens. The war news had worsened and France now faced the threat of invasion and defeat. This, in turn, increased the threat to Louis and his family, to non-juring clergy, to the remnants of the nobility and to anyone who did not show open and convincing patriotism. The radical *Fédéré* soldiers now ruled the streets, refusing to leave Paris. Their theme song, the *Marseillaise*, declaimed: '*Aux armes, citoyens!*'²² The Assembly's weakness gave strength to the *sans-culottes*, who were reinforced in their role as defenders of the revolution.

21 Philip Dwyer and Peter McPhee, *The French Revolution and Napoleon: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2002), 64.

22 'To arms, citizens!'

A CALL TO ARMS: *LA MARSEILLAISE*

In July 1792, the Assembly passed a decree to replace the king's personal guard with Fédérés, the volunteer National Guardsmen from the provinces. Their presence in Paris made the mood more dangerous. Nicholas Ruault wrote to his brother:

Quite a number of National Guardsmen have arrived here in the last few days since the fête de la federation of 14 July, and you must have a good idea why: for the most part, they are old soldiers with fierce moustaches ... Last night there was much unrest ... The National Assembly, which can see the storm coming, is at a loss to know which side to take. Should it decree that the King be dethroned to prevent terrible things from happening? But then it would have to organise a new executive power. Who would be appointed? ... It is impossible to offer the throne to any prince. Who would want ours at this moment?²³

On the way to Paris, the Fédérés had passed through Marseilles and learnt a song that had been written at the start of the war by Rouget de Lisle. It soon became known as the *La Marseillaise* and took on the status of a revolutionary anthem:

Let us go, children of the fatherland
Our day of glory has arrived,
Against us stands tyranny
The bloody standard [flag] is raised.
The bloody standard is raised.
Do you hear in the countryside
The roar of these savage soldiers
They come right into your arms
To cut the throats of your sons and
Your countrymen.²⁴

Louis XVI would have seen exactly what Nicholas Ruault saw. With the Paris crowd becoming more powerful, the National Guard increasingly an armed extension of the *sans-culottes*, the

provincial Fédérés there to defend the Brissotins/Girondins and the Assembly, his own position and that of his family was increasingly dangerous.



'*Marche des Marseillois*.' Songsheet published November 1792, by William Holland, London.

The *Marseillaise* became France's official anthem in 1795. It fell into disuse in the Napoleonic era and the restoration of the Bourbons in 1814, but by 1879 it was readopted during the period of the Third Republic, as a pledge of the permanence of France's republic and its values.

²³ Nicolas Ruault, *Gazette d'un Parisien sous la Révolution: Lettres à son Frère 1783-1796* (Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1976), 375.

²⁴ Cobb and Jones, *The French Revolution*, 149.

THE BRUNSWICK MANIFESTO

As the danger to the king's life increased, the invading armies sought to protect him until he could be rescued. A manifesto, issued on 25 July 1792 in the name of the Duke of Brunswick, commander of the Austrian forces, was intended to frighten the French so that no further harm would come to Louis and his family.

DID YOU KNOW?

In July 1792, the newly-crowned Emperor Francis II of Austria was visiting his ally, King Frederick Wilhelm II of Prussia. In the midst of spectacular celebrations honouring the visiting emperor, two different drafts of a manifesto aiming to protect French royalty were presented to the monarchs by rival groups of *émigré* nobles. Diplomats quickly looked over the two drafts, and hurriedly chose the second. The Duke of Brunswick took responsibility for its proclamation, an act he regretted for the rest of his life.



King Drinking to Revolution.

On 20 June 1792, the king placated the crowd by donning the *bonnet rouge* and drinking a toast to the revolution. He refused, however, to concede any political point.

The Brunswick Manifesto threatened Parisians that they would suffer ‘the most severe punishment’ if Louis and his family were harmed. The goal of the Austrian forces was ‘to terminate anarchy in the interior of France, to check attacks on the throne and the Church, to re-establish legal power, to give the king the security and liberty of which he is deprived, and to enable him to exercise the legitimate authority which is his due.’²⁵

The manifesto further demanded Louis’ freedom, stating that failure to place the king ‘fully at liberty’ would mean that those involved would be held personally responsible, ‘to be punished by military law, without hope of pardon.’²⁶

As for the people of Paris:

If the least violence, the least outrage be done to their majesties, the King, the Queen and the Royal Family, if their security, preservation and liberty be not provided for immediately, they will exact an exemplary and ever memorable vengeance thereon by delivering the city of Paris to military punishment and total destruction, and the rebels who are guilty of these outrages, to the punishments they deserve.²⁷

The Brunswick Manifesto had the directly opposite effect to its intention and brought disaster, not only to Louis, but also to those imprisoned in Paris because of the revolution and to the moderate Feuillants who had sought to preserve the 1791 Constitution.

Instead of shielding Louis, the Brunswick Manifesto exposed him to further danger because the people had their belief confirmed that the king was leading a conspiracy against the revolution. On 16 August, Prussian forces moved into France, followed by the Austrians on 19 August. Four days later, on 23 August, the fortress at Longwy surrendered and on 2 September, the stronghold of Verdun. The enemy was now only 140 miles (225 kilometres) from Paris.

ACTIVITY

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Evaluate the significance of the Brunswick Manifesto in the treatment of Louis XVI after the revolution.

THE STORMING OF THE TUILERIES

Under the threat of the Brunswick Manifesto, Paris became more radical. On 3 August 1792, Mayor Pétion went to the Legislative Assembly and demanded, on behalf of forty-seven out of the forty-eight Sections of Paris, that the monarchy be abolished. The Assembly refused to depose the king and defeated a motion to put Lafayette on trial. On 6 August, a huge meeting of Parisians and *Fédérés* took place in the Champ de Mars and demanded the abdication of the king. The Faubourg Saint-Antoine, which had led the sectional movement since mid-July, warned the Assembly that the king must be deposed or suspended by 9 August, or the Sections would take armed action.

On 9 August, the Revolutionary Commune was established in Paris, replacing the old municipal authority of the Hotel de Ville, the bourgeois Paris Commune. It was made up of representatives of the forty-eight Sections of Paris and controlled

the actions of the National Guard. The Commune also took command of the *Fédérés* soldiers from the provinces stationed in Paris. Santerre, one of the leaders of the *journée* of 20 June, took command of the Paris National Guard, replacing the Marquis Mandat de Grancy. Grancy was arrested and later executed. The mayor of the previous Commune, Pétion, although a republican, was confined in a room so that he could not interfere.

It was on the orders of the Revolutionary Commune that the Tuileries Palace was stormed on 10 August by 20 000 armed *sans-culottes* from the Sections, accompanied by the *Fédérés* and National Guards from the Sections. The Tuileries had only 900 Swiss Guards to defend it, 200–300 Knights of Saint-Louis and 2000 National Guards, who could not be counted on to oppose the crowd.

Louis XVI once more faced the mobs with courage. He went down to the courtyard to review the Guard where the crowds were massing, but by then many were deserting their posts to join the protesters. Cannons were being turned around to face the palace. The king sent a message to the Assembly, asking for protection; none came. However, Pierre Roederer, the *procureur-syndic* (public prosecutor) of the Paris Department advised Louis to abandon the Tuileries and seek refuge with his family in the National Assembly. In this way, an attack on the Tuileries might be averted and the Assembly would be forced to protect them. The Tuileries was now defended only by the Swiss Guard and Louis left orders that they were not to fire on the crowd, in the hope of preventing bloodshed.

What followed was a slaughter. Some of the Swiss Guards had already begun the defence of the Tuileries and did not receive Louis' order. As the mob advanced, singing the *Marseillaise*, the soldiers of the Swiss Guard moved in good order down the steps of the palace, firing their rifles and running towards the cannon, which they then turned on the crowd. The crowd fell back, but then rallied and renewed its assault. As the Swiss ran out of ammunition, the crowd fell on them and slaughtered them. Then the mob invaded the palace, killing anyone it encountered: soldiers, servants, doorkeepers, cooks. Rooms were looted and destroyed. People were thrown out of windows or hacked to death as they tried to escape. About 560 Swiss Guards were murdered that day as well as an unknown number of civilians within the Tuileries Palace. Of the attackers, some 300 were killed and many others wounded.

One of the royal servants later recalled,

Dressed in a plain coat, I managed to make my escape. Some of the Swiss who were pursued took refuge in an adjoining stable. I concealed myself in the same place. They were soon cut to pieces close to me. On hearing their cries, the master of the house ran up and [he took me back to his house with him]. Presently a body of armed men came in to see if any of the Swiss were hiding there. After a fruitless search these men, their hands red with blood, they stopped and calmly related to each other stories of the murders they had committed. I remained in the house until four o'clock in the afternoon, having before my eyes a view of all the horrors that were being perpetrated. Some of the men were still continuing the slaughter; others were cutting off the heads of those already slain; while the women, lost to all sense of shame, were committing the most indecent mutilations on the dead bodies from which they tore pieces of flesh and carried them off in triumph.²⁸

The power of the *sans-culottes* left the Assembly with little choice. It was no longer possible to pretend that Louis XVI could remain as a constitutional monarch in France. Nor could the Assembly pretend that it held power in Paris.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Swiss Guards who were in Paris, but not at the Tuileries, were rounded up and killed at the Abbaye prison. The underground passages at the Tuileries were flooded in an attempt to drown anyone who might be hiding there.

DID YOU KNOW?

On 12 August 1792, an English visitor to the Tuileries saw a crowd of women looting Marie Antoinette's clothing: 'How many curiosity seekers had assembled there! How many bonnets, elegant hats, rose-coloured skirts, and white petticoats flew out of the bedroom doors!' In prison, Marie Antoinette would wear black and had only one change of clothes.

25 Mark Fielding and Margot Morecombe, *The Spirit of Change: France in Revolution* (Sydney: McGraw-Hill, 1999), 96.

26 Fielding and Morecombe, *The Spirit of Change*.

27 Fielding and Morecombe, *The Spirit of Change*.

28 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 161.

DID YOU KNOW?

Danton was disfigured in childhood: he was gored by a bull, leaving a long scar on his face, his nose was broken after an attack by a herd of pigs, and he was scarred by smallpox. Despite this he was considered an attractive and popular man.

The new insurrectionary Commune had more influence over the population than the elected legislature. However, the Commune was not the government of France and therefore compromises had to be reached. Thus, the Assembly recognised the authority of the Commune, while the Commune accepted the decisions made by the Assembly.

Louis XVI's monarchy was suspended. The Assembly refused to end the monarchy, but imprisoned Louis and his family in the Temple prison. Here they were supervised by the National Guard, under the control of the Commune, and Santerre became the chief gaoler of the royal family.

The Feuillants were now seen as traitors and royalists, their influence over. On 19 August, Barnave and other Feuillant leaders were arrested and later executed; Lafayette, who was with his army at the battlefield, would have been tried for treason, as he was suspected of wishing to suppress the radical elements and perhaps to rule in the king's name. He escaped the fate of many of his fellow Feuillants by defecting to the Austrians on 19 August. They held him captive until 1797.

FEATURE

REVOLUTIONARY WARFARE

This image shows, from left to right, a grenadier, fusilier, *chasseur*, sapper, gunner and pikeman, the major specialisations of troops in the French revolutionary wars. Each of these roles had emerged over the preceding centuries as a result of changing military technologies and the development of standing professional armies. Grenadiers emerged in the early seventeenth century as specialist assault troops for siege operations. The fusiliers used light flintlock muskets. These early firearms had smooth

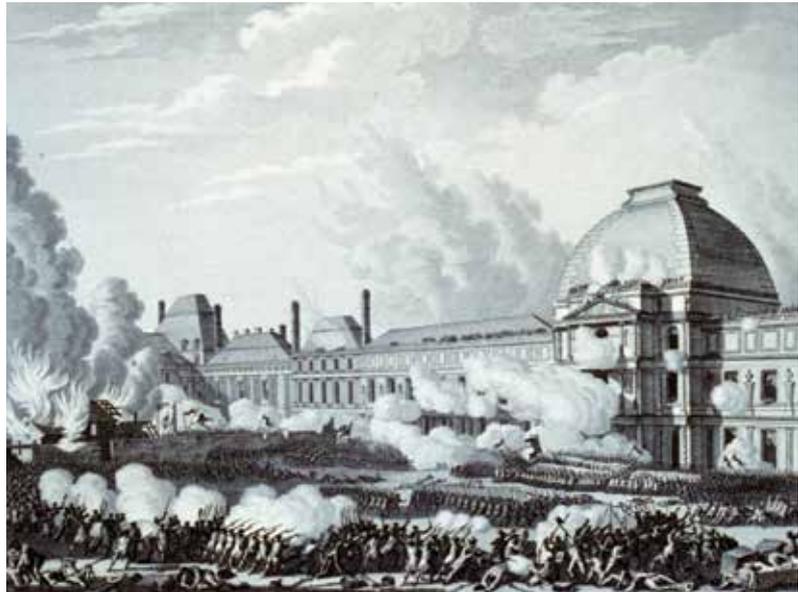
barrels and so lacked the range and accuracy of the later rifle. The *chasseurs*, from the French for 'hunter,' were more skilled in sharp-shooting than the fusiliers and were regarded as the elite light foot troops. The sapper units first appeared in the French armies of the *ancien régime* and were specialists in demolishing or undermining the fortifications and fixed positions of an enemy force. The gunnery crews specialised in the use of cannon and other forms of artillery. The pikeman had been a major feature of

European armies from the mid-fifteenth century. Using pikes, spears as long as three or four metres, the pikeman was easily trained and cheaply equipped as a highly effective counter to massed cavalry attacks. The development of the musket and bayonet, however, meant that by the late eighteenth century pikemen were not as significant as they had been in previous centuries.



Soldiers of the Revolutionary Armies, Lesueur Brothers.

In this climate of fear those deputies of the Legislative Assembly who had been constitutional monarchists (about two-thirds of the Assembly) did not feel safe, and those who had not been arrested stayed away from the Assembly, going into hiding. This left the caretaker Assembly of about 300 deputies dominated by the Brissotins/Girondins. A council of six ministers, including Danton as minister for justice, was appointed to take over the executive function. On 11 August, under pressure from the new Revolutionary Commune, the Assembly set a date for its dissolution and provided for the election of a National Convention within six weeks, on the basis of universal manhood suffrage. This would end the division between 'active' and 'passive' citizens.



Engraving of 10 August 1792, the fourth revolutionary *journée*.

In the six weeks between the fall of the monarchy and the convocation of the new republican legislative body (the National Convention), on 20 September 1792, the Legislative Assembly did all that the Revolutionary Commune wanted. Some of the most radical or socially progressive legislation of the whole revolution was passed in this period. On 23 August, with the enemy a mere few-hundred kilometres from Paris, the Assembly decreed that all refractory priests should leave France within seven days, 'considering that the unrest excited in the kingdom by the priests who are not under oath is one of the major causes of danger of the fatherland.'²⁹

It is doubtful whether the forces of the Commune and Sections were as orderly as this engraving would suggest.

On 25 August, the Assembly took further action against seigneurialism. Feudal (seigneurial) dues were abolished without compensation, unless there was a separate legally-binding contract to validate them. Thus, while the promise of the August Decrees of killing off the feudal regime 'in its entirety'³⁰ was still not fully realised, this was a significant step forward. Further, the Assembly ordered that the lands of *émigrés* should now be sold in small lots, thus making purchase accessible to more modest farmers, rather than just to wealthy bourgeois land-holders. In its very last session, on 20 September 1792, the Legislative Assembly passed a divorce law which gave women 'remarkably broad grounds for leaving an unhappy or meaningless marriage.'³¹

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF 10 AUGUST 1792

Simon Schama has argued that the Storming of the Tuileries on 10 August 1792 was a logical progression from the events at the Bastille in July 1789:

It was not an incidental moment in the history of the Revolution. It was, in fact, its logical consummation. From 1789 ... it had been the willingness of politicians to exploit either the threat or the fact of violence that had given them the power to challenge constituted authority. Bloodshed was not the unfortunate by-product of revolution, it was the source of its energy. The verses of the 'Marseillaise' and the great speeches of the Girondins had spoken of the *patrie* in the absolute poetry of life and

29 McPhee, *The French Revolution 1789–1799* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002), 98.

30 August Decrees, Article 1, cited in Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 107.

31 McPhee, *A Social History of France 1780–1880* (London: Routledge, 1992), 65.

death. Perversely, only if it could be shown that blood did indeed flow in its defence could the virtues of the Revolution be shown to be worth dying for. Means had become ends.³²

William Doyle has characterised 10 August 1792 as ‘a long awaited trial of strength’ between the Legislative Assembly and the Commune, in which Louis was the chief victim:

It was the bloodiest day of the Revolution so far, but also one of the most decisive. Though the King and his family remained unscathed, his authority fell with his palace ... Few believed that he would ever sit on the throne again, unless with foreign aid.³³

Norman Hampson simply said that ‘for the Parisian nobility it was 10 August 1792, rather than 14 July 1789, that marked the end of the *ancien régime*.’³⁴

ACTIVITY

CONSEQUENCES OF REVOLUTION

1. What were the consequences of the 10 August *journée* (Storming of the Tuileries) for the Feuillant faction?
2. What further consequences were there from the *journée*, e.g. for other groups seeking power?
3. To what extent do you agree with Schama that 10 August was a logical progression from the Storming of the Bastille in July 1789?

DID YOU KNOW?

The September Massacres of 1792 were not confined to Paris. Throughout the countryside and in the towns, violent murders and arson attacks occurred, either in retribution for past grievances or because nobles and priests were believed to be in league with the invading enemy.

32 Schama, *Citizens*, 617–8.

33 Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 189.

34 Hampson, *A Social History of the French Revolution*, 148.

35 Lucille Kekewich and Susan Rose, *The French Revolution: Self-Study at A-level* (UK: Longman, 1990), 136–7.

THE INVASION OF FRANCE AND THE SEPTEMBER MASSACRES

On 24 August 1792, news reached Paris that the fortress of Longwy had fallen to the enemy. Vergniaud is reported to have said that if Longwy fell so quickly, it must have been handed over to the Prussian forces. Then on 2 September, Verdun, the last fortified town before Paris, was captured. Panic embraced the city.

Danton, as Minister for Justice within the caretaker Legislative Assembly, proclaimed the notion of total war. On 2 September he addressed the chamber:

One part of the people will march to the frontiers, another will dig trenches, the third, with pikes if that's all we've got, will defend the towns. Commissioners will proclaim solemnly an invitation to all citizens to arm themselves and to march for the defence of the Country. The National Assembly will become a committee of war. We demand that you join with us to assist this sublime movement of the people. We demand that whoever refuses to serve in person or to give up any arms, be punished with death. The tocsin [bell] that we are going to sound is no alarm signal, it is the charge, the charge against the enemies of the Fatherland ...³⁵

Volunteers rushed to the front. Paris was left virtually undefended. The war, once so eagerly embraced by political leaders and politicians, was now threatening to bring an end to the revolution. To compound these fears, within the prisons were nobles and clergy who might break out and exact their revenge on the population.

Fear and hysteria galvanised people into action. There were demands that royalist officers be purged from the army; that non-juring priests be rounded up and that

Watch Committees should arrest anyone likely to be involved in a royalist conspiracy.

Revolutionary leaders encouraged the crowds to take action. Danton, declared,

Citizens, no nation on earth has ever obtained liberty without a struggle. You have traitors in your bosom; well, without them, the fight would have been over.³⁶

Marat, Hébert and other radical journalists urged the people to kill the traitors. Marat demanded, 'Let the blood of traitors flow. That is the only way to save the country.' Posters appeared on walls throughout the city: 'To arms, citizens! The enemy is at our gates!'³⁷

Danton's friend, Fabre d'Eglantine, also fanned the flames:

Once more, citizens, to arms! May all France bristle with pikes, bayonets, cannons and daggers, so that everyone shall be a soldier: let us clear the ranks of these vile slaves of tyranny. In the towns, let the blood of traitors be the first holocaust to Liberty, so that, in advancing to meet the common enemy, we leave nothing behind to disquiet us.³⁸

During the night of 2 September, crowds of *sans-culottes* armed with axes, knives and pikes attacked the prisons, slaughtering without mercy those held there. The journalist Restif de la Bretonne witnessed the massacres, among them the murder of the non-juring parish priest of Saint-Nicholas-du-Chardonneret, Abbé Gros. Bretonne wrote,

Abbé Gros saw, among the murderers, a man with whom he had had some dealings. 'Ah! There you are my friend! Hey! What have you come here for at this time of night?' – 'Oh,' the man replied, 'We come here at an evil time. You were good to me ... So why have you retracted your oath?' The man turned his back on him, as the Kings and Richelieu used to do to their victims, and signalled to his comrades. The Abbé Gros was not stabbed; he was given a more gentle death, he was thrown from the window. His brains gushed out on impact, he did not suffer.³⁹

The massacres were to continue for four days. In all, of the approximately 2700 prisoners in Paris, about 1200–1400 died, either massacred by the *sans-culottes* or sentenced to death by para-legal courts of *sans-culottes* set up quickly for that purpose.

Much of the blame for the slaughter can be attributed to the failure of Roland, Minister for the Interior, and Danton, Minister for Justice, to intervene. Roland remained silent about the massacres until after they were over. Danton 'turned a blind eye to the violence he clearly knew was about to take place in Paris.'⁴⁰ On 3 September, he was reported as saying that the 'executions were necessary to appease the people of Paris.'⁴¹ While the massacres were happening, no-one in power even attempted to stop them.

CONCLUSION

The September Massacres of 1792 further exposed the great divide between the radical Commune of Paris and the moderate Legislative Assembly. The Commune was hostile to the Assembly's failure to end the monarchy and bring Louis XVI to trial. The Assembly, controlled by the moderate Brissotins/Girondins and



Portrait of the actor Chenard in *sans-culottes* attire, by Boilly.

This is a romanticised depiction of the *sans-culottes* as defenders of the revolution.

36 Schama, *Citizens*, 628.

37 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 169.

38 Schama, *Citizens*, 630.

39 Restif de la Bretonne, cited in Dwyer and McPhee, *The French Revolution and Napoleon*, 66.

40 Schama, *Citizens*, 632.

41 Schama, *Citizens*, 633.



JAMES GILLRAY,
CARICATURIST

unaligned deputies, was horrified by the blood-lust of the *sans-culottes*. While the *sans-culottes* saw the massacres as a legitimate defence of the revolution against its enemies in order to save Paris, to the Brissotins/Girondins, the people involved were bloody murderers.

ACTIVITY

SOURCE ANALYSIS

Look carefully at the representation and complete the tasks that follow.



Un Petit Souper à la Parisienne, or A Family of Sans-Culottes Refreshing after the Fatigues of the Day. James Gillray (1756–1815) was a well-known British political cartoonist. This image was published in Britain on 20 September 1792.

1. Identify the creator and historical context of the representation.
2. Identify the likely perspective of the creator on the *sans-culottes*, based on the features of the representation.
3. Analyse the use of symbols and exaggeration to convey a message.
4. Explain the likely meaning of the reference to 'Pétion' that appears on the wall above the fire.
5. Using the source and your own knowledge, explain the contribution of the *sans-culottes* to the revolutionary events of 1792.
6. Evaluate the significance of the *sans-culottes* in the growing atmosphere of crisis in France from 1792. In your response, refer to the source and to other views of the revolution.

THE SEPTEMBER MASSACRES

Historians have different views on the September Massacres. John Hall Stewart has written that they must be understood ‘in the light of circumstances. They were occasioned by fear and hysteria. To the average Frenchman they doubtless seemed a regrettable but unavoidable necessity.’⁴²

Stewart further concluded that ‘at times it is difficult to tell just when the local authorities lose control of such a situation.’⁴³ William Doyle also attributed the massacres to ‘the paranoid atmosphere in Paris’ and to ‘the desire of the Commune for revenge on its enemies.’⁴⁴

George Rudé focuses less on the violence of the massacres than their political significance:

Whatever their origins and unsavoury as they were, the massacres were an event of some importance: they appeared to complete the destruction of the enemy some weeks before the volunteers at Valmy, on 20 September, routed Brunswick’s army and

drove it back across the frontier. Thus the Republic, proclaimed that autumn, became established on what seemed a solid enough foundation – by the victory of the Revolution over its enemies at home and abroad.⁴⁵

Simon Schama, however, made no excuses for the massacres, seeing them as evidence that violence was the ‘motor of the Revolution.’ According to Schama,

[T]he September massacres ... [arguably exposed] a central truth of the French Revolution: its dependence on organised killing to accomplish political ends. For however virtuous the principles of kingless France were supposed to be, their power to compel allegiance depended, from the very beginning, on the spectacle of death.⁴⁶

42 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 314.

43 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*.

44 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 190.

45 Rudé, *The French Revolution* (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 79.

46 Schama, *Citizens*, 637.

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Read the historians’ accounts above and complete the tasks below.

1. Outline *four* different reasons attributed by the historians to the causes of the September Massacres.
2. To what extent do the actions of the revolutionary leaders provide evidence for one or another of the above historical interpretations?
3. To what extent does the record of the journées over the period 1789–92 support Schama’s interpretation that the revolution depended on organised killing to achieve political ends?

ACTIVITY



THE SEPTEMBER MASSACRES

CHAPTER REVIEW

CONSTRUCTING AN ARGUMENT:

1) EXTENDED ANSWER

Write an extended answer of approx. 250 words on the following topic: *Explain the extent to which the absolute monarchy of Louis XVI was still intact by July 1792.*

2) ESSAY

Write an essay of 600–800 words on one of the topics below. Your essay should include an introduction, paragraphs supported by evidence from primary sources and historical interpretations, a conclusion and a bibliography.

Topics:

- ‘The revolutionary consensus of 1789 had vanished by September 1792.’ Discuss.
- To what extent had revolutionary ideals been achieved by late 1792? What, if any, compromises had been made?
- Why did France go to war with Austria and Prussia, and what were the consequences for the new regime?
- ‘Louis XVI continued to be a pivotal figure in France after the revolution.’ Discuss, with specific reference to the events of 1792.
- To what extent had the absolute authority of Louis XVI been transformed into popular sovereignty by the end of 1792?

DIVERSE EXPERIENCES – COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Referring to Chapters 4 and 5, compare and contrast the revolutionary experiences of two or more of the following groups of people between October 1789 and December 1792. Present your findings in a slideshow, diagram or or scripted conversation.

Groups:

- Émigrés
- Nobles
- The bourgeoisie
- The clergy
- Parisian workers
- Women
- Peasants.



QUIZ ON FRENCH
REVOLUTION

TYPES OF CHANGE – TIMELINE

Using the Section B Timeline as an example, make a timeline for the year 1792, sorting events from this chapter into the following types of change: Political, economic, military and social-cultural.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES – DISCUSSION

Discuss the perspective of the Brissotins/Girondins on the war with Austria and Prussia. What other perspectives were there, and to what extent did the Brissotins/Girondins suffer politically for their views?

CHAPTER

6

THE RADICALISATION OF THE REVOLUTION

IN SEPTEMBER 1792 THE FRENCH REPUBLIC WAS BORN, HEADED BY THE NEW NATIONAL CONVENTION. THE PERIOD TO FOLLOW DASHED THE HOPES OF CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHISTS AND SAW THE RISE OF THE *SANS-CULOTTES*, CHAMPIONED BY THE REVOLUTION'S MOST POLARISING FIGURE – ROBESPIERRE.

LATE 1792–MID-1793

INTRODUCTION: A NEW REPUBLIC

On 21 September 1792, the new Assembly of France, the National Convention, met for the first time. The deputies were mostly in their late thirties, nearly half coming from the legal profession. Of the remainder, there were fifty-five members of the patriotic or juring clergy, including Sieyès, Grégoire and Rabaut Saint-Etienne, who had all been deputies to the original Estates-General. Fifty-one were public servants. One deputy, Jacques Chevalier, came from the peasant class and one was a prince, Philippe-Egalité, the former Duc d'Orléans.¹

On that first day, the deputies reiterated their commitment to the sovereignty of the people and to the protection of all persons and property, and pledged that they would abolish the monarchy. On the second day, they declared that, from that day, all public documents should be dated from the first year of the French Republic, 'Year One of French Liberty,' thus creating a new republican calendar. Three days later, they declared that France was 'one and indivisible,' united under the Republic.²

While the new deputies reached consensus on these issues, the major challenges the National Convention faced provoked major confrontations: legislation to create a successful war effort, how to conduct the trial and execution of Louis XVI and the establishment of the principles of a new republican constitution for France. These three issues created fierce debate and dissent between the deputies of the Girondist faction (the Brissotins) and those of the increasingly powerful Mountain, the radical deputies of the Jacobins and Cordeliers.

On the day the Convention first sat, the French Army won a victory over the allied armies at Valmy. General Kellermann and General Dumouriez, with more men but fewer guns, succeeded in turning back the Prussian troops, thus changing the course of the war. This led, in turn, to an increase in recruitment to the army, with 20 000 men volunteering to go into battle to defend the revolution.³ General Dumouriez now moved to 'liberate' Belgium and the Netherlands, the countries to the north. On 6 November, he won a major battle at Jemappes, while other French armies invaded the Rhineland and the Italian states of Savoy and Nice.

DID YOU KNOW?

War Minister Jean-Baptist Bouchotte used state funds to distribute radical newspapers to the army. At a cost of 118 000 livres, 1 800 000 copies of Hébert's *Le Père Duchèsne* were handed out to the troops in order to educate them as to the 'correct' political views.

ACTIVITY

BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

What beliefs and attitudes underpinned French republicanism and the decision to restart the calendar at 'Year One'?

FACTIONS IN THE CONVENTION: GIRONDINS AND MONTAGNARDS

In the Convention, power was divided between the two main factions: the Girondins, and the Jacobins and Cordeliers (also known as the Mountain or Montagnards because they sat on the highest benches of the hall). The Girondins and their leaders Brissot, Vergniaud and Roland, some 180 in number, represented the more conservative and wealthy land-owners and factory-owners, who lived in the countryside and provincial cities. The bourgeoisie were suffering

1 Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (UK: Penguin, 1989), 647.

2 Schama, *Citizens*, 641.

3 William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 192.

an economic downturn from the war and were antagonised by the way that Paris was determining the policies for all of France.

Most of the Girondin deputies came from the provinces, particularly the port cities whose wealth derived from overseas trade. The Girondins saw themselves as protecting the liberties of these outlying regions against the more radical policies of the capital. They wanted a stable, federalist system of government in which power was shared by all the provinces of France, rather than centralised power in the hands of the Convention in Paris. The Girondin deputies were also strongly opposed to the alleged savagery of the *sans-culottes* – whom they called the *buveurs de sang* or ‘drinkers of blood’ – and deeply disturbed by the invasion of the Tuileries on 10 August and the savagery of the September Massacres, for which they blamed Marat, Danton and Robespierre.

Bitter antagonism had emerged between the two groups as a result of these events. The Girondins believed that Robespierre had attempted to have the 10 August Revolutionary Commune arrest them and their leaders, Brissot, Vergniaud and others, at the time of the prison massacres in September. By October, the Girondins took action to have Marat placed on trial. On 29 October, the Girondin deputy, Louvet, accused Marat of creating a personality cult around himself and having ambitions to become a dictator. This rash attack on a respected and popular leader led to a counter-attack by the Montagnards, who accused the Girondins of initiating secret correspondence with the king.⁴

The Girondins’ attempts therefore backfired, leading to the more moderate members of the Plain (the deputies who did not belong to a faction) aligning themselves with the Jacobins and against the Girondins.

If the Girondins could be seen as representing ‘wealth, commerce and industry’,⁵ the Jacobins saw themselves as representing the common man and the ‘general will’ of the people. Robespierre, particularly, saw the *journées* as a form of ‘direct democracy,’ arguing that it was the people, ‘the workers, the *sans-culottes* who made the revolution; it is they who have sustained it with success; it is they who will finish it.’⁶ The Jacobins, 200–300 in number, including Robespierre, Saint-Just, Couthon, Carnot, and Cordeliers like Danton, Desmoulins, Marat and Hébert, thus drew their power from their alliance with the Parisian popular movement – the *sans-culottes* and urban poor. Where the Girondins believed in a federalist system, the Montagnard faction believed in strong, centralised government. In his pamphlet ‘On Revolutionary Government’ (25 December 1793) Robespierre expressed their ideology:

The principal concern of constitutional government is civil liberty; that of revolutionary government, public liberty. Under a constitutional government, little more is required than to protect the individual against abuses by the state, whereas revolutionary government is obliged to defend the state itself against the factions that assail it from every quarter.⁷

In economic policies, while the Jacobins had initially supported physiocratic notions of free trade and legislation to prevent combinations of workers, by 1793 the increasing urban poverty due to price inflation had modified their beliefs. On 12 February 1793, the forty-eight Paris Sections petitioned for controls on grain prices; by September, the Montagnards would bring in the ‘Law of the Maximum’ in an attempt to regulate the prices of essential goods.

The historian David Jordan said of Robespierre:

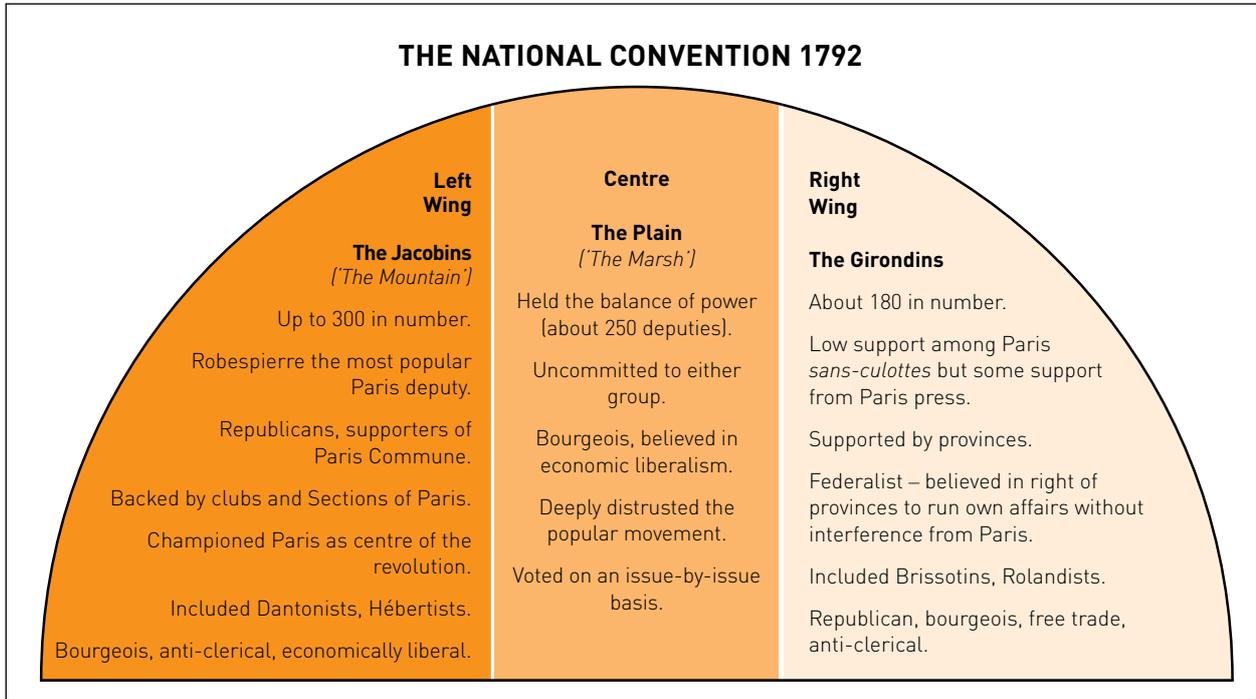


MORE ON DANTON

- 4 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 223.
- 5 John Hall Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1951), 379.
- 6 David Jordan, *The Revolutionary Career of Maximilien Robespierre* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), 159.
- 7 Gwynne Lewis, ‘Jacobinism’ in Kekewich and Rose, eds., *Self Study at A-level* (London: Longman, 1990), 146.

He saw and fought the Revolution as a struggle to the death between the Revolution and the counter-revolution, 'them and us', vice and virtue. He offered no compromises or accommodation and prided himself on his rectitude.⁸

Neither group, however, controlled the National Convention. In the middle ground were about 250 deputies, known as 'the Plain' or *Marais* (Marsh), who were uncommitted to either group and voted on an issue-by-issue basis. Thus, the power of both the Girondins and the Montagnards depended on their ability to convince the Plain.



ACTIVITY

KEY IDEAS

Compare and contrast the views of the Girondins, Plain and Jacobins regarding economics, the Paris Commune and provincial affairs.

A MORAL AND POLITICAL DILEMMA: DEALING WITH THE KING

The first critical issue which immediately faced the new National Convention was the problem of what should be done with the deposed king. Could Louis be tried? If so, did the National Assembly have the right to try him? What should be done with him if he were found guilty?

Louis XVI's correspondence with Austria, discovered in a metal cabinet (the 'Iron Chest' in the Tuileries) in November 1792, formed the basis of the trial of the king. As Austria was France's enemy, any citizen engaged with the enemy was, by definition, a traitor. With Louis now a prisoner in the Temple, his guilt was accepted by the deputies and by the majority of the people of Paris. The verdict was therefore a foregone conclusion.

⁸ Lewis, 'Jacobinism,' 2.

LOUIS XVI'S TRIAL

On 11 December 1792, 'Citizen Louis Capet' was indicted before the National Convention and accused of 'having committed a multitude of crimes in the establishment of [his] tyranny' and having 'violated the sovereignty of the people.'⁹ Specifically, the indictment mentioned the king's Flight from Paris, the massacre at the Champ de Mars, a conspiracy with Lafayette and Mirabeau, and financing counter-revolution within France.

Over the ensuing weeks, the king's trial became more a matter of public entertainment than a serious legal battle. L.S. Mercier was a deputy to the Convention and a Girondin supporter. In 1797, he recalled the atmosphere of the courtroom:

The far end of the room was transformed into a grandstand, where ladies in the most charming loose attire ate ices and oranges and drank liqueurs. We went to pay our respects; we returned to our place. The ushers played the part of attendants at boxes at the opera. They were constantly to be seen opening the doors of the reserved galleries ... The public galleries ... were never less than crammed with foreigners, and people of every class. The betting was open in every neighbouring café.¹⁰

How to convict Louis, and the penalty he should pay, proved a source of division. The Girondins in the National Convention found themselves in a difficult position. As moderates, they did not wish to vote for the death of the king. The

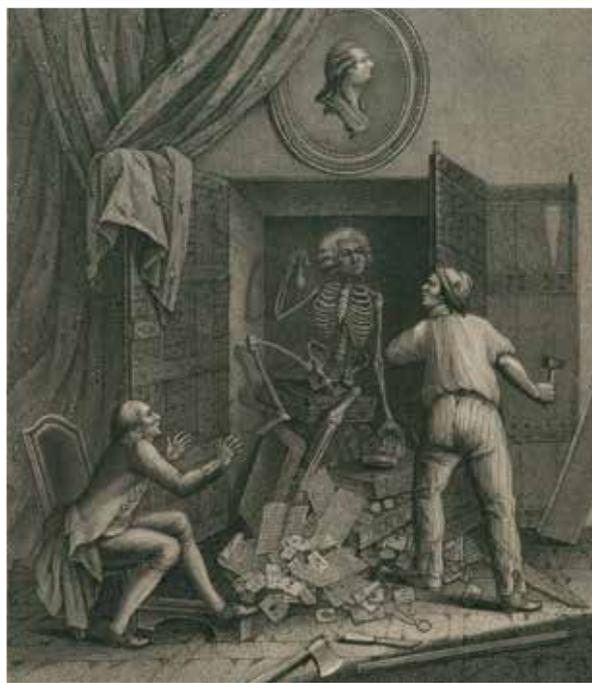
DID YOU KNOW?

The Capet dynasty had ruled France from 987–1378 and was the remote ancestor of Louis XVI, a member of the Bourbon dynasty. The Convention ignored Louis' protestations that Capet was not his name.

- 9 Philip Dwyer and Peter McPhee, *The French Revolution and Napoleon: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2002), 71–2.
- 10 L.S. Mercier, *The New Paris* (1797), cited in Reay Tannahill, *Paris in Revolution: A Collection of Eye-Witness Accounts* (London: The Folio Society, 1996), 75.

FEATURE

THE DAMNING 'IRON CHEST'



The Opening of the Iron Chest at the Tuileries.

In this representation, the 'Iron Chest' is shown to be prised open as the Girondin minister Roland looks on in astonishment. The drapery displays the Bourbon *fleur-de-lys* and is accompanied by a medallion of the king.

The skeleton of Mirabeau, one of those discredited by the chest's contents, peers out of the chest, holding the crown and a bag of gold. Others discredited by the find were Lafayette and Dumouriez.

The discovery of the Iron Chest in November 1792 was used by the Jacobins to discredit the king at the time of his trial. However, in reality, the chest contained very little of use to prove royal anti-revolutionary activities. It was an archive in which the king appeared to be attempting to preserve letters of the workings of royal government in case the monarchy should be restored.

DID YOU KNOW?

The lawyer who defended Louis XVI at his trial was Malesherbes, known to all as an honest man and defender of individual liberties. To defend Louis was dangerous. When asked by the Convention, 'What makes you so bold?', he replied 'Contempt for life.' In September 1793, the Malesherbes family was arrested and Malesherbes had to witness his family being executed before he himself was put to death.

1791 Constitution had declared Louis' person to be 'sacred and inviolable.' They believed that the best means of deciding his fate should be by referendum in order to consult the General Will. In theory, the referendum would help to restore national unity by destroying the suspicion that Paris was trying to dictate to the rest of France and, most importantly, it would honour the idea of the sovereignty of the people.

For the Girondins, the best solution to the problem was that the king should abdicate the throne, but not suffer the death penalty. Thomas Paine was an English-born American who had played an important role in the American Revolution and, having been granted honorary French citizenship, was now an elected deputy of the Convention. He suggested through his interpreter, for he spoke little French, that Louis could be exiled to America, 'where he might be rehabilitated as a decent citizen.'¹¹

Condorcet argued forcefully that Louis' death would only benefit France's enemies, declaring,

They will tell the people that that the Convention sacrificed Louis only to satisfy its vengeance; they will paint us as men greedy for blood; they will paint our revolution as leading to anarchy and disorder. Citizens, that is the real way to harm us, the one that despots hold in their hands ... If we take wise measures, we have nothing to fear.¹²

This stance, however, opened the Girondins to the charge of being royalists. The Jacobins and Cordeliers wanted immediate execution. Robespierre, in particular, pointed out with chilling logic to the Convention on 3 December that the people had judged the king on 10 August 1792, and that to hold another 'formal' trial was to put the revolution itself on trial, for 'If the King is not guilty, then those who have dethroned him are.'¹³ Tension mounted and the responsibility upon the deputies was extreme, for they knew that all of Europe was watching them. Marat further demanded that the decisions be reached publicly, so that the 'traitors' in the Assembly could be known.

THE CONVENTION PASSES JUDGEMENT

On 14 January, three questions were put to the Convention, the first being: 'Is Louis Capet guilty of conspiracy against public liberty and of attacks on the general security of the state?' On 15 January, the deputies voted unanimously that he was, although some added qualifications. The same day, the second question was put: 'Will the judgement of the National Convention against Louis be submitted for public ratification?' The majority of deputies voted 'No.' The final question, 'What penalty should be inflicted?' was voted upon after a public debate lasting twenty-four hours.

The deputies cast their votes verbally and as individuals. This action would mark each man for the rest of his life as a 'regicide' (voting for the execution of the king), or a 'non-regicide' (voting against). The result was a majority in favour of the death penalty: 387 deputies voted for execution while those opposed to execution numbered 334, giving a majority of fifty-three to those in favour.¹⁴ The Jacobins demanded that the penalty be carried out immediately, perhaps to stop any rethinking on the part of the moderates in the Convention, with Marat declaring that 'The Republic is only a house of cards until the head of the tyrant falls under the axe of the law.'¹⁵

11 Schama, *Citizens*, 665.

12 Mercier, *The New Paris*, 73.

13 George Rudé, ed., *Robespierre: Great Lives Observed* (Prentice-Hall, 1967), 27–8.

14 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 385. The astute reader will have remarked that of the 749 deputies in the National Convention, only 721 were recorded in the final vote. A small number of deputies, terrified at the gravity of the decision and the public nature of the vote, absented themselves on various pretexts.

15 Robert Ergang, *Europe from the Renaissance to Waterloo* (Boston: D.C. Heath and Co., 1954), 678.

The position adopted by the Girondins created the perception, at least in Paris, that they were traitors. Michael Adcock has argued that ‘it was the resistance by Girondin deputies that so profoundly alienated the people of Paris and undermined the credibility of the government.’¹⁶ He concluded that the decision to execute Louis created a lasting division between the Montagnards and the Girondins, and the Girondins and the people of Paris, leaving ‘a terrible legacy of bitterness’ in the Convention.¹⁷



EXECUTION OF
LOUIS XVI

COMPROMISED IDEALS

1. Robespierre had been an ardent critic of the death penalty early in the revolution. Why then did he support the execution of the king?
2. Why did the Convention not ask the people before executing Louis?

ACTIVITY

LOUIS' EXECUTION

On 21 January 1793, Louis XVI was to be publicly executed by guillotine. When he returned to prison, Louis asked to see his family and told them of the verdict. He spent the night alone. In the morning he asked for scissors to cut his hair, so that it might not impede the descent of the blade; these were refused him. He asked to see the Irish priest, Father Edgeworth, who was his minister, and made his last confession. Then he was escorted by two soldiers to the carriage that would take him to his death. Father Edgeworth and two policemen accompanied him. Surrounded by an armed guard, Louis travelled to the Place de la Révolution. The carriage arrived at 10.10 a.m. By 10.20, he was dead.

The order was given to bind the king's hands before his execution. Louis protested against this humiliation and attempted to resist. Father Edgeworth recorded this testimony:

This was the most agonizing moment of this whole terrible morning; one minute more and the best of kings would have received an outrage a thousand times worse than death, by the violence they were about to use towards him. He appeared to fear this himself, and turning his head, seemed to ask my advice. At first, I remained silent, but when he continued to look at me, I said, with tears in my eyes: ‘Sire, in this new outrage I see one last resemblance between your Majesty and the God who is about to be your reward.’ At these words, he raised his eyes to heaven with an expression of unalterable sadness. ‘Surely’ he replied, ‘it needs nothing less than His example to make me submit to such an insult.’ Then, turning to the executioners: ‘Do what you will; I will drink this cup, even to the dregs.’¹⁸

His coat removed, his hair now chopped so as not to impede the blade and his hands pinioned, the king climbed the stairs to the guillotine with difficulty and attempted to address the crowd:

I die innocent of all the crimes with which I am charged. I forgive all those who are guilty of my death and I pray God that the blood you are about to shed may never be required of France.¹⁹

He was unable to say more. The executioner ordered a roll of drums, drowning out his voice. He was strapped to the plank and placed in position. The blade fell and the executioner, Sanson, held Louis' head up for the crowd to see.

Mercier was there and recorded the following:

DID YOU KNOW?

The guillotine was a merciful death compared to previous forms of punishment. In eighteenth century Europe, the most common method of execution was drawing, hanging and quartering. The criminal was first ‘drawn’ on the rack, then brought to the place of execution. Once there, he was hanged until he lost consciousness, cut down before death and disembowelled, with his intestines pulled out of his body. Women were not subjected to this punishment, as the final phase would have exposed the whole body.

16 Michael Adcock and Graeme Worrall, *The French Revolution: A Student Handbook* (Melbourne: History Teachers' Association of Victoria, 1997), 88.

17 Adcock and Worrall, *The French Revolution*, 89.

18 Tannahill, *Paris in Revolution*, 76.

19 Tannahill, *Paris in Revolution*, 77.

His blood flows. Cries of joy from eighty thousand armed men rend the air. The cries are repeated all along the quays. I see the pupils of the Collège des Quatre Nations raising their hats on high. His blood flows and there are people who dip a fingernail, a quill ... in it. There is one who tastes it and says 'It is vilely salt' An executioner at the scaffold sells small bundles of his hair; people buy the ribbon that tied it. Everyone carries off a small fragment of his clothing or some other bloodstained remnant from the tragic scene.²⁰

The body of Louis XVI, King of All the French, Citizen Capet, was taken to the Madeleine cemetery, to be interred between the graves of his Swiss guards, massacred on 10 August, and the victims of the Champ de Mars Massacre. His body was put into a grave and covered with quick lime, in order that it dissolve quickly and leave no relics for royalists to retrieve.

On 23 January 1793, the Convention issued a Proclamation to the French People. It announced:

Citizens, the tyrant is no more. For a long time the cries of victims, whom war and public dissension have spread over France and Europe, loudly protested his existence. He has paid his penalty and only acclamations for the Republic and for liberty have been heard from the people.²¹

The execution outraged the other monarchies of Europe, already angry over Danton's declaration of France's intention to expand its borders and spread the revolution throughout Europe.

20 Tannahill, *Paris in Revolution*, 77.

21 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 293.

ACTIVITIES

ETHICAL DIMENSIONS

Discuss your own personal response to the execution of Louis XVI. To what extent was it necessary? What other options could have been explored?

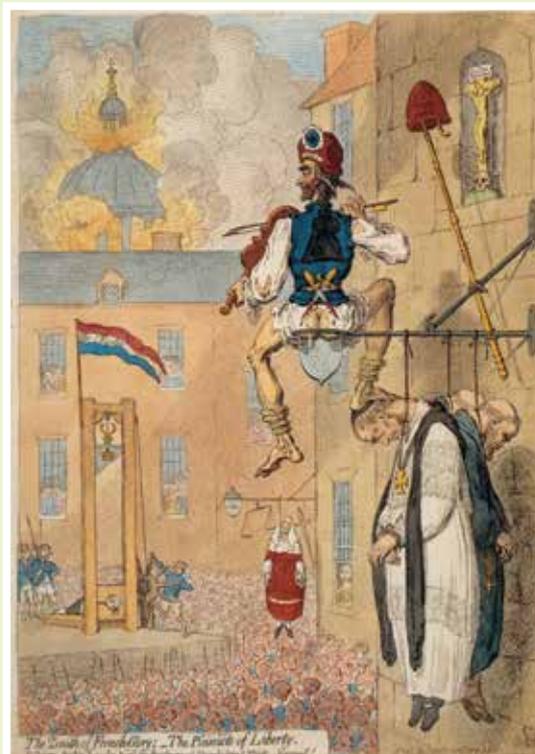
SOURCE ANALYSIS

Look carefully at the representation and complete the tasks below.

1. Identify the context in which the representation was created.
2. Identify what perspective on the French Revolution appears to be conveyed by the representation. Give one or more examples.
3. Analyse the use of graphic or confronting gestures to convey a message about the *sans-culottes* and/or the old regime.
4. From your broader knowledge, explain how the French monarchy, nobility and clergy were being treated by 1793.
5. Evaluate the extent to which the representation provides a complete picture of the consequences of the revolution. In your answer refer to historical interpretations.

The Zenith of French Glory. The Pinnacle of Liberty. Religion, Justice, Loyalty and all the Bugbears of Unenlightened Minds, Farewell! By James Gillray.

This satirical view of the radicalism of the French Revolution appeared in Britain in February 1793.



THE EUROPEAN WAR INTENSIFIES

The execution of Louis XVI caused diplomatic relations between France and the other European powers to be suspended. This signalled the inevitability of an escalation in the war. Increasingly, the other European leaders felt that the French Revolution must be crushed before it spread, so that the balance of power in Europe could be maintained, along with political stability. In February 1793, rather than waiting for a conflict which threatened to overwhelm it, France declared war on Britain and Holland, then on Spain. These countries joined Austria and Prussia to form the Grand Coalition, so that France was facing the combined strength of the European powers. ‘The Kings in alliance try to intimidate us,’ Danton declared. ‘We hurl at their feet, as a gage [challenge] of battle, the French King’s head.’²²

France was now surrounded on all sides by enemies who were determined to overturn the revolution and this, in turn, raised the levels of tension, both in the Convention and in the wider population. Fears of counter-revolution, of traitors within France working for its destruction and of betrayals by people claiming to be patriots, made it increasingly problematic to criticise the actions of self-proclaimed ‘patriots’ such as the Montagnards and their supporters, the *sans-culottes*. The position of the Girondins was undermined: Lafayette had fled France in late 1792 and, in April, the powerful figure of Dumouriez would also defect to the Austrian side.

LARGE-SCALE CONSCRIPTION

On 24 February 1793, the Convention ordered the conscription of 300 000 extra men into the Revolutionary Army to meet the demands of the escalation of the war:

All French citizens from the age of eighteen to fully forty years, unmarried or widowers without children, are in a state of permanent requisition until the date of the completion of the effective recruiting of the newly levied 300,000 men hereinafter decreed ... To the number of 300,000 men who are to be raised shall be added the numbers of men enrolled for the navy plus the number of national volunteers presumed to be with the colours, who shall be estimated at 250 per battalion; the total number resulting from this operation shall be divided among the departments in proportion to their population.²³

This levy (*levée en masse*) was met with protests and riots throughout France, partly because of a general hostility to the conscription of young men and partly because of other accumulated grievances, both religious and political. The historian Donald Sutherland has noted that,

Young men tore down liberty trees, burned draft lists, beat up mayors or National Guardsmen, or constitutional *curés* [priests] and donned white royalist cockades. North of the Loire ... people armed with hunting weapons and farm tools marched on the towns behind white flags demanding the abolition of the districts, which were thought to be the source of every evil from the Civil Constitution to arbitrary taxes.²⁴

The rebellion was particularly fierce in the four departments to the south-west, which became known as the Vendée.



FIGHTING ON ALL
FRONTS

DID YOU KNOW?

Conscription exempted married men from active service. This led to a marked increase in marriages throughout France. Where in the pre-revolutionary years there was an average of 240 000 marriages per year, in both 1793 and 1794 there were over 325 000.

22 Christopher Hibbert, *The French Revolution* (UK: Penguin, 1980), 193.

23 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 402.

24 D.M.G. Sutherland, *France 1789–1815: Revolution and Counter-Revolution* (London: Fontana Press, 1989), 167.

COUNTER-REVOLUTION IN THE VENDÉE



CATHOLICS IN THE
VENDÉE

The population of the Vendée region had long been resistant to direction from Paris. When the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was issued in July 1790, the area remained staunchly loyal to the old religion, with ninety per cent of the local priests refusing to take the Clerical Oath which followed in November 1790. A letter from the citizens of La Plaine, signed on 6 February 1791, made their support of traditional Catholicism clear:

The municipal officers of the parish of La Plaine and all other inhabitants of the parish have the honour to tell you that having learned that there was a decree requiring all curés and vicars of France to take an oath ... not only our parish, but all the neighbouring ones have decided never to recognise any other priest or vicar but those now in our parishes or their legitimate successors, and that, for anyone who comes to us from elsewhere, we will not allow him in our parishes.²⁵

By 9 October 1791, the Legislative Assembly was being informed of armed uprisings against the state in the Vendée region. This influenced the passing of a further decree in November, the Decree Requiring Non-Juring Priests to take the Civic Oath:

The National Assembly, having heard the report of the civil disturbances dispatched in the department of the Vendée ... relative to the disturbances instigated in several departments of the Kingdom, under the pretext of religion [believe] that for the enemies of the Constitution, religion is only a pretext [and] ... that such motives require that the legislative body take major political measures to repress the rebels who conceal their plots behind a sacred veil.²⁶

Priests who refused to take the Oath were 'deemed suspect of revolt against the law and of sinister intent toward the *Patrie*.'²⁷ The penalty was removal of the priest from his parish and the forfeit of his stipend from the state. Although Louis XVI vetoed the decree, it came into effect immediately, resulting in the arrest and imprisonment of non-juring priests. This disturbed loyal Catholics who believed that the Pope should govern the Church, who were loyal to their priests and the practices of the Catholic religion.

The execution of Louis XVI in January 1793 added to the flame of counter-revolution. The people of the Vendée were generally conservative and supporters of royalty. Moreover, the revolution had not resulted in tangible benefits to the peasants, the sale and redistribution of Church land generally benefiting the more affluent bourgeoisie.

The trigger for outright rebellion was the military *levée* of February 1793. The decree would take the young men of the Vendée away from the farms or their place of employment. In addition, the law exempted all public officials and National Guards, who were described as 'mobilised in place' and so stayed home. It seemed then that those who supported the revolution were exempted from conscription, while those who opposed it were to be drafted into the army. Because each commune had to produce a quota of conscripts, the men would be chosen by lot, and this, too, created tensions. The result was counter-revolution.

The action began in mid-March 1793, breaking out almost simultaneously throughout the region. (See map at end of chapter.) In Nantes, Poitiers, La Rochelle and Angers, peasants, priests, local nobles and some townsfolk rose up

DID YOU KNOW?

By 1794, munitions factories in Paris were producing 700 muskets a day for the Revolutionary Army. At the *Commune d'Armes* (formerly Saint Etienne) in the Loire Valley, 300 muskets and sixty pistols could be manufactured each day. Six thousand workshops were set up to purify the saltpetre, a necessary component of gunpowder, while every shoemaker had to produce a pair of boots every two days for the army.

25 Letter from the parishioners of La Plaine in Charles Tilly, *The Vendée* (USA: Harvard University Press, 1976, 237.

26 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 276.

27 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 277.

to challenge the National Convention or, at least, its local representatives. The revolt was, at first, localised, decentralised and unco-ordinated, with action aimed initially at local patriots, Constitutional priests and local officials who took their orders from Paris.

FEATURE

LOCAL REVOLTS: MAUGES

What happened in Mauges in southern Anjou is typical of the beginnings of the Vendée Rebellion. The conscription decree was announced on 2 March 1793. Overnight posters appeared on the walls: 'Woe to those who announce conscription!'²⁸ Local workers swore a mass oath to refuse conscription. When the commander of the National Guard and his five men tried to calm the crowd, they were overpowered and two of them stabbed. More troops arrived to support the National Guard. The crowd dispersed, but joined up again on the road outside the town and marched to the next town, ransacking houses and killing one man. At Chateau-Thébault, a Constitutional priest was murdered. By 12 March, the date when the conscription was to begin, large crowds of local people had gathered in most towns in the Vendée to prevent the recruitment.²⁹

Within three months, open revolt in other districts had led to the capture of Cholet and Saumur, while Nantes was in open revolt. By April, some 20 000–40 000 men had joined the rebel forces. The historian Charles Tilly saw the rebellion as 'an interesting combination of common themes and deep localism.'³⁰ He wrote,

The localism stands out in the way each little group of rebels sought to even the score with its own particular set of Patriotic enemies ..., demands for the redress of entirely local grievances and the apparent lack of any plans beyond righting the balance in the community, or handful of communities from which the rebels came ... Young unattached men predominated in the earliest outbreaks. They were the ones subject to the draft.³¹

As the rebellion spread, the groups became organised along military lines, with captains and lieutenants. Rebel bands looked for leaders amongst the local nobility and clergy. Madame Jeanne Ambroise de Sapinaud wrote in her memoirs,

Peasants rose in revolt near Buffelière ... They then scattered into the neighbouring parishes and came to find M. Sapinaud de Bois-Huguet ... 'We take you' they told him 'as our general and you will march at our head.'³²

After protesting that their rebellion would be crushed, her brother-in-law, M. Sapinaud, joined them:

I hate life since I was a witness to all the crimes and barbarities which our unfortunate *Patrie* has accumulated and I would rather die at your head, fighting for my God and my King, than be dragged to some prison as they have done to all my peers.³³

Sapinaud's remark reflected the broader dissatisfactions with government policies, the general discontent with the path the Convention was following and the failure of the hopes which had begun the revolution in 1789. Rebellion merged into a civil war that François Furet has described as 'the most symbolic conflict, because it pitched revolution and *ancien régime* against one another in open country.'³⁴

²⁸ Tilly, *The Vendée*, 116.

²⁹ Tilly, *The Vendée*.

³⁰ Tilly, *The Vendée*, 17.

³¹ Tilly, *The Vendée*.

³² *Mémoires de Madame de Sapinaud sur le Vendée* (Paris, 1824), cited in Dwyer and McPhee, *The French Revolution and Napoleon*, 97–8.

³³ *Mémoires de Madame de Sapinaud sur le Vendée*.

³⁴ François Furet, *History of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1990), 242.

THE TERROR BEGINS



DANTON'S SPEECH
TO THE TRIBUNAL

DID YOU KNOW?

A sign of the increasing sense of terror was the attack on Théroigne de Méricourt, who, according to popular mythology, had ridden her horse at the head of the march of the market women to Versailles in October 1789. Méricourt was set upon by a crowd of market women in 1793 and never recovered. She was confined to a mental hospital until her death in 1807.



Théroigne de Méricourt.

The execution of Louis XVI, the war with the First Coalition and the emergence of counter-revolution in the Vendée furthered the atmosphere of suspicion within France. By early 1793, the organisations which administered the Terror were being put into place. In October 1792, in response to the September Massacres, the Committee of General Security had been established. It was intended, according to Danton, 'to replace the supreme tribunal of the people's vengeance,'³⁵ a reference to the revolutionary *journées* and, in particular, the *ad hoc* and para-legal peoples' courts which had led to the mass slaughter in the prisons only months before. The ideology behind the Terror was summarised by Danton: 'Let us [the Convention] be terrible, in order that the people are not so.'³⁶ Thus, the Committee of General Security became a kind of police agency to bring traitors to justice. On 11 March 1793, the Revolutionary Tribunal was set up to hasten the trial and execution of suspects. It was to be reorganised for greater efficiency in September, with sixteen examining magistrates, a jury of sixty and a public prosecutor with a staff of assistants. Trials were quick, the judges lacked independence and, in October 1793, hearings were confined to three days in order to limit the defence. The Tribunal could impose a variety of penalties, but after the Law of the Prairial (10 June 1794) was enacted, if the suspect was not freed, there was only one penalty – death. Verdicts were passed by majority vote after secret deliberations, with the judge stating the grounds for the verdict publicly.

The position of representative-on-mission was also created in March 1793. Men serving in this role, who were drawn from the National Convention, were required to ensure that the spirit of the Convention's decrees was being followed in full in the provinces. Initially, there were eighty-two representatives-on-mission, whose task was to raise troops for the war effort. However, they became local agents for the two 'Great Committees,' the Committee of Public Safety and the Committee of General Security, enforcing the dictatorship of Paris. Boshier has stated that 'none played a bigger role in terrorising the nation than the representatives-on-mission.'³⁷ Their numbers were increased in December 1793, although by then the Vendée and revolts had been crushed.

The establishment of the Revolutionary Tribunal was followed by the creation of the Committees of Surveillance or Watch Committees, responsible for identifying and arresting suspects and issuing certificates of civic 'vertu' (loyal and patriotic citizenship). The Committee of Public Safety was created on 6 April, in order to control the conduct of the war inside and outside France and to maintain supplies to the army and the civilian population. Thus, it took charge of the country economically and politically. From July 1793 it had twelve members who worked in secret and maintained no minutes of their meetings. From their rooms in the Tuileries Palace, they issued orders to the representatives-on-mission, who were given virtually unlimited powers to deal with rebels and counter-revolutionaries. With the Law of Frimaire (4 December 1793), the Committee of Public Safety was granted full executive powers by the National Convention. It controlled ministers and generals, foreign policy and local government. The representatives-on-mission reported directly to the Committee, not to the Convention as previously.

Robespierre and the other revolutionary leaders believed that the dangers to the revolution demanded strong, centralised government and firm leadership, rather

35 J.F. Boshier, *The French Revolution* (Canada: Penguin Books, 1988), 193.

36 François Furet and Mona Ozouf, *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Bellknapp Press, 1989), 140.

37 Furet and Ozouf, *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, 192.

COMMITTEE OF GENERAL SECURITY	COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC SAFETY
<p>Objective:</p> <p>To protect the Revolutionary Republic from internal enemies (counter-revolutionaries, non-juring priests, hoarders and speculators).</p> <p>Dates of operation: 2 October 1792 to 1795 (disbanded under Constitution of Year III).</p> <p>Key activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintain internal security • pursue suspected counter-revolutionaries • supervise the treatment of suspects • conduct surveillance for the police • send suspects to Revolutionary Tribunal. <p>Key members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fouché • Amar • Vadier. <p>By mid-1794 the CGS became part of the opposition to Robespierre. Fouché, Vadier and Amar were directly involved in Robespierre's downfall on 9–10 Thermidor Year II (27–28 July 1794).</p>	<p>Objective:</p> <p>To protect the Revolutionary Republic from its external enemies (foreign armies and émigrés) and to allow the government to operate in wartime.</p> <p>Dates of operation: 6 April 1793 to 1795 (disbanded under Constitution of Year III).</p> <p>Key features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • initially dominated by moderates, the committee was increasingly radical from mid-1793 • CPS members were Convention deputies • the Convention renewed its emergency powers monthly. <p>Key members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robespierre (most influential) • Barère • Carnot • Saint-Just • Couthon. <p>The committee was restructured in August 1794, following the fall of Robespierre, severely limiting its power.</p> <p>There was no clear division between the Committees of Public Safety and General Security.</p>

DID YOU KNOW?

Serving on the Committee of Public Safety was equivalent to a year-long death sentence. Danton formed the Committee on 5 April 1793 and was executed exactly a year later, as was Delacroix. Robespierre and St. Just had their first Committee meeting on 28 July 1793 and were executed on the same day in 1794.

DID YOU KNOW?

Robespierre has traditionally been known as the key architect and instrument of the Terror. However, Peter McPhee argues that Robespierre became a convenient scapegoat for the excesses of the time.

than the spontaneous terror of 10 August 1792 or the September Massacres. 'Revolution,' Robespierre argued, 'is the war of liberty against its enemies. Revolutionary governments owe good citizens the protection of the state; to the enemies of the people, it owes only death.'³⁸

By 5 September 1793, the National Convention was to declare, 'Let Terror be the order of the day.' In this way, it officially announced that the state would systematically eliminate all threats to its existence through repressive laws imposed by specially set up institutions. The population was now divided into two: loyal citizens, whose first duty was to save the republic, and 'counter-revolutionaries,' those who were actively opposed the republic, critical of particular policies, indifferent to the fate of the republic, or who retained some connection with the old regime. These were designated as traitors deserving of death.

CONSTRUCTING AN ARGUMENT

Using three or four points, write an extended answer on one of the following topics:

- What was the Terror and how it was implemented in France in 1793?
- 'With France at war in 1793, rebels and counter-revolutionaries had to be ruthlessly dealt with by the Convention.' To what extent do you agree?

ACTIVITY

³⁸ Maximilien Robespierre, 'On Revolutionary Government,' 25 December 1793, cited in Dwyer and McPhee, *The French Revolution and Napoleon*, 105.

THE RADICALS GAIN CONTROL OF THE CONVENTION

DID YOU KNOW?

Many women believed the revolution should bring equality and political rights to all citizens. Over sixty Jacobin women's clubs were formed, partly as an expression of patriotism, but also to petition for the vote for women. On 30 October 1793, The National Convention, at this time dominated by the Jacobins, banned all women's clubs after an address by Citizen Amar of the Committee of General Security. Amar argued that 'women should not leave their families to meddle in the affairs of government.'

Club of Revolutionary Women 1793.
Le Sueur brothers.

By early 1793, the Girondins had lost power to the Jacobins/Montagnards. The Girondins had come to power both because of their battle with the Feuillants and their call for war against Austria in 1792. In the Legislative Assembly, the Brissotins/Girondins had been united with the Jacobins in their condemnation of the 'royalist' commitment of the Feuillants to constitutional monarchy and aristocracy; however, by early 1793, the rebellion in the Vendée, the expansion of the war into a five-front struggle against the First Coalition and their condemnation of the September Massacres earned the Girondins the ire of the *sans-culottes*. They were supporters of federalism, of weakening the power of the central government and of strengthening local government. They opposed the 'direct democracy' of the *sans-culottes*, attacking them as anarchists, *buveurs de sang* (drinkers of blood) and accusing the Jacobins of being 'levellers' (reducing all people to a common level).

The actions of the *sans-culottes*, however, were not solely motivated by political goals, but also grounded in the deteriorating economic situation. Petitions to the Convention on 22 and 24 February 1793 to set a maximum on prices were accompanied by attacks on grocery shops and wagons carrying foodstuffs. Like the bread riots of 1789 and the grocery riots of 1792, these were led mainly by women desperate to feed their families. Popular action had at its base hunger and economic suffering, with the difference between survival and starvation so minute that any small change in grocery prices was critical. The assignat had dropped to only fifty per cent of its face value. Coinage was rare and difficult to get. Food requisitioning for the army and the blockade of ports by the British navy created shortages of foodstuffs and caused commodity prices to rise. The food crisis of February 1793 intensified the conflict between the Girondins and the *sans-culottes* and their leaders. While the Montagnard leaders accepted popular protest as legitimate, the Girondins blamed Marat for inciting violence and Jacques Roux and his *Enragés* for preaching violence in the streets from soap-boxes.



THE DEFECTION OF DUMOURIEZ

The trigger for the fall of the Girondins was the defection of General Charles Dumouriez to the Austrian camp on 5 April 1793. Dumouriez was a complex man. He had been a strong supporter of Brissot's plans for war with Austria and had been appointed Minister for Foreign Affairs in the king's Girondin ministry in 1792. Beyond that, however, he had hoped that war

would bring an end to the revolution and restore Louis to the throne. He had commanded the French army at Valmy on 20 September 1792, saving Paris by defeating the Prussians, a critical turning point in the war. However, his goal was not to save the revolution but France itself.

Dumouriez wanted to defeat Austria by separating her from Prussia, thus ending the war; this done, he wanted to use his military force to bring order back to revolutionary Paris and install the young dauphin (now Louis XVII) to the throne. In March 1793, he was with his troops in Belgium, having defeated the Austrians at the battle of Jemappes.

But what were his intentions? While all France hailed Dumouriez as a hero, back in Paris the Committee of General Defence (the inept war committee of the National Convention, which was soon to be replaced by the Committee of Public Safety) had received a letter on 15 March from the General which suggested he wished to restore a constitutional monarchy. Danton travelled to the front to make further inquiries. The gravest suspicions of the loyalty of Dumouriez were entertained. Robespierre feared that Dumouriez would use Belgium as his base and march on Paris. Thus, where Dumouriez had promised an independent Belgian republic and to preserve its traditional institutions, Robespierre and the Convention demanded that all public money and the property of the Belgian Church be confiscated. All revolutionary decrees were to be applied within Belgium as in France itself.

Despite Dumouriez's complaints that these actions lost the support of the Belgian people for France, Robespierre was determined not to allow this brilliant, but untrustworthy, general to set up his own state. By April, following the defeat of his troops by the Austrians, Dumouriez had had enough. He began negotiations for an armistice with the Austrians and attempted to persuade his troops to desert France, join the allied powers and march on Paris to overthrow the Convention. When they refused, he and a few of his loyal officers deserted the French lines and rode to join the Austrians. His treason helped to bring down the whole Girondin faction.

FAILED ATTEMPTS TO HALT THE RADICALS

Back in Paris, however, war was breaking out between the radical Jacobins/Montagnards, backed by the Paris Commune and the Sections, and the Girondin deputies. On 13 March, Pierre Vergniaud had begun the attack on the radicals, demanding that violence be restrained and the revolution brought to an end. He argued that the revolution should be stopped, in order to give the people peace and to ensure that the gains of the revolution be preserved. Characterising the *sans-culottes* as 'idlers, men without work ... ignoramuses,' Vergniaud condemned the lawlessness of the *journées* and highlighted the danger to the nation of continuing the revolution on a path of violence, declaiming to the National Convention:

So, citizens, it must be feared that the Revolution, like Saturn, successively devouring its children, will engender, finally, only despotism, with all the calamities that accompany it.³⁹

He finished his speech with a call for peace:

DID YOU KNOW?

Adam Philippe, General Comte de Custine, was guillotined as a traitor when he failed to raise the siege on the town of Condé L'Escaut, on the Belgian border. He went to his death calmly, saying 'I have no more defenders; they have disappeared. My conscience charges nothing against me. I die calm and innocent.' His son was also executed for attempting to defend him.



'DANTON' THE FILM

³⁹ Schama, *Citizens*, 714.

Citizens, let us profit from the lessons of experience. We can overturn empires by victories, but we can only make the Revolutions for other people by the spectacle of our own happiness. We want to upset thrones. Let us prove that we know how to be happy with a Republic.⁴⁰

To the Montagnard leaders, Vergniaud's speech was a declaration of war against them. In attacking the *sans-culottes* and 'direct democracy,' he was attacking their power base and Paris itself. His words would appeal to those who saw Paris as too radical, who were against the bloodshed which accompanied the revolution and who wished the political structures to become decentralised. Vergniaud and the other Girondins became linked with Dumouriez's defection, the military defeats France was suffering and the growing anti-revolutionary feeling in the port cities.



JOURNALISM IN THE
REVOLUTION

DID YOU KNOW?

Marat was probably afflicted with *dermatitis herpetiformis*, which he may have picked up after being forced to hide in the sewers to avoid arrest in May 1790. This rare, chronic skin disease, characterised by intense eruptions of itching pustules and lesions, typically in clusters, is said to have been relieved by frequent bathing. As you will see, the most famous image of Marat depicts him in his bath.

THE MODERATES FIGHT BACK: MARAT ON TRIAL

The conflict was reflected in the arrest and trial of Jean-Paul Marat, at this time president of the Jacobins. In his *Journal de la République*, Marat had called on the people to attack the deputies of the Convention, especially the Girondin leaders, calling them 'criminal accomplices of royalty,' 'enemies of liberty and equality' and 'atrocious men ... who try to kindle the flames of civil war.'⁴¹

The Girondins fought back, demanding that Marat be brought to trial before the Revolutionary Tribunal for accusing the deputies who had voted for a public referendum on the king's execution of being the accomplices of Dumouriez. This was a poor tactic: Marat was a leader of the *sans-culottes* and his revolutionary loyalty was unchallengeable in their eyes. On 24 April 1793, Marat was acquitted. His supporters turned this into a spectacular personal triumph, crowning him with laurel wreaths and proclaiming him the 'father of the people.' He was paraded in the Convention, carried shoulder-high, with his supporters chanting and singing his praises.

Le Patriot Français, a journal produced by the Girondin leader Brissot, reported this in an extremely sour tone, observing that

The crime absolved and crowned, the audacious infringer of the laws carried in triumph in the midst of the sanctuary of the laws; this respectable sanctuary soiled by the impure gathering of drunken men and women of ill-fame, a worthy procession for the triumphant Marat; these are the events of the day, a day of mourning for all virtuous men, for all the friends of liberty.⁴²

Simon Schama has described the failed impeachment of Marat as 'a collective disaster for the Girondins.'⁴³ In ignoring the immunity to prosecution of a deputy of the National Convention, the Girondins had destroyed a principle and created a precedent that, in only a few weeks time, would be used by their enemies against them. Moreover, the Girondin leaders misread the public mood, which saw Marat as a hero and them as potential traitors. In the event, Marat was acquitted and the *sans-culottes* were determined to exact their revenge.

The Girondins made further blunders. They, along with the other members of the National Convention, had ignored the Paris Commune's demands for a price control on grain until they were forced to act by the Commune's threat of revolt

40 Schama, *Citizens*, 715.

41 Schama, *Citizens*, 718.

42 *Le Patriot Français*, No. MCCCLI: Buchez and Roux, XXVI: 148–9, cited in John Gilchrist and William Murray, eds., *The Press in the French Revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution in the Years 1789–1794* (Melbourne and London: Ginn and Cheshire, 1971), 189.

43 Schama, *Citizens*, 718.

against the Convention. They formed the majority of members on the Commission of Twelve set up by the Convention to investigate the actions of the Commune. In mid-May, the Commission had ordered the arrest of René Hébert, the Deputy Proctor of the Commune and of Jean Varlet, one of the leaders of the Enragés. When the Commune protested, a Girondin commissioner, Maximin Isnard, threateningly replied, 'if these extremists are allowed to have their way and the principle of national representation suffers, Paris will be annihilated; and men will soon be searching the banks of the Seine to see if the city had ever existed.'⁴⁴ This was, in effect, declaring that the Convention was at war with the Paris Commune and the sans-culottes. The Convention, as could be expected from a group of predominantly middle class men, was more conservative and had moved politically to the right, while Paris was becoming increasingly radical.

In the streets, it was the Paris Sections that led the demands for the arrest and trial of the Girondins. On 10 April, the district of Halle et Blé called for their arrest and the execution of Roland, the former Minister for the Interior. The *sans-culottes* from that district called on the Convention to save the French Republic, at the same time threatening the deputies that if they failed, the Sections would take matters into their own hands. This petition was then supported by thirty-three of the forty-eight Sections and, on 15 April, by the Commune of Paris itself: the Girondin deputies must be expelled from the National Convention. But who were the dominant voices in the Paris Commune? They were the 'men of 10 August'⁴⁵ – Danton, Marat and Hébert. Robespierre was also responsible for the attack on the Girondins within the National Convention, accusing them of being involved in Dumouriez's treason. On 26 May, he called on the people to rise up in anger against the 'corrupt deputies'⁴⁶ within the Convention and declared his own stand against them.



The Triumph of Marat, 1794, oil on canvas, Louis-Léopold Boilly.

After his acquittal, Marat, in great personal triumph, was carried shoulder-high by his *sans-culottes* supporters through the streets of Paris and into the National Convention.



MORE ON MARAT

EXPULSION OF THE GIRONDINS

The anti-Girondin riots from 31 May to 2 June 1793 were instigated by the Cordeliers, particularly Marat. The action had begun on 27 May when an angry mob had burst into the Convention demanding and obtaining the release of Hébert, Varlet and the other prisoners, as well as the abolition of the Girondin-dominated Commission of Twelve. By 28 May, the Commission had been re-established – although the prisoners remained

⁴⁴ Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 198.

⁴⁵ On 10 August 1792, the *journée* of the Tuileries Palace, 600 Swiss Guards were massacred.

⁴⁶ Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 234.

REVOLUTIONARY MARTYRS: MARAT

During the French Revolution, a divide had emerged between the Catholic religion and the state, so that by 1793 no patriotic citizen could also be a practising member of the Catholic Church. The Vendée Rebellion and the continuing adherence of many citizens to their old beliefs, however, created a need for the revolution to create its own heroes, revolutionary ‘martyrs,’ who would symbolise the values of the revolution and replace the saints of the Catholic Church as representatives of moral values. Three figures were to fill this role: Joseph Bara, aged only thirteen, who had been shot for refusing to hand over horses to rebels; Le Pelétier de Saint-Fargeau, the deputy who had been stabbed as he sat in a café the day after he had voted for Louis XVI’s execution; and Jean-Paul Marat, killed in his bath by Charlotte Corday in July 1793.



The Death of Marat, an engraving after David’s portrait of 1793. Private collection of Michael Adcock.

It was the Jacobin painter Jacques-Louis David who would transform these three into patriotic heroes who nobly gave up their lives for the freedom of France and the preservation of liberty. They were the personification of vertu, the love of the patrie (homeland) expressed in active citizenship and a replacement for the old Christian martyrs who represented the values of the Gallican Church of the ancien régime.

Of the three, it was Marat, the demagogue deputy, whose death created the most powerful symbol of the revolution. As in his portrait of the dead Le Pelétier, Jacques-Louis David drew on Christian symbolism. In his magnificent oil painting, *The Death of Marat*, Marat lies in his bath, bathed in a golden light, his wound bleeding onto the white sheet. He is caught in the moment of death, his right hand still grasping his pen and his left hand holding the letter from Charlotte Corday that gave her access to him.

Emmet Kennedy claimed that David’s composition echoed that of Michelangelo’s famous sculpted *Pietà* of Christ’s dead body, held in his mother’s lap after crucifixion. As Christ gave his life to save humanity from sin, so had Marat given his life for the *menu peuple*, the poorest of the poor, and the *sans-culottes*.⁴⁷

The painting deliberately portrays Marat as a benevolent and charitable man, his last moments spent in ministering to the needs of the people. Corday, however, had murdered Marat because he represented the bloody excesses of the Terror. She was a Girondin supporter from Caen, a Federalist town. On 13 July, at seven o’clock at night, she gained entry to Marat’s home by promising to identify traitors to the Republic. Finding him in the bath, where he often worked in order to relieve the itch caused by his skin disease, she sat on a chair next to him. She then took out a knife she had purchased and, leaning over the bath, swiftly stabbed him on the right side of his bare chest. After she had killed Marat, Corday made no effort to escape, but gave herself up calmly to the authorities. She explained to the police commissioner, Guellard, that ‘having seen the civil war was on the point of exploding

throughout France and persuaded that Marat was the chief cause of this disaster, she had wished to sacrifice her life for her country.⁴⁸ She was tried on 17 July 1793 and went to the guillotine the same day, showing no repentance or even fear. Marat was buried in the Panthéon and David's portrait was hung in the Assembly, above the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, serving as a symbol of republican values and to remind the deputies of the choice they must make: 'Liberty or Death.'

Michael Adcock has drawn our attention to the new type of language David was creating to turn revolutionary leaders into what he has called 'secular saints.'⁴⁹ David wanted to celebrate the death of Marat with a public ceremony, but

the body decayed so quickly that it could not be placed on display. David then painted his large and emotive portrait of the moment of death and this would be reproduced as an engraving to be distributed throughout France. Adcock has suggested these images were produced at times of great crisis and not only expressed specific grief, but also 'externalised broader doubts and fears about the fate of the revolution itself [through allowing] people to think through and discuss a painful moment of fear and doubt.'⁵⁰

47 Emmet Kennedy, *A Cultural History of the French Revolution* (Yale University Press, 1989), 286.

48 Schama, *Citizens*, 737.

49 Michael Adcock, *The French Revolution in Art: A Supplementary Text* (Melbourne: HTAV, 1997).

50 Adcock and Worrall, *The French Revolution*, 70.

free – and so the *sans-culottes* prepared to take to the streets once more. A new Insurrectionary Committee was formed, with Varlet as one of its members, and a militia of 30 000 *sans-culottes* was raised.

In the absence of Santerre, command of the National Guard was given to François Hanriot, a former clerk, footman, beadle, and brandy-seller, who had gained prominence during the storming of the Tuilleries on 10 August 1792. On 31 May, Jean Varlet rang the bell that signalled the start of these revolutionary *journées*; dissatisfied with the prevarication of the Convention on that day, a Friday, it was decided to march again on Sunday 2 June, when all workers would be free to join the uprising.

Accordingly, on Sunday 2 June, angry crowds, responding to the tocsin rung by Marat himself, invaded the Convention, demanding that the Girondin deputies be expelled and the Commission of Twelve be dissolved. They were reinforced by 75 000–100 000 National Guardsmen, who guarded the exits.

The *sans-culottes* demanded the imposition of a tax on the rich; a maximum (price-control) on grain; the purging of thirty Girondin deputies; the arrest of Roland, Clavière and Lebrun, who had been ministers; and the creation of an army of *sans-culottes* to deal with all traitors to the revolution, with the payment of forty sous per day to volunteers. Barère, in the name of the Committee of Public Safety, refused to recommend the arrest of the named deputies, but by now it was clear that the Convention was under siege.



'MARAT/SADE' FILM

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

With a partner, discuss the following points. Then share with the class.

1. What do you see as the fundamental differences between the Girondins and the *sans-culottes* by April 1793?
2. Why were the Girondins so despised by late May 1793?

ACTIVITY

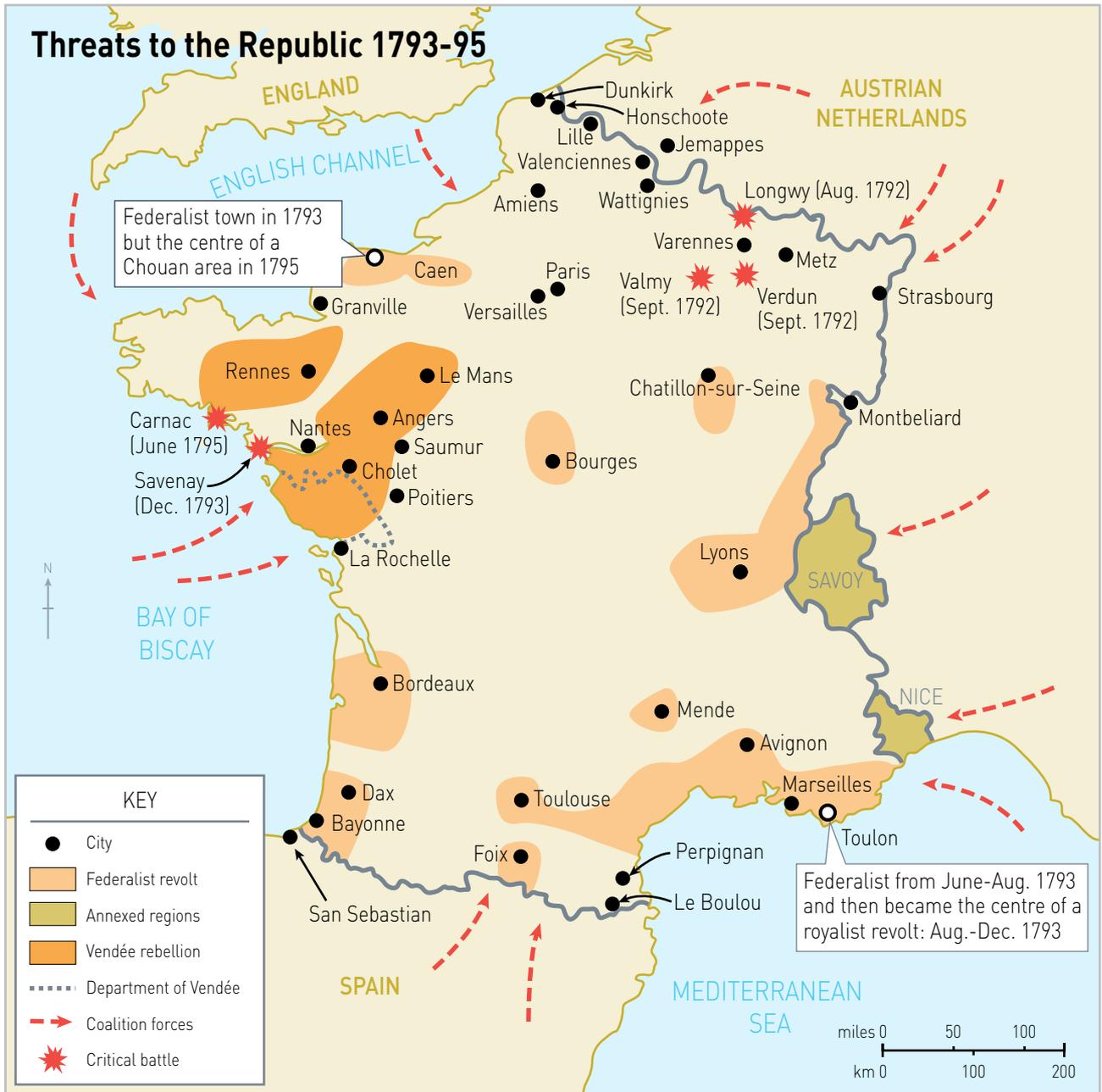
CONCLUSION

DID YOU KNOW?

When David presented the portrait to the Convention, he told the deputies, 'Citizens, the people were again calling for their friend; their desolate voice was heard: David, take up your brushes ... Avenge Marat. I heard the voice of the people. I obeyed.'

With cannons aimed at the hall and armed guards at every door, the National Convention had little choice but to expel the moderate Girondins. It ordered the arrest of twenty-nine deputies, including most of the Commission of Twelve. The Jacobins/Montagnards led the vote, while most deputies stayed silent. Vergniaud offered the deputies a glass of blood to slake their thirst, a metaphor for their betrayal of the Girondins.

The Girondins were reaping the consequences of abandoning the principle that representatives of the people were immune from arrest. Their unsuccessful impeachment of Marat only five weeks before exposed them all to danger. From this point on, no deputy in the National Convention was safe and over the next year, successive factions would be arbitrarily arrested and executed. The revolution had begun to devour its own children.



CHAPTER REVIEW

CONSTRUCTING AN ARGUMENT – ESSAY

Write an essay of 600–800 words on one of the topics below. Your essay should include an introduction, paragraphs supported by evidence from primary sources and historical interpretations, a conclusion and a bibliography.

Topics:

- 'The execution of Louis XVI was a necessary evil along the path to popular sovereignty.' To what extent do you agree?
- In what sense did terror become 'the order of the day' from 1793? Who and what constituted the Terror?
- 'The Girondins made a number of fatal errors between late 1792 and mid-1793.' To what extent do you agree?

DIVERSE EXPERIENCES – FACT FILE

Read about women affected by the revolution in this chapter. Find two more stories and present them in the form of a Fact File.

BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES – GLOSSARY

Compile a glossary of terms used to describe people under the new regime in France. Identify possible consequences for being identified in each group.

Include the following terms:

- *buveurs de sang*
- *sans-culottes*
- levellers
- counter-revolutionaries
- aristocrats/royalists
- Montagnards
- Girondins
- *menu peuple*
- *Enragés*.

KEY PEOPLE – PARAGRAPH

Write a paragraph explaining how Jean-Paul Marat, Georges Danton or Maximilien Robespierre changed French society between late 1792 and mid-1793.

NEW REGIME CHALLENGES – DIAGRAM

Create a diagram, graphic organiser or infographic showing the key challenges faced by the new regime in the first six months of 1793. Identify whether each challenge helped or hindered the new regime as it attempted to consolidate its power.

THE TOTALITY OF THE TERROR

BESIEGED BY EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL THREATS, THE CONVENTION GAVE WAY TO ZEALOTS WHO CALLED FOR TOTAL REVOLUTION, TOTAL WAR. THE QUEEN WAS SENT TO THE GUILLOTINE WHILE THE GREAT COMMITTEES ENSURED CONFORMITY WITH PURIST REVOLUTIONARY 'VIRTUES.'

INTRODUCTION: THE FEDERALIST REVOLTS

By mid-1793, the new regime was responding to simultaneous threats and rebellions around the country in an increasingly repressive manner. The first example of this was its crushing of the Federalist Revolt in the large trading cities in the south of France – Bordeaux, Lyons, Toulouse, Toulon and Marseilles.

Unlike the Vendée Rebellion, which sought to maintain traditional patterns of life, the Federalist Revolt was an expression of anger about the arbitrary nature of the government in Paris, the power of the *sans-culottes* and the damage done to trade by the war with the First Coalition (comprising Austria, Prussia, Spain and others).

THE BORDEAUX AND LYONS REBELLIONS

Bordeaux, in the department of the Gironde, had once been France's second busiest port, but as a result of the war and the British blockade its trade had disappeared. It was also the birthplace of Girondist politics, having sent Vergniaud, Gensonné and Gaudet to Paris as the people's representatives.

In the early months of 1793, the local Girondin club, the Society for the Friends of the Constitution, had viewed with increasing concern the control of the National Convention by the Sections of Paris under the direction of the Revolutionary Paris Commune. There had been talk of raising an army of Bordelais National Guards to march to Paris to protect the Convention, to allow the elected representatives to do their work without the intimidation of armed Parisian crowds. The arrest of the Girondin deputies on 2 June 1793 came as a severe shock and triggered Bordeaux's revolt. A 'Popular Commission of Public Safety' was set up, which urged local people to reject the rule of Paris, to establish their own National Convention and to march on Paris to restore constitutional government. A force of 1200 men was envisaged, but in the end only 400 set forth, and they turned back having marched fewer than fifty kilometres.¹

Lyons, famous for its silk manufacturing, had elected a Girondist mayor in February 1793, only to have him overthrown by the local Jacobin Club. In June, angered by the attack on the Girondins and by the *levée* of troops, the people of Lyons rose, prepared to defend their city against the local Jacobins and the revolutionary government. In June, Marseilles joined Lyons, formally declaring itself 'in a legal state of resistance' to the National Convention. It set up its own Revolutionary Tribunal and gave the death sentence to thirty Jacobins. In Toulon, a counter-revolutionary committee seized power and issued a declaration stating,

We want to enjoy our goods, our property, the fruits of our toil and industry in peace. Yet we see them constantly exposed to threats from those who have nothing themselves.²

Further uprisings in Caen, Marseilles and other towns led to the claim that 'more than sixty departments were in some degree "federalist" in spirit.'³ The

1 Alan Forrest, *The Revolution in Provincial France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 183.

2 Peter McPhee, *The French Revolution 1789–1799* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2002), 117.

3 Forrest, *The Revolution in Provincial France*, 181.

commander in the south-west, General Biron, reported of Bordeaux on 5 June: '[The rebels] don't want a king; they want a republic, but a rich and tranquil republic.'⁴

GOVERNMENT REPRISALS

The new regime responded savagely to the Federalist Revolts. In August 1793, General Kellermann's troops surrounded Lyons, cutting the town off from food supplies in order to starve it into submission. As the siege went on, houses were destroyed and, as food supplies became scarce, famine was widespread. On 12 October 1793, the Committee of Public Safety declared that Lyons should be destroyed, its name wiped out on maps, and a plaque set up on the ruins, which would state, 'Lyons made a war on liberty. Lyons is no more.'⁵ The houses of the rich, some sixteen hundred of them, were to be destroyed, as well as the city's fortifications.⁶ Henceforth, the city would be known as *Ville-Affranchie* or Liberated Town.⁷ From August to October, a Committee of Seven took out savage reprisals on Lyons for its challenge to Paris, guillotining some twenty-six people per day. The blood ran so freely in the gutters that citizens complained that it overflowed from the drainage ditch below the guillotine.⁸ This was not swift enough for the representatives-on-mission, Collot d'Herbois and Fouché. The worst action took place over three days in December 1793 when 360 people died; tied up in groups of up to sixty, they were lined up in front of ditches and fired on by cannon, in what has been called the *mitrillades* or mass shootings.⁹ 'What a delicious moment,' wrote one witness to a friend in Paris. 'How you would have enjoyed it! ... What a sight! Worthy indeed of liberty! Wish *bonjour* to Robespierre.'¹⁰ By April 1794, around 2000 men, women and children had been murdered.

In Bordeaux, the members of the Federalist Popular Commission were declared to be traitors and outlawed from France. In Marseilles, where starvation had induced the population to negotiate with the British to allow grain into the port, fighting broke out between French Patriots and the Federalists. On 25 August 1793, the town surrendered to the French Revolutionary Army. Here, reprisals were more moderate than in Lyons or Nantes: although 975 suspects were accused, only half were found guilty and of these, 289 were guillotined. In Bordeaux, another 104 were sent to the guillotine. Toulon, which had formed an alliance with Britain, was besieged for three months before being defeated. Eight hundred people were immediately executed and 282 more were sent to the guillotine.¹¹

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Explain in your own words the grievances of the Federalist rebels.
2. How did the Federalist Revolt differ in character from the Vendée Rebellion?
3. What threat did the Federalists pose to the Republic?

ACTIVITY

DID YOU KNOW?

A German volunteer in the Revolutionary Army was horrified by what he saw in Lyons: 'I said to a group of *sans-culottes* ... that it would be decent to clear away all this human blood – Why should it be cleared up? One of them said to me. It's the blood of aristocrats and rebels. The dogs should lick it up.'

- 4 William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 242; and Alan Forrest, *Society and Politics in Revolutionary Bordeaux* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 111.
- 5 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 254. Please note that Lyons is the alternative spelling of Lyon.
- 6 Marilyn Yalom, *Blood Sisters* (USA: Basic Books, 1993), 185.
- 7 David Andress, *The Terror: Civil War in the French Revolution* (London: Little, Brown & Co., 2005), 210.
- 8 Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (UK: Penguin, 1989), 783.
- 9 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 254.
- 10 Christopher Hibbert, *The French Revolution* (UK: Penguin, 1980), 227.
- 11 McPhee, *The French Revolution*, 121.

Bordeaux, as the leading city of the Federalist Revolt, received especially severe treatment in late 1793 at the hands of the representatives-on-mission, Ysabeau and Baudot. They were replaced by the even more ruthless Jean Tallien, a young man who was to rise to greater power during the Thermidorian period, after the



DID YOU KNOW?

A Vendéan general, La Rochejaquelein, became popular through his rallying cry, 'Friends, if I advance, follow me! If I retreat, kill me! If I die, avenge me!' Despite his stirring words, La Rochejaquelein was young and experienced, and died in battle at the age of twenty-two.

fall of Robespierre. On the night of 29–30 November, a month after twenty-nine of the Girondin deputies expelled from the National Convention were executed in Paris, 200 merchants were arrested as a measure of general security, of whom 104 were guillotined.¹² Their suspected crime: *négotiantisme*, the crime of using the revolution to become rich. During the nocturnal raids the merchants' account books were seized and searched for a word, a belief or an action that could incriminate them. Even erasures (rubbing out of words) could be fatal. On 5 March 1794, the forty-year-old merchant Auguste Journu was executed because of,

perfidy [betrayal], ... which naturally led the tribunal to suppose even more atrocious crimes. Further, they had found [evidence] which seemed to announce hatred for Marat and a sympathy for [his enemies].¹³

A Girondin deputy reported that in Bordeaux,

A woman was charged with the heinous crime of having wept at the execution of her husband. She was consequently condemned to sit several hours under the suspended blade which shed on her, drop by drop, the blood of the deceased whose corpse was above her on the scaffold, before she was released by death from her agony.¹⁴

THE NANTES DROWNINGS

On 1 August 1793, Barère, a member of the Committee of Public Safety, gave the order to subdue the rebellion in the Vendée region in western France: to burn the forests, raze the houses, remove the livestock and slaughter the rebels. General Turreau and General Westermann led an army of 30 000 soldiers into the Vendée to subdue a force of somewhere between 20 000 and 40 000 rebels,¹⁵ many of whom were now armed with rifles captured from defeated patriots. Turreau reported that,

They never allow themselves to be anticipated: they fight only when they want and how they want ... Their attack is a terrible eruption, sudden, almost always unexpected, because it is very difficult in the Vendée to ... keep watch and consequently to defend oneself against surprise.¹⁶

The government's retaliation was severe. Columns of soldiers marched across the countryside, destroying all life. Turreau wrote to Paris,

My purpose is to burn everything, to leave nothing but what is essential to establish the necessary quarters for exterminating the rebels ... All brigands caught bearing arms, or convicted of having taken up arms to revolt against their country, will be bayoneted. The same will apply to girls, women and children under the same circumstances ... Each column commander has orders to search and burn forests, villages, market towns and farms ...¹⁷

At Nantes, 3000 people died in prison from an epidemic. The representative-on-mission there was the insanely violent Jean-Baptiste Carrier, who authorised mass drownings. Between 2000 and 4800 further prisoners died, bound with ropes and thrown into barges, which were then sunk in the river; these drownings are known as the *noyades*. At first the *noyades* were confined to priests and took place at night, but then these 'republican baptisms' or 'national baths' became routine and took place by day. Prisoners would first be stripped of their clothes and belongings – an important source of income for the soldiers. Accounts began to circulate of 'republican marriages,' young men and women tied naked together in the boats, then drowned.¹⁸

12 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 255.

13 Aurélien Vivie, *Histoire de la Terreur à Bordeaux*, Vol. 2 (1877), 336. The term *l'ami du peuple* referred to the person of Marat himself – a play on the title of his newspaper.

14 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 227.

15 Andress, *The Terror*, 246.

16 *Mémoires pour Servir à l'Histoire de la Guerre de la Vendée par le Général Turreau* (Paris, 1824), cited in Philip Dwyer and Peter McPhee, eds., *The French Revolution and Napoleon: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2002), 99.

17 Correspondence of 19 January 1794, cited in Dwyer and McPhee, *The French Revolution and Napoleon*, 101.

18 Schama, *Citizens*, 789.

Christopher Hibbert has written:

The river became so choked with these barges that ships weighing anchor brought them up filled with the dead. Birds of prey hovered over the waters, gorging themselves with human flesh, and the fish became so contaminated that orders had to be given forbidding them to be caught.¹⁹

Benaben, Commissioner for Maine-et-Loire, witnessed the slaughter at the town of Le Mans, where the final battle between the Vendéan 'army' and the forces of the Republic took place:

Soldiers spread out into the houses, and having taken the wives and daughters of the brigands who had not time to flee, took them into the squares or the streets where they were crowded together and butchered on the spot: shot, bayoneted or slashed with swords.²⁰

Of the approximately 5000 rebels, two-thirds were slaughtered in the battle for the town and the mass shootings which followed.²¹ When the slaughter was over and the Vendée had been conquered, General Westermann reported to the Committee of Public Safety,

The Vendée is no more. It has died beneath the hooves of our horses, together with its men, women and children ... I have crushed the children under my horses, massacred the women – they, at least, will not give birth to any more brigands.²²

Seventy per cent of all deaths in the Terror occurred in the Vendée and Federalist Provence. Charles Tilly, a leading authority on the history of the Vendée, has estimated that, of those executed, eighty to ninety per cent were peasants and artisans. Of the percentage remaining, five to ten per cent were bourgeois, with a statistically insignificant number of local nobles and priests.²³ Thus, those who died were not usually aristocrats, but peasants and craftsmen who had taken up arms in defence of traditional ways and beliefs.

Simon Schama pointed out that the Terror was confined to specific areas, with ninety per cent of all executions taking place in only twenty of the eighty-six departments and that 'all of these areas, excepting Paris ... were war zones.'²⁴ He concluded,

The Terror was highly selective in its geography. The harshness of its impact critically turned on the [approach] of the representatives-on-mission; the seriousness with which local revolutionary committees took their duties; ... whether or not a town was on the route of the *armées révolutionnaires* ... It operated with crushing effect on areas that were indeed the centres of war and revolt.²⁵

Schama has argued that in the Federalist cities the Terror became a 'war against commercial capitalism.' The Jacobin rhetoric against 'rich egoists' and the attacks on the commercial elites associated with Federalism meant that unless mercantile and industrial enterprises had been pulled into the service of the war, they were regarded as counter-revolutionary. Schama has even argued that the capitalist and industrialist bourgeois class was the revolution's 'principal victim.'²⁶

DID YOU KNOW?

General Westermann, who with Turreau led the slaughter in the Vendée, was later executed as an 'indulgent'. Indulgents were those who argued that the Terror had shed enough blood and must end.

DIVERSE EXPERIENCES

Write an extended answer on the following topic:

Explain the impact of the Terror on rural people in France, including women, in 1793–94.

ACTIVITY

19 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 228.

20 Beneben, cited in Dwyer and McPhee, *The French Revolution and Napoleon*, 100.

21 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 257.

22 Dylan Rees and Duncan Townson, *France in Revolution* (Access to History Series), second edition (Hodder & Stoughton, 2001), 84.

23 Charles Tilly, *The Vendée* (USA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 327.

24 Schama, *Citizens*, 785.

25 Schama, *Citizens*, 786–7.

26 Schama, *Citizens*, 787.

WHY TERROR?

Why did France turn to terror? The new regime argued that it was largely because of the Girondins. First, the Girondins/Brissotins led the nation into a war against a powerful coalition (Austria, Prussia and others) that threatened to defeat the revolution. Then, Girondin supporter General Dumouriez proved himself a traitor to France, abandoning the revolution and fleeing to Austria. Finally, the Girondins, with their attempt to

impeach the popular (and radical) Marat, had shown themselves destructive of national unity and therefore conspirators with France's enemies. Once France effectively won the war in June 1794, there was no longer any compelling justification for the terror. As you will see in Chapter 8, victory in the war led to the a moderate period in the revolution – Thermidor.

ECONOMIC TERROR: THE *ENRAGÉS* AND THE RIGHT TO A LIVING

The spring and summer of 1793 brought a succession of alarms – the uprising in the Vendée from March in response to the *levée en masse*, the expulsion of the Girondins from the Convention at the end of May, the Federalist Revolt and subsequent reprisals of the representatives-on-mission from June, along with the assassination of Marat in July and, not least, the ongoing British naval blockade and foreign war. Against this background were the continued and unresolved economic problems of brutal price rises on basic commodities, caused (it was widely believed) by hoarders and speculators, and the plunging value of the assignat. By mid-August it had fallen to only twenty-two per cent of its face value and drought had reduced the grain supply to Paris by three-quarters.²⁷



Jacques Roux.

Throughout 1793, the group advocating the 'right to subsistence' (the right to earn a living), as articulated in the Constitution of June 1793, was not the Jacobins, but the *Enragés*, a loosely connected group of orators and politicians. Jacques Roux, the 'Red Priest,' became the spokesman for this group. Roux had been horrified by the suffering he saw in his parish during the winter of 1793, where poor market porters, water-carriers and unemployed building labourers attempted to survive in frozen hunger in overcrowded tenements and garrets. Roux's political message was simple: the revolution had been exploited by profiteers for their own selfish ends until the people were once again as famished as ever they had been under the old regime. Roux declared war on economic traitors. Hoarders and speculators should be punished by death, and if the government refused to institute these penalties, then the people should launch a new round of massacres against these 'blood

suckers.' The government should also fulfil its obligations to provide both work and subsistence at affordable prices.²⁸

The *Enragés* had agitated for violence during the food riots of 23–25 February. The popular movement had championed Marat and called for the expulsion of the Girondins over the issue of price control. Roux startled the Convention by

²⁷ George Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 125.

²⁸ Schama, *Citizens*, 710–1.

appearing on the evening of 25 July to read an address adopted by two of the more radical Sections and the Cordeliers Club. ‘Legislators,’ he shouted at them, ‘you have done nothing for the happiness of the people. For four years only the rich have profited from the revolution ... Under the old regime it would never have been permitted for basic commodities to have been sold at three times their value!’²⁹ Simon Schama points out that Roux had hit upon an ‘essential truth.’ The revolution had brought no practical benefits to the people whose active support in the days of 1789 had allowed it to succeed. These people, *le menu peuple*,³⁰ were not interested in the economic liberalism or individualism of the bourgeois Girondins and Jacobins. Much of their anger was a reaction against the unpredictable operation of the ‘free’ market. They still held the traditional mindset which saw in price rises and shortages a ‘famine plot.’ They wanted a more interventionist government policy to control the prices of essential goods. J.M. Thompson has called this the ‘first clear-cut class-issue since ‘89 ... While lack of food was nothing new in Paris, the revolution had given Parisians a new spirit to resent it, and to insist upon a remedy for it. For the first time the revolutionaries of the street-corner seriously challenged the revolutionaries of the assembly.’³¹ As 1793 progressed, the *Enragé* program – the death penalty for hoarders and speculators, and maximum prices and forced acceptance of the assignat – became widely accepted at the Cordeliers Club and in the Revolutionary Commune.



DOCUMENTARY ON
THE TERROR

THE HÔTEL DE VILLE UPRISING

The revolutionary *journée* of 4–5 September 1793 began with a crowd, incited by Roux, gathering before the Hôtel de Ville on 4 September to demand bread and higher wages. Here, members of the Revolutionary Commune, Hébert and Chaumette, proposed that the crowd should march on the Convention the following day to demand the immediate mobilisation of a revolutionary army to go out into the countryside to discover the evil hoarders and impound the food for delivery to Paris. Hébert suggested that each battalion should be accompanied by a mobile guillotine. Yet, when this program was carried out on 5 September, the proceedings were not dominated by the economic demands of the *Enragés* but by the disastrous news of the capitulation of the Port of Toulon to the British. In the atmosphere of patriotic emergency and the rhetoric which ensued, the questions of prices and supplies, though they had been the primary causes of the agitation on 4 September, were once again conveniently forgotten. The issue of price control was not addressed until 29 September, when the Convention finally yielded to popular pressure to pass the Law of the General Maximum which put a price limit on a large range of goods and services, including labour.³²

TERROR BECOMES ‘THE ORDER OF THE DAY’

Other important decisions were taken in the National Convention on 5 September 1793, which, although they seemed to empower popular democracy, in reality were designed to curtail it. Against the crisis of the fall of Toulon, Danton was quick to propose that ‘Terror [be] the order of the day.’ Further, the Convention immediately authorised the formation of a civilian *armée*

29 Schama, *Citizens*, 754.

30 The *menu peuple* were the poorest of casual urban workers: flower-sellers, street-cleaners, nightsoil men and so on. By 1793 the *menu peuple* had been absorbed into the *sans-culottes*, but many of the *sans-culottes* were quite well off as they owned small businesses.

31 J.M. Thompson, *The French Revolution* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964), 441.

32 Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution*, 126–7.

révolutionnaire to operate in the Paris region, an area extending over twenty-five departments. But instead of the 30 000 men demanded by the Commune, the Convention agreed to a force of only 6000 infantrymen and 1200 cavalry. The Jacobins saw this measure as a means of exporting some of the troublesome militants to the countryside and also addressing the crucial issue of food supplies. In addition to the official Parisian *armée*, another fifty-six unauthorised provincial *armées* were set up between September and December 1793, covering about two-thirds of the eighty-three departments. Their role was to ensure the free movement of food supplies into Paris and other large provincial cities and to round up counter-revolutionaries – deserters, hoarders, refractory priests, political suspects and royalists. In their mission to mobilise the nation's resources for the war effort by impounding church silver and bells, these armies became fervent warriors in the de-Christianisation campaign of Hébert, defacing and otherwise damaging many of France's most beautiful churches. The provincial *armées révolutionnaires* were disbanded by the Law of Frimaire (4 December 1793), because the Committee of Public Safety was anxious to break the anarchy created by these armies and the opposition to the revolution they engendered with their heavy-handed methods against the peasants during forced grain requisitioning.

DOCUMENT

DANTON'S ADDRESS TO THE NATIONAL CONVENTION, 5 SEPTEMBER 1793

... You have just proclaimed to all of France that it is still in a real and active state of revolution. Well, this revolution must be [fully realised]. You must never fear movements that could tempt counter-revolutionaries in Paris, who would no doubt like to extinguish the flame of liberty where it burns the brightest. But the immense number of true patriots, of *sans-culottes* who have crushed their enemies a hundred times, still exists [and are] ready to take action. We only need to know how to lead them, and once again they will confound and foil all conspiracies. It is not enough to have a revolutionary army; you must be revolutionary yourselves. Remember that industrious men who live by the sweat of their brow cannot attend the sections and that it is only when the true patriots are absent that scheming can take over the section meetings. Therefore decree that two large section-meetings be held each week, and that the man of the People who attends these political assemblies will receive just [payment] for the time spent away from his work.

It is also good that you proclaim to all our enemies that we are determined to be continually and completely prepared for them ... Let it be the republic that puts a gun into the hands of the citizen, the true patriot, and let the republic say to him, 'The country entrusts this weapon to you for its defense ...' Let a gun be our most sacred object ... Let each of us lose our life rather than our gun.³³

ACTIVITY SOURCE ANALYSIS

Examine Danton's address to the National Convention and complete the tasks below.

1. Describe Danton's point of view on what steps the National Convention should take, citing examples from the source.
2. Explain what problems Danton believed would be solved by paying people to attend Section meetings.
3. Using the source and your own knowledge, explain why some groups believed that terror was necessary following the revolution.
4. Evaluate the significance of the Terror in the lives of a range of French people in 1793–94. In your response, refer to the source and to other views of the revolution.

Next, in a move seemingly designed to promote popular involvement in the activities of the Sections, Danton proposed ending the ‘permanence’ of the sectional assemblies, instead limiting their meetings to twice a week, when *sans-culottes* would be paid forty sous a day for attendance, to replace lost earnings. On the face of it, this appeared to be government subsidisation of the participation of the common people in politics. However, the Jacobins were keen to break the influence of the Section leaders, usually small professionals, tradesmen, petty intellectuals and journalists. Poorer wage-earners, they reasoned, would be more easily controlled by the Commune, in alliance with the Jacobins in the Convention. Simon Schama has argued that 5 September, ‘far from being the high-water mark of popular democracy, was the beginning of the end of revolutionary insurrection in Paris.’ The Jacobins were manipulating the language and tactics of the popular movement in order to reinforce state power.³⁴

THE LAW OF SUSPECTS

The major structures of the Terror had already been set in place between August 1792 and June 1793, in order to deal with the war, the Vendée Rebellion and the Federalist Revolt. These were the Committees of Public Safety and General Security, the Revolutionary Tribunal, the Watch Committees and the representatives-on-mission. However, these emergency structures needed to be supported by laws to identify and condemn traitors to the Republic. The first significant piece of legislation was the Law of Suspects (17 September 1793). Under this law, all suspected persons were to be placed in custody. The law stated that suspects were:

- 1 Those who by their conduct, associations, talk or writing have shown themselves to be supporters of tyranny [‘royal despotism’] or federalism and enemies of liberty;
- 2 Those who are unable to justify their means of existence and the performance of their civic duties [e.g. shopkeepers who hoarded goods, speculators and profiteers, those who did not zealously carry out their National Guard or military duties];
- 3 Those who have been refused certificates of revolutionary patriotism;
- 4 Public officials who have been suspended or dismissed from their positions by the National Convention;
- 5 Former nobles, as well as any of their relatives still within France, who have not steadfastly shown their devotion to the revolution;
- 6 Those who have emigrated as a result of the revolution.³⁵

Local Watch Committees were to make up lists of suspected people, arrest them and confiscate their papers. These lists were then passed on to the Committee of General Security, along with the reasons for their arrest. The prisoners were then transferred to national gaols to await trial and sentencing. In this way, people who were ‘suspect’ could be held in prison without having committed any crime.

This legislation was followed by the Decree on Revolutionary Government (10 October 1793) which declared that ‘The provisional government of France is revolutionary [dictatorial] until the peace.’³⁶ The Decree suspended the 1793

DID YOU KNOW?

The ‘Popular Commission’ at the town of Orange was set up personally by Robespierre. There were to be five judges, but no jury to hear cases. No written presentation of cases was considered necessary. There was only one charge, that of being ‘an enemy of the revolution’ and death was the only penalty. From June to August 1794, 432 people were found guilty.

33 *Reimpression de l'ancien Moniteur*, 32 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1858D63), 17:580D83, 586, 591.

34 Schama, *Citizens*, 759.

35 John Hall Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1951), 477.

36 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 480.

DID YOU KNOW?

The 'Affair of the Carnation' was an attempt to rescue Marie Antoinette from prison. In August 1793, royalists visited the former queen in her cell and dropped a carnation which contained a message to prepare for imminent rescue. Marie wrote back, using a pin on a piece of paper, 'I trust in you. I will come.' The message was intercepted by the guard and Marie was put under twenty-four-hour surveillance, foiling the escape attempt.

Constitution and placed all other government organisations under the control of the Committee of Public Safety: the Executive Committee, the ministers of the government, the generals commanding the army, and all government bodies. Thus, laws on security initiated by the Convention had to be authorised by the Committee of Public Safety and all laws had to be brought into effect immediately in all districts. Furthermore, the Revolutionary Army was to be used to suppress counter-revolution and a garrison would be placed in all cities to deal with counter-revolutionary movements. On the economic side, the Decree stated that the Committee of Public Safety would produce tables estimating the production of grain in each district and, similarly, the needs of the district would be estimated. Grain would then be requisitioned by the Revolutionary Army to meet these needs. This law therefore made the 'Great Committees' more powerful than the democratically elected National Convention, giving absolute control to the Committee of Public Safety and the other institutions of the Terror.

Although the Convention retained the power to dissolve the Committees, John Hall Stewart has seen this law as fundamentally changing the nature of government in France:

The government which functioned under the terms of this declaration was an emergency government, a revolutionary government, but not strictly speaking a constitutional government ... and it claimed the right to use Terror against its enemies. The agencies through which it functioned were the Committee of Public Safety, the Committee of General Security, the Convention, the Revolutionary Tribunal, the Deputies on Mission and the Watch Committees.³⁷

The provisions of the Decree on Revolutionary Government were to be incorporated into the Law of 14 Frimaire (4 December 1793), the so-called 'Constitution of the Terror.'³⁸

ACTIVITY

COMPROMISED IDEALS

1. Explain how the Law of Suspects broadened the scope of the Terror and why it constituted a compromise of revolutionary ideals.
2. Identify two or more changes brought about by the Decree on Revolutionary Government.

THE EXECUTION OF MARIE ANTOINETTE

On 1 August 1793, the widowed Marie Antoinette was removed from the Temple prison to the Conciergerie, the 'waiting room' for the guillotine.

The pretty, frivolous and high-spirited Austrian princess who had scandalised France with her spending was now, at only thirty-eight years of age, a grey-haired and grieving woman. Her son, the former heir to the throne of France, had been taken from her to be abused at will by his guards; her husband was dead; her close friend, the Princesse de Lamballe, had been horribly murdered during the September Massacres; her own death was imminent. Yet she was still seen as a potential escapee and closely guarded in case of counter-revolutionary plots to release her. The move to the Conciergerie therefore caused great anxiety amongst

³⁷ Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*.

³⁸ Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 481.

her warders and the prison authorities, as this extract from Rosalie Lamorlière, servant to the wife of the gaoler (Richard) demonstrates:

The queen removed her nightcap, took a chair and said to me pleasantly, 'Rosalie, I want you to do my chignon [hair coil] for me today.' Hearing these words, the jailer ran forward, seized the comb and, pushing me aside, said in a loud voice: 'Leave it alone, leave it alone, that is my business'. The queen, greatly surprised, looked at Lebeau with an air of supreme majesty and said, 'I thank you, no.'³⁹

Marie Antoinette then gave Rosalie a ribbon, which was immediately taken by the gaoler, who said,

I am very, very sorry to have annoyed that poor woman, but my position is so difficult that the least thing makes me tremble ... For God's sake, Rosalie, do nothing imprudent or I am a lost man.⁴⁰

Rosalie Lamorlière recalled that the queen was given little privacy:

She was liable to receive unexpected visits in her cell at any hour of the day or night. The architects and prison administrators kept coming to make sure that the iron bars and walls were perfectly secure. I could see they were perpetually on edge, and heard them asking each other: 'Could she not escape this way? Or this?' They allowed neither us nor themselves a single moment of relaxation.⁴¹

On 15 October 1793, Marie Antoinette was sent to trial, accused of conspiring with foreign powers and with the enemies of the people within France. The trial lasted around twenty hours, beginning at eight o'clock in the morning and going until four o'clock the following morning. Marie Antoinette was found guilty. The verdict delivered, she was returned to the Conciergerie, then carried by common cart to her execution. Throughout the ordeal she remained calm. At half-past-twelve, her severed head was exhibited to the crowd.

THE DE-CHRISTIANISATION CAMPAIGN

The ideology of liberty was one of the strongest forces propelling the Terror. In the first place, it emphasised the love of the *Patrie* and the embracing of revolutionary *vertu*, in which the individual gave up his personal freedom to the general will, acting at all times in the interests of the state. In its other manifestation, the state attempted to impose liberty through 'de-Christianising' France and replacing the old religious symbols with a new revolutionary iconography. The deputy Thuriot told the Convention that

It is time, since we have arrived at the summit of the principles of a great revolution, to reveal the truth about all types of religions. All religions are but conventions [customs]. Legislators make them to suit the people they govern ... It is the moral order of the Republic, of the Revolution, that we must preach now, that will make us a nation of brothers, a people of *philosophes*.⁴²

In October 1793, a new calendar was issued, dating from the birth of the Republic in September 1792, with three ten-day weeks to the month, twelve months to the year and new names, drawn from the seasons. The old religious holidays were replaced by revolutionary celebrations such as the Fête de la Federation. Liberty was personified in the female figure named 'Marianne,' meaning 'of the people,' who came to substitute the Virgin Mary.⁴³ The



The 'Widow Capet.'

Marie Antoinette in the Conciergerie before her execution.

DID YOU KNOW?

Marie Antoinette's body was buried in an unmarked grave near that of Louis XVI, in the small park on which stands the Chapelle Expiatoire in Rue d'Anjou. A royalist lawyer saw the burial from his window and purchased the plot in 1796. Bones from the plot were exhumed on 18 January 1815 and reburied at the St. Denis Basilica alongside other French monarchs.



CHRISTIANS ON THE DE-CHRISTIANISATION CAMPAIGN

39 Reay Tannahill, *Paris in Revolution: A Collection of Eye-Witness Accounts* (London: The Folio Society, 1996), 88.

40 Tannahill, *Paris in Revolution*.

41 Tannahill, *Paris in Revolution*.

42 Schama, *Citizens*, 776.

43 McPhee, *The French Revolution*, 120.



Revolutionary Armies became the means for attacking the old religious symbols. In the town of Clermont-Ferrand, soldiers invaded the Cathedral and destroyed the statues of the saints:

With vigorous blows they swooped on St. Peter, smashed Saints Paul, Luke and Matthew ... all the angels and the archangel Raphael himself, the winged fowl of the celestial band, the beautiful Mary, who bore three children while remaining a virgin
....⁴⁴

Cemeteries were stripped of their crosses, church doors were smashed, crucifixes were torn from their mounts and paraded for citizens to spit on. Donkeys were led through streets dressed in bishop's robes and effigies (dummies) of the pope were burned. The gold and silver of the Church were melted down. Stained glass windows and altar-pieces were destroyed. The great Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris was rechristened the 'Temple of Reason,' with a young woman in white portraying Liberty, bowing down to the flame representing Reason. In Lyons, a Jacobin, Grandmaison, held up a chalice in parody of the Communion service, proclaiming, 'Verily I say to you, my brothers, this is the blood of kings, the true substance of republican communion, take and drink this precious substance.'⁴⁵

Thus, de-Christianisation borrowed its ceremonies from the religion it sought to abolish. Persecution of non-juring priests continued with new legislation passed on 20 November 1793, following on from the Vendée and Federalist rebellions. The movement was supported by the radical 'Ultras,' led by René Hébert, who were influential in the Paris Commune and the Cordeliers Club.

However, de-Christianisation alienated the general population, which remained Roman Catholic in its fundamental beliefs. Local riots, with citizens shouting 'Long live the Catholic religion! We want our priests! We want mass on Sundays and Holy Days!' demonstrated how deeply the program was resented. Robespierre, recognising this, ended it with the Law of 14 Frimaire and, in March 1794, the arrest and execution of Hébert and his followers.



Jacques-René Hébert.

ACTIVITY

BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

1. What new values and morals did de-Christianisation aim to bring about in French society?
2. To what extent was it risky for the revolutionary government to try to force people to abandon their religious beliefs?
3. What was the idea behind the new Republican calendar, and how did its introduction affect life for a range of people?

THE REVOLUTION DEVOURS ITS OWN CHILDREN: IN-FIGHTING AND EXECUTIONS

Marie Antoinette's death heralded the start of four great waves of executions. On 30 October 1793, the Girondin leaders were tried and found guilty. When the verdict was pronounced, Dufriche-Valazé killed himself in the courtroom, stabbing himself with a knife he had concealed in his clothing. The next day,

44 Schama, *Citizens*, 777.

45 Schama, *Citizens*, 779.

31 October, Brissot, Vergniaud, Boileau, the journalist Gorsas and eighteen other Girondins were guillotined. They celebrated a last fraternal meal in the Conciergerie the night before and sang the *Marseillaise* as they mounted the scaffold to their deaths. Dufriche-Velazé's body was also guillotined, the court not wanting him to escape the fate of his colleagues. They were followed by Bailly and Barnave, the revolutionary heroes of the Estates-General in 1789. Bailly, hated by the *sans-culottes* for his role in the Champ de Mars massacre, died separately via a guillotine erected especially for him.⁴⁶ The former Duc d'Orléans, Philippe Egalité, went to the guillotine on 7 November, followed by Madame Roland on 8 November. Her devoted husband, Jean-Marie Roland, chose to commit suicide on 10 November when he heard of her death. Pétion and Buzot shot themselves. Clavière also committed suicide, as did Condorcet.



The execution of Madame Roland.

DID YOU KNOW?

It took only thirty-six minutes to execute the twenty-two Girondin leaders on 31 October 1793. It was said that the executioner, Sanson, was very pleased with the efficiency of the guillotine.

ETHICAL DIMENSIONS

Discuss whether the Girondins were patriots or traitors. How convincing were the justifications given for their being executed?

ACTIVITY

ANTI-GIRONDIN PROPAGANDA

How did the popular mood become so radical, and so opposed to the Girondins? By mid 1793, the threat of foreign invasion was over, but the counter-revolution in the Vendée and the Federalist Revolt had divided France and intensified fear and suspicion. The Girondins were representatives from the Federalist regions, but they were also associated in many people's minds with the threat of military defeat and opposition to the Jacobin patriots, thus fragmenting the unity of the nation. They were therefore under suspicion as traitors.

Beyond this was economic strain. Alfred Soboul declared that 'Hunger was the bond that held together such varied groups as artisans, shopkeepers, journeymen and day labourers, giving them a common hostility to big merchants,

⁴⁶ Schama, *Citizens*, 253.



entrepreneurs, and hoarders of grain, whether noble or bourgeois.⁴⁷ Thus, he argued, the underlying motive for the crowd's hatred of other classes was 'a demand for daily bread.'⁴⁸ Fear, hunger and hatred of those who had more than they did, an anger fanned by Marat, Hébert and Varlet, propelled the *sans-culottes* into action.

William Doyle saw the conflict between the Girondins and Paris as more personally directed. While he agreed that 'no single motive united all those involved,' he pointed to the rhetoric of the Girondins as provoking the *sans-culottes*:

The *sans-culottes* wanted their enemies silenced at whatever cost. No compromise seemed possible with men who denounced patriotic Parisians as anarchists [and] blood-drinkers, ... and repeatedly invited the provinces to march on the capital and destroy it.⁴⁹

Doyle focused also on the leaders of the popular movement, Marat, Roux and Danton, saying that they had 'no trust in any representative form of government' and thus they could not allow the Girondin deputies to remain within the Convention. However, there was another factor. The Girondins' 'quarrel with Paris' in opposing the ending of the Commission of Twelve in March 1793 endangered the Convention itself.⁵⁰ Thus, the Convention was prepared to sacrifice the Girondin deputies in order to preserve stable government in France and, with it, its own position.⁵¹

David Jordan attributed much of the blame for the Girondins' fate to Robespierre, arguing that 'The deaths of the Girondins might be laid to Robespierre's account, but not exclusively.'⁵² Jordan stated that prior to the trial of the Girondins, Robespierre had had no personal role in the Terror. Yet, with the Girondin leaders, he personally intervened. He called for their trial to be shortened, stating,

Citizens, written proofs are weakest of all; it is the history of the Revolution that condemns them; it is public opinion that has struck down the conspirators we are about to decree accused.⁵³

Robespierre also argued that the trial be stopped as soon as the jury declared that they were ready to give a verdict, a gross injustice even if the trial itself had been a fair and balanced hearing, which it was not.

Simon Schama, however, identified the execution of the Girondins with the nature of the revolution itself:

The French Revolution had, from 1788 onward, been made possible by force of arms, by violence and riot. At each stage of its progress, those who had profited from its force sought to disarm those who had put them in power. At each successive stage, they became, in turn, prisoners rather than beneficiaries. This would continue so long as the people of Paris were allowed to pursue their chaotic resort to arms.⁵⁴

The imprisonment and death of the Girondins sealed the triumph of the Montagnards and their close ally, the Commune of Paris. Paris itself returned to peace and order and the Convention concentrated on its legislative program.

ACTIVITY

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Evaluate Simon Schama's argument (above) that the fall of the Girondins was entirely in keeping with the nature of the revolution. By October 1793, how had the 'force of arms' become the key player in the revolution?

47 Albert Soboul, *A Short History of the French Revolution* (University of California Press, 1997), 98.

48 Soboul, *A Short History of the French Revolution*, 98.

49 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 481.

50 The Commission of Twelve (21 May–2 June 1793) had been formed by the National Convention and was largely made up of Girondins. It sought to break the power of the Revolutionary Commune and the Sections of Paris.

51 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 238.

52 David Jordan, *The Revolutionary Career of Maximilien Robespierre* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), 182.

53 Cited in Jordan, *The Revolutionary Career of Maximilien Robespierre*, 182.

54 Schama, *Citizens*, 725.

ROBESPIERRE: DEMOCRAT OR TYRANT?

It was said of Maximilien Robespierre (1758–1794) in 1794 that, ‘There are two Robespierres, the one a genuine patriot and a man of principle, up to 31 May [1793] and since then, the man of ambition, the tyrant and deepest of villains.’⁵⁵ How could Robespierre be both democrat and tyrant, both ‘incorruptible’ and the ‘deepest of villains’?

In 1789, when he was elected at the age of twenty-nine to the Estates-General as deputy for the Third Estate of Arras, Robespierre was simply a provincial lawyer. He could not stand for the Legislative Assembly because of his own ‘Self-Denying Ordinance,’ but, by 1792, he had emerged as the leader of the popular cause and the political hero of the *sans-culottes*. He was the dominant figure in the Jacobin Club and was elected to the National Convention.

In July 1793, Robespierre became the most influential figure in the Committee of Public Safety, but by July 1794 he was so widely feared that both the people and the deputies of the National Convention turned against him. After a failed attempt at suicide, Robespierre was guillotined on 28 July 1794. He is buried in an unmarked grave and only one monument to him exists in Paris, a statue erected in 1949 at Saint-Denis, bearing the inscription ‘To Maximilien Robespierre: The Incorruptible.’

Robespierre the revolutionary

As David Jordan notes, Robespierre was not a key participant in the critical days of the revolution:

At no time was he able to present the kind of revolutionary credentials – attacked the Bastille, marched with the women to Versailles, petitioned in the Champ de Mars, attacked the Tuileries, purged the Convention – that many a street radical offered and demanded as a certificate of patriotism.⁵⁶

Early accounts of the revolution ring with the names of others: Lafayette, Mirabeau, Bailly, Barnave, then Brissot, Vergniaud, Danton. Robespierre’s presence,

according to Jordan, was recorded at only two events, suggesting that he was unimportant compared to others and formed only part of the crowd of deputies. In 1791, Jacques-Louis David placed Robespierre prominently in his painting *The Oath of the Tennis Court*, but in 1789 Robespierre was only a humble Third Estate deputy. He was noted as being at the Festival of the Supreme Being on 8 June 1794 and again on 26 July 1794.

Robespierre never wore the revolutionary *bonnet rouge*, but continued with the powdered wig and neat clothing of a lawyer of the pre-revolutionary period. It was his fierce patriotism, his egalitarianism expressed through speeches and pamphlets, that made him the idol of the *sans-culottes* and the leading revolutionary figure of the latter part of the revolution.

Robespierre and the Enlightenment

Robespierre was an ardent admirer of Rousseau, and his speech of May 1793 echoes many of Rousseau’s ideas:

Man is born for happiness and for liberty, and everywhere he is a slave and unhappy. The purpose of government is the conservation of his rights and the perfection of his being, and everywhere society degrades and oppresses him ... The ills of society never come from the people, but from the government ... Government is established to make the general will respected; but the men who govern have individual wills and seek to dominate.⁵⁷



Anonymous portrait of Robespierre, c. 1790. Musée Carnavalet, Paris.

The principle of *vertu*

It was also from Rousseau that Robespierre drew his deep belief in *vertu* or civic morality. *Vertu* meant active citizenship, whereby actions were governed by an awareness of public interest rather than individual desire. Thus, a new moral order was part of citizenship of the new French nation. In 1789, prior to the Estates-General, Robespierre wrote an open speech addressed to Louis XVI:

The glory of winning for us the treasures of plenty, of adorning your reign with all the sparkle and pleasure of luxury ... are not the most important part of the mission entrusted to you by heaven and your own soul. [It is] to lead men to happiness by *vertu* and to *vertu* by legislation founded on the principles of universal morality.⁵⁸

Similarly, in 1794, Robespierre directed citizens thus:

All that tends to excite a love of country, to purify manners, to exalt the mind, to direct the passions of the heart toward the public good, you should adopt and establish⁵⁹

'The people are never wrong'

Robespierre consistently argued for democratic government, based on the belief that the common people, as Rousseau had claimed, were the most oppressed, but the least corrupted by modern civilisation and therefore 'nearest to nature and less depraved.'⁶⁰

One of Robespierre's earliest interventions on the people's behalf was on 28 June 1790, when Camille Desmoulins presented a petition to the National Assembly in the name of the Bastille workers, which he claimed had been approved by Robespierre. It demanded subsistence (daily needs) as a citizen's right and suggested that workshops be maintained from a portion of the profits from sales of the seized Church lands.⁶¹

In a 1791 speech to the Jacobin Club, Robespierre defended the right of all male citizens to vote, saying, 'There is nothing so just or good as the people, whenever they are not stirred up by the excesses of oppression.'⁶² In August 1792, he demanded that the Legislative Assembly be replaced by a National Convention, urging the

Jacobins to go to the Paris Sections in order to 'make sure the National Assembly ... [admits] all citizens without distinction.'⁶³ In December 1792, he said that the people are 'always guided by a purity of intention,'⁶⁴ and, in February 1793, he said, 'I have maintained in the midst of persecutions and without support, that the people are never wrong.'⁶⁵

Robespierre on the Terror

For Robespierre, the Terror had a higher purpose than ridding France of traitors. It was the means of creating a new society: the Republic of Virtue. Terror separated the citizen of *vertu* from the counter-revolutionary traitors. 'Revolution,' said Robespierre in December 1793, 'is the war of liberty against its enemies ... The revolutionary government needs an extraordinary activity precisely because it is at war.'⁶⁶ The Terror was 'the law of self-preservation,'⁶⁷ which symbolically acted for the people, replacing the *journalées*, which had become too savage and bloody.

Was there a contradiction between democracy and terror? No, said Robespierre:

[The sword] that glistens in the hands of the heroes of liberty resembles the sword with which the satellites of tyranny are armed. ... Conquer by Terror the enemies of liberty and you will be right as founders of the republic.⁶⁸

In May 1793, Robespierre identified the enemies of the republic as 'those corrupt men who prefer their own interest to the general interest.'⁶⁹

By 1792, Robespierre had divided the population into two opposites: the citizens of *vertu* who fully supported the republic, National Convention, Great Committees and the Terror; and the rest of the population, who were unsupportive or critical of the ruling group, the latter being the Girondins, rebels in the Vendée and *Fédéré* cities, Danton and the 'Indulgents,' and Roux and the '*Enragés*'.

In October 1793, the Constitution was suspended and the Declaration of Revolutionary Government declared that 'The Provisional Government is revolutionary until the peace.'⁷⁰ This gave immense power to the Committee of Public Safety, the Revolutionary Tribunal, the Watch Committees and the representatives-on-mission. Terror of both a political and economic nature

was applied, with the most extreme law, the Law of 22 Prairial, identifying the ‘enemies of the people’ and allowing ‘every kind of evidence ... material or moral, oral or written’⁷¹ to be used against them, with the sole penalty being death.

This dreadful law is said to have been the main cause of Robespierre’s downfall, because it threatened even the deputies themselves. By July 1794, Robespierre seemed to symbolise all of the threats the Terror presented, while the danger of war which brought the Terror into being had faded.

On July 26 1794, Robespierre addressed the Convention for the last time, but the deputies united to arrest him. A suicide attempt failed, leaving him in dreadful pain with a shattered jaw. He was executed on 28 July 1794.

See activity on assessing Robespierre at end of chapter.

- 55 Gracchus Babeuf, cited in Norman Hampson, *The Life and Opinions of Maximilien Robespierre* (Duckworth, 1794), viii.
- 56 Jordan, *The Revolutionary Career of Maximilien Robespierre*, 7.
- 57 Mark Fielding and Margot Morecombe, *The Spirit of Change: France in Revolution* (Sydney: McGraw-Hill, 1999), 65.
- 58 Cited in Hampson, *The Life and Opinions of Maximilien Robespierre*, 81.
- 59 Maximilian Robespierre, ‘On the Principles of Public Morality’ (February 1794).
- 60 R.B. Rose, *Tribunes and Amazons* (NSW: Macleay Press), 211.
- 61 George Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution*, 83.
- 62 Rose, *Tribunes and Amazons*, 211.
- 63 Rose, *Tribunes and Amazons*, 219.
- 64 Rose, *Tribunes and Amazons*, 211.
- 65 Rose, *Tribunes and Amazons*.
- 66 Dwyer and McPhee, *The French Revolution and Napoleon*, 105.
- 67 Robespierre, ‘On the Principles of Public Morality.’
- 68 Robespierre, ‘On the Principles of Public Morality.’
- 69 Rose, *Tribunes and Amazons*, 212.
- 70 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 480.
- 71 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 528–9.

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE TERROR: THE LAW OF FRIMAIRE



ROBESPIERRE
ARCHIVE

The Law of Frimaire (5 December 1793) has been called the ‘Constitution of the Terror’⁷² because it consolidated the Terror in a legal sense. The means by which laws should be applied, the time allowed for applying new laws and the way in which they were made public were brought into a single document. The Law of Frimaire clearly outlined the relationship between the Convention and the Committees of General Security and Public Safety, as well as the powers of ministers, the Revolutionary Tribunal and Watch Committees in each district.

While the National Convention was identified as ‘the sole motive centre of government,’⁷³ the two ‘Great Committees’ received full executive powers. Following from the Decree on Revolutionary Government (10 October), the Committee of General Security was made responsible for police and internal security, the operation of the Revolutionary Tribunal and the local Watch Committees. The Committee of Public Safety controlled the ministers, appointed the generals, conducted foreign policy and had extensive powers over local government. At the same time, the powers of departments and communes, including the Paris Commune, were limited to routine matters of administration. Power was consolidated in Paris and, in practice, into the hands of Maximilien Robespierre and his colleagues on the two Committees.

Simon Schama has disputed the idea that the Law of Frimaire was a ‘constitution’ designed to entrench the practices of the Terror, claiming instead that it was ‘aimed *against* all those who had exacted the most brutal retribution in the name of republican orthodoxy’ and intended, therefore to end ‘the anarchic process by which zealots could take the law into their own hands.’⁷⁴

72 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 481.

73 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 482.

74 Schama, *Citizens*, 813.



The Law of Frimaire applied severe penalties for officials who failed in their duty to the state, who were negligent in their duties or who were excessive in applying laws. The tone of the document shows the determination of those who wrote it that there would be public accountability for infringements:

Every infraction of the law, ... every abuse of public authority ... shall be punished with five years' imprisonment and confiscation of one-half of the property of the condemned person; and for those not salaried, ... the penalty shall be deprivation of the rights of citizenship for six years and the confiscation of one-fourth of their incomes during the same time.⁷⁵

This was particularly directed towards the representatives-on-mission, so that they could no longer take action against citizens without the specific authority of the Committee of Public Safety. It thus recognised the excesses of the Terror in the Vendée and Federalist uprisings. Doyle has supported Schama's view that Frimaire was intended to restrain the Terror, rather than entrench it, in that Frimaire 'heralded the end of the anarchic Terror ... the end of the depredations of the Revolutionary Armies, now reduced to a single force ... and, by implication, of de-Christianisation.'⁷⁶ The Terror would now be 'orderly' and contained, rather than spontaneously brutal, controlled by a strong central government and this, in turn, aroused protests from the radical Hébert and his 'ultra-revolutionaries' within the Cordeliers Club, the Paris Commune and the Sections. On the other side, Frimaire was also rejected by Danton and his 'Indulgents,' who wanted to bring a complete end to the Terror.

The law may have marked the end of anarchy and severely curtailed the power of the *sans-culottes* movement, but, as Duncan Townson has pointed out, 'It also marked the complete reversal of the principles of 1789 ... and many of the characteristics of the *ancien régime* reappeared.'⁷⁷ Gone were the provisions of the 1791 and 1793 Constitutions which had established decentralisation, elections to all positions, the separation of the legislative from the executive power and non-political justice. Robespierre justified the measures, claiming, 'We must organise the despotism of liberty to crush the despotism of kings,' but the measures were contrary to the democratic rights he had advocated while out of office.⁷⁸

ACTIVITY

COMPROMISED IDEALS

Discuss Duncan Townson's view (above) that the Law of Frimaire marked 'the complete reversal of the principles of 1789.' To what extent do you agree?

75 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 490.

76 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 263–4.

77 Duncan Townson, *France in Revolution* (Access to History), first edition (Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), 86.

78 Dylan Rees and Duncan Townson, *France in Revolution* (Access to History), second edition (Hodder & Stoughton, 2001), 89.

THE END OF THE HÉBERTISTS

Jacques-René Hébert and his followers were the political force behind the de-Christianisation movement and the pressure to introduce a Maximum (law to regulate maximum prices on specified foods and to regulate wages). Now they called for the Terror to continue and expand. Hébert's call for a *journée* on 5–6 September 1793, in order to place pressure on the National Convention and

force it to obey the ‘general will’ of the people, placed him in direct conflict with Robespierre’s desire for the centralising of power in the hands of the state. Although the *journée* forced the Convention finally to introduce a state-controlled economy, passing the Law of the Maximum on 29 September 1793, such challenges to the government invited retaliation.

Factionalism, including attempts by the *sans-culottes* to bully the deputies, was no longer permissible. The ‘general will’ of the people had to be replaced by the ‘single will’ of the state. Moreover, Robespierre was determined to end the religious terror of the de-Christianisation campaign and in this he was supported by the Dantonists.

The Hébertists were accused of being involved in a ‘foreign plot,’ largely as a result of dubious ‘evidence’ given to the Convention by Danton’s associate, Fabre d’Eglantine. This was given some credibility by the fact that two of the Hébertists were foreigners – Cloots was Prussian and Pereira a Portuguese Jew. On 17 December, several Hébertists were arrested and charged with plotting to overthrow the state, although they were soon released.

In February 1794, Hébert called for a ‘holy war’ against an unnamed ‘oppressive faction’ which he said was worse than Brissot’s. In the Cordeliers Club, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen was covered with a black cloth to symbolise the death of public liberty and the rights of the people.⁷⁹ Finally, on 4 February, Hébert called for another popular uprising, but this time the *sans-culottes* did not respond. Nor would Robespierre permit the resurgence of popular agitation. In one of his most important speeches made to the Convention, on 5 February 1794, Robespierre outlined his views on the relationship of citizenship to the state:

What is the end to which we are striving? The peaceful enjoyment of liberty and equality; the reign of that eternal justice whose laws are engraved, not on marble and on stone, but on the heart of all men ... What sort of government can realise these prodigies? Only democratic or republican government ... Democracy is a state where the sovereign people, guided by laws which are its own work, does by itself what it can do well, and by delegates what it cannot do well. ... What then is the fundamental principle of democratic or popular government ...? It is virtue ... which is nothing other than love of the land of your birth and its laws ... This sublime sentiment supposes a preference for public interests above all particular interests ... In the system of the French Revolution, what is immoral is impolitic and what corrupts is counter-revolutionary. Weakness, vices and prejudices are the high road to monarchy.⁸⁰

The last sentences were a warning. On 13 March 1794, under Robespierre’s influence, the Convention passed the Decree on Conspiracies and Hébert and his followers were placed under arrest. They were charged with planning a military coup, plotting against the security of the state and of being covert royalists.

On 24 March 1794, Hébert, Vincent, Momoro and General Ronsin were guillotined, followed in June and July 1794 by fourteen other members of Hébert’s *ultra*-revolutionary faction and by their opponents, the *citra*-revolutionaries, conservatives who were opposed to the policies of the Committee of Public Safety. In this way, the Committee of Public Safety was able to eliminate the critics who felt that the revolution had not gone far enough and those who felt it had become too radical. However, the government also lost the support of the *sans-culottes* and this was to contribute to Robespierre’s downfall.

DID YOU KNOW?

It was Hébert who, on the day of Marie Antoinette’s trial, accused her of committing incest with her own son when he was seven years old.

79 D.M.G. Sutherland, *France 1789–1815: Revolution and Counter-Revolution* (London: Fontana Press, 1989), 234.

80 Cited in Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 272–3.

CALLS FOR MODERATION: DANTON AND THE ‘INDULGENTS’



Georges Danton.

If Robespierre would not tolerate Hébert’s attempt to instigate popular agitation against the government, nor would he accept the calls of Danton’s so-called Indulgents for moderation. Danton wanted to bring an end to the Terror and restore government under the Constitution of 1793, to reinstate the independence of local authorities, remove government controls over the economy, and negotiate peace with the First Coalition. He argued that it was now time to be ‘sparing of human blood,’ tolerant in terms of religion, and to allow people to go back to their normal lives. In an attack on the excesses of the Hébertists, he said,

The people are sick to death of them ... Perhaps the Terror once served a useful purpose, but it should not hurt innocent people. No one wants to see a person treated as a criminal, just because he happens not to have enough enthusiasm.⁸¹

Danton’s campaign coincided with the fall of Lyons, the defeat of the Vendéan army at Granville and victories against the First Coalition on the frontier. Thus, his call fell on sympathetic ears: the Convention established the Commission of Clemency to examine the lists of those suspects held in the prisons. Yet, although internal and external threats were less intense, Robespierre’s goal was now the achievement of the Republic of Virtue.

The Dantonists challenged both the Hébertists and the Committee of Public Safety. Desmoulins’ journal *Le Vieux Cordelier* campaigned for greater clemency from the government and the release of suspects. In November and December 1793, Dantonists mounted attacks on the Committees and generals. The *Vieux Cordelier* criticised Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety:

You want to remove all your enemies by means of the guillotine! Has there ever been greater folly? Can you make a single man perish on the scaffold, without making ten enemies for yourself from his family or his friends? ... I think quite differently from those who tell you that Terror must remain the order of the day.⁸²

Robespierre was, at first, reluctant to move against the Indulgents: Danton was a hugely popular and powerful figure and Desmoulins was an old school-friend. Efforts to resolve the tension failed, even after personal meetings between Robespierre and Danton. Increasingly, Robespierre became convinced that Danton’s support for the destruction of the Hébertists was part of a wider plot to discredit the government and lose it the support of the people. As Danton’s bid to end the Terror attracted more adherents, Robespierre’s own position and those of the other members of the Committee of Public Safety were endangered. Corruption charges against two Dantonists, d’Eglantine and Chabot, provided the excuse for bringing the Indulgents to trial.

On 26 March 1794, two days after the execution of the Hébertists, Danton and his followers were arrested. In spite of Danton’s demolition of the charges against them, the verdict had been decided in advance: ‘The court knows Danton,’ Robespierre said. ‘Tomorrow he hopes to sleep in the bosom of glory. He had never asked for pardon and you will see him go to the scaffold with a clear conscience.’⁸³ On 5 April, Danton, Desmoulins and sixteen others were guillotined. Danton met his death with his usual theatricality; he said to the executioner, ‘Don’t forget to show my head to the people, it’s worth it.’⁸⁴

81 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 235.

82 John Hardman, ed., *French Revolution Documents*, Vol. 2 (Oxford, 1893), 127–8.

83 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 241.

84 Tannahill, *Paris in Revolution*, 95.

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE TERROR



The Committee of Year II, engraving, ca.1794–95.

Two prints from 1794–95 portray the Terror in a particularly grim manner.

In *The Committee of Year II*, a revolutionary Watch Committee of patriotic citizens from a Section is comprised of unsympathetic, even malevolent, men wearing liberty bonnets and reading certificates of good conduct and civic virtue. An elderly man, a suspect, is instructed to place his certificate upon the pile. Justice seems doubtful.⁸⁵

See picture below.



The Interior of a Revolutionary Committee under the Reign of Terror, engraving by Fragonard and Berthault, 1794–95.

In this representation, a large committee regards with hostility the woman entering on the left with her child, certificate in hand. Another man is in the process of presenting his certificate for scrutiny.

Wine is being consumed liberally and there is little sense of order or consistency in the room, while the patriotic salute of David's *Oath of the Tennis Court* has turned into a jeering gesture of accusation.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Emmet Kennedy, *A Cultural History of the French Revolution* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 268–9.

⁸⁶ Emmet Kennedy, *A Cultural History of the French Revolution*, 268–9.

A week later, Lucile Duplessis was sent to the guillotine as an accomplice of her husband, Desmoulins. Her mother wrote a bitter letter to Robespierre:

It is not enough for you to have murdered your best friend. You must have his wife's blood as well ... In less than two hours she will be dead ... If Camille's blood has not driven you mad, if you can still remember the happy hours you once spent before our fire holding our little Horace, spare an innocent victim.⁸⁷

Danton's death moved the Terror one step further, and Robespierre's determination to create a 'virtuous' state grew stronger. As François Furet has explained, the purges of the Hébertists and Dantonists effectively reduced revolutionary Paris to silence and reinforced the absolute dictatorship of the Committee of Public Safety. The Revolutionary Commune of Paris now obeyed the Committee of Public Safety. The societies and clubs said nothing, or simply disappeared. With its acceptance of the purges of the nation's representatives, the Convention itself became a prisoner of the Terror. It, too, obeyed the Committee of Public Safety, whose members it elected and re-elected. Thus, as Saint-Just would remark, 'The Revolution is frozen.'

⁸⁷ Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 245.

DID YOU KNOW?

Robespierre and Desmoulins were educated at the same school, the famous *Lycée Louis-le-Grand* in the Latin Quarter of Paris. They became best friends and, later, ardent opponents of the old regime. Robespierre was the witness when Desmoulins married Lucile Duplessis. Yet, on 4 April 1794, Desmoulins was guillotined along with Danton. Lucile was beheaded a week later.

THE PEAK OF THE TERROR: THE LAW OF 22 PRAIRIAL

The executions of the Hébertists and the Dantonists, and the continuing expansion of the killings, made the Terror seem more and more arbitrary and barbaric, especially as the revolutionary frontier armies won victories against the First Coalition. The war emergency had been the justification for the Terror, but even as the threat of the overthrow of the Republic diminished, Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety widened the definition of 'counter-revolutionary.' The Law of 22 Prairial (10 June 1794), drafted by Couthon and Robespierre, turned alarm into panic, especially as the deputies to the Convention were subject to its provisions:

The following are deemed enemies of the people: those who have instigated the re-establishment of monarchy or have sought to disparage or dissolve the National Convention, ... have disseminated false news, ... have sought to mislead opinion ... [or] to impair the energy and purity of revolutionary and republican principles ... Contractors of bad faith ... [and] squanderers of public fortune ... The penalty provided for all offences ... is death ... The proof needed ... comprises every kind of evidence ... material or moral, oral or written ... the rule of judgements is the conscience of jurors, enlightened by love of the *Patrie* ...⁸⁸

Almost anybody could therefore be accused of crimes against the state and, as the accused were not permitted to have defence counsel to represent them, could not call witnesses or produce evidence in their defence; the penalty of death was almost inevitable. Thus, the number of executions increased: of the 2639 people guillotined in Paris between March 1793 and August 1794, over fifty per cent died in June and July 1794,⁸⁹ many of them aristocrats who had not been accused previously. Historians agree that the Law of the Prairial was the ultimate cause of Robespierre's overthrow.



MORE ON THE CULT OF THE SUPREME BEING

88 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 528–9.

89 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 275.

FEATURE

THE CULT OF THE SUPREME BEING

On 3 May 1794, Robespierre launched an attack on atheists, claiming that those with no belief in a Supreme Being were not just immoral but 'aristocratic.' He proposed a decree that would show the world that France had a new civic religion, which worshipped the immortality of the soul and the existence of a higher being. This was not God, as the old regime had known him, but some creative force which was his equivalent.

To honour this new 'religion,' Robespierre, President of the National Convention, ordered that the people should celebrate the Festival of the Supreme Being throughout France on 8 June.

In Paris, church bells, drums and cannon called people to the Tuileries Palace, where a pyre contained effigies (dummies) representing Atheism, Discord and Selfishness. After a speech, Robespierre lit the pyre. A figure representing the Goddess of Wisdom then rose from the ashes, 'her face so blackened that several spectators could not contain their laughter.'⁹⁰ Had Robespierre lost his grip on reality? One deputy muttered, 'It is not enough for him to be master. He has to be god.'⁹¹

90 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 252.

91 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 277.

THE FALL OF ROBESPIERRE

While the Terror continued into 1794, Robespierre's own fall was to be the consequence of the lack of immunity for the deputies against the excesses of the Terror. Once the mighty Danton and his followers became victims, no-one felt safe and, in the end, Robespierre's passionate pursuit of *vertu* made him the victim of his own legislation.

Moderate deputies, who had supported emergency legislation as a necessary response to the war, rejected Robespierre's belief that he could build a moral and just society through killing. Extremists, particularly those involved in the excesses of the Terror in the Federalist and Vendée revolts, feared that they might, in their turn, be accused and executed. The victory of the French in the Battle of Fleurus on 26 June 1794 and the full military withdrawal of the coalition's forces demonstrated to all that there was no justification for the continuance of the bloody executions of hundreds of citizens. Increasingly, Robespierre was seen as a ruthless dictator. Louis Madelin wrote,

Fear was on every side, in the creak of a door, an exclamation, a breath. Drawing rooms were empty, wine shops deserted; even the courtesans stopped going to the Palais Royal where (extraordinary sight) virtue reigned supreme. The dreary city waited, under the burning summer sun.⁹²

Illness had kept Robespierre away from the Convention since his appearance at the Festival of the Supreme Being. His reappearance in the National Convention on 26 July and his speech, which included threats to unnamed deputies, rallied his opponents. Robespierre claimed that,

Every scoundrel insults me. Let them prepare hemlock [poison] for me. I will wait on these sacred seats. I have promised to leave a formidable testament to the oppressors of the people. I bequeath them the truth ... and death.⁹³

On 27 July 1794, as Robespierre tried to speak in the Convention, deputies cried, 'Down with the tyrant! To the guillotine!' As a list of accusations against him was read out, Robespierre rushed up and down the steps of the rostrum, shouting, 'Death! Death!' at each deputy he pointed to.

To Thuriot, chair of the Convention, Robespierre shouted, 'For the last time, will you give me time to speak, President of murderers?' His voice then broke; into the silence someone called, 'Ah! Danton's blood chokes you.' When he collapsed on a seat, Robespierre was told, 'How dare you? That was Vergniaud's seat.' The proposal for his impeachment was supported unanimously.⁹⁴

Robespierre was arrested, along with Couthon, Hanriot and Saint-Just, and taken to the Hôtel de Ville. The *sans-culottes* did not rally around him; most of the Paris Sections supported the Convention. The frightened deputies, aware that their own lives were at stake if Robespierre was not imprisoned, sent Revolutionary Guards to the Hôtel de Ville. As they entered Robespierre's room, a shot rang out.

DID YOU KNOW?

The 'saddest place in Paris' is the park on which stands the Chapelle Expiatoire. Therein lie the bones of 1343 known victims of the Terror, including Charlotte Corday, Philippe Egalité and members of the Swiss Guard. Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette were also buried there initially.



HISTORICAL
INTERPRETATIONS OF
ROBESPIERRE

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Identify two or more features of the Law of 22 Prairial and how they would have affected suspects sent to trial.

ACTIVITY

92 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 255.

93 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 260.

94 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 260–3.

DOCUMENT

WILLIAM DOYLE, *THE OXFORD HISTORY OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION*

Few episodes in the Revolution are harder to interpret than the fall of Danton and Desmoulins, for reliable evidence about the motivations of those involved is almost completely lacking. At least Hébert and his associates had been openly calling for an insurrection. Desmoulins had merely been advocating (and by now he had stopped) a less bloody regime; and Danton had not been calling with any vehemence or consistency for anything. It seems that they were struck down more for what they might do than for what they had done. Their execution, in fact, marked the beginning of a new phase in the Terror, when people would die for their potential as much as for specific crimes, and sometimes merely for their failure to match some ideal moral standard. 'The word virtue made Danton laugh,' Robespierre grimly noted. 'How could a man, to whom all idea of morality was foreign, be the defender of liberty?' Danton's death marked the inauguration of a Republic of Virtue.

It was characterized by continued concentration of power at the centre ... On 16 April [1794] it was decreed that all conspiracy cases should henceforth be tried by the Revolutionary Tribunal in Paris, and over the ensuing weeks most of the ... courts which had enforced the Terror in the provinces were closed down. The effect was to cram the prisons of the capital with suspects, and to cope with them the procedure of the tribunal was simplified and speeded up. By the Law of 22 Prairial (10 June) the number of judges and jurors was increased, witnesses were virtually dispensed with, and accused persons were deprived of defending counsel. The purpose of the tribunal was redefined as the punishment of enemies of the people, and the only penalty it was allowed to impose was death. But enemies of the people were so widely defined that, as with the Law of Suspects, almost anybody was vulnerable to the charge. The effect on the character of the Terror was immediate. Executions, which had declined sharply ... began to climb markedly once more. A far higher proportion [of these executions] was from the upper ranks of society than for the Terror as a whole: 38 per cent of its noble victims and 26 per cent of its clerical ones were dispatched during this short phase, and almost half of those from the richer bourgeoisie ... Never was the Terror closer to being an instrument of social discrimination rather than one punishing specific counter-revolutionary acts than in these months ... The abrupt change in the Terror's pattern suggests that some ... of those it now struck down died as much for what they were (or had been before 1789) as for what they had done.⁹⁵

ACTIVITY

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Read William Doyle's comments above and complete the tasks below.

1. How does Doyle interpret the executions of Danton and Desmoulins?
2. What reasons does Doyle give for the introduction of the Law of 22 Prairial (10 June 1794)? What effect did the law have on the character of the Terror?
3. Using your own knowledge, explain how the revolutionary government implemented the Terror between mid-1793 and mid-1794.
4. Evaluate Doyle's account in light of other views on the final stages of the Terror.

A policeman was to claim that he shattered Robespierre's jaw; other versions say it was an attempt at suicide.

From there, Robespierre was removed to the rooms of the Committee of Public Safety at the Tuileries, where his jaw was bound by a surgeon. At eleven a.m., he was taken before the Revolutionary Tribunal, along with twenty-one others, and condemned to death. The verdict was based on 'a simple recognition of identity.'⁹⁶ At six p.m. on 28 July 1794, three carts took the condemned men to the Place de la Révolution, with the crowd so thick that the journey took an hour and a half.

⁹⁵ Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 274–5. Extract by permission of Oxford University Press.

⁹⁶ Antoine de Baecque, *Glory and Terror: Seven Deaths under the French Revolution* (London: Routledge, 2003), 146.

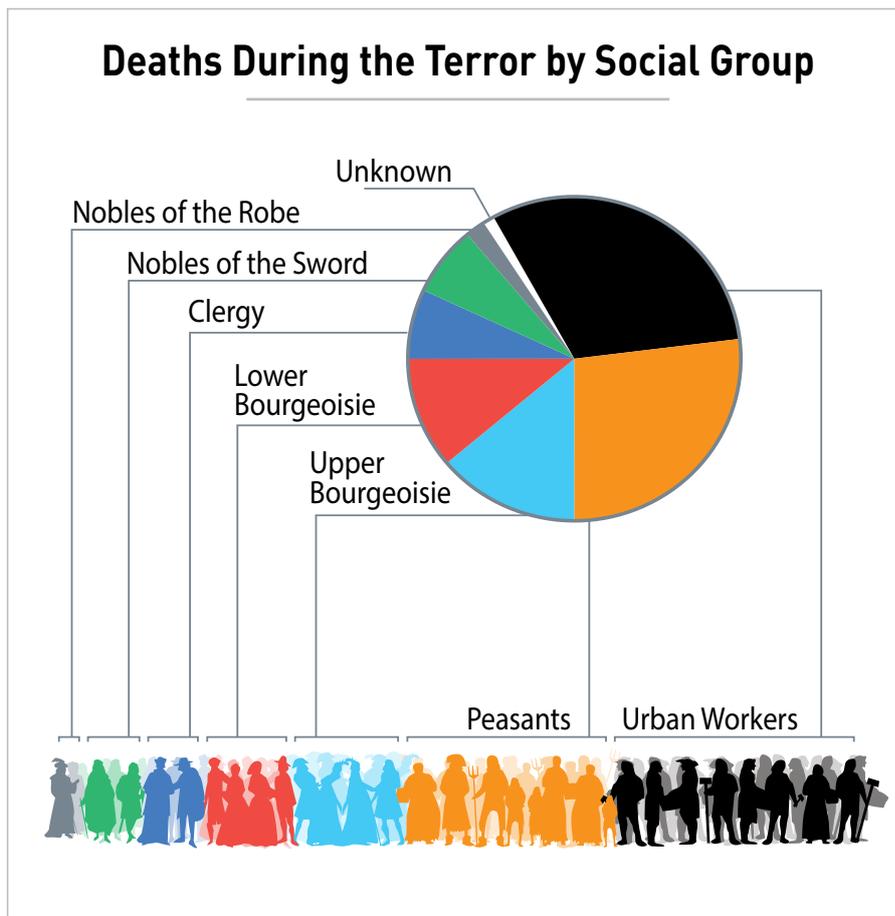
Robespierre howled in agony from his injured jaw as he was put in place under the blade and decapitated.⁹⁷

ASSESSING THE TERROR

DEATHS

Claims of the number of deaths under the Terror vary, from Darnton's very low estimate of 17 000 to Furet's 100 000. Jones has estimated that 6.5 per cent of victims were clergy; 8.2 per cent noble; 14 per cent upper-middle class; 10.5 lower-middle class; 31 per cent working class; and 28 per cent peasants.⁹⁸

These statistics undermine the commonly-held myth of the slaughter of the aristocracy of France, made popular in novels such as Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* and Orczy's *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. The largest group (59 per cent) was from the lowest end of society, the workers and peasantry, followed by the middle classes at 24.5 per cent. This makes the death toll in the former First Estate (clergy) of 6.5 per cent and the former Second Estate (nobility) of 8.2 per cent look remarkably modest. Many of the deaths were military executions of conscripts for desertion; over fifty Military Commissions in Paris and the provinces accounted for 50.3 per cent of all deaths.⁹⁹



Source of figures: Colin Jones, *The Longman Companion to the French Revolution* (London, 1988), 115–9.

97 Both de Baecque and Hibbert give excellent descriptions of Robespierre's final journey, though the details vary slightly: five o'clock, six o'clock, twenty-two condemned, twenty-three condemned.

98 Colin Jones, *The Longman Companion to the French Revolution* (London: Longman, 1988), 115–9.

99 Fielding and Morecombe, *The Spirit of Change*, 110.

DOCUMENT

ANTOINE-CLAIRE THIBAUDEAU, FORMER DEPUTY TO THE CONVENTION

The Terror, as it is understood in France, subjected the whole nation to its bloody sceptre [staff]. It began on 31 May [1793] and ended on 9 Thermidor [27 July 1794] ... In France, no one was exempt; it hovered over everyone's head, striking them down indiscriminately; it was as arbitrary and swift as Death's scythe. The Convention, as well as the people, supplied its own [logic]. Danton, Camille Desmoulins and the officers of the commune of Paris perished on the same scaffold to which they had dragged the Gironde. The people impartially applauded the death of both executioners and victims. ... Robespierre ... , the high priest of the bloody fury, was reserved as its last victim.¹⁰⁰

NB. In 1789, Thibaudeau had joined the Estates-General at Versailles. In 1792 he was elected to the National Convention and in 1793 supported the Jacobins/Montagnards. During the Thermidorian reaction he maintained neutrality, served as President of the Convention in March 1795 and then on the Committee of General Security and Committee of Public Safety.

Robespierre Guillotining the Executioner after having Guillotined all France. This image appeared sometime in 1794. The anonymity of its creator suggests it was before the fall of Robespierre on 9–10 Thermidor, rather than being part of the general jubilation of the Thermidorian reaction.



ACTIVITY

SOURCE ANALYSIS

Examine the extract and visual representation above and complete the tasks below.

1. Identify the message conveyed about Robespierre in the visual representation.
2. Explain the symbolism of the pyramid, the chimney stack and the line of guillotines.
3. According to Thibaudeau, how did people react when they witnessed executions during the Terror?
4. Compare Thibaudeau's perspective on the Terror with Robespierre's.
5. Using the two sources and your own knowledge, explain how the Terror of 1793–94 compared with the revolutionary ideals of 1789. In your answer, refer to other views of the consequences of the revolution.

THE EMBRACING OF VIOLENCE

The word 'Terror' in its new revolutionary political sense was first used by Marat on 23 January 1793, two days after the execution of King Louis XVI. Marat argued that 'the execution of Louis XVI, far from troubling the peace of the state, will serve only to strengthen it, not only by restraining internal enemies by terror, but also external ones.'¹⁰¹ The policy of Terror was to become the platform of the Committee of Public Safety, set up by the National Convention in April 1793. From September 1793 to July 1794, this Committee and its emissaries and supporters increasingly governed by intimidation and political execution. Frank

100 *Mémoires sur la Convention et le Directoire* (2 vols, 1824), Vol I, 44, cited in L.W. Cowie, *The French Revolution: Documents and Debates* (Macmillan, 1988), 105–6.

101 Jean-Paul Marat, *L'Ami du Peuple*, No. 105, 23 January 1793, 1. Our italics.

Kafker and James Laux have presented a variety of opinions as to why this was so. James Thompson has argued that political coercion was a tradition in France and was less severe in 1793–94 than it had been at other times.¹⁰² Defenders of the revolution have stressed that terrorism was the regrettable product of conditions – especially civil and foreign wars – and that most terrorists were not bloodthirsty impractical theorists. Albert Mathiez analysed how events affected revolutionary leaders and Richard Cobb discussed the impact of circumstances on the ‘rank and file.’¹⁰³ Critics of the revolutionaries of the Year II, such as Crane Brinton, have viewed the Jacobin leaders as misguided humanitarian idealists, while Pierre Gaxotte believed that the revolution had been captured by an in-group, seeking to equalise wealth by means of force. Georges Lefebvre suggested a combination of motives.¹⁰⁴

The National Convention delegated its powers to the Committees because it believed that France had to have tough, uncompromising laws in order to survive. Terror was to be struck into the hearts of the enemies of the revolution, without and within. ‘Let us be terrible so the people will not have to be,’ said Danton to the Convention, defending the establishment of the Revolutionary Tribunal.¹⁰⁵ The counter-revolutionaries were to be cowed, the whole nation mobilised for war, and public good was to be more important than individual freedoms, even though this went against the grain of the deputies of the Convention, as the revolution had fought so hard for these liberties.

Peter McPhee has sounded a warning about the ‘myths’ of the Terror.¹⁰⁶ In popular conception the Terror seems to be equated with Robespierre. He was, in fact, one person on the twelve-member Committee of Public Safety, chosen from all the deputies of the National Convention. He signed fewer arrest warrants than other members of the Committee. The National Convention decided it needed a war cabinet with emergency powers. Robespierre cannot be regarded as a dictator, neither can the Committee of Public Safety, as the Committee had to report to the Convention each month to have its power renewed. The institutions of the Terror were regarded as temporary. The republican Constitution of 1793 was ‘temporarily’ suspended. The whole point of the Terror was to reach a point of safety where the Convention could open the oak chest on the central table in which the Jacobin Constitution of 1793 was stored and implement it.

When considering the bloodshed of the revolution, McPhee has reminded us that the estimated number executed was 30 000 out of a population of about twenty-eight million. (Robert Darnton places the figure at only 17 000.)¹⁰⁷ The annual road toll in France in 2004 was 5232.¹⁰⁸ In twentieth century terms the death toll of the Terror is small. It is generally accepted that six million Jews perished in the Holocaust, that 204 000 French soldiers died in the Battle of the Somme between 1 July and 18 November 1916 in World War I,¹⁰⁹ a war in which Australia lost over 60 000 men from a population of under five million.¹¹⁰ It is because the executions of the Terror were carried out during a revolution which was being fought for the finest things in public life – liberty, humane treatment, tolerance – that the killing is so shocking to us. It is noteworthy that in the early months of 1794 some of the most democratic and liberal reforms were passed by the National Convention: state education for all children, pensions for widows, benefits for the ill, the abolition of slavery in the colonies. However, it is the lack of fair trials and the summary executions of the Terror which seem inexcusable

102 James Thompson, ‘A French Tradition’ in Frank Kafker and James Laux, eds., *The French Revolution: Conflicting Interpretations* (New York: Random House, 1968), 225–8.

103 Albert Mathiez, ‘A Realistic Necessity,’ and Richard Cobb, ‘Mentality Shaped by Circumstance,’ in Kafker and Laux, *The French Revolution*, 229–34 and 235–49.

104 Crane Brinton, ‘A Kind of Religious Faith,’ Pierre Gaxotte, ‘The Desire to Communize,’ and Georges Lefebvre, ‘A Synthesis,’ in Kafker and Laux, *The French Revolution*, 250–62, 263–8 and 269–78 respectively.

105 Schama, *Citizens*, 707.

106 These ideas come from a lecture given by Peter McPhee on 11 August 1997 at Melbourne University, and a tutorial led by Michael Adcock on 18 August 1997.

107 Robert Darnton, *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1990), 17.

108 *Time Europe Magazine*, 10 October 2005.

109 Gary Sheffield, *The Somme* (Cassell, 2003), 151.

110 The Australian War Memorial website.

to us in a liberal society. As a moral dilemma, the problem of the Terror is of immense proportions.



The guillotine.

The Terror was not a proportionate response to the counter-revolutionary threat. In comparison to the provinces, where eighty per cent of executions resulted from military charges, in Paris more than one-third of the executions were for political opinions. Marie Antoinette was the only true counter-revolutionary; the others, Girondins, Hébertists, Dantonists, Robespierrists, were children of the revolution who were devoured by factional division. From 10 March 1793 to 10 June 1794, 1250 were executed in Paris. In the six weeks from 10 June to 27 July 1794 there were 1375 executions. This was at a time of military successes against the counter-revolution, when the Terror could have been disbanded.

The differing views on the causes of violence may be characterised by the debate between Robert Darnton and Simon Schama. Darnton has argued that the revolution was a great project, and he has captured the sense of excitement and idealism of this giant leap forward.¹¹¹ He has warned us that we need to be careful about looking back on the revolution through the dark optic of the Terror, even though 'It was the trauma that scarred modern history at its birth.'¹¹² However, in Darnton's view, the revolutionaries were:

an assortment of unexceptional persons in exceptional circumstances ...[who], when things fell apart, responded to an overwhelming need to make sense of things according to new principles. Those principles still stand as an indictment of tyranny and injustice.¹¹³

In reacting to circumstances, Darnton saw the Terror as 'releasing a utopian energy,' creating a sense of 'possibilism.'¹¹⁴ It cleared the way for the redesigning and rebuilding of the revolution and struck down old institutions with such force that it made anything seem possible. Darnton has allowed circumstances to account for most of the extreme swings of violence, but recoiled at explaining the September Massacres ('The Slaughter of the Innocents') in these terms.¹¹⁵ Soboul and Rudé had no such hesitation: 'Unsavoury as the episode must appear in itself, the massacres were an event of historical importance: they completed the destruction of the internal enemy.'¹¹⁶ For Soboul and Rudé the massacres were an awful event, but explained as a reaction to the powerful threat of counter-revolution.

Pierre Caron, the French historian of the September Massacres, saw extreme barbarity such as the fate of the Princess Lamballe, the queen's favourite, as the regrettably inevitable 'excesses' committed in such moments of mass hysteria. The exhibition of the Princess' head on a pike was no more than 'the custom of those days.' He goes to great lengths to dismiss stories of other atrocities as self-evident myths of royalist martyrology.¹¹⁷

Schama has been very severe on Caron, describing his *Massacres de Septembre* (1935) as a 'monument of intellectual cowardice and moral self-delusion ... A scholarly normalization of evil.'¹¹⁸ Schama's central proposition was that violence was 'the motor of the revolution.'¹¹⁹ For him the revolution was always about violence, from the fall of the Bastille, when the crowd hacked off Launay's head with a penknife. He argued that the September Massacres were an event 'which more than almost any other exposed a central truth of the French Revolution: its dependence on organized killing to accomplish its political ends.'¹²⁰ He viewed the Terror very cynically, as centralised and organised violence which was the

111 Darnton, *The Kiss of Lamourette*: the first part of Chapter 1 is devoted to creating a sense of the complete remake of the revolutionary world.

112 Darnton, *The Kiss of Lamourette*, 15.

113 Darnton, *The Kiss of Lamourette*, 20.

114 Darnton, *The Kiss of Lamourette*, 17 and 19.

115 Darnton, *The Kiss of Lamourette*, 17.

116 Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution*, 112.

117 Schama, *Citizens*, 635.

118 Schama, *Citizens*, 631.

119 Schama, *Citizens*, 859.

120 Schama, *Citizens*, 637.

beginning of totalitarian justice. He demonised Robespierre and Marat, viewing the revolution as a whole through the prism of violence. Schama accused other historians of squeamishness when dealing with this issue. He returned violence:

to the centre of the story since it seems ... that it was not merely an unfortunate by-product of politics, or the disagreeable instrument by which other more virtuous ends were accomplished or vicious ones thwarted. In some depressing unavoidable sense, violence was the Revolution itself.¹²¹

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

In a table, compare and contrast the views of historians (see above) regarding the use of violence in the revolution. Then respond to the following question: *To what extent was violence needed to create significant change in French society?*

ACTIVITY

CONCLUSION

In assessing the Terror of 1793 and 1794, it is worthwhile to remember just how violent daily life was in the eighteenth century. It was an era in which slave trading was practised and criminals were sent to penal settlements, enduring harsh conditions on the sea voyage. It was an age of child labour in mines, of press gangs roaming the countryside to coerce able-bodied men into the army or navy. It was an age of torturous executions, as descriptions of the execution of Damiens in 1757 for attempted regicide demonstrate.¹²² The guillotine, introduced in 1792, was regarded, by contrast, as a swiftly humane, egalitarian means of ensuring death.

This very difference between the eighteenth century perceptions of the guillotine and our twenty-first century view, shaped by the optic of the Terror, demonstrates one of the key challenges facing the historian: not simply to judge an era by one's own period's values, but to attempt to immerse oneself in the *mentalité* of the period under study. In this manner he or she may enter into what the British historian E.H. Carr famously called 'the unending dialogue between the present and the past.'¹²³



SLAVERY AFTER THE REVOLUTION

¹²¹ Schama, *Citizens*, xv.

¹²² Michel Foucault, 'The body of the condemned', Chapter 1 of *Discipline and Punish* (London, 1977), 3–6.

¹²³ E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (Harmondsworth, 1964), 24.

CHAPTER REVIEW

CONSTRUCTING AN ARGUMENT – PARAGRAPH

Write a paragraph on the following topic: *To what extent did the Terror succeed in repressing the Federalist Revolt?*

INTERPRETATIONS OF ROBESPIERRE – EXTENDED ANSWER

Peter McPhee writes of Robespierre:

As soon as he died at the age of thirty-six, people rushed to vilify [discredit] him as much as he had been lionized [idolised] while alive, and projected onto him actions and motives based on rumour or their own guilt. His entire life was read backwards and presented as an inexorable trajectory [unstoppable journey] leading to tyranny and the guillotine.

Peter McPhee, *Robespierre: A Revolutionary Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), xvi.

Ruth Scurr writes:

Robespierre has been cast [by some historians] primarily as the defender of the Republic and the ideal of social democracy: a passionate witness to the grievances of the poor ... whom history betrays. ... [But] Robespierre's self and the Revolution cannot be separated. ... His identification with the Revolution grew only closer as the Terror intensified.

Ruth Scurr, *Fatal Purity: Robespierre and the French Revolution* (London: Vintage, 2007), 6–7.

Compare the two historical interpretations above with others in this chapter and the Annotated Bibliography. Then write an extended answer on the following topic: *Explain Maximilien Robespierre's role in the Terror of 1793–94.*

ECONOMIC CHALLENGES – DISCUSSION

Discuss the economic challenges that remained in France by 1793–94 and how they affected ordinary people.

KEY PEOPLE – PARAGRAPHS

Explain the contribution of Jean-Paul Marat and Georges Danton to the new society between 1789 and 1794. (One paragraph each.)

COMPROMISED IDEALS – DIAGRAM

Using a format similar to the Section B Overview, create a diagram about the Terror. In your diagram:

- Choose four or more key events / elements of the Terror
- For each event / element, add a brief summary, a primary source quote and a historian's quote
- Try to include the experiences of a range of people.

Compare your diagram with those of other students. Then, as a class, discuss the extent to which the Terror was a compromise of the revolutionary ideals of 1789.



THE REVOLUTION 'BACK ON TRACK': THERMIDOR

AFTER THE TERROR AND THE FALL OF THE JACOBIANS, THE CONVENTION GAINED FIRM CONTROL OF THE NATIONAL GUARD. DESPITE SOME FINAL GASPS OF REBELLION, FRANCE ENDED THE REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD WITH A CONSERVATIVE CONSTITUTION AND A SYSTEM FAVOURING BOURGEOIS, PROPERTY-OWNING INTERESTS.

DID YOU KNOW?

Thermidor derives from the Greek *thermos*, meaning 'heat.' The month of Thermidor was at the height of the French summer (mid-July to mid-August).

DID YOU KNOW?

After Robespierre's demise, people attended 'victims' balls' at which people wore a thread of blood-red silk around their neck and had their hair cut short, as if for execution. Some men buttoned their coats above their heads to appear as if they had been beheaded.

INTRODUCTION: REGROUPING AFTER THE TERROR

The first consequence of the execution of Robespierre and his colleagues was the ending of the Reign of Terror. On 10 Thermidor (10 July 1794), the citizens of France awoke to a world where the crushing weight of fear was finally lifted. In the next three days, there were over 100 executions of 'Robespierrists,' to the great joy of all in Paris. Thibaudeau, the moderate deputy, recalled in his *Mémoires* the atmosphere in Paris:

Immediately after 9 Thermidor all hearts embraced the most joyful hopes. It was affecting to witness the zest of the citizens searching for each other, exchanging their experiences, good or bad, of the Terror ... Among the victims, calm happiness had replaced inhibition and wretchedness. It was a sort of resurrection of the dead.¹

Popular Societies and Sectional Assemblies sent over 800 messages of congratulation and support to the National Convention, while working men expressed their approval in a more robust expression, 'F--- the Maximum!² The bourgeoisie took hope again: 'People were hugging each other in the streets and places of entertainment,' recalled Charles de Lacretelle, 'and they were so surprised to find themselves still alive that their joy almost turned to frenzy.'³

In the Convention, the process of scapegoating the dead was quick to begin. Robespierre became responsible for all the policies of the Terror. Songs soon began to circulate in the streets, accusing him of slandering the French armies, while popular images showed him as the executioner of all France, with piles of skulls at his feet or in the act of guillotining the executioner himself.

Bertrand Barère, who had happily called for the execution of Louis XVI, blustered that 'the strength of revolutionary government will be increased a hundred-fold by the downfall of the tyrant,'⁴ while a contributor to the *Journal des Hommes Libres* claimed, 'No, liberty cannot perish; never will another man dare to attempt to destroy it, for I hope that Frenchmen will renounce the habit of worshipping and idolising individuals.'⁵ Robespierre was denounced for his ambition and even accused of wanting a royal restoration. The newspaper *Le Sans-culottes* warned its readers of Robespierre's 'plans' on 12 Thermidor (30 July 1794): 'You would have seen the *fleur-de-lys* replacing the *tricouleur*, a new high priest substituted for the one you have overthrown and tyranny reimposed over your dying bodies.'⁶

Despite this and other unlikely charges levelled against the dead Robespierre, the Convention had, at first, no intention of abandoning the Terror. Barère declared that the previous days had been 'a slight disturbance which left the government untouched'⁷ and went on to state that 'the might of the Revolutionary Government will increase a hundred-fold now that power has been returned to its source and produced a more energetic moving spirit and Committees better refined by the purge.'⁸ The press announced that the government, now that it was rid of the tyrants, intended to continue its policy towards aristocrats and 'all wicked men,' and in the provinces, the Watch Committees remained operational for nearly a month after the coup. Executions continued, though not in the numbers that had marked the Great Terror.⁹

Both Barère and the popular press had failed to grasp the significance of Robespierre's death. As Doyle has commented, 'The ninth of Thermidor marked

- 1 M. Thibaudeau, *Mémoires*, cited in Peter Vansittart, *Voices of the Revolution* (London: Collins, 1989), 230.
- 2 Thibaudeau, *Mémoires*.
- 3 François Furet and Denis Richet, *The French Revolution* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 219.
- 4 Barère, cited in Furet and Richet, *The French Revolution*, 216.
- 5 Barère, cited in Furet and Richet, *The French Revolution*.
- 6 Barère, cited in Furet and Richet, *The French Revolution*, 225–6.
- 7 Albert Soboul, *The French Revolution 1787–1799* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 418.
- 8 Soboul, *The French Revolution*.
- 9 Furet and Richet, *The French Revolution*, 226. Peter McPhee has given the figures of executions as 1251 between March 1793 and June 1794; 1376 in the six weeks following 10 June, the passing of the Law of 22 Prairial; only six executions in August 1794 and forty for the rest of 1794.

not so much the overthrow of one man or a group of men as the rejection of a form of government.¹⁰ The Jacobins/Montagnards, held responsible for the worst excesses of the Terror, would be removed, along with the laws and institutions which supported it. Royalists, including the *émigrés* who had waited hopefully on the borders of France and in England, would see an opportunity for the restoration of monarchy. The *sans-culottes*, having lost leaders like Danton, Marat and Hébert, would be crushed in their attempt to reassert the democracy of the streets. For the moderate deputies of the National Convention – the *Conventionnels* – who had either supported the Terror or been silent, the challenge became to retain the achievements of the revolution while distancing themselves from the immediate past. François Furet has said of these men:

They had successively destroyed the old society and the old monarchy, they had cast down the aristocracy, and most of them had voted for the death of Louis XVI, while yet others had been pitiless agents of the Terror ... Many had purchased *biens nationaux*; all were uncompromising over the destruction of privileges and the creation of a society of civic equality ... The return of aristocratic society was unacceptable in their eyes. The Thermidorians brought back and would give lasting life to that new race of political men ... conservative revolutionaries.¹¹

As confidence grew that the Reign of Terror had ended, *émigrés* headed back to France. Prisoners awaiting execution, among them some Girondin deputies, would be released, while persecuted Catholics would emerge to take revenge on Jacobin officials who had denied them their faith. Those who had suffered under the Terror now came back into the political arena demanding retribution.

DIVISIONS IN THE NATIONAL CONVENTION

The Thermidorians within the National Convention were a strange coalition, temporarily united by their fear of Robespierre. First, there were the conspirators of 9 Thermidor (27 July 1794), the day of Robespierre's arrest, such as Collot d'Herbois, Fouché and Vadier, all members of the Great Committees. These men, who had seen their own lives under threat from Robespierre, were determined to consolidate their power through the Committee of Public Safety and continue the policies of the Terror. This group lost influence every day; by September, the tide of public opinion had so turned against them that they were forced to resign from the Committees. Of them, the historian Alfred Cobban wrote,

There was little to admire in them; no motive higher than self-preservation inspired their desperate attack, no ideals justified their executions, no laurels crowned their victory.¹²

Within the group of conspirators of 9 Thermidor was an even odder faction: the deputies who had been representatives-on-mission, responsible for much of the severity of the Terror, who feared that loss of power would lead to retribution for what they had done. These men, like Carrier (responsible for the drownings at Nantes), Tallien and Fréron (who had presided over the slaughter at Lyons) and Barras (who now commanded the police and the army of the interior) were widely hated and considered corrupt. Temporarily, however, they were joined with moderate deputies whose major aim was to reform the Revolutionary Tribunal and bring an end to Terror. All these groups had united solely to bring down

DID YOU KNOW?

Although he was France's most distinguished artist, Jacques-Louis David, who had been associated with the Jacobin government, was imprisoned for seven months from August 1794. He was freed due to the efforts of his wife. In prison David began work on his masterpiece, *The Intervention of the Sabine Women*, a testament to his wife's love for him. David and his wife had separated in 1790 and divorced in 1794. They remarried in 1796.



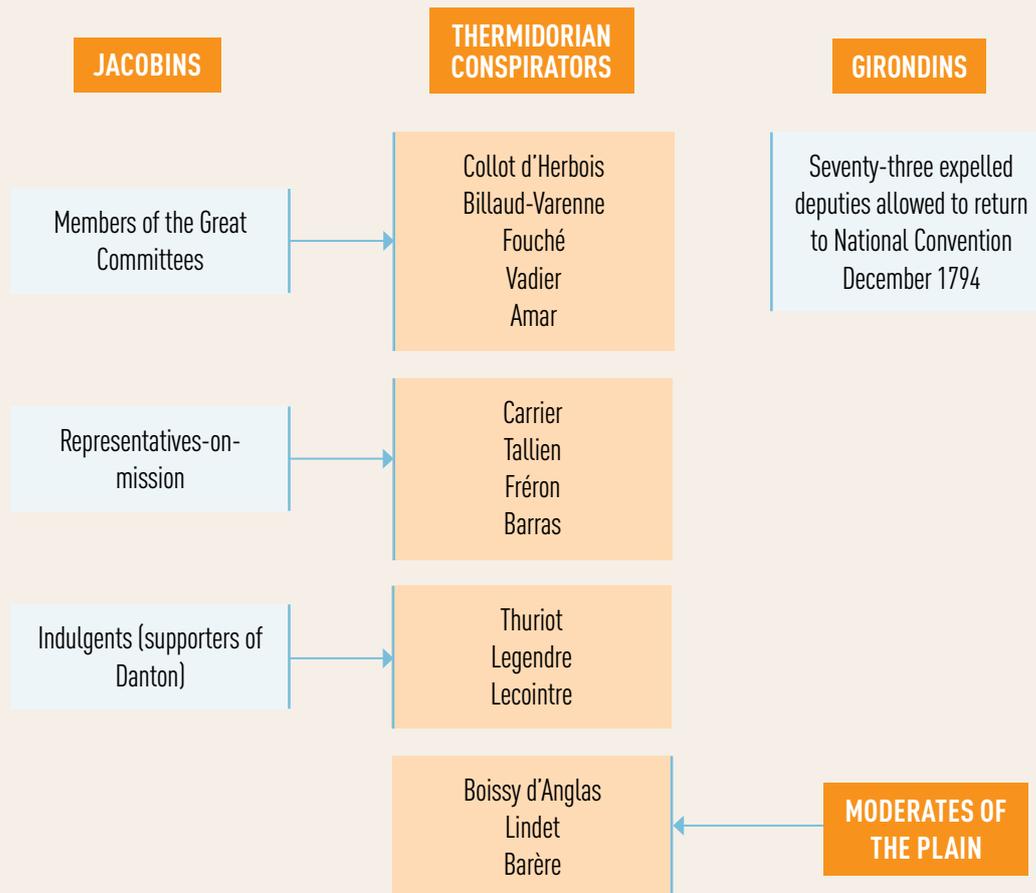
Self-portrait by Jacques-Louis David, 1794.

10 William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 281.

11 Furet, *Revolutionary France* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 152–3.

12 Alfred Cobban, *A History of Modern France, vol. 1 (1715–1799)* (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1977), 241.

THE NATIONAL CONVENTION, JUL–DEC 1794



Robespierre and all of them were intent on securing power for themselves. As a result, within three months, the ‘conspirators’ of Thermidor had broken apart.

Another group of Thermidorians in the National Convention were Danton’s friends and supporters, such as the Indulgents Thuriot and Legendre. Thuriot, one of the original *vainqueurs* of the Bastille, took the vote on Robespierre’s arrest. Legendre had had the courage to appear as a witness for Danton at his trial.¹³ Lecointre, an army officer and friend of Marat before he was a deputy in the Convention, was said to always carry a speech against the government in his pocket, waiting for the right time to bring it out. On 9 Thermidor, it had been he who had produced the act of accusation against Robespierre, seconded by Barère.¹⁴

Finally, there were the moderates of the Plain (*Marais*) like Bourdon de L’Oise, Boissy D’Anglas and Barère, ‘practical and limited men driven to ruthless action by fear.’¹⁵ These unaligned deputies had little influence while the Terror was in place but rapidly gained authority once the Robespierrists had been executed. While they had joined with the Montagnards to get rid of Robespierre, they soon made it clear that their support had come at a price. The Plain wanted an end

13 Furet, *Revolutionary France*, 150.

14 Furet and Richet, *The French Revolution*, 230.

15 Furet, *Revolutionary France*, 242.

to the dictatorship of the Committee of Public Safety. They wanted control over the executive and an end to restraints on prices brought about by the Law of the Maximum. The Republic of Virtue must come to an end and, with it, political repression.

By December 1794, the seventy-three Girondin deputies who had been imprisoned for protesting against the judicial murder of their leaders were released and reinstated in the National Convention, to be followed by those who had fled the Convention and gone back to the provinces. Thus, the balance of power turned against the old Montagnards. The Girondins now joined with the moderates to bring an end to the apparatus of the Terror. Furet and Richet have commented that this enlarged central group represented 'the very essence and logic of the bourgeois revolution,'¹⁶ in that it had the same goals as the original revolutionaries of 1789, to bring stability and constitutional government back to France.

EVALUATING
THE TERROR

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Discuss ways in which daily life changed after the death of Robespierre and the end of the Terror, giving three or more examples.

ACTIVITY

DISMANTLING THE MACHINERY OF THE TERROR

During the month after Robespierre's downfall, the institutions of the Terror were rearranged or removed. First, the two Great Committees of Public Safety and General Security were reorganised so that the membership rotated: one-quarter of the membership (six members) would be replaced each month, with outgoing members ineligible for re-election for the space of one month. The Committees were now to be attached to parliamentary committees, thus weakening them further.

The authority of the Committee of Public Safety was severely reduced. It now had jurisdiction only over Foreign Affairs and the Army, handing over Police to the Committee of General Security. Administration of the Interior and Justice went to the Legislative Committee, which now began to play a leading role, as it appointed local administrators. With power now divided between three committees, instead of two, and with a changing membership, the threat posed to the National Convention disappeared. Never again would a powerful group within a committee be able to assert dominance over the government.¹⁷

Popular opinion continued to mount against the remaining aspects of the Terror. On 30 July (12 Thermidor), relatives and friends of prisoners crowded into the Sectional Assemblies, attacking the Watch Committees and demanding the release of those who had been accused of *aristocratism*. With them were the remaining Hébertists, some nobles, and republican generals such as Kellermann, the hero of the Battle of Valmy in 1792 and, less creditably, of the Vendée slaughter. On 1 August (14 Thermidor), the Law of 22 Prairial, which had threatened the safety of the deputies themselves, was repealed.

¹⁶ Furet, *Revolutionary France*, 227.

¹⁷ C.W. Crawley, ed., *The New Cambridge Modern History*, vol. IX (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 285.



Jean-Lambert Tallien

On 5 August (18 Thermidor), the Convention ruled that all detainees who did not come under the jurisdiction of the Law of Suspects should be set free and that revolutionary committees and representatives-on-mission had to give grounds for arresting suspects. This legislation allowed the release of 478 prisoners between 18 and 23 Thermidor, among them La Harpe and the actors of the *Théâtre Français*. By the end of the month, 3500 had been set free.¹⁸ *Le Sans-culottes* reported:

From the prison doors all the way back to their homes citizens who have been released from their chains are being warmly greeted by the people ... while their denouncers are left to feel only shame, remorse and dishonour.¹⁹

Among those who benefited was Jean-Lambert Tallien, who was now able to organise the release of his lover, the twenty-one-year-old Thérèse Cabarrus, who had met him after her arrest in Lyons. She had turned him against the Terror and had saved so many victims before being arrested that she was nick-named 'Our Lady of Thermidor.' After her release, Tallien was able to marry her and she became the toast of Thermidorian Paris, taking charge, according to Thibaudeau, of 'the department of grace and mercy.'²⁰

DID YOU KNOW?

Thérèse Cabarrus was married at fourteen. Later she became a leader of Thermidorian society, famous for promoting the neo-Grecian style of dress.



Thérèse Cabarrus.

On 10 August (23 Thermidor), Barère called for the abolition of the Revolutionary Tribunal. While initially this did not succeed, it gave rise to two important developments. A decree of accusation was served on Fouquier-Tinville, the Public Prosecutor of the Revolutionary Tribunal, who was arrested to face trial. His trial was to last forty-one days before he was condemned to death on 7 May 1795, for his actions as Prosecutor. He went to the guillotine, leaving a last letter: 'Tell the children their father died unhappy but innocent.'²¹ The Revolutionary Tribunal itself was reorganised so that suspects now had to be provided with a legal defence and could summon witnesses. While an ever-decreasing number of trials and executions were held, by the end of 1794 the Law of Suspects was also abolished and the Revolutionary Tribunal itself went on 31 May 1795.

On 24 August 1794 (8 Fructidor), the Revolutionary Commune of Paris was abolished; the administration of the city was put into the hands of an executive committee responsible to the National Convention. The Convention also reduced the powers of the forty-eight Sections by regrouping them into twelve *arrondissements* with one Watch Committee each. These were appointed by the Committee of General Security and were directly accountable to it for the arrest and release of suspects. Meetings were reduced to one in ten days and the allowance of twenty sous per day for those without work was abolished.

During these early months, one of the biggest problems facing the National Convention was how to deal with past terrorists and the institutions of the Terror. If it refused to condemn those who had initiated and carried out the Terror, it would be seen as condoning their crimes. Yet, if it brought them to trial it would be accusing itself, for it was the deputies of the Convention who had endorsed the actions of the Committee of Public Safety, either by formal vote or by complicit silence. If the Convention abolished the institutions of the Terror, was it possible to do so without taking action against the men who had been responsible for them?

18 Furet and Richet, *The French Revolution*, 285.

19 Furet and Richet, *The French Revolution*, 231.

20 Thibaudeau, cited in Richard Cobb and Colin Jones, *The French Revolution: Voices from a Momentous Epoch 1789–1795* (London: Guild, 1988), 233.

21 Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (UK: Penguin, 1989), 851.

To do justice to the Convention, it did rise to the challenge. For so long intimidated into frightened silence, it gained courage from its renewed authority. Convention deputies once more debated freely, with the debates often marked by the 'personal animosity, noise and chaos reminiscent of earlier years.'²² Men who had sat silent and subdued by Robespierre and Saint-Just now emerged from relative obscurity to begin their careers in the service of the Republic and, later, the Empire. They intended to end dictatorship, to restore parliamentary government and the rule of law.²³



LES MERVEILLEUSES

THE CLOSURE OF THE JACOBIN CLUB

Jacobin resistance was channelled through the Jacobin Club. Closed for two days after the death of Robespierre and his associates, it was reopened by Legendre on 29 July 1794 (11 Thermidor). On September 3 (17 Fructidor), Carrier moved that the 'traitors' who had plotted against Robespierre – Fréron, Lecointre and Tallien – be expelled from the Jacobins. He then demanded a return to the Terror 'in order to annihilate the aristocrats who show themselves.'²⁴ On 5 September (19 Fructidor), the Jacobin Club adopted a petition from the Dijon Jacobins, which called for the National Convention to enforce the Law of Suspects, to exclude all former nobles and priests from public office and for the restriction of the freedom of the press. The petition was supported by the representatives of eight Paris Sections. The resurgence of the Jacobins led to another revolutionary *journée*, a demonstration of Paris' continued support for radicalism.

ETHICAL DIMENSIONS

Identify and explain the key ethical and political dilemmas facing the Convention as it dismantled the machinery of the Terror.

ACTIVITY

RETRIBUTION FOR THE TERROR

THE GILDED YOUTH

Young men were encouraged to take arms against the Jacobins. Dressed in coats with exaggeratedly padded shoulders, high brown cravats (to signify Louis XVI's death by guillotine) and with long hair caught up behind or in blond wigs, the *jeunesse d'orée* ('Gilded Youth'), also known as Muscadins, saw themselves as emulating the '*costume à la victime*' of the Terror.²⁵ Duval commented that 'The movement attracted all the young people of the higher classes of Parisian society. It also included notaries' clerks, advocates' clerks, merchants' clerks – in short, everybody belonging to the respectable bourgeoisie.'²⁶ They were joined by released prisoners, some *sans-culottes*, ex-Hébertists and even former Cordeliers who had been devoted to Marat and who were now savagely anti-Jacobin.

From their headquarters at the Palais Royal, these gangs roamed the streets armed with lead-tipped cudgels to beat up any Jacobin they could find, in order to destroy '*la queue de Robespierre*' (Robespierre's tail).²⁷ Actors were forced to sing a new song before performances, *Le Réveil du Peuple*, which attacked the 'monsters'

22 Martyn Lyons, *France under the Directory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 11.

23 Lyons, *France under the Directory*, 10.

24 Soboul, *The French Revolution*, 422.

25 Another term for these gangs was 'Muscadins,' in reference to their habit of wearing a musk perfume and their highly theatrical costume. Doyle called them 'well-pomaded rejectors of the shaggy sans-culottes political style.' *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 222–3.

26 Duval, cited in Furet and Richet, *The French Revolution*, 219.

27 Cobban, *A History of Modern France*, 243.

DID YOU KNOW?

Marat, the 'martyr' of the Jacobin period, was particularly hated. In February 1795, his remains were removed from his grave by a gang of Gilded Youth, who threw them into an open sewer.



Les Incroyables (The Incredibles). Two Muscadins in coats with exaggerated lapels, Turkish style slippers, hair cropped short at the back and carrying a stick for street fights.

of the Terror as 'drinkers of human blood.'²⁸ Busts of Marat were smashed, a sign that the radicalism of the past years was well and truly over. Marat's remains, which had been interred in the Panthéon, the resting place of the revolution's great men, were removed immediately after Thermidor.²⁹ At the same time, the National Convention refused to accept deputations from the Jacobin Club and when its members made a failed attempt to release Carrier and the Club was attacked by groups of Gilded Youth, the Jacobin Club was ordered to expel all 'friends of Robespierre' and to cut off connections with the Jacobin Clubs in the provinces. Carrier's trial was the final death blow to Jacobinism. On 12 November 1794 (22 Brumaire Year III), the Jacobin Club was closed.³⁰

EXECUTION OF 'THE BUTCHER OF NANTES'

This trial was the result of testimony given to Revolutionary Tribunal. These prisoners had been jailed on Carrier's orders in January 1794, when Carrier was the representative-on-mission to Nantes. Thirty-eight had died in prison from mistreatment by September 1794.³¹

Carrier had initiated the notorious *noyades* (drownings) at Nantes in November 1793. He had instigated the 'republican marriage,' the tying together of a couple who were then thrown into the Loire River to drown. He had used the Loire as the 'national bathtub,' sending some 2000–4800 people to drown, tied at hand and foot, in barges which were then sunk. At first, these dreadful massacres had

28 Furet and Richet, *The French Revolution*, 238.

29 D.M.G. Sutherland, *France 1789–1815: Revolution and Counter Revolution* (London: Fontana Press, 1985), 262.

30 Crawley, *The New Cambridge Modern History*, 285.

31 Cobban, *A History of Modern France*, 244.

been restricted to priests – ‘republican baptisms’ – but later they were practised generally.³²

Carrier’s defence was simple. He was only carrying out the orders of the Convention; the whole body was responsible, ‘down to the president’s bell.’³³ He was not personally responsible, because his mission was to ensure food supplies for the troops. But as the witnesses testified, one after another, to his actions, Carrier admitted to what he had done. He told the court that he accepted full responsibility, absolving his associates who were awaiting trial, saying that they were his agents, acting on his instructions. He was found guilty and sent to the guillotine on 16 December 1794 (26 Frimaire Year III).³⁴

William Doyle has argued that, ‘His defence was perhaps fair enough and he was certainly not responsible for all the atrocities attributed to him. But in sacrificing him, the Convention set an ominous example ... So far from reconciliation, 1795 was to be a year of revenge.’³⁵ Perhaps, however, Furet’s judgement was also accurate: ‘Thermidor Year III was a time when men sought to forget something that simply could not be forgotten.’³⁶

THE WHITE TERROR

In the south-east of France, the execution of the Robespierrists almost immediately gave rise to retaliation against local Jacobins. As the ‘suspects’ were released from prison and *émigrés* began to return, the local populations took revenge for the excesses of the Terror, the destruction of trade and the persecution of Catholics. At Nîmes, Marseilles, Aix and Orange, bands of men calling themselves the Company of the Sun attacked and put to death anyone associated with carrying out the Terror. In Lyons, the Company of Jesus assassinated Jacobin officials and their women. Rudé described the situation in Lyons:

The Company of Jesus flung the bodies of their victims, men and women, into the Rhône, and prisoners were massacred wholesale in jail and on their way to prison; while in other southern cities, bands of the so-called Companies of [Jesus] and the Sun indiscriminately murdered ‘terrorists’, ‘patriots of 1789’ and – most eagerly of all – purchasers of former Church properties.³⁷

After 1794, pressure had been placed on the Convention to allow the Catholic religion to be practised and churches to be reopened. Women often led the movement, demanding the keys to closed churches from local officials and reopening them for worship. Catholics had been outraged by the attacks on the Church and by the desecration practised during the military and economic crises of 1792–93. Church bells had been cut down and melted as gun-metal, chalices (wine cups), monstrances (containers for displaying the blessed bread) and candelabra (candlesticks) were seized and statues and other religious symbols destroyed.³⁸ The de-Christianisation campaign was a further affront to Catholics that united them against the government and, in some cases, the Republic itself.

Such was the pressure to restore public worship that the Convention was forced to allow religious liberty. In September 1794, freedom of religious practice was extended to Catholics, as long as they worshipped privately, but this did not placate those who had suffered, and the massacres of Jacobins simply increased.

Fréron was sent by the Convention, as a representative-on-mission to the south of France, to put an end to the massacres. Later, he was to be accused of actually

DID YOU KNOW?

On 10 January 1795, a decree was passed proclaiming 21 January as an annual day of festivities to celebrate the ‘just punishment of the last king of France.’

32 Schama, *Citizens*, 789.

33 Lyons, *France under the Directory*, 247.

34 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 285.

35 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*.

36 Furet and Richey, *The French Revolution*, 224.

37 George Rudé, *Revolutionary Europe* (Great Britain: Fontana/Collins, 1964), 164.

38 Crawley, *The New Cambridge Modern History*, 147.

orchestrating them in Toulon and Marseilles. He recorded his impressions of the massacres at Marseille, although he was not physically present at the actual events and probably exaggerated them:

It was not hard to excite the people's minds to a fury against anyone who could be called a terrorist. The image of the dangers Marseilles had just miraculously escaped obsessed everyone's thoughts. It was necessary in some way to turn the people into criminals. Popular hatred was directed against the ex-terrorists held in Fort Jean in Marseilles. Some of the people joined the gangs of murderers who went by the name of the *compagnie de Jésus* or *compagnie du Soleil* ... They rushed upon their defenceless and starving victims. Daggers and pistols, bayonets and stiletos were not enough – they loaded cannon with grapeshot and fired it point-blank into the prison yards ... They killed, slaughtered, they sated themselves on murder ... Knee-deep in blood, they could only tread upon corpses, and the last sighs of many a republican were breathed under the feet of the representatives of the people.³⁹

The slaughter continued from April to May 1795. Peter McPhee has stated that the death toll was around 2000.⁴⁰

ACTIVITY

DIVERSE EXPERIENCES

Compare the experiences of a range of different people in the period of retribution that followed the Terror.

THE COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY RESURGENCE

The resurgence of counter-revolutionary activity encouraged royalists both within and outside France to believe that a restoration of the monarchy was possible. Hopes had rested with the dauphin, who, on his father's death in January 1793, became Louis XVII. This led to plans by his uncles, Provence and Artois, to mount an expedition to place him on the throne.

DID YOU KNOW?

Hoche was regarded as one of the best generals in France. After his death, Napoleon funded a competition amongst composers, with a medal and monetary prize, for the best piece of musical composition commemorating Hoche.

THE VENDÉE AND THE ROYALIST INVASION

At first, royalists had counted on renewed fighting in the Vendée region to overthrow the Thermidorian government. A counter-revolutionary movement, comprising small bands known as *Chouans* had arisen in Brittany and the Vendée in the spring of 1794 in reaction to the bitter repression by republican armies in 1793.

The movement was led by Jean Cottreau, also known as Chouan (the 'silent one,' or 'the owl'). Initially opposing the attack of the revolution on the Catholic Church and the *levée en masse* of March 1793, the Chouan movement, while peasant-based, was supported by many royalist nobles and followed the royalist cause. The Chouans joined the *Armées Catholique et Royale* (Catholic and Royal Armies), which had been raised with funds provided by Britain, but the rebels were soon defeated by a French republican, General Hoche. In keeping with the more reasonable times, Hoche negotiated a truce which gave amnesty to the

39 Fréron, cited in Philip Dwyer and Peter McPhee, eds., *The French Revolution and Napoleon: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2002).

40 McPhee, *The French Revolution 1789–1799* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2002), 162.

rebels, allowed freedom of worship and even paid an indemnity to local priests, in return for an undertaking to withdraw from rebellion against the state.

Thus, if Louis XVII were to become King of France, something desired by France's enemies, it could only be achieved by armed invasion. On 10 June 1795, an English squadron conveyed 4000 *émigré* troops, supplied with guns, cannon, food and fake assignats, to the coast of Brittany, just north of the Vendée region. No English troops were to be directly involved, because 'it seemed better all round if the King of France should be restored by loyal Frenchmen.'⁴¹ The aim was to encourage the west to rise up again and then to march on Paris. On 26 June 1795, the troops landed on the Breton coast and began to move inland, joining up with the defeated Vendéan rebels and the Chouans. The total royalist force may have swelled to as many as 22 000 men. At Essais, they massacred the defending Jacobins before Hoche's troops pushed them back to the Quiberon Peninsula. Poor weather prevented royalist reinforcements from landing and, by 21 July, Hoche's troops overcame the defenders. Because many of the soldiers were *émigrés*, under the law of 25 Brumaire Year II (15 November 1793), they incurred the death penalty. Thus, 630 were executed, but juries looked more leniently on local rebels and many were released.⁴²

However, royalist hopes were shattered by the death of the ten-year-old Louis XVII in the Temple prison on 28 June 1795.⁴³ The new 'king' of republican France was Louis XVI's brother, the Comte de Provence. He immediately issued the Verona Declaration, an action D.M.G. Sutherland has called 'deplorable and inept.'⁴⁴ The declaration promised to reject all the changes made to France after 1789, to restore the lands of the Church and nobility, to bring back the *parlements* and to punish those who had voted for the death of Louis XVI.

However, this did not mean that French citizens wanted a return to the old days of absolute government, seigneurial privilege and a lack of representative government. Even ardent Catholics believed in 'liberty, equality and popular sovereignty.' As Sutherland has pointed out, 'the promise to restore "stolen properties" alienated a huge constituency of owners of the *biens nationaux* and all those who had profited from the abolition of the tithe and seigneurial dues.'⁴⁵

Although the Vendée would not be fully subdued until 1796, the hopes of royalists were ended. French armies, under the talented generals thrown up by the revolution, were triumphing over their enemies, and the major European powers were more interested in stabilising power than restoring a king few wanted. Only Russia and Sweden recognised the Comte de Provence as King of France.⁴⁶

Nor did the French people want another king. Mallet du Pan, the Swiss commentator, stated this clearly in a letter he wrote to the Comte de Provence after the Declaration of Verona: 'The great majority of Frenchmen will never willingly give in to the former authority and those who wielded it.'⁴⁷ As for the counter-revolutionaries, their concerns were to do with government policies and religion, not monarchy. As William Doyle wrote,

Their quarrel was with a revolution that had disrupted their communities and their religious and social certainties, and brought outside interference into their lives without producing enough compensatory benefits ... Much of it ... like the so-called 'Federalist' revolt of 1793, merely sought to stop the revolution going any further ... What triggered the revolts in the west was conscription, which threatened to take young men away to distant frontiers to fight unknown enemies.⁴⁸

DID YOU KNOW?

One of the rebels executed by the government was Athanase de Charette, who had served in the American War of Independence and as a soldier defending Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette in the *journée* of 10 August. In 1793, he became a leader of the Vendée Rebellion, then became involved in the attempt to restore the monarchy in 1795. He was captured and condemned to death by firing squad. As the bullets fired, he shouted, 'Vive Le Roi!'



Death mask of Athanase de Charette.

41 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 313.

42 Sutherland, *France 1789–1815*, 271–2 and Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 312–3.

43 Christopher Hibbert, *The French Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1980), 280 and Furet and Richet, *The French Revolution*, 256.

44 Sutherland, *France 1789–1815*, 270.

45 Sutherland, *France 1789–1815*.

46 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 316.

47 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 316–7.

48 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 317.

THE FATE OF THE 'BOY KING': LOUIS XVII

Louis-Charles was seven years of age when he entered the Temple prison in August 1792. His mother described him at that time as 'a rather highly strung child who needs plenty of fresh air. But essentially he is a cheerful little boy.'⁴⁹ Being the second son, he should not have been heir to the throne, but he became the dauphin when his elder brother died of tuberculosis on 4 June 1789.

At first the boy lived in the Temple with his family, but six months after having said goodbye to his father upon the eve of his execution, the child was removed from his mother. The Convention feared that he would become the focus of royalist restoration plots and decided he should be given a 'revolutionary' education to 'wean him from his dynastic inheritance.'⁵⁰

Initially Louis-Charles received rough tutoring from Simon the Cobbler, a member of the *sans-culottes* Paris Commune, but, as fears of conspiracies multiplied, even this human contact was withdrawn. The boy was confined to his room and quickly deteriorated. When members of the Convention inspected his quarters on 28 July 1794 they found them 'stinkingly filthy and the prisoner barely able to walk.'⁵¹ Deprived of all mental and physical stimulation, the regression continued and the little boy preferred a cot to his bed. By the winter he was very withdrawn. By May 1795 he was seriously ill.

Louis-Charles died of tuberculosis on 28 June 1795, his body covered with tumours and infested with scabies.⁵² The doctor who performed the autopsy attributed the death to 'the terrible treatment, body and soul, that the infant had endured for so long.'⁵³

The ten-year-old boy's death was never fully confirmed. The doctor was cautious about identifying the body as that of the dauphin, reporting only that the prison guards had told him the identity of the corpse. Furthermore, the illness of the orphan of the Temple had been reported only to the Committee of General Security; neither the public nor the deputies of the Convention were aware of the child's precarious state of health. Therefore, the news of his sudden death was greeted with astonishment and aroused the deepest suspicion. There arose a widely held view that there

had been a cover-up. Had the real dauphin escaped months before with the help of royalists? Was he now living in a foreign country and would he one day return to France to claim his throne? Or, had the dauphin been murdered at the height of the Terror and another poor child been substituted?



Louis XVII, Aged 8, at the Temple Prison, Joseph-Marie Vien the Younger, 1793.

This uncertainty led to a number of claims by pretenders to the throne, after the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy in 1814. In *The Last King of France*, Deborah Cadbury has explored a number of the fascinating stories of the 'dauphin epidemic' which quickly spread from France to London and the United States. There were, in time, over 100 dauphins, who surfaced in all corners of the globe, not necessarily of French origin nor even French speaking. There was even a 'Monsieur Louis' in the Seychelles who was said to hold court beneath the shade of palm trees.⁵⁴

Entwined throughout the account is the extraordinary story of the dauphin's heart,

stolen by the doctor at the time of the autopsy. For centuries it had been the tradition to preserve the embalmed hearts of the kings of France in the crypt of Saint Denis. The doctor, Pelletan, had unsuccessfully tried to return the heart to the Bourbons after the Restoration.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the boy's heart, preserved in alcohol in an urn, endured many adventures. Finally, with the advent of DNA testing, it was possible to verify that the organ, by then as hard as a stone, was indeed the heart of the son of a maternal relative of the Habsburg line. The scientific results, combined

with the historical evidence, allow for certainty that the heart belonged to Louis-Charles. In April 2000, the leading DNA specialist who led the testing claimed that 'Everything seems to indicate that it was the young dauphin who died alone in the Temple prison in tragic circumstances.'⁵⁵

49 Cobb and Jones, *The French Revolution*, 241.

50 Cobb and Jones, *The French Revolution*.

51 Cobb and Jones, *The French Revolution*.

52 François Furet and Denis Richet, *The French Revolution*, 256.

53 Deborah Cadbury, *The Lost King of France* (St Martin's Press, 2002), 165.

54 Cadbury, *The Lost King of France*, 218.

55 Cadbury, *The Lost King of France*, 281.

CONSEQUENCES OF REVOLUTION

Create a diagram showing the key consequences of the Terror. Include:

Thermidorian reaction	Gilded Youth
White Terror	Chouan movement
Royalist invasion	Verona Declaration.

ACTIVITY



THE KING'S OLDEST DAUGHTER

THE SCALING BACK OF CHURCH REFORMS

Even with the defeat of the rebels, freedom of religion remained a critical issue, particularly in rural areas. In September 1795, the state finally conceded that a form of peace had to be made with the Catholic Church. The answer was to separate the two: from now on, neither one would infringe on the other's rights:

- The state would no longer financially support cults or religions
- Freedom of worship would be maintained
- Church properties, while remaining the property of the Communes, could be used for worship
- Ministers of religion were to take an oath of submission to the Laws of the Republic
- Laws against non-juring clergy remained, but were rarely used
- The lands of the Church would not be restored, nor would compensation be offered.⁵⁶

This did not entirely satisfy the many non-juring priests now returning from exile. There was debate over the oath and whether loyal Catholics could obey a system which had attacked their religion and which had initiated laws hostile to Catholic teaching. Some priests refused to conform and instead called for a counter-revolution or encouraged the Companies of Jesus to take revenge on Jacobins

DID YOU KNOW?

With the return of religion, many couples wanted their marriages blessed and their children baptised. In Bourg, Father Grillet baptised more than 150 children and remarried seventeen couples in one year.

56 Crawley, *The New Cambridge Modern History*, 149.

and, particularly, those who had purchased the *biens nationaux*, the confiscated lands of the Church. Others, however, urged acceptance, arguing that the Catholic Church could only survive in France if it could celebrate the mass and worship openly.⁵⁷ The rift between Church and state would not be resolved until Napoleon negotiated the Concordat with the Papacy in 1802.

ACTIVITY

DIVERSE EXPERIENCES

Note down how the return to a more tolerant approach to religion in 1795 affected the daily lives of French Catholics. Give two or more examples.

ECONOMIC CHALLENGES: INFLATION AND THE FOOD CRISIS

On 7 September 1794, still under the influence of the Jacobins, the Law of the Maximum was extended for another year, thus protecting the poorer classes against inflation in food prices. However, wage erosion brought further problems. The harvest of 1794 had been particularly poor, 'arguably the worst harvest of the century,'⁵⁸ and the army had priority over the civilian population for food. The

winter had been severe and had lasted too long and there was a shortage of horses and wagons due to the demands of the army. As a result, food shortages in Paris became acute and the value of the assignat declined still further. Candles, oil and sugar became almost impossible to buy, while farmers hoarded the little grain they had to sell for cash to those who came calling. The meat ration in Paris was one quarter-pound (around 125 grams) per citizen every ten days.⁵⁹

The police reported the existence of a black market: 'Everything is selling in the markets above the maximum ... The people are saying that the law is unenforceable, and that unlimited freedom on trade is the only remedy for its ills.'⁶⁰

Between August and December 1794, the value of the assignat fell significantly. One hundred livres in assignats were worth only twenty livres in coins or twenty per cent of their face value. Confronted with evidence that price controls were not working, on 24 December the Convention lifted the Maximum, ending the regulation of wages and prices, but the abolition led only to a huge increase in prices and an increase in the desperation of the people. The winter of 1794–95 was a particularly hard one and although the government imported grain from Africa, in both Paris and the provinces bread had to be rationed and subsidised. The government even produced a 'national loaf,' a mixture of bran and beans, to replace the flour which had become so scarce. By March 1795, meat prices had risen by 300 per cent and butter by 100 per cent, while the assignat declined to eight per cent of its face value.⁶¹ Six months later, in



An assignat from 1792.

57 Crawley, *The New Cambridge Modern History*, 151.

58 McPhee, *The French Revolution*, 166.

59 Evangeline Bruce, *Napoleon and Josephine* (London: Phoenix, 1995).

60 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 285.

61 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 286.

September 1795, Henri Meister, one of the first visitors to Paris from Switzerland, was appalled by what he saw. In Paris, he said, 'almost all the house frontages and the broad alleys have become so many stores in which furniture, clothes, pictures and prints are being sold ... The capital of the world looks like an old clothes shop.'⁶² He watched the sad and desperate trade in the markets as individuals struggled to save themselves and their families:

At every step you meet men and women of all ages and every condition carrying parcels under their arms. These contain samples of coffee, sugar, cheese, oil, soap or whatnot. Or sometimes it is the last piece of furniture or the last garment that an unfortunate individual has to dispose of, in order to get enough money to buy food for himself or his unfortunate family.⁶³

In the countryside, conditions were more variable. With so many men away at war, peasants could bargain at harvest time for higher wages. Those who had borrowed to buy an extra plot during the sale of *émigré* land in 1793–94 could now take advantage of the rampant inflation to pay back capital. Larger tenant farmers profited from high prices paid for their produce to pay off taxes and leases and to buy land.

In the towns, by contrast, even the wealthier citizens found it difficult to survive that winter. However, as a returned *émigré*, the Baron de Frénilly, wrote, 'It is impossible to die of hunger with more gaiety,' such was his joy on returning at last to Paris. Hunger was common amongst those who returned and he noted that 'It was impossible at any dinner table to find a topic among the newly liberated, other than the white flour one had found or the meal one had nearly eaten.'⁶⁴ Peter McPhee has estimated that by April 1795 prices had risen to 750 per cent above 1790 levels, leading to the final uprisings of the *sans-culottes* in April and May 1795 (Germinal and Prairial Year III).⁶⁵

THE JOURNÉE OF 12 GERMINAL

For the *sans-culottes*, the food crisis had become desperate and so, once again, the people took to the streets in order to force the government to resolve the crisis. Hungry men and women attacked bakeries in the desperate search for bread. As the disturbance grew, it formed into a mass protest, but one without a clear plan or any real leadership. It was, said Rudé, 'essentially a social protest, inspired by hunger and hatred of the new rich.'⁶⁶ On 12 Germinal Year III (1 April 1795), the mob broke into the Convention bearing placards and crying out 'Bread and the Constitution of 1793,' the Jacobin Constitution which granted universal male suffrage. In addition, they demanded that the jeunesse d'orée be suppressed, the imprisoned Jacobins and *sans-culottes* be released and that the Revolutionary Government itself be abolished. Above all, the food shortages had to end. Speakers shouted at the deputies, attempting once more to influence the government policies through the old 'direct democracy' of intimidation.⁶⁷

The Convention, however, rather than be bullied, called in the National Guard, which dispersed the crowd. Paris was declared to be in a state of siege. The army was called up to defend the capital and twenty-six Montagnard deputies, held to have incited the demonstration, were arrested, along with 4000 Jacobins and *sans-culottes*.⁶⁸

Among the arrested deputies were Barère, Billaud-Varenne, Collot d'Herbois and Vadier. Having resigned from the Committee of Public Safety in August

DID YOU KNOW?

Richard Cobb calls 1795 'the great murder year,' when many took revenge on the Jacobins who had instigated the Terror. In the department of the Vaucluse, two villages were set on fire and 300 people massacred. In Fleurigné, the 'patriot' Jean Chalmel was forced to climb to the top of the church steeple, wave a white flag and shout 'Long Live Louis XVIII!'

62 Henri Meister, *Recollections of my Last Journey to Paris (1795)*, cited in Georges Pernoud and Sabine Flaissier, *The French Revolution* (UK: Camelot Press, 1961), 339.

63 Meister, cited in Pernoud and Flaissier, *The French Revolution*.

64 Souvenirs du Baron de Frénilly, cited in Bruce, *Napoleon and Josephine*, 77.

65 McPhee, *The French Revolution*, 158–9.

66 Rudé, *Revolutionary Europe*, 166.

67 McPhee, *The French Revolution*, 71.

68 McPhee, *The French Revolution*.

1794, they were now sent for trial for their part in the Terror, in particular in Lyons during the Federalist Revolt. They were found guilty, but were sent by the Convention into exile on the island of Oléron, off the French Atlantic Coast. Barère managed to escape, while Vadier fled into hiding before he could be arrested. Collot d'Herbois and Billaud-Varenne were shipped on to French Guiana in South America, where Collot d'Herbois died of yellow fever.⁶⁹ For the Convention, it was one more step away from the radical republic and back towards a more conservative rule. The hunger, however, continued and, with it, the desperation of the people.



The Crowd Entering the Convention on 1 Prairial, Alexandre-Évariste Fragonard.

THE JOURNÉE OF 1 PRAIRIAL

The failure of the Germinal uprising led directly to the last journée of the sans-culottes and changed the course of the French Revolution.

It was begun by the market women, but their numbers were rapidly increased by workers from the central districts and neighbourhoods. Again, they invaded the Tuileries, where the Convention met, and spokesmen pushed past the protesting deputies to insist that they be heard. A young deputy, Féraud, attempted to stop them. He was killed and his head mounted on a pike. Yet the crowd still lacked the leadership to make its protests effective. The National Guard was called in and the demonstration was ended. Rudé has estimated that over 10 000 were exiled, and Montagnards and Jacobins held to have encouraged the mobs were arrested.⁷⁰ Another 1700 were stripped of their civil rights.⁷¹ A volunteer army was sent into the Saint-Antoine district, where the protest had originated, to seize all arms,

⁶⁹ Furet, *Revolutionary France*, 159.

⁷⁰ Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 156.

⁷¹ McPhee, *A Social History of France 1780–1880* (London: Routledge, 1992), 71.

including cannon.⁷² This marked an end to the political influence of the poor, leading Georges Lefebvre to suggest that 'This date should mark the end of the revolution; its mainspring had been broken.'⁷³

THE CONSTITUTION OF YEAR III: A LIBERAL TRIUMPH

There was to be no return to the broad democracy promised by Robespierre. While the Jacobin 1793 Constitution had given the vote to all French males, regardless of income or status, the *Conventionnels* looked back to the Constitution of 1791, where suffrage was granted only to 'active' citizens, that is, taxpayers. The new constitution of 1795 was to be even narrower in its prescription of who could vote. Boissy D'Anglas, the president of the Convention, was clear:

We should be ruled by the best citizens ... With very few exceptions, you will find such men only among those who own some property, and are thus attached to the land [of France] and to the laws that protect it ... who owe to their property and to the affluence it affords, the education which has fitted them to discuss widely and equitably the advantages and disadvantages of the laws which determine the fate of their country.⁷⁴

In spite of the heroic efforts of revolutionary women like Claire Lacombe, Pauline Léon and Olympe de Gouges to gain full citizenship, women were excluded from voting. Wealth, education and gender, therefore, decided whether a person would be permitted suffrage. Significantly, too, where previous constitutions had included as a preamble the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, the Constitution of the Year III talked of 'the rights and *duties* of man and citizen.'⁷⁵ Where Clause 1 in 1791 had declared 'All men are free and equal in rights,'⁷⁶ and the Constitution of 1793 had said 'All men are equal in nature and before the law,'⁷⁷ the Constitution of the Year III defined equality in much more restricted terms: 'Equality is a circumstance in which the law is the same for all, whether it protects or punishes.'⁷⁸

Thus, there were no promises of political equality or equality of rights. The people of France would not be denied representation, but this did not entitle them to equal citizenship.

Accordingly, the Constitution set up a system of indirect voting for a new national assembly: all French citizens could vote in primary assemblies, composed of all the citizens of the canton (subdivision of an *arrondissement*, itself a division of a department). Each canton would elect five members, who were then responsible for conducting annual elections for that area. The primary assembly could then choose one elector per 200 citizens.

To qualify as an elector, a citizen had to be male, at least twenty-five years old, and be the owner or tenant of a property or properties valued at a rental equivalent of 150–200 days' labour. This meant that the power to choose deputies lay in the hands of the wealthier citizens – 'the rich *rentier* bourgeoisie, rich tenant farmers and former nobility, who were eligible as long as none of their relatives was an *émigré*.'⁷⁹ It excluded much of the bourgeoisie and the peasants and urban workers.

DID YOU KNOW?

In February 1794, the *Révolutions de Paris* newspaper had warned that 'For too long we have allowed women to leave their homes to be present at the deliberations of the legislators ... You will recall their true, their unique vocation, and not permit them to deviate from it any more. They will continue to adorn the national feasts, but they will no longer interfere in public affairs.'



CONSTITUTION OF YEAR III

- 72 Furet, *Revolutionary France*, 159.
- 73 Lefebvre, cited in Furet, *Revolutionary France*, 159.
- 74 McPhee, *A Social History of France*, 72.
- 75 John Hall Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 572.
- 76 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 114.
- 77 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 454.
- 78 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 573.
- 79 Sutherland, *France 1789–1815*, 272.

Electoral assemblies would then choose deputies to a two-house National Assembly, first to the Council of Five Hundred, then to the Council of Elders:

THE COUNCIL OF ELDERS / ANCIENS	THE COUNCIL OF FIVE HUNDRED
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership of 250. • An Elder had to be forty years old or more and either married or a widower. • A third of members were elected annually. • Elders could not initiate legislation, and had no power to amend legislation, but could return it to the lower house. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership of 500. • A member had to be thirty years old or more and have lived within the French Republic for the last ten years. • Legislation was proposed in this house, read three times, voted on, and (if passed) sent to the Council of Elders.

Finally, there was to be an executive branch of government, called the Directory, made up of five members, one of whom had to retire each year. It had no role in legislation but could suggest issues to be discussed by the lower house. The Directors, chosen by the Elders from a list drawn up by the Five Hundred, controlled the military, police, foreign affairs and diplomacy, made appointments to office and administered the laws. The Directors acted independently of the two houses, although ultimately they could be indicted by them.

The decisions of the Directory and the Assembly were carried out through seven ministers, again drawn from a list made up in the lower house. Finally, there were appointed Commissioners, whose role was to supervise the administration of laws and executive decisions. This gave them a large degree of power over the elected administrators of cantons and departments.

Notice that there were no property qualifications to become a deputy in either house: because those who chose the deputies were wealthy property-owners, this proved sufficient to ensure the choice of conservative land-owners or like-minded people as deputies. Note also, however, that the Constitution excluded many royalists from becoming deputies through the residency clause: those who had fled France during the revolution could not be chosen.

Peter McPhee has seen the Constitution as 'a return to the provisions of '91 ... France was again to be governed by representative, parliamentary government based on a property qualification and the safeguarding of economic and social liberties ... Now ... a declaration of duties ... [was] appended to the Constitution, exhorting respect for the law, the family and property.' In this sense, McPhee has argued, 'the Constitution marks the end of the Revolution.'⁸⁰ Furet looks further back, seeing in the Constitution an attempt 'to signpost the new road which had been opened up in 1789 and lost in 1793.' He writes,

The Revolution retraced its steps. It reopened the discussion about the Declaration of Rights, the sovereignty of the people, representation. It sought to write a document which would render impossible any return to the Revolutionary Government, which it branded 'anarchy', the lawless regime, and finally to bring 1789 to an end by a Republic governed by reason and property-ownership.⁸¹

There was still one concern for the outgoing National Convention. By restricting the franchise to the wealthy, even with the constraints on who became a deputy, the Convention ran the risk of royalists or republicans regaining power. Accordingly, on 30 August 1795 (13 Fructidor Year III), it issued the 'Law of Two-Thirds',⁸² which decreed that all the present deputies were eligible for re-

80 McPhee, *The French Revolution*, 72.

81 Furet, *Revolutionary France*, 163.

82 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 642–3.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. What were the key values underlying the Constitution of Year III? To what extent was it a response to the excesses of the *sans-culottes* period (1793–94)?
2. How were voting rights limited under the Constitution of Year III? How did the suffrage differ from that granted under the Jacobin Constitution of 1793? What similarities and differences were there to the suffrage rights granted by the Constitution of 1791?
3. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of the political system under the Constitution of Year III.
4. Why was the Constitution of Year III not entirely successful in stabilising the revolution?
5. In what sense did the Constitution suggest a return to the representative government envisaged in 1791?

ACTIVITYACTIVITY ON
PREAMBLE TO
CONSTITUTION**DOCUMENT**
**SPEECH TO THE NATIONAL CONVENTION BY BOISSY D'ANGLAS
(A FRAMER OF THE CONSTITUTION OF YEAR III), 1795**

We should be ruled by the best among us: the best are the most learned and those most interested in maintaining the law: now, with very few exceptions, you will find such men only among those who, possessing property, are attached to the country where it is located, to the laws that protect it, to the tranquillity that preserves it, and who owe to this property and the affluence that it brings the education that has made them able to discuss with wisdom and aptness the advantages and inconveniences of the laws that determine the fate of their fatherland. On the contrary, the man without property must constantly make virtuous efforts to interest himself in the order that holds nothing for him, and to oppose the movements that offer him some hope.

If you give political rights to men without property unreservedly, and if they ever find themselves on the benches of the legislators, they will arouse unrest ... without fear of its outcomes; they will establish ... taxes disastrous to trade and agriculture, because they will have neither felt nor feared not predicted their deplorable results, and finally, they will lead us headlong into those violent convulsions from which we have barely emerged ... A country governed by property owners is in the social order; that where non-property owners govern is in the natural state.⁸³

83 Cited in *Le Moniteur Universel*, 29 June 1795.

SOURCE ANALYSIS

Read the speech to the National Convention and complete the tasks below.

1. Identify the creator and historical context of the source.
2. Outline the qualities of the ideal deputy, as suggested by the source.
3. Explain why, according to the source, it would be difficult for a man without property to deliberate wisely upon national laws.
4. Using the source and your own knowledge, explain what is meant by 'those violent convulsions from which we have barely emerged.'
5. Evaluate the significance of the Constitution of Year III as a consequence of the revolution. In your response, refer to the source and to other views of the revolution.

ACTIVITY

REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF YEAR III

Constitutional authorities were independent of each other, with each body keeping a check on the power of the others. The new system was fairly equitable and transparent, but also more bureaucratic.

LEGISLATURE

Limitations

The short terms were designed to prevent any one person or minority group from gaining too much power, but they increased the instability of the government.

Council of Ancients

Membership of 250.
Had to be over forty years of age and married or widowed.
Could not introduce or change bills.
No additional property qualifications.
Yearly term for all Ancients.

Council Of Five Hundred

Councillors had to be over thirty years of age.
Could initiate legislation and send it to Council of Ancients.
No additional property qualifications.
Elections were held annually.
One third of Councillors retired annually.

Electors Chose Councillors

Electors had to be over age of twenty-five.
Property qualification.
Had to be owner or tenant of an estate or house on which land tax was 30–40 francs (equal to 150–200 days' labour).

Assemblies Chose Electors

All male citizens over twenty-one who paid direct taxation could vote.
The number of Electors ('active citizens') fell from 50 000 in 1790–92 to 30 000 in 1795, because of high property qualification.
These Electors were the very rich who had suffered under Jacobinism in 1793–94.

Limitations

No means of resolving conflicts between Legislature and Executive.

Councils could refuse to pass laws which Directory needed to govern.

Directors could not dissolve the Councils nor veto their laws – could only overcome opposition by taking unconstitutional action.

Legislative could not easily replace Directory in times of conflict – could only replace one Director per year.

EXECUTIVE

Directory

Five Directors aged at least forty.
One chosen annually by the Ancients and Council of Five Hundred.
Directors held office for five years; one would retire each year.
Could not be members of Five Hundred or Ancients (separation of powers).
Had limited powers.
Could not initiate or veto laws.
Could not declare war.
Had no control over treasury but had considerable authority.
Controlled foreign affairs and could conclude treaties, even secret ones.
Chose generals and could conduct a war.
Appointed ministers and government commissioners to replace the representatives-on-mission.
Controlled police and local administration.
Could issue directives.

Judiciary

Elected judges.
High court.

Treasury

Treasury worked in concert with accounts department.

election and that two thirds of the new deputies had to be chosen from the old, excluding the seventy-three Montagnard deputies imprisoned as a result of the Germinal and Prairial demonstrations. This would perpetuate the *Conventionnels*' own power and, they hoped, guarantee the stability that was needed to bring an end to the revolution. But, for many French citizens, yearning to put the bad years behind them, the Law of Two-Thirds was simply a means of maintaining in power men who were associated with the dark days of the Terror and 9–10 Thermidor.

Such was the unpopularity of the *Conventionnels* that many men in the electorate who voted to approve the Constitution of the Year III would not vote in the Law of Two-Thirds. The Constitution was approved by a vote of 1 057 390 to 49 979 against.⁸⁴ However, in the case of the Law of Two-Thirds, there was a decline to around thirty-five per cent of the first vote, 205 498 for and 108 754 against.⁸⁵ Peter McPhee has suggested that voters were angry that 'the price of social order was to limit democracy.'⁸⁶ Thus, he quoted citizens in Limoges: 'We are deeply disturbed to see the wealthy supplanting all other categories of citizen.'⁸⁷ In the partial elections of October 1795, only fifteen per cent of those eligible voted and these 'elected royalists almost exclusively.'⁸⁸ In Languedoc and the west, the 'White Terror' continued to pursue the Jacobins and those who had purchased Church lands. Spurred on by hatred of the Law of Two-Thirds, the royalist landings at Quiberon and the renewed resistance in the Vendée, there was one last attempt in Paris to overthrow the government, this time from royalists.

BOURGEOIS LIFE RETURNS

Paris in May 1795 was, in spite of the food riots of the lower classes and the poverty of many *émigrés*, a pleasant place to be for people of means. An ambitious young officer, Napoleon Bonaparte, who was later to become emperor of France, wrote home to his brother, Joseph:

The memory of the Terror is no more than a nightmare here. Everyone appears determined to make up for what they have suffered; determined too, because of the uncertain future, not to miss a single pleasure of the present.⁸⁹

In the streets, prostitutes once more solicited their clients at the Palais Royal. Novels reappeared, mainly mysteries and love stories, while political songs largely disappeared. The well-to-do paraded in their costumes, almost transparent Grecian tunics split up to the thigh and down to the navel and even dipped in scented oil so that they clung to the body.⁹⁰ At balls, it was the fashion to have the hair shaved at the back of the neck and to wind a thin red ribbon around the throat, to signify escape from the guillotine.⁹¹ Napoleon was enchanted:

Everywhere in Paris, you see beautiful women. Here, alone of all places on earth, they appear to hold the reins of government, and the men make fools of themselves over them, think only of them and live for them ... A woman needs to come to Paris for six



The New Rich Replace the Old Noblesse: Paris Revives. Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

- 84 Bruce, *Napoleon and Josephine*, 82.
 85 McPhee, *A Social History of France*, 70–1.
 86 Bonaparte, cited in Bruce, *Napoleon and Josephine*, 110.
 87 Sutherland, *France 1789–1815*, 274.
 88 Sutherland, *France 1789–1815*.
 89 McPhee, *The French Revolution*, 161.
 90 McPhee, *The French Revolution*, 161–2.
 91 McPhee, *The French Revolution*.

months to learn what is her due, and to understand her own power. Here only, they deserve such influence.⁹²

The terms ‘citizen’ and ‘citizenness’ gave way once more to ‘monsieur’ and ‘madame.’⁹³ Balls were held, where couples danced the polka and the waltz. One was even held at Les Carmes, a monastery-turned-prison, where, in the September Massacres, its Carmelite priests had been slaughtered.⁹⁴ Restaurants and gambling halls opened again, while thirty-two theatres and a circus catered for the appetite

of the wealthy for entertainment.⁹⁵ ‘No-one,’ wrote Swiss observer Mallet du Pan, ‘thinks of anything now but eating and drinking and pleasure.’⁹⁶

Who were the wealthy in this time of economic hardship? It was not the returned *émigrés* and their friends who had the money, but an array of newly rich, whose money often derived from dubious sources like army contracts, land speculation and the stockmarket, ‘wealth insolently displayed by bourgeois upstarts.’⁹⁷ Some of the beautiful women were the mistresses of rising politicians,

such as Thérèse Tallien (previously Cabarrus), Josephine Beauharnais (later Napoleon’s wife and empress of France) and Fortunée Hamelin. The Gilded Youth and their supporters rampaged through the streets shouting ‘Down with the Two-Thirds,’ attacking anyone who seemed associated with the previous regime. Poverty and despair in the working population, now broken and leaderless, showed itself in the lack of support for festivals such as that celebrating the downfall of the monarchy in September 1795. Police reported that the crowds were in ‘a state of apathy.’⁹⁸

In regard to freedom of expression in the new Paris, the Constitution of Year III stated that there could be ‘no limitation of the freedom of the press,’ except in circumstances which ‘make it necessary,’ a loophole which could allow broad censorship.⁹⁹ There was a ‘deliberate policy of [fostering] the right cultural and political values.’¹⁰⁰

The lack of enthusiasm for government and the knowledge that the two-thirds law would prevent any legal resumption of power by monarchists led to one last attempted coup.

A FINAL REBELLION

In the first week of October 1795 (Year IV), posters appeared, urging citizens to ‘take their religion and their king back into their hearts in order to have bread and peace.’¹⁰¹ On 4 October, the moderate Section of Paris rose in revolution. Drums beat and city bells once more called the citizens, in all some 30 000, to rise up against their government in the Section of Lepeletier. Leadership was



The Newspapers, engraving by Louis-Léopold Boilly, ca. 1795.

92 Correspondence de Napoléon III: 1858–1869, cited in Bruce, *Napoleon and Josephine*, 109.

93 McPhee, *A Social History of France*, 71.

94 Bruce, *Napoleon and Josephine*, 83.

95 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 292.

96 Mallet du Pan, cited in Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 292.

97 Furet and Richet, *The French Revolution*, 215.

98 Furet and Richet, *The French Revolution*, 283.

99 Emmet Kennedy, *A Cultural History of The French Revolution* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 322.

100 Peter McPhee, *The French Revolution*, 157.

101 www.historynet.com

taken by General Danican, who had served in the Vendée, but had been dismissed after exhibiting 'royalist tendencies.'¹⁰²

In the Convention, a Committee of Defence was established to sit in permanent session until the crisis was over. General Menou, called on to organise the defence, was sacked when he negotiated with the rebels, then withdrew, leaving the Tuileries undefended. In addition, he had left the artillery in camp outside the city, so that when he brought his troops up, they had no cannon to defend the Convention. Menou's place as commanding general of the Army of the Interior was taken by Paul Barras, but he lacked the battle experience; thus, at nine in the evening, Barras called on the young officer who had played a prominent role in the attack on Toulon during the Federalist Revolt, Napoleon Bonaparte, giving him three minutes to accept command.¹⁰³

Napoleon acted quickly. He sent a cavalry officer, Joachim Murat, to retrieve the artillery. Murat and his men galloped through the rebel groups, then harnessed the gun carriages to the horses and brought them back.

Napoleon had far fewer troops than the rebels. There were 5000 regulars, another 1500 police and National Guardsmen, and 1500 'Terrorists,' men who had been expelled from the rebel Sections for supporting the government and even some released from prison. These troops were ordered to surround the Tuileries and direct their guns at the streets. The cannon were charged. The remaining deputies inside the Tuileries were supplied with guns, in case the mobs penetrated the building.

Instead of attacking in the morning, it was close to four o'clock on the afternoon of 5 October when the rebels began their assault. The plan was simple and, as it turned out, poorly thought through: to march in columns up the streets leading to the Tuileries and then attack. As the noise of drums, marching feet and muskets firing was heard, the Convention's troops steadied themselves. When the rebels came into sight, they opened fire. Then Barras gave Napoleon the command to fire the cannon:

Immediately the gunners responded. The shots tore into the advancing ranks, mowing many of them down and blasting chunks of masonry from the walls of the church. The rebels faltered, then came on again, wavered as the shot tore into them and finally fell back as the guns were wheeled to the right and left and fired down the Rue St. Honoré from top to bottom. The sectionnaires, scattered now, fled backwards towards Lepeletier.¹⁰⁴

A second attack was launched and, again, repelled by cannon and musket fire. By six o'clock, the rebellion was over. Napoleon wrote again to his brother:

At last, it is all over. My first impulse is ... to tell you my news. The Convention ordered the Section Lepeletier to be disarmed ... We made our disposition; the enemy marched to attack us in the Tuileries. We killed many of them; they killed thirty of our men and wounded sixty. We have the Sections all quiet. As usual, I was not wounded.¹⁰⁵

It is unclear how many rebels died as a result of Napoleon's 'whiff of grapeshot.' Evangeline Bruce tells of 400 bodies piled up in the Church of St. Roch and



Napoleon Bonaparte on the Bridge at Arcole.

DID YOU KNOW?

Contrary to popular myth, Napoleon was not particularly short for men of his time. It was said of him, 'His smile is friendly and winning, his eyes wonderful.'

102 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 286. In Furet and Richet's account, General Danican simply vanishes in the heat of battle: *The French Revolution*, 264.

103 Bruce, *Napoleon and Josephine*, 142–5; Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 286–9; Furet and Richet, *The French Revolution*, 262–4.

104 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 287.

105 <http://historynet.com/mh/blnapoleonjtakescharge/index1.html>.



‘about a thousand others left in the rain-soaked streets.’¹⁰⁶ Hibbert is more conservative, estimating only 200–300 from both sides.¹⁰⁷

The events of that day marked a new stage in the French Revolution. For the first time, the army had been turned against the people. Real power would lie now not with the unpopular new government of the Directory (installed three weeks later) but with the French Army and its generals. As Thomas Carlyle put it, with 13 Vendémiaire the revolution ‘was blown into space and became a thing that was.’¹⁰⁸

ACTIVITY

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Write a paragraph analysing the significance of the insurrection of 13 Vendémiaire. How did it change the power dynamic in France?

DID YOU KNOW?

The National Convention abolished slavery on 4 February 1794. The French Revolution is said to have contributed to the popular revolt in the Caribbean colony of Saint-Domingue (now Haiti), led by Toussaint L’Ouverture.



106 Bruce, *Napoleon and Josephine*, 144–5.

107 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 288.

108 Sir Thomas Carlyle, cited in Bruce, *Napoleon and Josephine*, 145.

109 Rudé, *Revolutionary Europe*, 160.

110 Albert Soboul, *A Short History of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 156.

111 Schama, *Citizens*, 858.

CONCLUSION: EVALUATING THE REVOLUTION

Thermidor marked an end to the Terror and the triumph of conservatism over radicalism. As well as upholding the Montagnards’ decision to abolish slavery in the French colonies, the Thermidorian government turned the revolution back to its roots; but its concerns were not the same concerns as those of 1789, when ‘liberty, equality and popular sovereignty’ was the catchcry. How could they be? The major concern of the *Conventionnels* was stability. They sought to retain major goals of the revolution, like equality before the law, limited representative government and freedom of trade, while defending the republic against popular anarchy and a royalist restoration.

George Rudé has argued,

The fall of Robespierre led to something of an anti-climax. The Revolution continued, though at a slackened pace; and the Republic – a new ‘republic of proprietors’ – lingered on through a series of crises until Napoleon’s grenadiers swept them away ... The *sans-culottes* were once more disarmed and disenfranchised; and the rulers of 1795, after a period of hesitation, tried to revert to the ‘principles of 1789.’¹⁰⁹

Albert Soboul has come to a somewhat similar conclusion:

[The revolution] destroyed the state structure of the old regime, sweeping away the vestiges of separatism, abolishing local privileges and provincial autonomies. It thus made possible the establishment of a modern state under the Directory ... corresponding to the need and interests of the bourgeoisie.¹¹⁰

According to Simon Schama,

The framers of the Constitution of the Year III obviously learned something from [the Terror]. A two-chamber legislature was introduced ... in which property was the criterion for membership. A governing council was, in theory, accountable to the legislature ... In practice, however, the experiment remained darkened by the long shadow of the Revolution itself, so that factions crystallised ... plans for the overthrow of the state, hatched either by royalists or neo-Jacobins. With the separate organs of the Constitution in paralysing conflict with each other, violence continued to determine the political direction of the state, far more than did elections.¹¹¹

Furet and Richet have argued that 'The Thermidorean period has come to be regarded as a rather mournful phase in the history of France. Politically, it brought only failure, for the regime to which it gave birth was soon to crumble undramatically and ingloriously under the mild assault of Bonaparte's troops.'¹¹²

According to William Doyle,

Before 1789, there were plenty of signs that the structure of French society was evolving towards domination by a single élite in which property counted for more than birth. The century-long expansion of the bourgeoisie which underlay this trend looked irreversible; and greater participation by men of property in government ... seemed bound to come. Meanwhile many of the reforms the revolution brought in were already being tried or thought about by the absolute monarchy – law codification, fiscal rationalisation, diminution of venality, free trade, religious toleration ... In all these fields, the effect [of the revolution] was to accelerate or retard certain trends, not to change their general drift.¹¹³

Doyle, however, credits the revolution with bringing about ideological change:

It transformed men's outlook. The writers of the Enlightenment, so revered by the intelligentsia who made the Revolution, had always believed it could be done if men dared to seize control of their own destiny. The men of 1789 did so, in a rare moment of courage, altruism and idealism which took away the breath of educated Europe.¹¹⁴

To gain a deeper understanding of the revolution it is helpful to assess the gains and losses made by each of the major groups in French society.

DID YOU KNOW?

It wasn't until 1795 that the king and queen's eldest child, Marie-Therese, heard that her parents had been executed. She had been kept in solitary confinement in the Temple prison since 1792. Unlike her parents and three siblings, she died peacefully in old age.

112 Furet and Richet, *The French Revolution*, 215.

113 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 423–4.

114 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 425.

CONSEQUENCES OF REVOLUTION – BALANCE SHEET

Having read about the French Revolution, how would you describe your own attitudes to the consequences of the revolution for a range of people?

Are you a *maximalist*, believing that the revolution brought about major political, social and economic change? Or, do you take the *minimalist* view, that despite all the upheavals, death and suffering, the same people ended up holding the wealth and power? Who benefited from the revolution? Who was disadvantaged by it?

To assess the gains and losses to different groups, draw up a balance sheet like the one below and fill it in. Use the questions in the left column to guide your research. For each one, include useful facts, quotes and historians' opinions so that you can use these as a basis for assessment tasks and exam preparation.

You might like to divide the table amongst the class and compile a master list at the end.

	GAINS BY 1795	LOSSES BY 1795	EVIDENCE FROM SOURCES AND INTERPRETATIONS	OVERALL GAINS/LOSSES BY 1795
<p>THE NOBILITY AND ÉMIGRÉS</p> <p><i>Consider the following prompts:</i></p> <p>Social-cultural: What happened to the privilege and status of the nobility? Did nobles suffer in other ways? How many of them were executed during the Terror?</p> <p>Economic: What happened to the estates of the nobility? Did they make economic gains in other areas?</p> <p>Political: Did the nobility gain any power from the revolution? What was the fate of <i>émigrés</i>?</p>				

Table continued over page.

ACTIVITY

	GAINS BY 1795	LOSSES BY 1795	EVIDENCE FROM SOURCES AND INTERPRETATIONS	OVERALL GAINS/LOSSES BY 1795
<p>URBAN WORKERS</p> <p><i>Consider the following prompts:</i></p> <p>Social-cultural: Did urban workers gain better conditions?</p> <p>What did urban workers sacrifice for the revolution? (e.g. in street action, revolutionary armies either inside France or on the frontiers)</p> <p>Economic: Was there full employment?</p> <p>Were workers able to provide for themselves?</p> <p>What taxes did they pay? What was the effect of the plummeting value of the assignat?</p> <p>Political: Did they end up with the vote?</p>				
<p>THE ECONOMY</p> <p><i>Consider the following prompts:</i></p> <p>Social-cultural: Who was fed first – the army or the general population? Could farmers keep their grain?</p> <p>What was the effect of bad harvests and severe winters?</p> <p>Economic: Did the war and labour shortages give peasants better bargaining power?</p> <p>How did the value of the assignat affect urban and rural people?</p> <p>Did the British blockade from 1793 affect colonial trade? Could raw materials get through easily? Did war create demand in some industries?</p> <p>How did the value of the assignat change throughout the revolution? (See Section B Timeline.)</p> <p>Political: How did the deaths of 1.5–2 million people in revolutionary wars affect the economy?</p>				
<p>PRIESTS AND CLERGY</p> <p><i>Consider the following prompts:</i></p> <p>Social-cultural: What were the effects of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, refractory priests and the de-Christianisation campaign?</p> <p>To what extent was French society made more secular?</p> <p>What kinds of social and physical harm did Church members sustain?</p> <p>Economic: What economic effect did the nationalisation of Church lands have on the Catholic Church?</p> <p>Political: How much power did the Church wield politically by 1795?</p>				

Table continued next page.

	GAINS BY 1795	LOSSES BY 1795	EVIDENCE FROM SOURCES AND INTERPRETATIONS	OVERALL GAINS/LOSSES BY 1795
<p>THE BOURGEOISIE</p> <p><i>Consider the following prompts:</i></p> <p>Social-cultural: How did daily life change for the bourgeoisie?</p> <p>Economic: What were their economic gains or losses?</p> <p>Political: Did the revolution bring greater access to the political system for the bourgeoisie?</p>				
<p>PEASANTS</p> <p><i>Consider the following prompts:</i></p> <p>Social-cultural: How did peasants feel about the treatment of the Church after the revolution? Did they support non-juring priests or the de-Christianisation campaign?</p> <p>Were peasants treated harshly by representatives-on-mission?</p> <p>Economic: Did peasants still have to pay feudal dues?</p> <p>How did labour shortages due to conscription affect peasants' work lives? Was there forced grain requisitioning?</p> <p>What happened to grain prices, esp. under the Law of the Maximum?</p> <p>Political: Did peasants have a chance at local government or to buy land once the government sold Church land off in smaller lots?</p>				
<p>WOMEN</p> <p><i>Consider the following prompts:</i></p> <p>Social-cultural: What was the significance of the Divorce Law (20 September 1792)?</p> <p>What was the impact of the change in inheritance laws (March 1790)?</p> <p>What role did women play in the intellectual life of the revolution?</p> <p>Economic: What were the <i>taxations populaires</i> (1792–93) (direct economic actions)? Did women agitate for the General Maximum in 1793?</p> <p>Political: What role did <i>sans-culottes</i> women play during the revolutionary <i>journées</i>? Which <i>journées</i> were most important for women? (Research the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women set up in February 1793.)</p> <p>Could women belong to political clubs and bear arms for the cause?</p> <p>What actions did the Jacobins take against women?</p>				

CHAPTER REVIEW

EVALUATING THE REVOLUTION – ROLE PLAY

As a class, complete the activity below after finishing your French Revolution Balance Sheet (see previous pages).

Set up the classroom as if it is the final session of the National Convention on 26 October 1795. Appoint class members to represent the following groups from the revolutionary period:

- The royal family/royalists
- Liberal nobles
- *Sans-culottes*
- Jacobins/Montagnards
- Girondins
- Peasants
- *Émigrés*
- Women
- Vendéan rebels
- The military.

NB. If your character would already have been dead by 1795, you will take part in the form of a 'ghost.'

Appoint the president of the session. The president's job is to run the debate and keep order. He or she may call anyone to the Tribune (speaking platform).

The Convention should then discuss and vote on the following resolution: *That the people of France are better off than they were before the 1789 revolution.*

CONSTRUCTING AN ARGUMENT – ESSAY

Write an essay of 600–800 words on one of the topics below. Your essay should have an introduction, paragraphs supported by evidence from primary sources and historical interpretations, a conclusion and a bibliography.

Topics:

- In what sense did Thermidor constitute a 'reaction'? To what extent was the government reactive rather than proactive after the Terror?
- 'Whenever the new regime was confronted with a challenge, they jettisoned their principles in order to retain power.' To what extent do you agree? Use evidence to support your answer.
- 'The French Revolution must be deemed a failure as it neither changed society nor met the goals of the revolutionaries of 1789.' Discuss, using evidence.

EXTENSION

Look online for the following accounts of the French Revolution in an international context. Note down a key quote from each book, then compare these with other interpretations of the revolution in this book.

- Suzanne Desan, Lynn Hunt, and William Max Nelson, eds. *The French Revolution in Global Perspective*. Ithaca, New York & London: Cornell University Press, 2013.
- Peter McPhee. *Liberty or Death: The French Revolution*. London & New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016. See Chapter 17.
- Jeremy Popkin. *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2012.
- Donald M.G. Sutherland. *The French Revolution and Empire: The Quest for a Civic Order*. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2003. See Conclusion.

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

A

ABSOLUTE, DIVINE RIGHT MONARCHY

Theory of royal authority which argued that hereditary monarchs were divinely appointed by God and granted special wisdom to rule with absolute authority. Thus the authority of the divine right monarch was sacred (given by God); paternal (the king cared for his subjects as a father); absolute (the king was accountable only to God, not to his ministers or subjects); and it was subject to reason. The king could therefore choose his own ministers and was unrestricted by a written constitution.

AIDES

Indirect taxes on food and drink.

ARBITRARY POWERS

At the will or pleasure of the king.

ARISTOCRATISME

During the Great Terror (June–July 1794) under the Law of Prairial, anyone suspected of any tendency to luxury could be accused of aristocratie (i.e. liking the ways of the old regime) and could be imprisoned or even executed.

ASSIGNAT

Paper currency issued from 19 December 1789 against capital raised by the sale of Church lands or Biens Nationaux.

B

BANALITÉS

The peasant often had feudal obligations to grind his corn in the seigneur's mill, bake his bread in the seigneur's oven, press his grapes in the seigneur's wine press, making payment – usually in kind – for the 'privilege.'

BOURGEOISIE

The middle-class town dwellers. This group consisted of the haute bourgeoisie, some of the very wealthiest people in the kingdom (e.g. some of the Atlantic Port merchants who had lavish houses in the port cities and vast domaines in the countryside), through to the petite bourgeoisie, small business holders whose resources were very modest.

BRETON CLUB

A group of deputies to the Estates-General who formed the Breton Club in 1789. This was the forerunner of the Jacobin Club.

BRISSEOTINS

The 'Brissotin' faction consisted of members of the Legislative Assembly who surrounded Brissot and attended the salon of Madame Roland in 1791–92. They did not officially take the name Girondins until the gathering of the National Convention in September 1792, although both groups comprised essentially the same membership. The Brissotins were in favour of the war but not of the extension of political rights to the sans-culottes. See also Girondins.

BUVEURS DE SANG

Literally 'drinkers of blood,' those who had taken part in the September Massacres of 1792. See also Septembrists.

C

CAHIERS DE DOLÉANCES

Lists of grievances called for by Louis XVI prior to the meeting of the Estates-General. The First, Second and Third Estates from towns and regions all over France had programmes of reform listed in these cahiers.

CAPITATION

Direct tax on each 'head' or person, paid by all commoners.

CHOUAN

The Chouan were guerrilla groups who, initially, operated in the Vendée and in Brittany between 1794 and 1796. They were opposed to government-imposed conscription and to the attack on the Catholic Church by the revolution through the Civil Constitution of the Clergy.

CIVIC VIRTUE

See Vertu.

COCKADE

A ribbon or knot of ribbon or rosette of leather, worn in the hat as a badge of a political party. In 1767 a regulation ordered soldiers to wear a white cockade and in 1782 cockades were forbidden to all but soldiers. After the Storming of the Bastille, the National Guard was granted a cockade of white, edged with red and blue, the colours of the city of Paris. The wearing of this cockade was extended to all citizens and became a patriotic duty.

COMMISSION OF TWELVE

This was a committee of inquiry formed by the National Convention which met between 21 May and 2 June 1793. It was abolished by the demand of the Sections of Paris during the revolutionary days which saw the expulsion of the Girondins from the National Convention (31 May–2 June 1793). It had been composed mainly of Girondins who aimed to break the power of the radical Commune of Paris and suppress the forty-eight Sections of Paris.

COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC SAFETY

This committee was established on 6 April 1793 to supervise and speed up the activities of the ministers of the government, whose authority it superseded. Committee members were all elected deputies to the Convention and the Convention renewed its emergency powers each month. At first it consisted of nine members who were moderates, seven coming from the Plain. In July 1793 the Committee was expanded to twelve members and Robespierre joined it. From that point until the reorganisation of the committees in August 1794 it became increasingly radical. With the Law of Frimaire (4 December 1793) the Committee of Public Safety was granted full executive powers by the National Convention. It controlled ministers and generals and foreign policy and had the power to purge local governments.

COMMITTEES OF SURVEILLANCE (WATCH COMMITTEES)

Each section in the cities and towns and each commune in rural areas was expected to assemble a 'watch' committee whose job it was to keep an eye on the people in its area and to denounce any suspicious characters, such as people suspected of harbouring a refractory priest, of hoarding food or of taking part in federalist or royalist counter-revolutionary activities. In times of particular crisis these Watch Committees could be given 'quotas' which they were told they must fill. Suspects named by them would appear before provincial Revolutionary Tribunals.

COMMUNE OF PARIS

On 13 July 1789, thirty-six of the Electors of Paris illegally took over some of the municipal power and formed a 'permanent committee' to govern Paris. On 30 July this committee took the title Commune and appointed Jean-Sylvain Bailly as Mayor of Paris and its leader. It controlled the National Guard and was responsible for civil order in

Paris as well as the important matter of supplying food. In 1790, a regular government was elected by the active citizens of the forty-eight Sections. Its leaders lost favour with the people of Paris after the Champ de Mars Massacre on 17 July 1791. The Second Paris Commune or Revolutionary Commune seized power from the First Commune during the night of 9 August 1792.

COMPTE RENDU

Literally an 'account rendered,' the Compte Rendu was a public statement of the kingdom's finances. The first ever Compte Rendu, presented by Necker to Louis XVI in 1781, was highly significant because until that time no public statement of finances had ever been made and the concept of public financial accountability of the king did not exist.

CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY

The rule of a kingdom by a monarch who must rule according to laws and practices laid out in a constitution. Usually, the monarch shares power with some type of elected assembly or parliament. The people of the state become citizens, owing allegiance to the monarch and the state.

CORDELIERS CLUB

Founded in April 1790, the Cordeliers Club was more radical than the Jacobin Club. It objected to the distinction between 'active' and 'passive' citizenship and supported the programme of the sans-culottes: direct democracy and the right of insurrection. It had great support amongst the working people and was one of the few clubs which admitted women. It was led by bourgeois lawyers Danton and Desmoulins, journalists Hébert and Brissot, and Marat, journalist and failed doctor.

CORVÉE

Either fourteen days of forced labour on the roads or, more generally, unpaid labour for the feudal lord. It was hated because it took labourers away from the fields for substantial periods of the year.

COUP D'ÉTAT

A violent or illegal change of government. In French coup means a violent stroke or direct hit.

D

DAUPHIN

The heir apparent to the throne, the crown prince.

DEISM

Enlightenment religious philosophy arguing that the world was created by a supreme being to a rational pattern and that humans were endowed with intelligence to observe that pattern and to govern their affairs accordingly.

DESPOT

A single ruler who is authoritarian, autocratic and/or tyrannical.

DIRECTORY

The bourgeois-controlled government of France, led by an executive of five members between 1795 and 1799, with a legislature consisting of the Council of Elders and Council of Five Hundred. The Directory was weak and dependent on the army; it was toppled in the coup d'état of 18 Brumaire (10 November 1799) led by Napoleon Bonaparte.

DON GRATUIT

Voluntary annual payment to the king by the Church.

E

EDICT

A royal decree or law, literally a 'saying' of the king.

EMIGRÉS

French men and women, usually of noble birth, who fled France during the revolution.

ENCYCLOPÉDIE

Published between 1751 and 1780, the Encyclopédie was edited by Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond D'Alembert. Consisting of twenty-seven volumes of text and eleven volumes of engravings, it featured articles by all the leading thinkers of the century.

ENLIGHTENED DESPOT

A single ruler with autocratic powers but who rules according to enlightened principles.

ENLIGHTENMENT

The flowering of thought in eighteenth-century Europe – particularly politics, science and philosophy – which advocated a rational approach, rejecting explanations which seemed to be grounded in theology or superstition and favouring logically consistent explanations based on observation and experimentation.

ENRAGÉS ('MAD DOGS')

Informal faction of the far left which agitated for price controls, higher taxes for the wealthy, economic reform, more democracy and more power to the Sections. It was led by Théophile Leclerc and Jacques Roux, the 'Red Priest.' While the faction was condemned by the Jacobins (and to some extent the Cordeliers) until mid-1793, it wielded considerable influence over the *sans-culottes* during the spring, summer and autumn of 1793.

ESTATES

Also known as orders, the estates were the three groups which divided French society under the old regime. The First Estate, the clergy (comprising about 0.6 per cent of the population) and the Second Estate, the nobility (about 1.5 per cent) were exempt from taxation. The Third Estate or commoners (comprising up to ninety-eight per cent of the population) bore the taxation load.

F

FARMERS-GENERAL

The Farmers-General purchased their positions (venal offices) to collect indirect taxes, paid a lump sum to the government and kept the rest, often lending money to the Crown at interest, although it was largely the Crown's own money.

FEDERALISM

Federalists sought to weaken the power of the central government and to strengthen the authority of provincial government. Provincial discontent with Parisian rule expressed itself in the creation of revolutionary committees of the departments in September 1792 and then with 'federal' revolutionary committees. After the expulsion of the Girondins from the National Convention on 2 June 1793, the Girondin deputies who had fled to safety in the countryside encouraged a series of uprisings against the 'dictatorship' of the capital. The Jacobins denounced these separatist ideas.

FÉDÉRÉS

Representatives sent to the Festival of Federation on 17 July 1790. The term was particularly used to refer to the volunteers who, in 1792, were raised in the provinces and sent to the capital where they played a significant part in the insurrection of 10 August.

FEUDAL DUES

Taxes, goods and services payable by the peasant to his overlord (*seigneur*) in accordance with old contracts and practices, e.g. banalités, harvest dues and local customs duties.

FEUILLANT CLUB

Liberal constitutional monarchists or monarchiens who broke away from the Jacobin Club in July 1791, refusing to sign a petition calling for the removal of the king after the Flight from Paris. Members included Lafayette, Barnave, Duport, Bailly and Mounier. They were moderates, supporters of the original revolution and constitutional monarchy.

FISCAL

Relating to public revenues and government finances and their management. In the context of the financial crisis of 1786, it is often used to mean taxation issues.

G

GABELLE

Indirect tax on salt.

GALLICAN CHURCH

The French (Gallican) Roman Catholic Church had certain privileges which were not permitted in other countries. For example, archbishops and bishops were chosen by the king, while in other Catholic countries they were appointed by the pope.

GARDES FRANÇAISES

The French Guard, an elite regiment of household troops, created in 1564 to protect the royal family when in residence. By 1789, the 3600 French Guards had a mainly ceremonial role. Many deserted Louis XVI in July 1789, assisting in the capture of the Bastille.

GÉNÉRALITÉS

The thirty-six major administrative divisions of pre-revolutionary France.

GIRONDINS

Most powerful between 1792 and 1795, the Girondins were National Convention deputies from the Bordeaux area and their supporters. They were anti-clerical republicans who hated privilege and favoured free trade. The Girondins had the support of most of the Paris press in late 1792 as well as strong support in the provinces. They were in favour of the declaration of war but not of the extension of political rights to the urban *sans-culottes*. They were determined to protect the rights of the provinces against the dominance of Paris and the popular movement. See also Brissotins.

H

HOBEREAUX

An unflattering term for the impoverished country nobility.

INDULGENTS

Jacobins/Cordeliers such as Danton and his faction who were accused of wishing to be lenient or 'indulgent' towards counter-revolutionaries and to introduce a relaxation of the Terror.

INTENDANTS

Royal officials in charge of administering généralités under the old regime.

JACOBIN CLUB

The political club which formed in Paris in 1789 and which had a number of provincial branches. The Paris group met in the Jacobin Convent. Jacobinism began in 1789 as a moderate bourgeois movement for constitutional monarchy and ended in 1794 as a republican movement which endorsed the repressive policies of the Terror.

JEUNESSE D'ORÉE

The Gilded Youth, young bourgeois men of the Thermidorian Reaction who engaged in thuggery during late 1794–95.

JOURNÉES

The days of action by the *sans-culottes* during the revolution that led to important political change.

LAISSEZ-FAIRE

An economic theory that commerce should be left as free as possible from the constraints of government.

LETTRE DE CACHET

A pre-revolutionary order committing a person to prison or exile indefinitely without trial. It was hated as a symbol of arbitrary justice, especially by the nobles who were its most frequent victims.

LIBERALISM

Belief in the importance of freedom and equality. In general, liberals believe in individual freedoms within society: freedom of speech and the press; equality before the law; freedom from arbitrary government or arrest (such as had existed in France under the despotism of divine right monarchy); democratic rights through free and fair multiparty elections; free trade or laissez-faire trade practices; freedom of religion and separation of Church and state. Further, rulers should be subject to the consent of the governed (especially in matters of taxation) and should be held accountable. The individual has fundamental rights – to life, liberty and property ownership.

LIGHTNING BOLT

The lightning bolt occurs in a few places in revolutionary iconography – notably in David's *The Oath of the Tennis Court*. It represents liberty.

LIT DE JUSTICE

Ceremony at which the king forced the parlement to register royal decrees despite its objections (remonstrances).

LIVRE

Unit of French currency, made up of twenty sous.

M

MARAIS ('THE PLAIN')

A group within the Legislative Assembly and National Convention, led by Barère, which kept a central position and voted on an issue-by-issue basis, sometimes supporting the left and sometimes the right.

MASONIC SYMBOLS

The all-seeing eye of wisdom and the triangle of Freemasonry were part of the ideological mix of the French Revolution. Masons met together in brotherhood to discuss, in equality, many aspects of society. The image of the eye symbolised wisdom or enlightenment and reason and the image of the triangle – often developed into a pyramid – symbolised equality.

MAXIMALIST HISTORIANS

Historians who argue that the French Revolution brought about massive and lasting changes to Europe over the following hundred years: that it fed worker protests in France in 1830, throughout Europe in 1848, and the Paris Commune in 1871; that it promoted the growth of capitalism in France; that it promoted great social change in France during the Napoleonic Period (1799–1814) and that it left a lasting legacy of liberal idealism to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

MENU PEUPLE

The poorest of urban workers, generally casually employed, such as flower-sellers, street cleaners and nightsoil men. By 1793 the *menu peuple* had been absorbed into the *sans-culottes*, but many *sans-culottes* were quite affluent, owning their own businesses. See also *Sans-culottes*.

MÉTAYERS

Peasants who owed half of their produce for the year to their landlord (the landlord provided tools, seed, animals and buildings). Also called sharecroppers.

MONARCHIENS

Group of deputies in the National Constituent Assembly which continued to support the idea of a constitutional monarchy with Louis XVI as king, even after the Flight from Paris. See also Feuillants.

MONARCHY

The rule of a kingdom by a king or queen of his or her subjects, who owe the monarch personal allegiance.

MONTAGNARDS ('THE MOUNTAIN')

Deputies in the National Convention who were members of the Jacobin Club and supported the radical policies of Robespierre. They sat on the high benches in the Convention.

MINIMALIST HISTORIANS

Historians who argue that despite all the upheaval and suffering caused by the French Revolution, in the end very few real economic or social gains were made, especially for the poor. They generally concede that there were lasting legal changes.

MUSCADINS

See Jeunesse d'orée.

N

NATIONAL GUARD

A citizen's militia formed by the First Commune of Paris on 13 July 1789 to defend the property of the bourgeoisie. Lafayette was appointed its commander on 15 July and its membership quickly swelled to 20 000. The Guard quickly took on duties of keeping order in Paris and ensuring that bread supplies reached the city. Initially only active citizens were eligible; they had to pay for their own uniforms and weapons and give three days' service per month.

NOBLESSE D'ÉPÉE

Nobility of the sword. Members of this group had gained privilege through their ancestors' service to the crown in battles many generations before.

NOBLESSE DE COURT

Court nobility. Technically, members of this group had to be able to trace their noble lineage back to 1399. In reality they were distinguished by their wealth, which allowed them to live at Versailles.

NOBLESSE DE ROBE

Nobility of the robe. Members of this group had been recently ennobled by service to the monarch or through purchase of one of 50 000 venal offices from the King. The group consisted of magistrates in the parlements, tax farmers and other administrative officers.

NON-JURING CLERGY

See Refractory clergy.

O

OCTROIS

Indirect customs duty payable on goods brought to town to sell at market.

P

PARLEMENT OF PARIS

Most powerful of the thirteen parlements (law courts), the Parlement of Paris had jurisdiction over about ten million people in northern France and tended to take the lead in disputes with the king.

PARLEMENTS

The thirteen sovereign courts of appeal in France which were responsible for registering the king's decrees, having checked them for legal correctness. They could 'remonstrate' with the King by refusing to register a decree, but he could override them by imposing a *lit de justice*.

PHILOSOPHES

A group of writers and thinkers of the eighteenth century which criticised many aspects of the old regime. Some philosophes held conflicting views but generally this group debated ideas based on principles of reason derived from close observation of the laws of nature, freedom of speech and religion, and equality before the law. They criticised superstition and the abuses of despotism.

PHRYGIAN BONNET ('BONNET ROUGE')

The red 'Phrygian' bonnet had been worn by freed slaves in the time of the Roman Republic as a symbol of their emancipated status. It therefore symbolised freedom from slavery.

PHYSIOCRATS

A group of French intellectuals, led by de Quesnay, which believed that land was the only source of wealth and that land-owners should therefore pay the bulk of the taxes.

PLAIN

See Marais.

R

REFRACTORY CLERGY

Clergy who refused to take the Clerical Oath of allegiance to the state.

REPRESENTATIVES-ON-MISSION

Deputies from the National Convention who were sent out to the provinces from March 1793 to ensure that the decrees of the Convention and the Great Committees were being fully followed. These men had immense individual power and autonomy in their provinces, and many of the excesses of the Terror occurred because of particularly cruel representatives-on-mission. Their powers were severely curtailed after 5 August 1794.

REPUBLIC

A state in which there is no hereditary monarch. The head of state is elected, along with the assembly or parliament. The people of the state are citizens who owe allegiance to the state.

REVOLUTIONARY ARMIES

The National Convention authorised the formation of the Revolutionary Army of Paris on 9 September 1793. Another fifty-six unauthorised civilian revolutionary armies were set up in the provinces between September and December. Their role was to ensure food supplies for the cities and to round up army deserters, hoarders, refractory priests and royalist rebels; they were also to augment the nation's war treasury by confiscating church silver and bells. This quickly escalated into the de-Christianisation movement which gave the armies licence to smash religious statues and stained glass windows and to desecrate the beauties of French ecclesiastical architecture. The Committee of Public Safety did not like the Revolutionary Armies because they were anarchic and outside the control of the authorities, creating opposition to the revolution by their heavy-handed tactics with the peasants.

REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNE

See Commune of Paris.

REVOLUTIONARY TRIBUNAL

The Paris Tribunal was set up 10 March 1793 by Danton as a court of the people to try those suspected of crimes against the revolution. It was one of the key institutions of the Terror – Danton himself was judged by it, along with many other revolutionaries. It was abolished on 31 May 1795.

RIGHT OF REMONSTRANCE

In theory this was the power of the parlements to point out technical illegalities in royal edicts, but the parlements increasingly insisted that their remonstrances could also defend subjects against violations of their privileges and rights by the king.

S

SALONS

Social and intellectual gatherings run in private houses. In pre-revolutionary France, many of the ideas of the philosophes were discussed and spread in salons. During the revolution the Girondins developed many of their ideas at the salon of Manon Roland.

SANS-CULOTTES

This group is better regarded as a coalition than a class. Between 1789 and 1792 it took on the consciousness of a group, calling itself the sans-culottes and becoming a major force in shaping the revolution in 1793–94. Its composition was very diverse: master craftsmen, independent shopkeepers, dealers, journeymen and apprentices. While some sans-culottes were poor, others were small proprietors.

SECTIONS OF PARIS

Forty-eight Sections or areas of Paris, created by the decree of 21 May 1790 to replace the sixty districts which had been set up for the elections of 1789. The Legislative Assembly allowed the Sections to continue meeting in permanence by the decree of 25

July 1792, and to these meetings were gradually admitted the ‘passive’ citizens aged twenty-five and above. The Sections were prominent in organising the revolutionary journées such as the deposition of the king (10 August 1792) and the expulsion of the Girondins from the National Convention (31 May–2 June 1793). They were abolished by the Directory in 1795.

SEIGNEURIAL DUES

See Feudal dues.

SEPTEMBRISTS

Those who took part in the September Massacres of 2–5 September 1792.

SOCIETY OF REVOLUTIONARY REPUBLICAN WOMEN

Group founded by Claire Lacombe and Pauline Léon which argued for women’s rights to bear arms. Closely allied to the radical Enragés, the women undertook military training. The Society was shut down by the Montagnards in October 1793 as part of general action to curb the sans-culottes movement.

SOVEREIGNTY

The ‘source of power.’ In early times it was the monarch who held complete power and so we often refer, even today, to kings or queens as sovereigns, even if they have little or no power. In France sovereignty had resided with the monarch in 1715, but by 1793 the sovereignty resided with the people of France (popular sovereignty).

SUBSISTENCE FARMING

Where the farmer produces just enough for the needs of his or her family with nothing extra; that is, no surplus which can be sold or stored.

T

TAILLE

Direct tax on land, from which the Church and most of the towns and the nobility were exempt.

THERMIDOR

A revolutionary month of the year (19 July–17 August) – the ‘hot’ month. On 9–10 Thermidor Year II (27–28 July 1794), Robespierre and his followers were defeated.

THERMIDORIANS

Men like Fréron, Tallien, Vadier and Ysabeau, who led the coup against Robespierre and tried to gain power in the National Convention after his fall.

THERMIDORIAN PERIOD

Period from 9 Thermidor Year II (27–28 July 1794) to 4 Brumaire Year IV (26 October 1795), the date on which the National Convention was dissolved.

TITHE

Direct tax of about eight per cent of income, levied by the Catholic Church (though it was as high as twenty-five per cent in some parts of France). The tithe was supposed to contribute to the upkeep of the local clergy.

TUILERIES

The palace of the French monarchy, situated between the Louvre Palace and the Place de la Révolution. It was built in 1564 and the gardens were established in 1600. Because of uprisings of nobles against the Bourbon monarchy in the seventeenth century (Wars of the Fronde), Louis XIV decided to move his residence out of Paris to Versailles. After the March of the Women to Versailles (5–6 October 1789), Louis XVI was reinstalled in the Tuileries against his will. The National Assembly moved there on 9 October 1789.

TYRANNY

Arbitrary or unrestrained use or abuse of power.

V

VENAL OFFICES

Legal, financial, administrative, military and religious positions purchased from the Crown which often carried titles, e.g. judges, tax collectors, provincial administrators and all officer ranks in the army.

VERTU

Courage, valour, virtue, where the individual gives up his personal freedom to the general will, acting at all times in the interests of the state.

VINGTIÈME

Direct tax on income levied during the American War (1778–83) and for three years afterwards (until 1786).

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upon his fellow deputies in the National Convention to express the revolutionary value of fraternity in a time of uncertainty by offering each of his neighbours a fraternal embrace. Darnton creates a sense of excitement in the project to remake society completely in the revolutionary world. He identifies the possibilities of the revolutionary project and warns us against looking back at the revolution 'through the dark optic of the Terror.'

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WHO'S WHO

ENLIGHTENMENT THINKERS

Denis Diderot was originally intended for the Church but scraped a living as a writer. He was the originator and chief editor of the *Encyclopédie*, the largest publication of the eighteenth century, which aimed to organise all useful knowledge. The contributors were all the leading enlightened thinkers of the age and the *Encyclopédie* ran to twenty-seven volumes of text and eleven volumes of engravings, published in installments between 1751 and 1780. Despite problems with censorship, it encapsulated the learning and thinking of the eighteenth century and Louis XVI himself owned a set.

DIDEROT, DENIS
(1713–1784)

An English philosopher and writer whose ideas on government had great influence on events in America at the time of the War of Independence (1775–1783), as well as in Enlightenment circles in France. He placed emphasis on the need of the ruler to have the consent of the governed if he was to rule justly; also on the inviolability of property rights. His major publication was *Two Treatises of Civil Government* (written in 1680 but published in 1690), which first presented the idea of the social contract and responsible government.

LOCKE, JOHN
(1632–1704)

A member of a noble family from Bordeaux, he first practised law and attained the position of president of the Bordeaux Parlement. He took up writing, largely on political subjects, after a long visit to England. His 1748 book, *De l'Esprit des Lois* (*The Spirit of the Laws*), in which he presented the idea of the separation of powers and argued the virtues of a constitutional monarchy, was very influential in Enlightenment circles.

**MONTESQUIEU,
CHARLES**
(1689–1775)

English physicist and mathematician, the creator of calculus. Newton was famous for his *Laws of Motion* (1687) which explained the laws of gravity. His success in embracing the motions of bodies upon the earth and of the sun, planets (including the earth), and the moon in the skies in a single rigorous system was the supreme intellectual achievement of the new natural science.

NEWTON, SIR ISAAC
(1642–1727)

A Swiss political writer and philosopher who wrote for the *Encyclopédie*, but who later quarrelled with his colleagues. He put forward the ideas of the General Will and of the natural goodness of man in his works *Emile* (1762), a treatise on education, and *The Social Contract* (1762).

**ROUSSEAU,
JEAN-JACQUES**
(1712–1778)

VOLTAIRE (FRANÇOIS-MARIE AROUET)
(1694–1778)

The most celebrated of eighteenth-century French writers, Voltaire was responsible for many satires, poems, novels and other works, all putting forward enlightened reforming ideas. Voltaire was particularly hostile to the French Church.

YOUNG, ARTHUR
(1741–1820)

Young was a very prominent English writer on agriculture and related topics. His *Travels in France 1787–89*, which first appeared in 1794, provides the historian with an invaluable account of the state of France on the eve of the revolution.

ROYALTY

D'ARTOIS, CHARLES-PHILIPPE, THE COMTE
(1757–1836)

D'Artois was the youngest brother of Louis XVI. In 1788 he was the major influence behind the Memorandum of the Princes of the Blood, the manifesto of the most reactionary nobles, and on 16 July 1789 he left Versailles for the Austrian Netherlands, becoming the leader of the *émigrés*. He finally became King as Charles X in 1824, but was overthrown in 1830. He died in exile in Austria.

LOUIS XIV
(1638–1715)

King of France from the age of five, Louis XIV pursued a policy of enhancing France's European position through military expansion, attempting to push the borders of France to its natural frontiers. Declining to call an Estates-General to raise taxation, Louis began the practice of selling nobility and positions to the bourgeoisie to raise money. He decided to move his palace from the Tuileries and built a splendid palace at Versailles, outside Paris, developing an elaborate court ritual where he ruled supreme as the 'Sun King.'

LOUIS XV
(1710–1774)

Louis XV was the great-grandson of Louis XIV and followed the same European policy as his predecessor, resulting in France being involved in almost continuous war throughout his reign, financed by a series of foreign loans that were later to prove ruinous for the *ancien régime*. His wars also extended to the French colonies where France was involved in a bitter rivalry against Britain, most notably in India and America.

LOUIS XVI
(1754–1793)

King of France during the revolution, Louis was the third son of the heir to the French throne. In 1768, Louis' marriage was arranged to Marie Antoinette, the youngest daughter of Maria Theresa of Austria. The groom was sixteen and his bride fifteen. In 1774, his grandfather died and he became king at the age of twenty. Louis was crowned in the cathedral at Rheims as an absolute, divine right monarch. In 1787, with the crisis of bankruptcy threatening, he took Calonne's advice and called the Assembly of Notables. Faced with their refusal to support reforms to taxation, he tried to register the reforms with the Parlement of Paris, unleashing a political rebellion. In 1788, he submitted to calls for an Estates-General, thereby unleashing the momentum for reform. Sovereignty was transferred to the National Assembly. By October

1789, Louis XVI was virtually a prisoner, forced to move from Versailles to Paris by the mob. The breaking point with the revolutionary forces came in 1790, with the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. Louis was forced to sign it, but his religious beliefs meant he could not accept the primacy of the state over God. On 20 June 1791, the royal family made a clumsy attempt to escape the revolution but were recaptured at Varennes and returned to Paris. Imprisoned at the Tuileries Palace, the royal family found itself at the mercy of the mob and under attack from the radical Jacobins and Cordeliers, who were determined that Louis should face trial for treason. Forced to flee the Tuileries on 10 August 1792, the royal family was imprisoned in the Temple. Louis took refuge in prayer, finding spiritual solace in his faith. At his trial, he remained silent. Found guilty of treason, he approached his execution with courage and was guillotined on 21 January 1793.



LOUIS XVII
(1785–1795)

Louis-Charles, the second son of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, became dauphin (heir to the throne) upon the death of his elder brother on 4 June 1789. At the age of seven, he entered the Temple prison, losing his father, mother and aunt to the guillotine. The prince deteriorated both mentally and physically and died of tuberculosis in prison on 8 June 1795.

Marie Antoinette was the youngest daughter of Queen Maria Theresa of Austria. Her marriage to Louis XVI was arranged as a result of a political alliance between France and Austria. She married Louis XVI by proxy in 1769 at Vienna and then left her homeland for her new country. Her first child was born in 1778, a girl, followed by two sons in 1781 and 1785. By then, the royal family had become an object of ridicule. Her Austrian origins were held against her. She was said to be ambitious for power, promiscuous and financially extravagant. She was commonly called the 'Austrian whore' and 'Madame Deficit.' In 1785–86, Marie's name was further muddled by the 'Affair of the Diamond Necklace.' By the time the revolution began, she was widely disliked. Marie did not accept the revolution passively, but corresponded, negotiated and plotted against it. She played for time, hoping that discontent within France and intervention from her brothers, Joseph II and then Leopold II of Austria, would end the imprisonment of the royal family and restore them to power. The failed attempt of the Flight from Paris sealed the royal family's fate. Public opinion continued to rise against Marie Antoinette, branding her a traitor to France. She was executed on 16 October 1793.

MARIE ANTOINETTE
(1755–1793)



King of France from 1814 until his death in 1824, the Comte de Provence was the grandson of Louis XV and brother to Louis XVI. He worked to secure the intervention of foreign powers to restore Louis to the throne. After Louis' execution in 1793, Provence declared himself regent for his nephew, Louis XVII. When the boy died in prison, he announced his accession to the throne as Louis XVIII and publicly rejected all the changes which had been made since 1789. This gave rise to the saying that the Bourbons had 'learned nothing and forgotten nothing.' Louis remained in exile until the defeat of Napoleon in 1814 restored him to the throne.

**PROVENCE,
THE COMTE DE**
(1755–1824)

THE KING'S MINISTERS

BRIENNE, ETIENNE-CHARLES LOMÉNIÉ DE (1727–1794)



Etienne-Charles Loménie de Brienne was a cleric and by 1788, Archbishop of Toulouse in the Gallican Church, a man of immense authority, a generous benefactor and a man of learning. In May 1787, when Calonne fell from favour, Louis XVI appointed Brienne to the position of Head of the Royal Council of Finances and then Chief Minister. Like Calonne, he failed to convince the Assembly of Notables to support the tax reforms, so they were dismissed in May 1787. The tax reforms were then sent directly for registration to the Parlement of Paris, where they again met opposition. In July 1787, the Parlement refused to register the taxes and open hostility flared between the King and the aristocracy. In August, Louis XVI exiled the recalcitrant magistrates to Troyes, but they won such popular support that he was forced to recall them. Their return was met with demonstrations and riots in Paris. Public pressure was so strong, however, that Louis XVI was forced to agree to the demand for an Estates-General to decide the tax question. Brienne resigned on 25 August 1789. During the Terror, he was arrested and died in prison on 16 February 1794.

CALONNE, CHARLES-ALEXANDRE DE (1734–1802)



Calonne was a career public servant who held various positions in the royal administration. In 1783 he became Director-General of Finances. Calonne had a great deal of personal charm and was a favourite in court circles. Queen Marie Antoinette was one of his patrons. In 1786, he was confronted with the imminent bankruptcy of the state. Realising that the Third Estate was already overtaxed, he devised a plan to raise revenue which included a 'territorial subvention' or tax on the productivity of land. This would allow the eradication of the *vingtième* and move some of the tax burden from the peasants to the land-owners. However, the reforms would also mean an erosion of the privileged status of the nobility and the Church. Calonne therefore anticipated hostility and requested the King to call an Assembly of Notables, whose support for tax reform would add weight to the royal decree. The move in 1787 to call the Notables was a mistake and led to Calonne's downfall. The 144 Notables saw the opportunity to question the government about spending; resentment of the new taxes grew, as did opposition to Calonne. He was forced to flee to England to escape arrest and became an active opponent of the revolution.

NECKER, JACQUES (1732–1806)

Necker was born in Switzerland. In 1776, he took over from Turgot as Comptroller-General of Finances. In January 1781, he published his controversial *Compte Rendu au Roi*, in an attempt to restore confidence in the royal finances by opening them to the scrutiny of the public. By excluding the costs of war from the accounts, Necker showed the finances to be ten million livres in surplus.

THE REVOLUTIONARIES

A member of the Committee of General Security in 1793, Amar was therefore an elected deputy of the National Convention. In July 1793, with his colleagues from the Committee of General Security, he joined a small group from within the Committee of Public Safety to take a decisive role in the downfall of Robespierre on 9 Thermidor Year II (27 July 1794). Amar was one of the deputies who stood up to Robespierre in the National Convention on 8 Thermidor.

**AMAR, JEAN
PIERRE-ANDRÉ
(1755-1816)**

Bailly's political experience came from organising the Third Estate elections to the Estates-General for Paris. In defiance of royal orders, he allowed the sixty Paris districts to elect 407 deputies. This group was to form the Paris Commune, which effectively governed Paris from the Hôtel de Ville (Town Hall). Bailly was elected Mayor of Paris and deputy of the Third Estate. It was Bailly, as president of the Third Estate deputies, to whom the Tennis Court Oath was made, 'never to be separated until we have formed a solid and equitable Constitution as our constituents have asked us to.' Following the Champ de Mars massacre, he lost his popularity and was executed in 1793.

**BAILLY, JEAN-SYLVAIN
(1736-1793)**

Barère was a lawyer and a freemason. In 1789, he was elected to represent the Third Estate of Bigorre. He favoured moderate constitutional reform but was still elected to the National Convention in 1792. He became the leader of the group known as the Plain in the Convention and was elected a member of the Committee of Public Safety in 1793. He supported the Terror, and although sympathetic to Danton and the Indulgents, he survived their fall and was later involved in the plot to depose Robespierre.

**BARÈRE, BERTRAND
(1755-1841)**

Born at Grenoble, Barnave became a lawyer and was elected as a deputy of the Third Estate at the Estates-General. He was actively involved in resisting the monarchy through the Oath of the Tennis Court. Later, he would join the Feuillant faction in an effort to save the constitutional monarchy. Barnave was arrested in August 1792 and executed on 29 November 1793.

**BARNAVE,
ANTOINE-PIERRE
(1761-1793)**

D'Anglas was elected to the Estates-General in 1789. He opposed the execution of the king and the arrest of the Girondins. He later helped dismantle the Jacobin regime and establish the Directory in 1795. He gave a key speech in the Convention on the values of the Constitution of Year III.

**BOISSY D'ANGLAS,
FRANÇOIS-ANTOINE
(1756-1826)**

Bonaparte was born in Corsica, which was then under French control, and trained for the army. His career epitomised the revolutionary principle of advancement by merit. From 1789 he was friendly with the Jacobins and by 1793 he had gained prominence by retaking the Mediterranean port of Toulon from the British. His friendship with Robespierre led to his temporary disgrace after Thermidor Year II, but in 1795 he regained his credit by suppressing the royalist rising of *Vendémiaire*. He became the self-appointed

**BONAPARTE, NAPOLEON
(1756-1821)**

emperor in 1804. He was ultimately defeated at the Battle of Waterloo (1815) and was exiled to the distant island of St. Helena, where he died in 1821.

**BRISSOT DE WARVILLE,
JACQUES-PIERRE
(1754–1793)**

Brissot was one of the leading members of the Girondin faction, also known as the 'Brissotins.' He was a lawyer and writer whose thinking was heavily influenced by the works of Rousseau. On 6 May 1789, he founded the journal *Le Patriote Français* which became a strong advocate for the revolution. He joined the Jacobin Club, where he became known for his brilliant oratory and was elected as a deputy to both the Legislative Assembly and the National Convention. Because of his deep interest in foreign affairs, he was influential in shaping France's declaration of war on Austria and Prussia. However, the opposition of the Girondins to the execution of Louis XVI and to the Terror saw them fall from power. Brissot was caught as he attempted to flee France in May 1793, and was executed in October 1793 with other leading Girondins.

**BURKE, EDMUND
(1729–1797)**

An English orator and Member of Parliament, Burke was a political theorist whose writings against the Revolution were very influential, especially his *Reflections on the French Revolution*, published in 1790.

**COLLOT D'HERBOIS,
JEAN-MARIE
(1750–1795)**

Jean-Marie Collot d'Herbois was originally an actor and playwright. Politically he was a moderate, favouring the retention of the constitutional monarchy established by the 1791 Constitution. After this period, however, he became increasingly radical, influenced through his membership of the Commune of Paris. Elected to the National Convention in September 1792, he took part in the September Massacres. As a member of the Committee of Public Safety, he was a strong supporter of the Terror, directing, along with Fouché, the slaughter in the Vendée and the *mitrillades* at Lyons in November 1793. However, Collot's support for Hébert saw him turn against Robespierre. He supported the overthrow of Robespierre on 9 Thermidor but was himself accused during the Thermidorian reaction and deported to French Guiana in April 1795.

**CONDORCET, JEAN-
ANTOINE-NICHOLAS DE
CARITAT, MARQUIS DE
(1743–1794)**

Born into the nobility, Condorcet became a leading Enlightenment thinker, mathematician and philosopher. He was a member of the Society of Thirty which, prior to the revolution, met to discuss political change and a written constitution for France. He became a deputy to the Convention and helped draw up the Girondin version of the 1793 Constitution. He was denounced and imprisoned after the fall of the Girondins and died of self-administered poison in prison.

**CORDAY, MARIE-ANNE
CHARLOTTE
(1769–1793)**

Charlotte Corday became famous for the murder of Jean-Paul Marat on 13 July 1793, for which she was guillotined. Although Corday came from a royalist family, with two brothers who served in the *émigré* army, Schama has argued that she was deeply imbued with republican ideals and that 'she imagined the revolution as bringing about an exalted moral transformation.' It is believed her motives were to do with the imprisonment of the Girondins, including her fiancé.

Couthon was a lawyer by profession and a deputy to both the Legislative Assembly and the National Convention. He had been crippled in adolescence and was forced to use a wheelchair. In May 1793, he became a member of the Committee of Public Safety and became one of its most dominant members. He was responsible for the slaughter at Lyons in 1793 and, in June 1794, introduced the law of the Prairial which refused a legal defence to those accused under the Terror. He was a close associate of Robespierre and Saint-Just and was guillotined with them on 28 July 1794.

**COUTHON,
GEORGES-AUGUST
(1755–1794)**

Etta Palm, along with Pauline Léon, fought for the rights of women to equal citizenship and the right to engage in political action. On 30 December 1790, she addressed her 'Discourse on the Injustice of the Laws in Favour of Men, at the Expense of Women' to the deputies of the Assembly, protesting against the 'eternal subordination' of women. Along with Olympe de Gouges, Pauline Léon and Claire Lacombe, she was a member of the *Cercle Social*, which fought for equality for women. However, by 1793, the time of active citizenship for women had passed. In debates within the Convention, male deputies voted against women's right to vote or to join political associations or even women's clubs. Palm was arrested and imprisoned in 1794, but escaped the guillotine.

**D'AELDERS, ETTA PALM
(1743–1799)**

Danton was lawyer who joined the National Guard in 1789. In January 1790, he formed the Cordeliers Club with Desmoulins. Danton was already a leader of the Paris crowd, with a gift for oratory. He helped plan the *journée* of 10 August 1792, when Louis XVI and his family were forced to flee the Tuileries; though again, he was not there when the *sans-culottes* stormed the palace. After this, he became Minister for Justice, supporting Robespierre's call for strong government. However, Simon Schama accused Danton of 'turning a blind eye to the violence he clearly knew was about to take place in Paris' – the September Massacres. Danton supported the creation of the Committee of Public Safety on 6 April 1793. He rallied the people to fight against the invading forces of Austria and Prussia. Thus, Mona Ozouf concluded that he was 'a man who sought to stabilise the revolution by strengthening the government, establishing the Revolutionary Tribunal, centralising administration, relying on military justice and devoting little thought to the problem of creating enduring institutions.' However, in 1793, he changed his opinions, resigning from the Ministry of Justice and opposing the Terror. He and his followers, the Indulgents, were executed by order of the Committee of Public Safety on 5 April 1794.

**DANTON, GEORGES
(1759–1794)**



David is best known for his great painting of *The Oath of the Tennis Court* and the portrait of the revolutionary martyr Marat. His small sketch of Marie Antoinette on her way to execution projects the pathos of her figure and the sadness of her fall. David was a member of the Jacobin Club, a deputy to the government of the Convention and voted for the execution of Louis XVI. He was a close friend of Robespierre but escaped his friend's fate.

**DAVID, JACQUES-LOUIS
(1748–1825)**

**DESMOULINS, CAMILLE
(1760–1794)**

Desmoulins was a school-friend of Robespierre. He trained as a lawyer but his stammer was a disadvantage in representing people in court. He practised as a journalist and was involved in the revolution from its beginning, haranguing crowds at the Palais Royal in support of the revolution on 12 July 1789. He failed to get elected to the Estates-General but was active in urging that the king be brought back to Paris on 5–6 October. He became a founding member of the Cordeliers and was active in the Champ de Mars protest in July 1791. He was elected to the National Convention and became a moderate Jacobin, a supporter of Danton and a critic of Robespierre. He was arrested, along with Danton and the other Indulgents in March 1794, and guillotined on 5 April 1794.

**D'ORLÉANS,
LOUIS-PHILIPPE-
JOSEPH, THE DUC
(PHILIPPE-EGALITÉ)
(1747–1793)**

The Duc d'Orléans was one of the early supporters of the revolution, his liberal political philosophy seeming to be a complete contradiction to his name and status. He was one of the seven princes appointed to the Assembly of Notables in 1786 and chaired one of the committees which discussed Calonne's proposed reforms. He was openly opposed to absolute power and at the Royal Session called by Louis XVI to force registration of the tax reforms, it was Orléans who challenged Louis' right to forcibly register the loans against the remonstrance of the Parlement of Paris. In 1788, he joined the Society of Thirty, the group of liberal patriots whose goal was to reform the French political system. Orléans became a deputy to the National Assembly and the Convention as a radical Jacobin. He voted for the execution of his cousin, Louis XVI, but was himself executed in 1793. His son was to become the last King of France from 1830–48.

**DUMOURIEZ,
CHARLES-FRANÇOIS
(1739–1823)**

Dumouriez was a professional soldier and diplomat before 1789. He was made a general because of his victories at Valmy, where 52 000 French troops defeated 34 000 Prussians in September and at Jemappes in November 1792. His political sympathies were with the Girondins, but he was also prepared to negotiate with the Austrians, in spite of his hatred for them. His plan to evacuate Belgium, make peace with Austria and march to Paris to overthrow the Convention and restore the Constitution of 1791 was thwarted by his soldiers' refusal to follow him. He fled to Austria, his defection contributing to the fall of the Girondins.

**DUPORT, ADRIEN
(1759–1798)**

Duport was a lawyer who dropped the aristocratic 'de Prelaville' from his name to identify with the Third Estate. Duport founded the Society of Thirty, which met at his house in Paris. He was dedicated to the writings of Montesquieu, supported the physiocrats and was a Freemason. He was elected as deputy for the nobility of Paris in the Estates-General. A member of the Jacobin Club, Duport left it to found the Feuillant faction in support of the constitutional monarchy.

**FOUCHÉ, JOSEPH
(1759–1820)**

Fouché was a priest under the old regime. He became a deputy in the National Convention and voted for the king's death. He was a representative-on-mission for the Committee of Public Safety, was involved with the atrocities in Lyons and expelled from the Jacobins. He became a deadly enemy of Robespierre and the chief organiser of the coup of Thermidor. He survived the revolution and became chief of police under Napoleon.

Fréron was one of the most notable ‘Thermidorians,’ the group of deputies in the National Convention that led after the fall of Robespierre on 9 Thermidor Year II. While he had lived a life of leisure on inherited income before the revolution, in December 1789 Fréron founded a newspaper which in tone resembled Marat’s *L’ami du Peuple*, embracing the more radical principles of the revolution. Elected to the National Convention, he voted for the death of the king and, as representative-on-mission, in the summer of 1793 at the height of the Federalist Revolt, installed a revolutionary tribunal in Marseilles. He joined Tallien and others to move against Robespierre, and was one of the most ardent authors of the Thermidorian Reaction which followed. He was the leader of the *Jeunesse D’orée* or Muscadins, who attacked republicans on the street.

**FRÉRON, STANISLAUS
-LOUIS-MARIE
(1754–1802)**

Olympe de Gouges was a playwright and a journalist. During the revolution she became an advocate for women, demanding that they have the same rights in the new society as the men. She challenged the oppression of male authority over women and was a founding member of the Fraternal Society of Citizens of Both Sexes, an organisation of around 800 people whose goal was to extend the rights accorded to males to include females. In 1791, Gouges published *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Citizeness* which included a marriage contract. Gouges died at the guillotine in 1793 as a result of her strong political stance.

**GOUGES, OLYMPE DE
(1748–1793)**

Abbé Grégoire was an enlightened clergyman who was very active in the Society of the Friends of the Blacks, the anti-slavery society founded by Brissot in 1788. Grégoire was elected to represent the First Estate at the Estates-General in 1789. He supported the reform of the Gallican Church and was the first clergyman to take the Clerical Oath. He was then appointed as a ‘constitutional’ bishop. In spite of his support for the revolution, however, Grégoire refused to renounce Christianity during the period of de-Christianisation.

**GRÉGOIRE, HENRI, ABBÉ
(1750–1831)**

Guillotín was a doctor and a member of the Constituent Assembly. He did not invent the guillotine, but advocated it as a humane and egalitarian form of execution, hence the apparatus was named after him.

**GUILLOTIN,
JOSEPH IGNACE
(1738–1814)**

A journalist by trade, Hébert published his radical journal *Le Père Duchesne* from 1790–94. It became the platform for his virulent attacks on the monarchy, opponents of the revolution and his political opponents. In 1791, he became a member of the Cordeliers Club and in August 1792 a member of the Revolutionary Commune of Paris; both became the basis for the dissemination of his increasingly radical views. Hébert saw himself as the representative of the Paris poor and was largely responsible for the passing of two significant pieces of legislation during the Terror, the Law of the Maximum and the Law of Suspects. The increasing power of Hébert over the *sans-culottes* and within the Commune of Paris established him as a threat to the survival of the National Convention: direct democracy as exercised through the *journées* was turned against the government. Robespierre saw that Hébert must be removed or Paris would be thrown into anarchy. Hébert and his followers were sent to the guillotine in May 1794.

**HÉBERT, JACQUES-RENÉ
(1757–1794)**

LACOMBE, CLAIRE
(1765–1798)

An actress who used her talents to rouse the crowd to attack the Tuileries on 10 August 1792, Lacombe was a founder of the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women, a radical body associated with the Hébertists and which quarrelled with the more moderate Jacobin market women. The Society was closed down by the Committee of Public Safety on 30 October 1793. Lacombe was briefly imprisoned and then resumed her stage career.

LAFAYETTE, THE MARQUIS DE
(1757–1834)



The Marquis de Lafayette was the first volunteer for the American War. He became ‘the hero of two worlds,’ a member of the Assembly of Notables and of the Society of Thirty. He came back from the American Revolution enthused with the ‘spirit of the revolution,’ of liberal government, equal citizenship, democratic principles and the rule of reason. He was one of the ‘courtiers against the court, aristocrats against privilege, officers who wanted to replace dynasties with national patriotism.’ Lafayette was an influential early leader of the Aristocratic Revolt and a strong supporter of the revolution itself. He was elected to the Estates-General in 1789 and appointed the first commander of the National Guard in July of that year. In 1791 he helped found the Feuillant Club. Lafayette lost popularity because of his sympathy towards the Crown after the king’s Flight from Paris and his opening fire on the crowd at the Champ de Mars in July 1791. In 1792, he became a commandant at the frontier and denounced the influence of the clubs, especially the Jacobins. He failed to gain the support of his troops for a march on Paris and, after the fall of the king, crossed to the Austrians on 19 August 1792. Lafayette was imprisoned in Austria until 1797, after which time he lived in retirement until after Waterloo.

LÉON, PAULINE
(B. 1758)

Pauline Léon was a chocolate manufacturer who soon became caught up in the revolutionary politics of her Section. In 1791 she addressed the National Assembly on behalf of Parisian women, suggesting that a women’s militia be formed. In July 1791, she signed the petition at the Champ de Mars. Along with Claire Lacombe, Léon founded the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women and became its president in 1793. She married Le Clerc, who led the *Enragés*, and was an associate of Jacques Roux, the ‘Red Priest.’ After the National Convention declared all women’s clubs and associations illegal on 30 October 1793, Léon was detained until August 1794. She survived the revolution but little is known about her subsequent life.

MARAT, JEAN-PAUL
(1743–1793)

Marat originally qualified as a doctor, but from 1789 was best known as a radical journalist and editor of the widely read newspaper *L’ami du Peuple*. He was a member of the Cordeliers Club and, through his paper, incited violence which led to the September Massacres of 1792. He was a strong supporter of the Mountain. The attack on him by the Girondins was one factor which led to their expulsion from the Convention in June 1793. Marat was assassinated in his bath by Charlotte Corday, a Girondin supporter, on 13 July 1793; David’s painting of the event helped to immortalise Marat as a revolutionary martyr. The Jacobins gave him a huge public funeral and he was buried in the Panthéon, alongside other heroes of the revolution.

Anne-Josèph Théroigne de Méricourt, born in the Austrian Netherlands (Belgium), was a peasant girl who became a rich courtesan. She was a strong supporter of the revolution and a warrior for women's rights. She was a dramatic character, notorious for being well armed and for wearing a man's riding habit, complete with a dashing red silk jacket, which earned her the name 'Amazon.' Méricourt's great claim to fame was that she rode at the head of the women who marched to Versailles in October 1789; but this would appear to be a myth created and perpetuated by nineteenth-century historians, happy to tell a romantic story. On a visit to the Austrian Netherlands she was arrested and accused of being involved in a plot against Marie Antoinette. After being released by the Austrians, Méricourt was able to return to Paris in January 1792. She became associated with the Girondins and after their fall from power in 1793 was attacked by a mob of Jacobin supporters, stripped naked and badly beaten. As a result of this ordeal, Méricourt developed a mental illness in 1794 and was committed to a series of asylums before dying in 1807.

**MÉRICOURT,
THÉROIGNE DE
(1762–1817)**



Noble by birth and thus belonging to the Second Estate, Mirabeau became a deputy of the Third Estate, representing the town of Aix. According to Schama, 'Mirabeau was not just esteemed. He was loved. The black sheep of his family had become the white knight of the people.' Mirabeau was the great voice of the early revolution: 'War on the privileged and privileges,' he declared, 'That's my motto.' When the king's troops threatened to eject the rebellious deputies from the Tennis Court, it was Mirabeau who stood his ground: 'Go and tell those who sent you that we are here by the will of the people and that we will go only if driven out by bayonets.' Mirabeau later fell into disrepute because he negotiated with and took money from the court, attempting to find common ground between the monarchy and the National Assembly.

**MIRABEAU, HONORÉ-
GABRIEL RIQUETTI,
THE COMTE DE
(1749–1791)**

Mounier was a lawyer and, in 1783, became *noblesse de robe*, having bought the office of Judge. Along with Barnave, he was involved in the Day of the Tiles at Grenoble, which Schama says 'delivered the initiative for political action into the hands of a younger, more radical group.' The Day of the Tiles, 7 June 1788, was important because 'it signified the breakdown of royal authority and the helplessness of military force in the face of sustained urban disorder.' It was Mounier who first suggested and then co-drafted the Oath of the Tennis Court. He was also responsible for the first three articles of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. However, he left Paris after the October Days to return to his home and eventually fled to Switzerland in May 1790.

**MOUNIER, JEAN-JOSEPH
(1758–1806)**

Pétion was a lawyer by profession and became a Third Estate deputy for Paris in the Estates-General. He was elected Mayor of Paris in 1791 and was thus associated with the radical actions of the *sans-culottes*. Pétion later became identified with the Girondins.

**PÉTION DE VILLENEUVE,
JACQUES
(1756–1794)**

**ROBESPIERRE,
MAXIMILIEN
(1758–1794)**



The son of a barrister, Robespierre was born in Arras and became a lawyer known for his defence of the poor. In 1789, he became a Third Estate deputy representing Arras. He was responsible for the 'Self-denying Ordinance' of May 1791, which disallowed any deputy from the Constituent Assembly from standing for election to the Legislative Assembly, thus ensuring the return of an overwhelmingly bourgeois Assembly. He was a founding member of the Jacobin Club and became a prominent revolutionary leader. He was elected in 1792 to the National Convention and, in July 1793, to the Committee of Public Safety. By 1793, he was the architect of the Terror. Robespierre was the proponent of *vertu*, the love of the nation, which he wanted to become the predominant value. The passing of the Law of 22 Prairial, however, frightened the deputies of the National Convention, because for the first time they were not exempt from its provisions. Anti-Robespierrist forces began to rally. On 26 July 1794, he declared that there was a 'conspiracy against public liberty' within the Convention and the Committees of Public Safety and General Security, leading to fears that there would be a purge. When Robespierre tried to speak to the Convention on 27 July, he was drowned out by cries of 'Down with the tyrant!' Aware that he was about to be arrested, on the evening of 27 July he attempted to shoot himself, but only broke his jaw. He was guillotined on 28 July with other 'Robespierrists,' thus marking the end of the Terror.

**ROLAND, JEAN-MARIE
(1734–1793)**

Roland's background was in manufacturing, first as an Inspector of Manufactures under Louis XVI's government, then later as minister of the interior. Roland became one of the most prominent members of the Girondin faction. When the Girondins fell from power he was arrested but managed to escape. However, when he heard of his wife's death at the guillotine he committed suicide.

**ROLAND, MANON
PHILIPON
(1754–1793)**

The daughter of an artist, Manon Roland was an intelligent, studious and articulate woman. She married Jean-Marie Roland, a future Girondin, and became famous for her *salon* in Paris, which attracted all the important revolutionary leaders, including Robespierre, Brissot and Pétion. However, after Jean-Marie Roland publicly attacked the violence of the revolution, the couple fell from favour and Manon was imprisoned on 1 June 1793. She was executed on 8 November 1793, crying out to the crowd, 'Oh, Liberty! What crimes are committed in your name!'

**ROUX, JACQUES
(1752–1794)**

Jacques Roux was a priest, but abandoned his vocation at the start of the revolution in 1789. He became one of the first priests to accept the Civil Constitution of the Clergy but he never abandoned his commitment to the poor. He became a member of the Commune of Paris of August 1792 and the leader of the *Enragés* of the Paris Sections – a radical and violent group of *sans-culottes*. In February and March 1793, Roux helped to instigate food riots in Paris. He bitterly attacked those bourgeois citizens who had made large fortunes out of the revolution. Roux and his followers took a major role in the overthrow of the Girondins, leading the *journée* of 2 June 1793, but his intemperate attacks on the government lost him the support of even close

colleagues like Hébert. Roux was arrested in September 1793 under the Law of Suspects and condemned by the Revolutionary Tribunal. His execution was delayed, however, and he took his own life in prison in January 1794.

Rabaut Saint-Etienne was a liberal clergyman of the Protestant faith, much influenced by the works of the Enlightenment *philosophes*. His concerns, however, were also an extension of his pastoral role. Saint-Etienne is depicted in David's *Oath of the Tennis Court*, symbolising the union of clerical deputies with those of the Third Estate. He was guillotined with the other Girondists in 1793.

**SAINT-ETIENNE, RABAUT
(1743–1793)**

Saint-Just was educated as a lawyer, joined the National Guard in 1789 and, at twenty-five, was the youngest deputy in the National Convention. He became a close associate of Robespierre on the Committee of Public Safety and became known as the 'angel of death.' After 9 Thermidor, he was sent to the guillotine with Robespierre.

**SAINT-JUST, LOUIS
ANTOINE DE
(1767–1794)**

A Parisian and a brewer by trade, Santerre developed a taste for politics during 1789. He became Commander of the National Guard of Paris for the district of Enfants Trouvés. He joined the Cordeliers Club and was involved in the protests at the Champ de Mars, after which he was forced to go into hiding. Santerre led the National Guard of Paris in the *journée* of 10 August 1792, which forced Louis XVI to flee the Tuileries Palace. During the Terror, he was sent out on missions. Santerre was imprisoned in September 1793, but he was later released and lived quietly until his death in 1809.

**SANTERRE,
ANTOINE-JOSEPHE
(1752–1809)**

Abbé Sieyès studied for the priesthood at the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice and was later appointed the *curé* for Chartres. He became a radical writer, producing his influential pamphlet *What Is the Third Estate?* in January 1789. In it he questioned the nature of French society and challenged the privileges of the nobility: 'What is the Third Estate? Everything, but an everything shackled and oppressed.' Sieyès became a deputy for the Third Estate in the Estates-General and a member of the National Convention. He survived the revolution and was instrumental in bringing Napoleon to power.

**SIEYÈS, EMMANUEL
JOSEPH, ABBÉ
(1748–1836)**

In 1791 Tallien started *l'Ami du Citoyen*, the newspaper of the Jacobin Club. He was elected to the National Convention where he sat with the Mountain, attacked the Girondins and voted for the death of the king. Tallien was an original member of the Committee of General Security. In March 1793 he was sent out as a representative-on-mission to enforce the *levée en masse* and in August he was sent to subdue Bordeaux, a centre of the Federalist Revolt. While there he met among the prisoners Thérèse Cabarrus, with whom he fell in love. He released her and, once Robespierre had fallen, married her in December 1794. Thérèse's influence turned Tallien away from the Terror. Because of her influence many lives were saved, although his commitment to the revolution itself remained strong. Tallien led the attack on Robespierre

**TALLIEN, JEAN-LAMBERT
(1767–1820)**

within the National Convention. He then became a leading member of the new Thermidorian government. Eventually, however, Thérèse left him and his career drifted downwards. He died in Paris in 1820.

**TARGET, GUI-JEAN
(1733–1806)**

Target was a lawyer and politician from the bourgeois class. He represented the Third Estate of Paris in the Estates-General and was one of the most idealistic and passionate of the deputies. Target supported all of the early legislation including the union of orders, the suspensive veto for the monarch and the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. He died peacefully in 1806.

**TALLEYRAND-PÉRIGORD,
CHARLES-MAURICE
(1754–1838)**

Talleyrand was born into the nobility and became the Bishop of Autun. He was elected as a noble deputy to the Estates-General. He accepted the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, but gave up the Church to become Ambassador to London for the revolutionary government of the Terror. By 1794 he was in America looking for land to sell to French *émigrés*. He later served the government of Louis XVIII.

**VADIER, MARC
GUILLAUME ALEXIS
(1736–1828)**

Vadier was a deputy in the National Convention and a member of the Committee of General Security from September 1793. He was a remorseless terrorist. Although one of the leaders of the coup against Robespierre (9 Thermidor Year II), he managed to survive the ensuing reaction against the Terror and lived quietly under Napoleon's rule.

**VERGNIAUD, PIERRE
(1753–1793)**

Vergniaud was one of the leading Girondins. He was a supporter of the war against Austria and Prussia, opposed extending the franchise to the *sans-culottes* and the execution of Louis XVI. He fell from power with his leader Brissot and the other Girondins, was arrested and imprisoned in June 1793 and executed with his colleagues on 31 October. One of the leading orators of the Girondin faction, it was Vergniaud who delivered on 13 March 1793 in the National Convention the famous and terrible prophecy that 'It must be feared that the revolution, like Saturn, successfully devouring its children, will engender, finally, only despotism and the calamities which accompany it.'

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