

FOR THE NEW HISTORY SYLLABUS 2021-2025

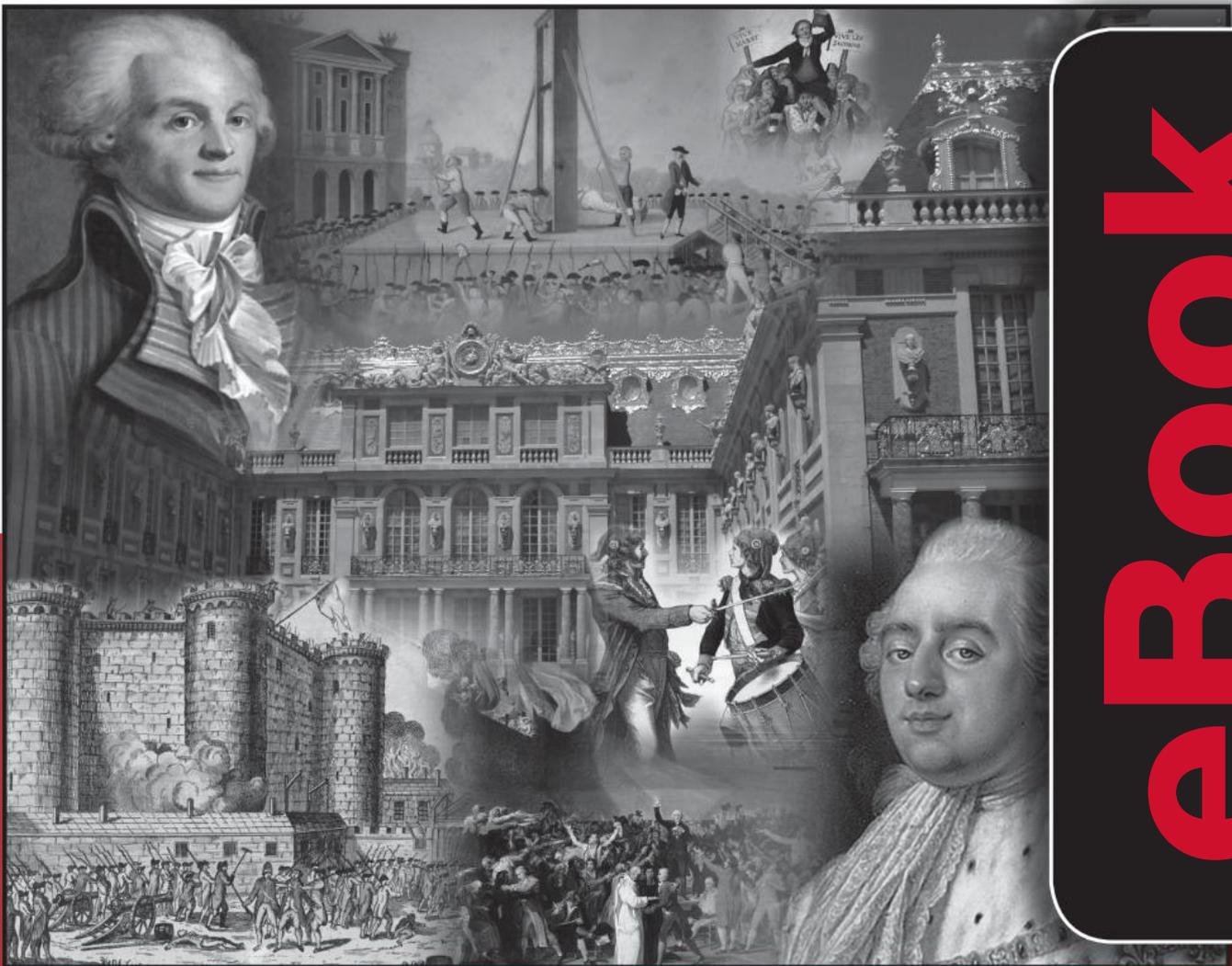
REVOLUTIONS

— CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES —

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION OF 1789

by Ken Webb

Here it is: the factual detail, historiography, revision exercises and advice on how to write examination-style responses on **THE FRENCH REVOLUTION OF 1789**



eBook

*“Everything you wanted to know about THE FRENCH REVOLUTION OF 1789
but were afraid to ask.”*

REVOLUTIONS

— CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES —

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by Ken Webb M.A. (Oxon), C.Ed

*“Everything you wanted to know about
‘THE FRENCH REVOLUTION OF 1789’,
but were afraid to ask.”*

www.kenwebb.com.au

1st Edition

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About the author

Ken Webb was educated in the United Kingdom and graduated from the University of Oxford. He taught in several state schools before moving to Pymble Ladies' College where he taught Modern, Ancient and Extension History. He later moved to Ravenswood School for Girls where he also taught the International Baccalaureate course in History. He is a member of the NSW Independent Schools Examination Committee for Modern History. He frequently lectures and runs workshops for Year 12 and teacher groups. In addition to his own work, Ken Webb has contributed to colleagues' work and to newspapers and periodicals. He has also been a consultant on various history video documentaries. Ken Webb has been a state winner of the "National Excellence in Teaching" award.

Over the years, Ken Webb has written a very wide range of study guides and textbooks Australia wide, including:

- *"Russia and the Soviet Union: 1917-1941"* (Nelson: A Cengage Company)
- *"The Age of Imperialism"* (Nelson: A Cengage Learning)
- *"Analysing Australian History"* (CUP)
- *"Monumental Humanities"* (CUP)
- *"Conflict in Europe 1935-1945"* (Get Smart Education)
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"THE FRENCH REVOLUTION OF 1789" has been specifically written for VCE History. It is one of two titles written for VCE History. He has also written:

- *"The Russian Revolution of October 1917"*

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Author's note

The purpose of this book – as with all titles in the “*Everything you wanted to know about... but were afraid to ask*” series – is to make life easy for students and teachers working their way through THE FRENCH REVOLUTION OF 1789. It is not intended to be the final word on The French Revolution of 1789; nothing beats wide-reading and going back to the primary sources!

However, neither teachers nor students always have the time for such luxuries. Teachers have several other classes to worry about, not to mention a growing multitude of administrative and bureaucratic tasks to fulfill! Students have other subjects to study, and may also be burdened with a series of major works. Thus, “Everything you want to know...” steps in to make life easy.

The principal aims of this book are to:

- provide the essential factual detail needed to understand the topic;
- provide some experience in dealing with sources;
- provide references to major modern written and visual sources;
- provide an introduction to the essence of historiographical debate
- provide ideas for approaching the types of questions that can be expected when examined on *The French Revolution of 1789*.

UNITS 3 AND 4: REVOLUTIONS

Students studying “Revolutions” will develop an understanding of the complex nature of the causes and consequences of revolutions. Teachers have to select two revolutions from the list of revolutions below, one is for Unit 3 and one is for Unit 4.

- The American Revolution of 1776
- The French Revolution of 1789
- The Russian Revolution of October 1917
- The Chinese Revolution of 1949

Section One: Causes of Revolution ■ (A) Background to revolution

Chapter One

The old regime: L’Ancien Règime

*“...It is a paradox that no important people or forces in France of 1789 wanted revolution. Revolutions may begin, as wars often begin, not because people positively want them. They happen because people want other things that, in a certain set of circumstances, implicate them in a revolution or in a war...”*¹

This is how David Thomson opens his analysis of the revolutionary situation in France at the end of the 18th century. Indeed, the people of France were not brutally oppressed by a cruel and vicious despot such as Russia experienced from time to time. Evils and absurdities of its ancient, worn-out feudal system were well-recognised but few at the time would have predicted that these faults in the system would lead to the extreme violence and destruction that were to soon engulf France (and Europe). France had its problems but it also had a large and growing middle class and a peasantry that was far more prosperous than that of any other European country. The irony was that it was this that added to the ‘revolutionary situation’.

*“...It tends to be people with something to lose, and not merely something to gain, who think most eagerly of improving the existing state of society... The last thing most people wanted was violent and destructive revolution...”*²

France in the 18th century

France in the late 18th century was considered one of Europe’s most powerful states. Despite its financial problems and successive failures to deal with these³, France was a wealthy nation with significant resources. It was a centre of intellectual achievement and seen as the centre of the enlightenment⁴, and it had had military success during the American War of Independence⁵.

However, France was not a unified or well-organised kingdom in the 18th century and faced major economic and social problems.

- Over time, the French kings had expanded their domains as a result of warfare, marriage or negotiation. However, several areas of France retained their own distinctive character which diminished the idea of a unified state.
 - Dialects varied so much that not all French people could even understand each other.
- Large provinces like Brittany and Provence had their own customs, systems of weights and measures, laws and assemblies.
 - One town had twenty-nine feudal courts.

¹ Thomson, D, Europe Since Napoleon, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1966, p 24

² Thomson, D, Europe Since Napoleon, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1966, p 25

³ See Chapter Five.

⁴ See Chapter Four.

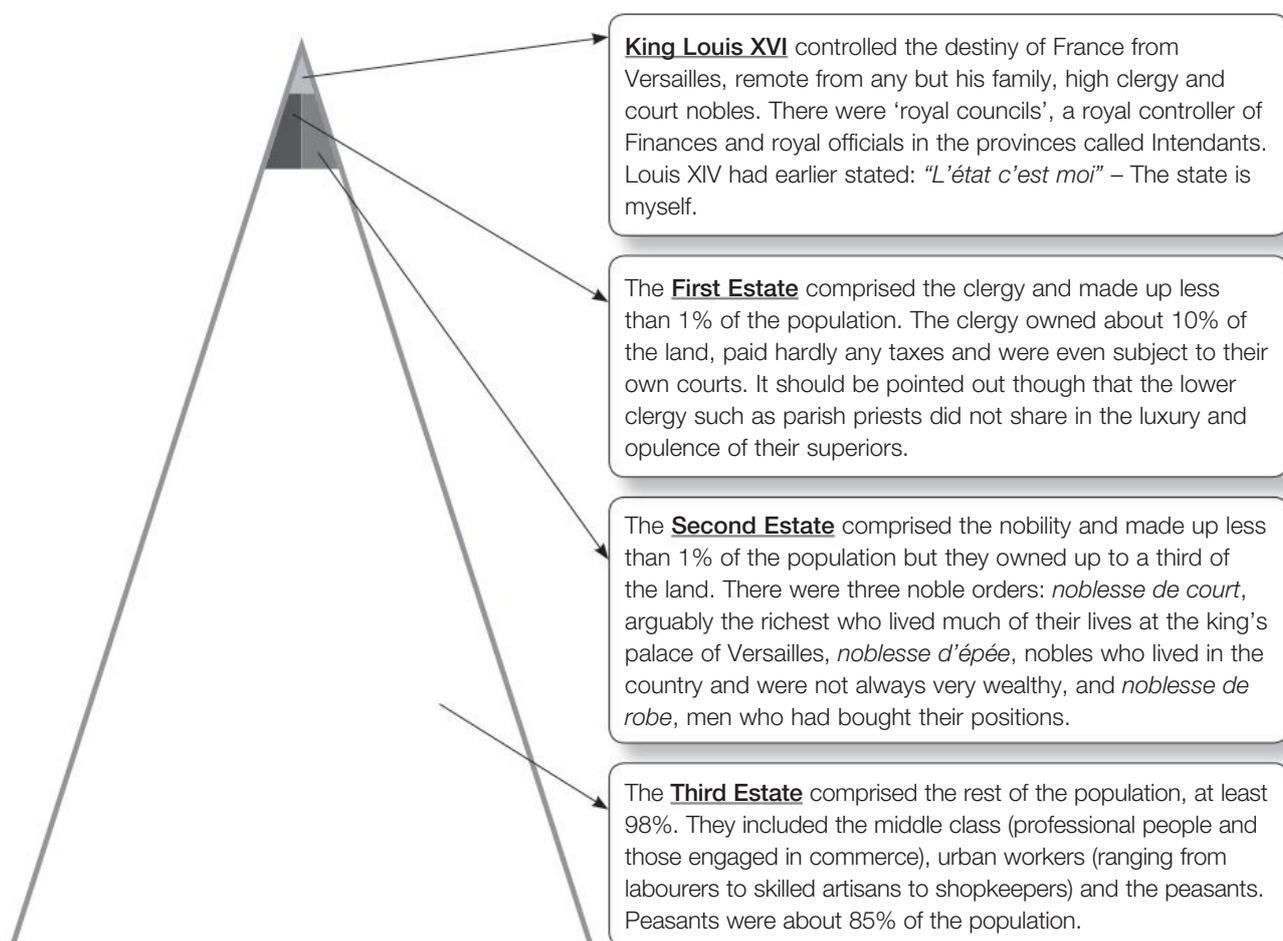
⁵ See Chapter Two.

- The country lacked economic unity as France's provinces imposed customs dues on goods entering from other provinces. Enormous variations existed between provinces in how taxation was levied and paid.
 - A boat carrying wine from the south of France to Paris could be forced to pay up to forty separate tolls.
 - The burden of taxation was spread very unequally with the noble classes paying next to no tax while commoners bore the brunt of taxes.
 - Taxes included the gabelle, (salt tax), the taille (land tax) and the corvée (forced unpaid labour, often on roads).
- Though France's potential made it a major power, in some areas it was well behind nations like Britain, eg in the area of industry, such as textiles. Britain had been innovating and inventions such as James Hargreaves' Spinning Jenny (1764) had become widespread in English textile mills, while France used far fewer.
- Those from the higher social classes could use their position or wealth to avoid duties or to gain positions for which they were quite often totally unqualified.

The social system of late 18th century France

France's social structure epitomised this situation. French society was divided into "three estates". This system is summarised in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1 The French social system in the late 18th century



Exercise 1.1 Indicate the social group to which each of the following belonged.

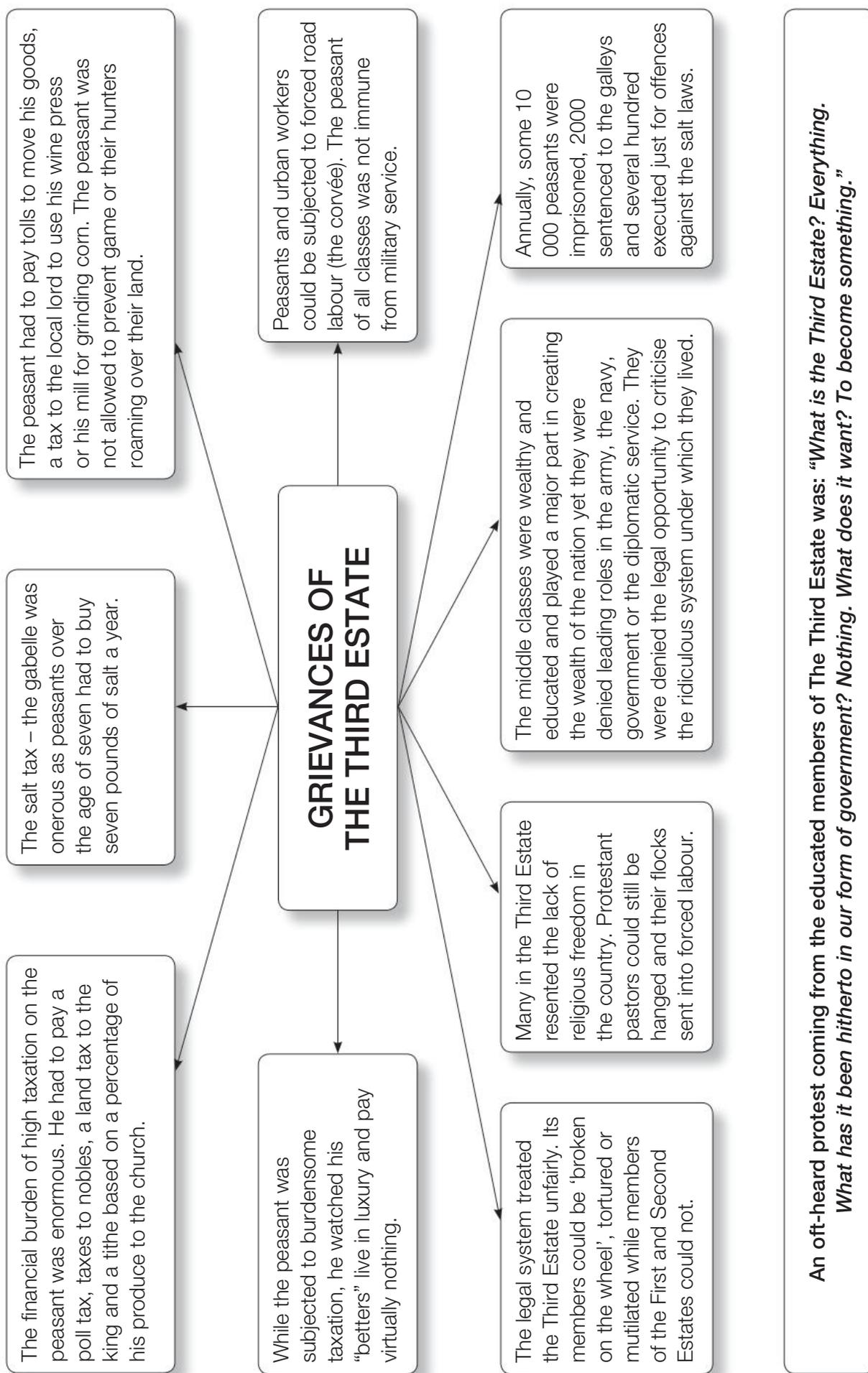
1	I am a local shopkeeper in Bordeaux selling various kinds of leather goods.	
2	I am a parish priest and in a really poor village in the foothills of the Alps.	
3	I am a noble living in Provence though my wealth does not really match my social status.	
4	I am a wealthy and successful lawyer working in Le Marais district of France.	
5	I am a very poor peasant and am forced to pay high rents and unfair taxes to my local lord.	
6	I am a noble living in Toulouse who has used my wealth to buy my position.	
7	I am a very high-ranking member of the clergy living in Paris.	
8	I am prosperous peasant living in the Loire Valley and own my own land.	
9	I am a very successful banker who has managed to branch out into various trading ventures.	
10	I am a very wealthy noble and spend most of my time at the royal court.	

The First Estate, The Second Estate (noblesse de court), The Second Estate (noblesse d' épée), The Second Estate (noblesse de robe), The Third Estate

Grievances of the Third Estate

As was indicated in Figure 1.1, the Third Estate comprised the vast majority of the population, at least 98%. The Third Estate was not a coherent group and consisted of a wide range of occupation types and levels of wealth. There were those members of the middle class – the bourgeoisie – who were involved in commerce such as bankers, traders and owners of factories. Other members of the bourgeoisie were well-educated professional people who included lawyers, doctors and civil servants. The urban members of the Third Estate might be successful, skilled artisans and shopkeepers or poverty-stricken labourers, never sure when their next work might arrive. There were also major differences within the peasantry. Some owned their land and might even employ workers; while others were forced to pay high rents to a distant landlord and barely manage to eke out an existence. Whichever sub-group they belonged to, the members of the Third Estate had grievances they wanted rectified. These grievances are summarised in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2 Grievances of the Third Estate



Grievances of the aristocracy

French nobles certainly benefitted from the system of ‘L’ Ancien Régime’. However, this did not mean that they were satisfied with the status quo, and during the reign of Louis XVI, their ire began to rise. Differences between the aristocracy and the monarchy had deep roots. As the French state was being created, the monarchy had dispossessed and antagonised aristocratic groups. Noble opponents of the king could be dealt with quickly by the issuing of a writ known as a *lettre de cachet*. Once such a writ had been issued, a noble critic could be arrested and imprisoned for an indefinite time without a trial of even a charge having been laid.

King Louis XIV had succeeded in keeping the aristocrats in their place. However, his weaker successors, Louis XV (1715-1774) and Louis XVI, lacked the strength and power of the “sun king”⁶. Louis XV is reputed to have uttered the phrase “*après moi, le déluge*” (after me the flood), suggesting that he was aware of the chaos and crisis that might soon envelop the monarchy. The aristocracy gradually began to assert themselves. The rivalry between the king and the aristocracy would come to a head as the country’s financial crisis worsened in the 1780s.⁷

In this struggle between the king and the aristocracy, the “parlements”, especially the “parlement of Paris”, would play a major role.

- A parlement was a judicial body and its members were drawn from the *noblesse de robe*.
- Parlements had various functions:
 - they acted as Courts of Appeal;
 - they exercised political functions;
 - they could reject any royal measure that they believed went against French law; though a king could overrule such a rejection, he would be loath to do this.⁸

Though the parlements were seeking to defend their own interests, they came to represent opposition to royal, arbitrary and authoritarian government. It was the parlement that would demand the summoning of the Estates General.⁹

⁶ Louis XIV was often referred to as the Sun King.

⁷ See Chapter 5.

⁸ This right had been returned to the nobility early in the reign of Louis XV. When Philip of Orleans was acting as regent for the young king, he returned to the Parlement of Paris its right to declare a royal edict as being against French law. He had done this in exchange for the parlement’s agreement to declare Louis XIV’s will null and void.

⁹ See Chapter 6.

What do the historians have to say about the Old Regime?

1. Arthur Young: *Travels in France during the years 1787, 1788, 1789*

Arthur Young was a wealthy English farmer who had a life-long passion for agriculture and he had been responsible for popularising many modernising aspects of English agriculture in the late 18th century. Following his travels around France in the late 1780s, he wrote in detail about the backward state of French agriculture and the often-desperate conditions faced by many of the French peasantry.

*“...The same wretched country continues to La Loge; the fields are scenes of pitiable management, as the houses are of misery. Yet all this country is highly improvable, if they knew what to do with it: the property, perhaps, of some of those glittering beings, who figured in the procession the other day at Versailles. Heaven grant me patience while I see a country thus neglected – and forgive me the oaths I swear at the absence and ignorance of the possessors...”*¹⁰

2. *The Notebook of Grievances of the Third Estate of the Parish of Saint-Vaast*

Once the Estates General had been called, the king was persuaded to order a compilation of “notebooks of grievances” or cahiers. These notebooks listed grievances of all sectors of society from across the country. In a sense it was the world’s first example of opinion polling. The grievances contained within these notebooks sometimes dealt with major legal and human rights issues such as the freedom of the press, representative government and anger at the use of lettres de cachet. However, often the grievances of the people centred on more basic issues. One such grievance referred to a 1669 ordinance called the Hunting Code, most of which:

“...turns free commoners into true serfs. It is contrary to human rights that a cultivator who owns his land cannot lift a finger to destroy the wild animals which devastate his harvest, which is even more destroyed by those who chase these animals with great noise and numbers...”

3. *Another grievance from the same Notebook argued that it was:*

*“...contrary to reason as well as the principle of liberty that a peaceful inhabitant of the country, merely because he is a commoner, can be seized from the centre of his family and sent to prison by order of the governor of the province, simply because he has a gun to assure his own safety and is, therefore, suspect of having killed a Lord’s rabbit...”*¹¹

¹⁰ Young, A, *Travels in France during the Years 1787, 1788, 1789*, p27

¹¹ Extract from *The Notebook of Grievances of the Third Estate of the Parish Saint-Vaast*, 1789

Exercise 1.2

Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

1	Why was the Third Estate so angry about the French taxation system?	
2	Why were the middle classes so resentful about the old regime?	
3	What was a <i>letter de cachet</i> ?	
4	What is Arthur Young's opinion of the nobles he saw at Versailles?	
5	What is Young referring to in the phrase <i>absence and ignorance of the possessors</i> ?	
6	Why was the gabelle such a burden for the French peasantry?	
7	What was Louis XV suggesting with his phrase <i>après moi, le deluge</i> ?	
8	Who comprised the membership of the <i>parlements</i> ?	
9	What key power did the parlement of Paris have?	
10	What was the purpose of the cahiers?	

Exercise 1.3

Examine the following cartoon that appeared in France shortly before the revolution in 1789. Answer the questions that follow.



1	Which social class is represented by the old man, bent over, with the walking stick?	
2	Which two social classes are represented by the other two men?	
3	What comment is the cartoonist trying to make?	
4	Do you think the cartoonist's comment is justified? Give reasons.	

Chapter Two

France and the American War of Independence

Background to the American War of Independence

Between 1775 and 1783, the Thirteen American Colonies fought a war with Britain to achieve their independence. The war resulted in a humiliating defeat for Britain. However, the war, or rather France's direct involvement in the war, was to have a major impact on the situation inside France in the 1780s.

Britain ran the Thirteen Colonies along traditional 'mercantilist' lines. This meant that the colonies existed for the benefit of the 'mother country'. They provided raw materials which Britain could not produce itself, and also provided a reliable market for goods produced in Britain's factories.

- In the 1760s and the 1770s, Britain stepped up its mercantilist regulations and insisted that all trade to and from America had to pass through British ports. This was to be the case even if that trade was with European countries.
 - This would place American trade under British scrutiny and would enable the British government to tax all such trade.
 - The colonists did their best to evade these regulations and smuggling became common.
 - The British government also began to demand taxes from the colonists to pay for the heavy defence burdens brought about by the British presence in North America.
- The American colonists resented the idea of being taxed by a government on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. The cry that rang out from America was "no taxation without representation".

During the early 1770s, relations between the colonists and the British authorities deteriorated and on occasions resulted in violence. By 1775, the American colonists were in open revolt against Britain. In 1776, the Americans formally announced their independence with the Thomas Jefferson penned "Declaration of Independence". Under the leadership of George Washington, the American colonists achieved victory over the British. This was achieved as a result of poor British military leadership, the problem of distance, European assistance to the Americans and inept political leadership in London. Britain and the Thirteen Colonies ceased fighting in 1783.

The government of King George III and representatives of the now United States of America signed a peace treaty in Paris on 3 September 1783.

- The Americans had gained their independence from Britain.
- Boundary lines between British territories and the United States were put in place.
- Other details in the treaty related to the exchange of prisoners of war, fishing and property rights.

France enthusiastically entered the American War of Independence on the side of the Americans. In February 1778 France signed a Treaty of Alliance and a Treaty of Amity and Commerce with the Americans. Louis XVI's government formally declared war on Britain in June 1778. France had little interest in the aspirations of the Thirteen Colonies. It was motivated purely by a desire for revenge against Britain who had defeated it in the Seven Years War (1756-63). That defeat had driven the French out of Canada and India.

France experienced its most successful military conflict of the 18th century.

- The Marquis de Lafayette had taken volunteers to America to support the colonists and he was joined by 6000 troops under Rochambeau.
- In 1781, a Franco-American army successfully besieged British General Cornwallis in Yorktown. At the same time, a French fleet under Admiral de Grasse, who had earlier defeated Admiral Hood, now controlled the seas outside of Yorktown.
- However, Britain soon regained its naval superiority over the French at sea with Admiral Rodney's victory over de Grasse at the Battle of Saintes in the West Indies. The French and the Spanish had besieged Gibraltar since 1779 but it was relieved in 1782.

France gained little from its involvement in the conflict beyond the gratitude of the Americans, military pride and satisfaction at having defeated an old rival. In the peace treaty signed at Versailles in 1783, France regained the small islands of Saint-Pierre and Miquelon near the St Lawrence waterway in Canada, the islands of Santa Lucia and Tobago in the West Indies, and Senegal and Goree in Africa.

However, French involvement in the American war and the Americans' success in that war were to have major ramifications inside France. These consequences are summarised in Figure 2.1.

What do the historians have to say about France and the American War of Independence?

1. Alfred Cobban: *A History of Modern France Volume 1: 1715-1799*

Cobban makes the point that democratic ideas had become more influential in parts of Europe in the second half of the 18th century. He refers to their growing development in places such as the Dutch Republic and Geneva. However, Cobban makes the point that they had not made their presence felt as much in France. Indeed, he argues that to suggest that French enlightenment thinkers were 'democratic' is an illusion. The impact of the American War of Independence changed that situation.

*"...Alliance with the Americans not merely exposed French society to democratic and republican ideas, but made them fashionable and respectable... 'I was far from being the only one,' wrote the young comte de Ségur, 'whose heart palpitated at the growing awakening of liberty, seeking to shake off the yoke of arbitrary power.'..."*¹

2. *The American Declaration of Independence, 4 July 1776*

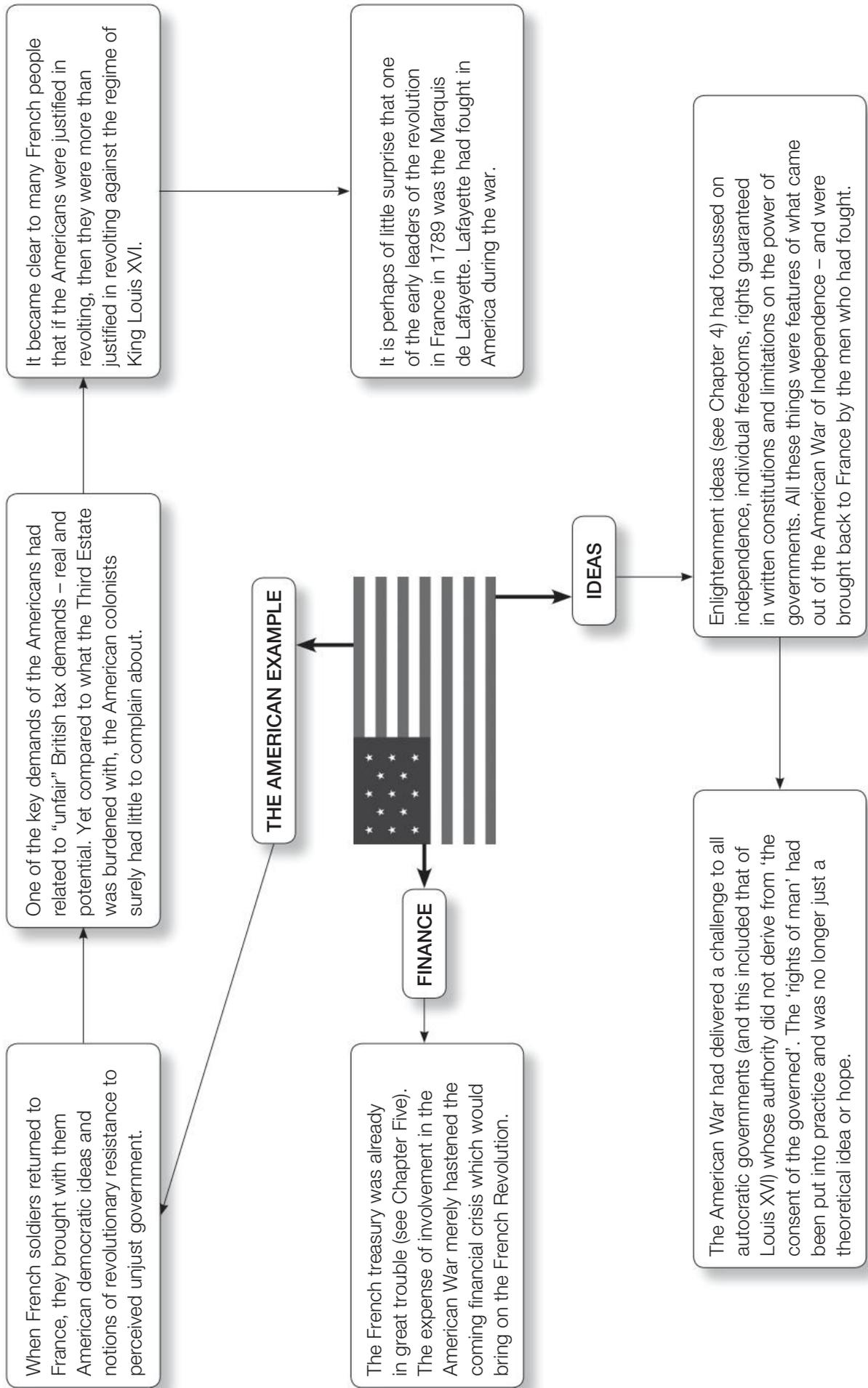
Largely written by the future US President, Thomas Jefferson, the Declaration of Independence, offered words and thoughts to make many thinking Frenchmen question the legitimacy of the regime of Louis XVI under which they lived.

*"...whenever any government becomes destructive of these (inalienable rights)..., it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organising its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness..."*²

1 Cobban, A, *A History of Modern France, Volume 1: 1715-1799*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1961, p 119

2 Extract from the US Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776

Figure 2.1 The consequences for France of its involvement in the American War of Independence



Exercise 2.1 Indicate whether the following statements are true or false.

1	France was extremely reluctant to enter the American War of Independence.	TRUE/ FALSE
2	France was motivated more by a desire for revenge against Britain than love of American ideals.	TRUE/ FALSE
3	During the American war, French forces performed poorly and suffered defeat after defeat.	TRUE/ FALSE
4	France made substantial territorial gains from the American war which made involvement very worthwhile.	TRUE/ FALSE
5	French soldiers returning from the war had been greatly affected by American democratic thinking.	TRUE/ FALSE
6	To most Frenchmen, their situation regarding taxation was far worse than that of the American colonists.	TRUE/ FALSE
7	The popularity of the ideas of the Enlightenment had been greatly enhanced because of the American war.	TRUE/ FALSE
8	Louis XVI's regime had little to be concerned about in relation to the ideas that came out of America.	TRUE/ FALSE
9	French involvement in the American war had surprisingly little impact on the finances of the Louis XVI's regime.	TRUE/ FALSE
10	The US Declaration of Independence contained potentially very dangerous ideas for Louis XVI's regime.	TRUE/ FALSE

Chapter Three

Economic change and the rise of the bourgeoisie

Nothing in history is inevitable and this was certainly the case with the French Revolution. Whether or not it was King Louis XV or his mistress, Madame de Pompadour who opined “*après moi, le déluge*”, their prediction did not mean that the regime was doomed. Perhaps France could have evolved in the same manner as Britain. However, the combination of various elements – gross inequality, ideas, financial chaos and the example of America – would compound to bring about the events of 1789 and after.

One of the key developments that would propel France towards revolution was the process of economic and social change that was hastening throughout the 18th century. Above all, of crucial importance was the rise of the bourgeoisie.

Economic developments

- Though France would lag behind the economic development of Britain, there was still significant progress in trade and industry throughout the 18th century.
 - Between 1716 and 1789, French foreign trade had more than tripled from 215 million livres to 655 million livres. The French merchant fleet comprised about 3500 vessels.
 - Sugar and rum were transported from Haiti.
 - French slave traders operated out of Africa.
- French ports along the Mediterranean, the Atlantic and Channel coasts were a hive of activity and around each of them various industries grew up in the wake of the maritime trade.
 - Ports such as St Malo, Lorient, Le Havre, Nantes and La Rochelle grew.
 - The cotton trade expanded around Rouen.
 - Linen was a key product in the Breton ports.
 - The cloth trade prospered around Marseille.
 - Around Nantes and Bordeaux distilleries and wineries were expanding.
- There were also economic developments beyond the coastal regions.
 - Small scale steel mills and paper mills appeared.
 - Though behind British development, coal mining was growing.

There were also major developments in the area of finance. The story of the Scottish banker, **John Law** highlights some of the advances – and disasters – of the French financial system. John Law settled in Paris in 1714 and soon became a key figure in French financial affairs during the chaos that followed the death of Louis XIV in 1715 and the early years of Louis XV when the Duke of Orleans acted as regent.

- France badly needed liquid capital and so Law’s ambitious banking scheme was taken up enthusiastically by the Duke.

- In 1716, Law set up the General Bank, soon nationalised as the Banque Royale.
- This bank could issue its own banknotes, paper money redeemable by coin.
- In 1717 Law persuaded the government to become involved in a note issue of 60 million livres.
- In 1717, Law set up the Mississippi Company to develop trade in the vast territory of Louisiana. Investors flocked to buy shares.
- However, Law had gone too far. Company revenues were wildly overestimated. While supporting the Company's shares with purchases funded by issuing banknotes, the link with coin was broken. This soon led to a bank run and a massive devaluation.

Law's major ventures failed, and after the failure of the bank, he was reduced to poverty and needed to be helped by friends. However, his General Bank was a key innovation which

*"...prefigured modern fractional reserve banking, and many of Law's insights into money, political economy, monetary policy and banking remain profoundly important today. In effect, he sought to modernise France; to create what Adam Smith would later call a 'commercial society', and turn its rentiers into investors at risk. The irony is that his efforts set back France's commercial development and ultimately compounded many of the problems he sought to solve; problems that would later set the scene for the French Revolution..."*¹

Despite Law's earlier troubles, other financiers were willing to experiment and monarchs were equally willing to seek them out for money.

- In 1777, the Mont de Piété was set up to deal with the increasing demand for loans.
- After 1780, joint-stock companies appeared, dealing with a range of economic activities including coal mines, mills and marine insurance.

(France's financial troubles which were to precipitate the revolution will be dealt with more fully in Chapter Five.)

The rise of the bourgeoisie

As time would show, arguably the key group in the lead-up to and progress of the French Revolution was the bourgeoisie. France's middle-class was powerful and numerous. Its rise had been considerable during the reign of Louis XIV, helped in no small part by the policy of mercantilism that had been promoted by the king's Minister of Finances (1661-1683), Jean-Baptiste Colbert. So keen had Louis XIV been to involve members of the bourgeoisie in some aspects of government, that the Duke de Saint-Simon at the time called Louis' policy the "bourgeois reign".

It was to be a tragedy for the regime that the talents and demands of the bourgeoisie were never recognised. Many members of the bourgeoisie were also becoming imbued with the enlightenment thinking of the time, from writers such as Voltaire and Rousseau, who questioned the legitimacy of the old regime.² Thus, France's bankers, merchants, traders

¹ Norman, J, The Spectator, 8 September 2018

² The impact of the enlightenment thinkers will be considered in detail in Chapter Four. It is not necessarily the case that there was a direct connection between enlightenment thinking and the outbreak of revolution in France in 1789.

and financiers, aware of new ideas and even more aware of the country's creaking economic system, were becoming restless and demanding reform. Other members of the middle class included professional people such as lawyers, academics and doctors. Intelligent and highly-educated, they too resented the lack of opportunity that the old regime afforded them.

- The bourgeoisie wanted an end to the unequal taxation system which allowed parasitic nobles to live well and pay little.
- They hated a system which ensured that the key positions in government, army and diplomacy were decided by one's birth rather than by ability and education.
- They were angered by the country's continuing financial woes.

However, few of the bourgeoisie were openly clamouring for violent revolution. Rather they sought reform. Many of them had bought country properties and enjoyed a rising social status, similar to some of the middle class in England. Yet, it was to be members of the middle class who would be prominent in the events of the revolution, men like Danton, Marat, Carnot and Robespierre.

The old regime did introduce some reforms but these measures merely whetted the appetite of the middle classes. Far from satisfying them, and dampening their ardour for change, it merely opened their minds to the opportunities that were being denied them and so they sought more change.

- In 1772, the Bureau de Commerce was established providing assistance and information with the Conseil du Commerce.
- Forced road labour, the Corvée Royale, was regularised in 1738.
- Toll gates were gradually reduced in number to assist internal trade.
- Turgot the reformer (see Chapter 5) slowly reduced the power of guilds to limit the establishment of new enterprises.
- From 1779, leading citizens were able to participate in provincial assemblies.

Exercise 3.1 Identify whether each of the following is a fact or an opinion.

1	The outbreak of revolution in 1789 was inevitable.	FACT/ OPINION
2	French maritime trade grew significantly in the 18th century.	FACT/ OPINION
3	John Law was a key figure in French banking activities.	FACT/ OPINION
4	The regime missed its opportunities to embrace the bourgeoisie.	FACT/ OPINION
5	Members of the bourgeoisie would never be satisfied until they had been granted significant political power.	FACT/ OPINION

Exercise 3.2 Answer the following questions.

1	What kind of trading activities was France involved in in Africa and the Americas?	
2	What sorts of industries began to develop around French ports?	
3	What was John Law's contribution to French finances in the early 18th century?	
4	What happened to the Mississippi Company established in 1717?	
5	What had been Louis XIV's attitude towards the bourgeoisie?	
6	Name two enlightenment writers with whose works middle class Frenchmen were becoming familiar.	
7	Why were so many members of the bourgeoisie discontented with the regime?	
8	Were all members of the middle class clamouring for revolution? Give reasons for your answer.	
9	What impact did attempts at reform by the regime have on the middle classes?	
10	Name three future revolutionary figures who came from the middle class.	

Chapter Four

The challenge of ideas

During the 18th century, France, or more specifically Paris, was regarded as a centre of the intellectual world. It could boast a host of thinkers and writers whose works are still studied and admired today. Many of the works of these writers were banned, and severe punishments existed for those caught publishing or reading them. However, this did not stop many people in France reading the likes of Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu and Diderot. These ‘enlightenment’ writers were eager to attack the faults and evils of the old regime as it operated in France. The king, his queen, the noble class and the clergy were all targets of their pen.

The presence and influence of the enlightenment thinkers in France have led some historians to argue that their work should be seen as a key factor in bringing about the revolution in 1789. Here is the view of an old English textbook on European history:

*“...but above all, it was (the bourgeoisie) who had the requisite political education. This political education they had found in the works of certain French philosophers of the 18th century, whose influence in causing the revolution was extremely important...”*¹

The French writer M Roustan’s 1926 book, *Pioneers of the French Revolution*, argued that the influence of the enlightenment writers was crucial in bringing about the revolution. For many years, his argument held great sway as many historians emphasised the importance of the French philosophers’ ideas in bringing on the outbreak of the revolution.

However, more recent research has questioned the impact of enlightenment thinking as a crucial factor. This issue will be examined later in the chapter.

Réne Descartes (1596-1650)²

Arguably the spark that spurred on the enlightenment came from the 17th century philosopher, Descartes. The French historian, Michelet, has suggested that the French Revolution began with Descartes. Descartes asserted the importance of the power of human reason to discover the truth about the universe. He used the method of logical argument to construct complex explanations of the universe. His method of using ‘reason’ soon extended to matters of morality, religion and politics. The thinkers of the enlightenment, disagreed on many things. However, they accepted two of Descartes’ key ideas:

- the first step to knowledge is doubt;
- everything is not for the best in this best of all possible worlds.³

In 1784, Immanuel Kant took these ideas further when he stated in *Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment*: “Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity... Dare to know!”

¹ Richards, D, *Modern Europe 1789-1945*, Longmans, Green and Co, London, 1951, p 5

² It is Descartes who stated “Cogito, ergo sum”, “I think, therefore I am”.

³ It was the German thinker, Gottfried Leibniz, who in 1710 stated that the actual world is the best of all possible worlds.

Voltaire (1694-1778)

Born Francois-Marie Arouet, Voltaire was arguably the greatest of the enlightenment philosophers. He was a man whose interests extended far and wide, from popularising science to poetry, drama and of course social and political satire.

Figure 4.1: Statue of Voltaire – the Pantheon, Paris



Voltaire was an unsparing critic of the institutions of L’Ancien Règime. Using his wit and satire, he attacked religious persecution, unfair taxation, torture and inequality. He mocked the pretensions of the church, the foolishness of government, and the credulity of those people who accepted the myths and superstitions of the church and notion of “divine right”.

Voltaire’s works included the anti-church “Philosophical Dictionary” (1764), “Letters on the English Nation” (1734) and *Candide* (1759) in which he attacked Leibniz’s “best of all possible worlds” belief.

Voltaire declared himself a “deist” but his god was not the Christian god. He was astute in his attacks on L’Ancien Règime but he suggested nothing to replace the system. He was no democrat, once saying: *“I had rather be ruled by one lion than a hundred rats.”*

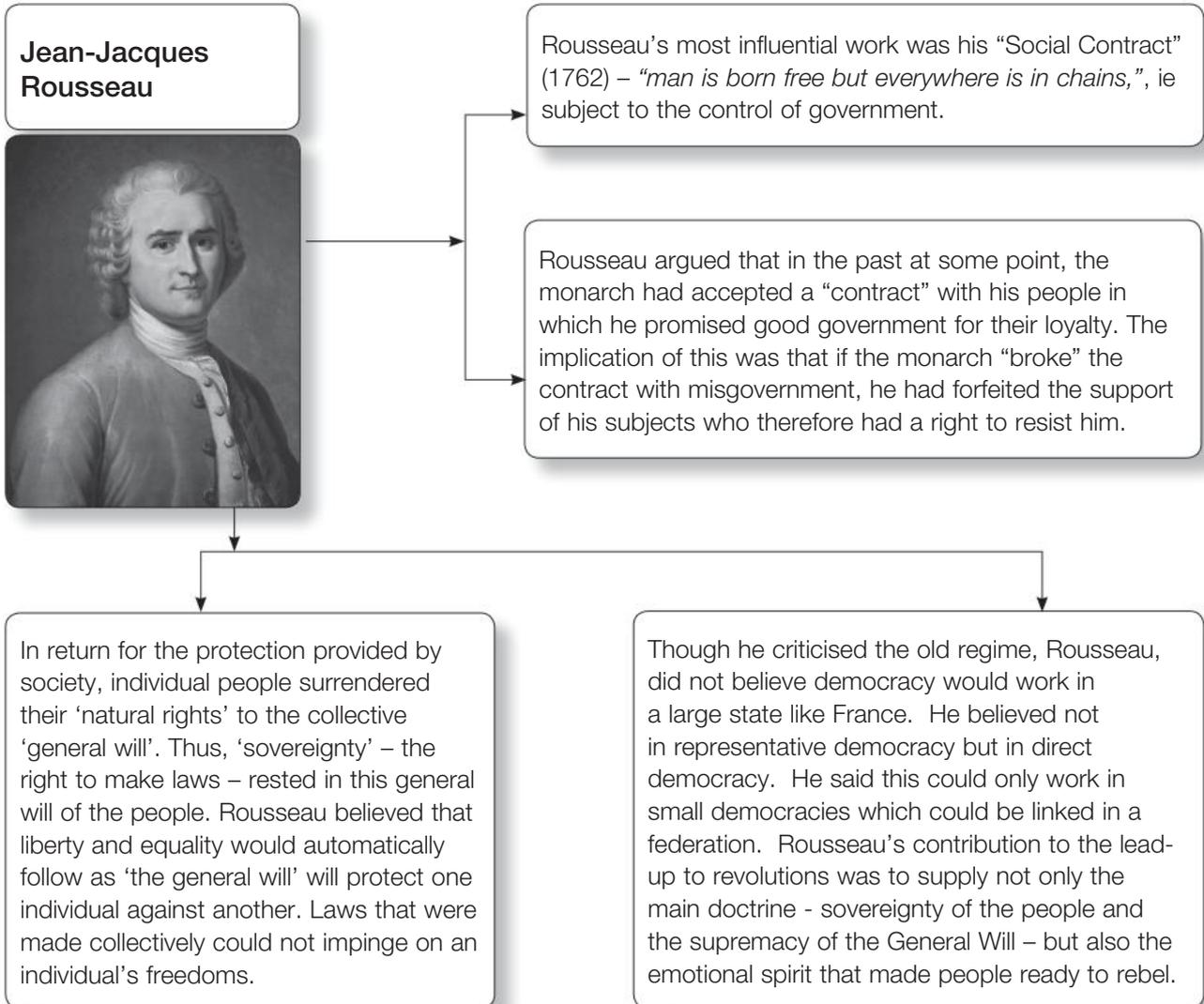
Voltaire had been a victim of a “letter de cachet” and spent time in the Bastille. Not till the end of his life was he safe in France. Crowds fought to see his plays but ever the realist he said: *“Ah, they’d come in just the same crowds to see me executed.”*

Voltaire befriended leaders such as Catherine the Great of Russia and Frederick the Great of Prussia. To the latter he wrote in 1770: *“Doubt is not a pleasant condition. But certainty is an absurd one.”*

Led by **Diderot**, the *Encyclopaedists* (1751-52), sought to produce an account of all existing knowledge. However, as time went, their work became a prolonged criticism of L’Ancien Règime. Diderot showed that it became impossible to consider the state of current knowledge and not be highlighting the folly and injustices of the church and the state. Another group, called the *Economists*, argued for the removal of taxes except a tax on land. This was clearly aimed at the First and Second Estate, but little else was suggested as an alternative system.

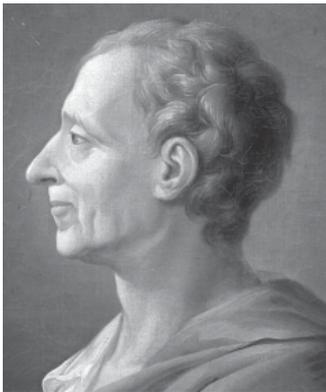
Rousseau (1712-1778)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau as well as being a philosopher was a poet and a musician. He lived a stormy life and from time to time was driven out of France and his birth place, Geneva.



In 1762, Rousseau wrote *Emile*, expounding his ideas on education. He argued that children's natural tendencies should be free to develop rather than be held in check and disciplined. Children should learn from example not from books and lectures. (Rousseau had five children, all of whom he abandoned to foundling hospitals).

Montesquieu (1689-1755)⁴



Montesquieu once conducted an experiment in which he froze a tongue. He observed that the taste-papilla were smaller and less sensitive in the cold than in the heat. From this he concluded that people in warm climates needed despotism and that people in cooler regions could be trusted with democratic ideas.

Montesquieu was a great admirer of England’s constitutional set-up with its parliament, independent judges and constitutional king. He expounded on this in his *de l’Esprit des Lois - On the Spirit of Laws* (1748). He liked the ways in which the different parts of government in the English system seemed to work separately, acting as a check on each other as this led to the liberty of the individual. Some American political thinkers adapted Montesquieu’s ideas on this ‘separation of powers’ when working on the future American constitution.

Exercise 4.1 Who would be likely to have said the following?

1	I find that it is impossible for me not to mock the myths, superstitions and pretensions of the church.	
2	I am a great admirer of the English system of government with its independent judges.	
3	I believe that at one point the monarch entered a contract with his people to rule well.	
4	People clamoured to see my plays but they would have also clamoured to my execution.	
5	Some Americans were keen to develop my ideas on the separation of powers.	
6	I believe that the power of human reason is crucial to understanding the world and discovering truth.	
7	I developed notions such as the sovereignty of the people and the supremacy of the General Will.	
8	I remain convinced that the world we live in is the best of all possible worlds.	
9	My work <i>Emile</i> outlined my ideas on how children’s natural tendencies should not be stifled.	
10	I wanted to write down all knowledge but found myself highlighting the folly and injustices of the old regime.	

⁴ Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de La Brède et de Montesquie

What do the historians have to say about the challenge of ideas?

1. Brian H Fletcher: *The French Revolution and its impact on Europe 1789-99*

Fletcher argues that the influence of enlightenment figures such as Voltaire and Rousseau has been greatly overstated. He says that the philosophers were not a united group seeking revolution. Their views were sometimes given meanings that they did not intend, and were used by both supporters and opponents of the revolution. Fletcher also points out that the philosophers only influenced the middle class, and that they were just one group that brought on the revolution.

*“...To take Rousseau once more, careful research has shown that his Social Contract was not read widely until after the Revolution broke out. These circumstances make one wary of placing his ideas and those of his fellows too high on the list of causes of the Revolution...”*⁵

2. George Rudé: *Revolutionary Europe 1783-1815*

Rudé suggests that the ideas of the enlightenment thinkers were picked up by a wide variety of political leaders and activists and so to conclude that they played a major role in bringing on revolution is too simplistic. He suggests that Montesquieu's influence was conservative rather than social-revolutionary. Voltaire was friends with despots and Rudé suggested his ideas were more likely to be taken up by reforming monarchs rather than revolutionaries in the streets. As for Rousseau he suggests that had he lived, he would have been in opposition to those in 1793 who were making use of his teachings.

*“...This merely underlines the truth that it is not so much ideas in themselves that are important in history, or even the intentions of their authors, as the political and social context in which they circulate...”*⁶

5 Fletcher, B H, *The French Revolution and its impact on Europe 1789-99*, F W Cheshire, Melbourne, 1967, pp 7-8

6 Rudé, G, *Revolutionary Europe 1783-1815*, Collins, London, 1964, p 36

Notes

Chapter Five

Looming bankruptcy and the failure of reform

Background to France's financial situation

Throughout the 18th century, France's financial system was creaking, barely holding up and bankruptcy was not a case of "if" but of "when". Part of the problem was the fact that there was no distinction between the King's private funds and the those of the State Treasury. The essence of the problem had three fundamental causes: royal extravagance, an inefficient financial system and the French propensity for engaging in expensive wars.

Louis XIV was extravagant in the extreme, seen no better than his construction of the Palace of Versailles just outside of Paris. Louis XV was equally spendthrift and inefficient. Louis XVI was not quite so bad as his predecessors.

- He had only 2000 horses and 400 carriages in the royal stables.
- His wife, Marie Antoinette, managed with only 500 servants and four new pairs of shoes a week.
- Louis XVI was well-intentioned but weak. ¹

Figure 5.1: The Palace of Versailles



¹ See Chapter Eight.

As was explained in Chapter One and Three, France had a ridiculously inefficient and unfair taxation system. The First and Second Estate owned the vast majority of the land but paid very little tax. Some taxes were collected by offering the process to the highest bidder. The salt tax brought in 60 million livres, but it cost 20 million livres to collect and up to 50 000 troops were employed to stop salt smuggling.

In the hundred years before the outbreak of revolution in 1789, France had been involved in a series of costly and often unsuccessful wars. These are outlined in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2 France's wars from 1667-1763

1667-1668	The War of Devolution
1672-1678	The Franco-Dutch War
1683-1684	The War of Reunions
1688-1697	The Nine Years War
1701-1714	The War of Spanish Succession
1733-1738	The War of Polish Succession
1741-1747	Italian campaigns in The War of Austrian Succession
1744-1748	King George's War (part of The War of Austrian Succession)
1746-1748	The First Carnatic War
1756-1763	The Seven Years War
1758-1763	The Third Carnatic War (part of The Seven Years War)

France's wars involved massive military expenditure. The Seven Years War took the country to a state of massive indebtedness with estimates that up to 50% of national income was being spent on debt interest.

In 1778 France decided to back the American colonists against Britain in the American War of Independence. Victory was gained against the old foe across the English Channel, but the cost of this war was to finally break the French treasury.²

Attempts at reform of the financial system

During the reign of Louis XVI, there were to be several attempts at reforming France's chaotic and totally inequitable financial system. Three figures stand out in this unsuccessful process: Turgot, Necker and Calonne.

² See Chapter Two.

Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, Baron de l'Aulne

Turgot was the king's Controller-General between 1774 and 1776. Turgot was an experienced government official and for thirteen years had been in charge of one of France's poorest provinces and had succeeded in removing many hardships that had been foisted on the people there.

Once he was appointed as Controller-General, Turgot advocated economy and limits on court extravagance. He encouraged Louis to cut the generous royal pensions that were often handed out to the king's favourites. Turgot could claim credit for a series of reforms introduced during his tenure in office:

- restrictions on the grain trade were removed;
- guilds were abolished which meant that all professions and industries were now open to all;
- the *corvée* was abolished and instead landowners were to pay a road tax;
- in his lands, Louis abolished servitude and he encouraged others to do the same;
- attempts were made to abolish torture and freedom of conscience for Protestants was decreed.

Turgot faced enormous opposition to his reforms. The rich classes resented the land tax, nobles and clergy feared for a loss of their privileges in the future and tradespeople hated the abolition of the guilds. Such was the feeling against Turgot, that Louis was forced to dismiss him in May 1776. Turgot believed that the government should seek the help of people's representatives in assessing taxation. In a sense, he brought revolution closer by making known the abuses of the system and in trying to enlist the sympathy of the people.

Jacques Necker

Necker held the finance position from 1777-1781. He sought to place the country's finances on a solid basis and abolish immunities from taxation. However, he did not persist with his reform efforts. Necker borrowed recklessly for the American War which had the effect of hastening the onset of France's financial crisis.

In February 1781, Necker issued his *Compte Rendu*. This suggested France was prosperous and was well into surplus. War expenditure was not included, and probably did much to encourage bankers to lend the regime money for the war. Necker's attempts at changing how national accounts were worked out or even at setting up a centralised treasury failed in face of the American War's insatiable demand for money.

Necker tried to reduce court expenditure, removed some tolls to assist the movement of trade but he reintroduced the *corvée*. He only succeeded in antagonising many of those at court and he was dismissed in 1781. Necker would be called again by the king to his post in 1788.³

Charles Alexandre de Calonne

After Necker's dismissal in 1781, Joly de Fleury took over, faced the same problems, and continued to raise loans and taxes for the war. He was replaced in 1783 by **Calonne**.

³ See Chapter Six.

- Calonne was prodigal in his spending. He believed in free spending and argued that a rigid economy would be the nation's downfall.
- His attitude made him popular at court but he soon discovered that the parlements would not consent to more loans and that the already exorbitant taxes could not be increased.
- By 1787, much of Turgot's reforms had been undone and the annual deficit had become enormous. By 1787, almost 50% of national income was being spent in advance of revenues coming in.

By 1786, France's economic situation had become a disaster.

It was Calonne who had to finally tell the king the country was on the verge of bankruptcy and that radical change was needed. The king was informed that he must call the Notables, representatives of the privileged orders to ratify certain proposed reforms and force those privileged orders to tax themselves.

What do the historians have to say about 'Looming bankruptcy and the failure of reform'?

1. Alfred Cobban: *A History of Modern France Vol 1: 1715-1799*

Cobban gives a very pessimistic view of the efforts of Turgot, or rather the opposition that he faced. Not only was Turgot opposed by members of the privileged orders but also by most of Louis' other ministers such as Saint-Germain at the Ministry of War and Miromesnil, the 'Keeper of the Seals'. After Louis dismissed Turgot in May 1776, Turgot's work was rapidly undone. However, Cobban makes the point:

*"...Even if he had succeeded in his reforms one can hardly suppose that he could have held back the coming aristocratic revolt or saved the ancient regime; but it might have died less discredibly had there been more chances of survival for a minister like Turgot..."*⁴

2. A Goodwin: *The French Revolution*

Goodwin highlights the link between France's outdated and inequitable social system, and the financial malaise of the country. He shows that in 1788, total state expenditure was 630 million livres; of this 318 million was spent on the interest charge on the public debt alone while defence and diplomatic expenditure was 165 million livres. To finance the American War, Necker had been borrowing at rates of 8 to 10%. The disastrous financial position, he argues, was due to frivolous policy, the lack of a proper accounting system and the medieval social structure of Estates and the taxation privileges this entailed.

*"...Effective financial reform in 18th century France would, therefore, necessarily have implied changes tantamount to social and political revolution. Privilege was so intertwined with contract, social rank so closely associated with special favours, and the canon-law obligations of the clergy as trustees for their endowments so binding, that the extinction of fiscal exemptions could only have been imposed by an all-powerful sovereign..."*⁵

4 Cobban, A, *A History of Modern France Vol 1: 1715-1799*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1961, p 104

5 Goodwin, A, *The French Revolution*, Hutchinson University Library, London, 1965, p 13

Exercise 5.1 Use the terms below to complete the following passage.

France's dire financial state was due to its continuous involvement in _____ since the late 17th century, an _____ and inefficient taxation system and royal _____. The final straw for the treasury came with France's entry into the American war in _____. Louis XVI's first Controller-General, _____, promoted _____ and a reduction of _____ extravagance. He did achieve some reforms such as ending _____ on the grain trade and the abolition of _____. However, Turgot faced great opposition and was dismissed in _____. The next Controller-General was _____. Though he attempted reform early on, his reckless _____ to finance the American War pushed the country closer to _____. In _____, Necker issued his Compte Rendu which suggested the nation's finances were in far better _____ than they actually were. He also alienated many at court and was _____ in 1781. Calonne took over in _____. He was a _____ spender and soon most of _____ reforms had been overturned. It was Calonne who informed the king that he would have to summon the _____ to consider a radical change to the financial system.

SHAPE – PRODIGAL – UNFAIR – TURGOT – NOTABLES – ROYAL – 1781 – 1778 – 1783 – ECONOMY – RESTRICTIONS – NECKER – GUILDS – WARFARE – DISMISSED – EXTRAVAGANCE – TURGOT'S – BORROWING – BANKRUPTCY

Chapter Six

From the Assembly of Notables to the National Assembly

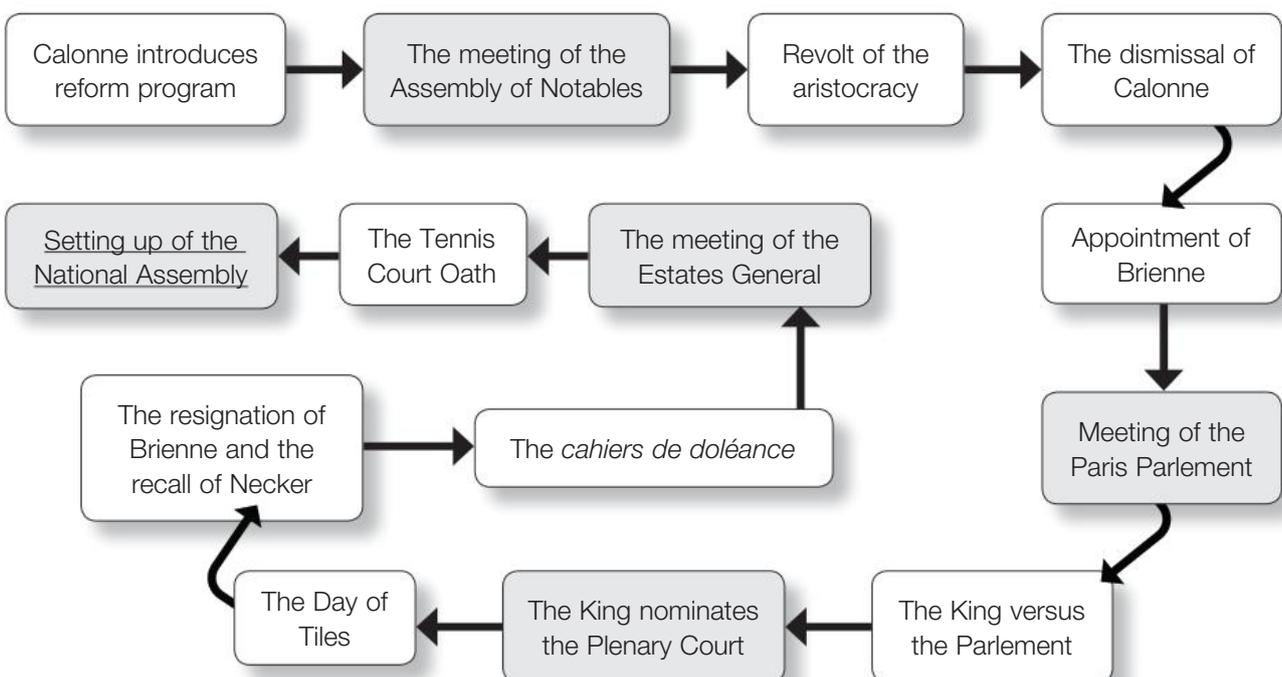
The financial crisis facing France in the late 1780s had been building up for some time as was explained in Chapter Five. However, the situation was worsened by other factors at play at that time:

- the French economy had been experiencing a contraction since 1778;
 - by 1788, the wine industry had declined by 50%;
 - grain prices had fallen considerably and this had reduced the level of production;
- the country suffered severe droughts in 1784, 1785 and 1789 which led to scarcity and high food prices;
- the bourgeoisie resented the Commercial Treaty signed with England in 1786 which was allowing cheap English goods to enter France.

The combination of such factors set against looming bankruptcy was a recipe for trouble for the ailing regime of Louis XVI.

During his first term as British Prime Minister in the 1960s, Harold Wilson uttered a phrase which politicians and pundits have oft used when commenting on political developments: *A week is a long time in politics*. This phrase is extremely apt when dealing with the fast-moving events in France between 1786 and 1789. Few in 1786 would have predicted the extent and rapidity of developments during these years. Figure 6.1 outlines the main events which are then explained in detail below.

Figure 6.1 From Calonne to the National Assembly



The road to the Estates General

On 20 August 1786, **Calonne met the king and outlined his reform program**. The program included such things as direct tax, taxes on landholders, the abolition of tax privileges and the end of custom taxes. The effect of this program would have been to lessen the tax burden of the Third Estate and equalised the system of taxation. However, if Calonne was to achieve his goal of making the First and Second Estate pay their fair share, he needed the support of France's powerful.

Calonne asked the king to call into session the **Assembly of Notables**, which comprised members of all three estates, though only 30 of the 144 members came from the Third Estate.

- This was the Assembly's first meeting since 1626. The calling of the Assembly was a revolutionary act as it showed the king to be effectively admitting to his inability to govern,
- The Assembly accepted several of Calonne's proposals but not the attack on their privileges.
- In fact, by lumping all his proposals together, Calonne managed to offend almost everyone:
- The nobles, the clergy and those in privileged provinces resented their loss of tax immunities;
- Financiers who were able to collect duties resented the ending of customs barriers;

The bourgeoisie were having doubts about Calonne's ability to run state finances. In 1786, he announced that state finances were in good condition in order to raise a loan and then early the following year claimed disaster was looming. On 22 February 1787, **the revolt of the aristocrats** occurred as the Notables demanded to know the details of state finances. If the king gave in to this demand, it would in effect have made him answerable to the Notables. Unhappy with his finance minister's work, **the king dismissed Calonne** on 8 April 1787.

On 1 May 1787, **the king appointed Brienne** in Calonne's place.¹ Brienne took advantage of his position and immediately had himself transferred to the more lucrative Archbishopric of Sens:

- Brienne had been an opponent of Calonne but quickly adopted a modified version of Calonne's position;
- he faced the same difficulties as Calonne with the Assembly of Notables. The Assembly of Notables was dissolved on 25 May 1787.

The Notables surprisingly began to use revolutionary language. They appealed to the people in the name of ancient French liberties against this new arbitrary despotism of the king. They now blamed the financial crisis on royal extravagance. As has been explained, this was certainly a factor causing the situation but it is unlikely that fewer carriages in the royal stables, or one less ball or Marie Antoinette making do with only one new pair of shoes each week would have made much difference. The Notables and their allies at first mobilised their ancient privileged corporations – **the parlements** – against the king. The parlements had come to stand as a constitutional check on royal powers. The parlements were predominantly made up of the bourgeoisie but they had gained privileges similar to the aristocracy. They claimed to be liberal in outlook but they were keen to preserve their privileges.

The parlements, especially the **Paris Parlement**, became the focal point for political leadership against the monarchy:

- however, the Paris Parlement was really anti-monarchical rather than being concerned about the people's welfare;

¹ Lomenie de Brienne, Archbishop of Toulouse.

- the parlement could not outright reject a policy of the king but it could return it for reconsideration – this was called the ‘Right of Remonstrance’;
- the parlement now stated that there could be no taxation without its approval, arguing that Calonne’s and Brienne’s proposed reforms were opposed to the rights of the nation.

It was clearly now a conflict of **the king versus the parlement**.

- The king now enforced his lit de justice, a formal session of the parlement under the presidency of the king. It was used to enforce the compulsory registration of royal edicts.
- The parlement declared his edicts null and void, arguing they went against “the general will”.
- This defiance on the part of the parlement led to their forced removal to Troyes. This swung public opinion behind the parlement and soon after, Frenchmen had taken to the streets to protest the king’s action.

As the financial situation worsened, Brienne was forced to recall the parlement as he was seeking a loan of 120 million livres over the next five years. He promised to reconvene the Estate General – not called since 1614. The parlement said it would treble the loan but insisted that the Estates General be called in 1789.

- On 19 November 1787, the king told the Paris Parlement that he rejected the compromise and ordered the registration of the original loan stating “*it is legal because it is my pleasure*”.
- There was now a major split between the parlement and the king. The parlement denied registration of the loan. Several of its members were exiled by *lettres de cachet*.
- On 3-4 May 1788, the Paris Parlement issued bold statements, stated its right to register laws and demanded freedom from arbitrary arrest.
- The king ordered the arrest of its magistrates.

The parlement was suspended on 8 May 1788 and replaced by a **Plenary Court**, nominated by the king and given the power to issue royal edicts. All parlements were suspended. Political unrest now began to spread and the parlements were being seen as defenders of the people. Violence began to break out. On 7 June, protestors in the town of Grenoble took to roofs and hurled tiles down at troops below. There were several deaths. This incident is known as the **Day of Tiles**.

Faced with growing violence, a disastrous financial situation and a revolutionary spirit amongst the privileged classes, the regime gave in and on 5 July 1788, it announced the calling of the Estates General for 1 May 1789.

- On 24 August 1788, **Brienne resigned and the king reluctantly recalled Necker**.
- On 23 September the Paris Parlement was reinstated. It ruled that the Estates General be constituted as in 1614, with three separate houses, each with the same number of deputies.
- The king was finally forced to submit the question of finances to a representative national parliament, the Estates General.

Throughout early 1789, books of grievances, called “**cahiers de doléance**” were written up in all the provinces on order of the king. People listed their grievances. A range of pamphlets was issued that increased public debate, and the phrase ‘the pamphlet war’ appeared. Most significant of these was that written by the clergyman, Abbé Sièyes, “What is the Third Estate?”, in which he stated:

*What is the Third Estate? Everything. What has it been hitherto in our form of government?
Nothing. What does it want? To become something.*

The Estates General

The opening session of the Estates General came on 5 May 1789 at Versailles.

- The Third Estate was expected to accept its proper place as inferior to the clergy and the nobles but the lawyers and professionals of the Third Estate had no intention of going along with that.
- They felt that they had the nation behind them, and they had been enflamed by two years of anti-royal propaganda from the nobles.
- Their demands were soon to go beyond changes in national finances.

The system of voting was expected to be one vote for each estate. This would mean that the Third Estate could always be outvoted by the privileged classes of the First and Second Estates. The Third Estate demanded that voting be 'by head'.

- At Vizelle on 21 July 1788, a gathering of deputies from provincial estates had conceded double representation for the Third Estate.
- This became the basis of the 'doubling of the Third', initiated by Necker, and it became an Act on 27 December 1788. Thus, voting by head gave the Third Estate's increased representation practical significance.

Figure 6.2 From Estates General to National Assembly

On 17 June 1789, the Third Estate and some lower clergy adopted the name 'Commons', as they were representing common people. They declared themselves to be the sole national assembly of France.

On 23 June, Louis challenged their move and closed their meeting place. The deputies then took themselves to an indoor tennis court and swore "**the tennis court oath**" – they would never separate until a constitution had been established.

They held firm and the king was finally forced to amalgamate all three estates into a **National Assembly** on 27 June. The bourgeoisie were now the dominant force in the Assembly and the monarch was no longer absolute.

Throughout June and early July, the National Assembly continued to consolidate its position.

- The king half-heartedly prepared a military counter-revolution.
- The Paris rising of 14 July and the fall of the Bastille,² frightened Louis into dropping any plans he might have had for counter-revolution.
- It compelled him to compromise with the National Assembly to avoid a blood bath.

² See Chapter Seven.

Exercise 6.1 Place the events on the right into the correct chronological order.

1st event		The day of tiles
2nd event		Appointment of Brienne
3rd event		The king calls for cahiers de doléance
4th event		Paris Parlement suspended
5th event		Calonne introduces his reform program
6th event		Meeting of the Estates General
7th event		Appointment of Necker
8th event		The Assembly of Notables
9th event		The Tennis Court Oath
10th event		Paris Parlement becomes focus of anti-royal opposition
11th event		Creation of the National Assembly
12th event		Dismissal of Calonne
13th event		Resignation of Brienne
14th event		Revolt of the aristocrats
15th event		King nominates a Plenary Court

What do the historians have to say about 'From the Assembly of Notables to the National Assembly'?

1. Eric Hobsbawm: *The Age of Revolution 1789-1848*

Hobsbawm suggests that it is inaccurate to blame the court for France's financial woes in the 1780s. He makes the point that court expenditure was only 6% of total expenditure while military expenditure was 25% and the servicing of existing debt was 50%. He states that "*War and debt – the American War and its debt – broke the back of the monarchy*". The financial crisis, says Hobsawm, gave the aristocracy and the parlements their chance to extend their privileges. The first real breaches in absolutism were the calling of the Assembly of Notables and the decision to call the States-General.

*"...The revolution thus began as an aristocratic attempt to recapture the state. This attempt miscalculated for two reasons: it underestimated the independent intentions of the 'Third Estate'... and it overlooked the profound economic and social crisis into which it threw its political demands..."*³

2. Thomas Carlyle: *The French Revolution*

Carlyle's version of the French Revolution does not perhaps hold up to the critical scrutiny of modern-day historians. However, it is still a wonderful read. Here he describes the scene at Versailles just before the work of Estates-General is about to get under way.

*"...The good Louis welcomes his Honourable Members, with smiles of hope. He has prepared for them the Hall of Menus, the largest near him; and often surveyed the workmen as they went on. A spacious Hall: with raised platform for Throne, Court and Blood-royal; space for six hundred Commons Deputies in front; for half as many Clergy on this hand, and half as many Noblesse on that. It has lofty galleries; wherefrom dames of honour, splendent in gaze d'or; foreign Diplomacies, and other gilt-edged white-frilled individuals to the number of two thousand,--may sit and look. Broad passages flow through it; and, outside the inner wall, all round it. There are committee-rooms, guard-rooms, robing-rooms: really a noble Hall; where upholstery, aided by the subject fine-arts, has done its best; and crimson tasseled cloths, and emblematic fleurs-de-lys are not wanting..."*⁴

³ Hobsbawm, E, *The Age of Revolution 1789-1848*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1997, p 58

⁴ Carlyle, T, *The French Revolution*, Book 1, IV, States-General

Chapter Seven

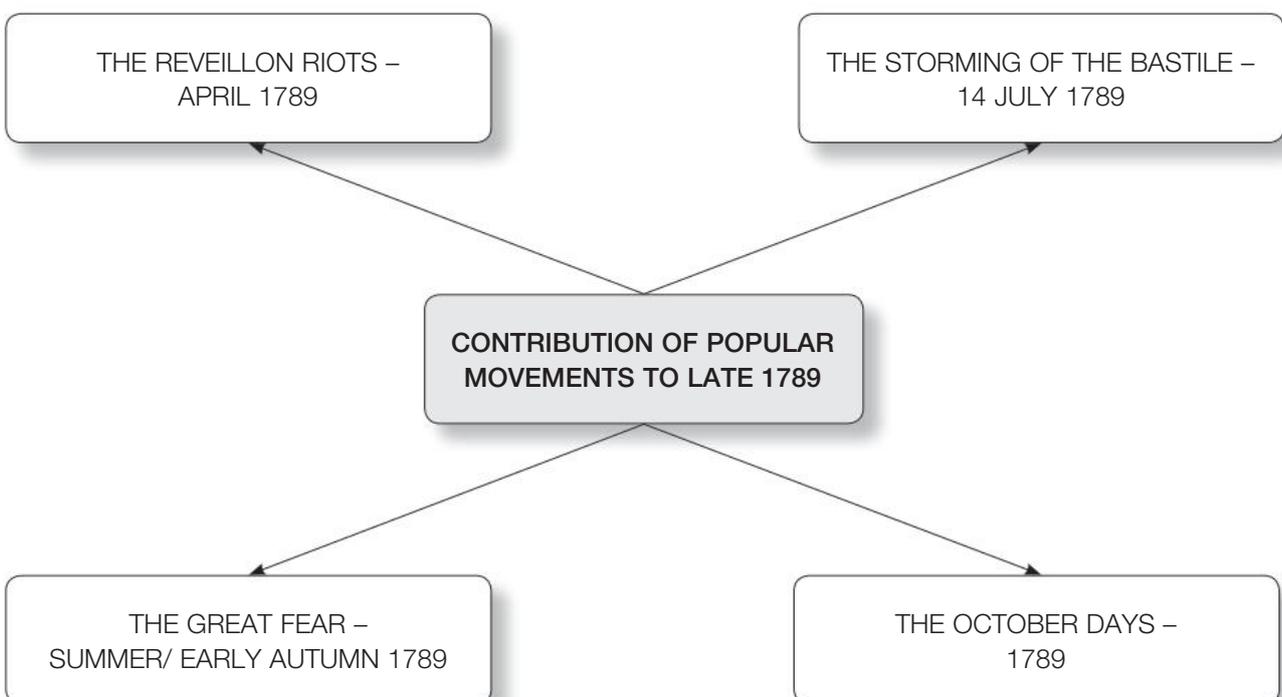
The contribution of popular movements

By the spring of 1789, tension and unrest were increasing across the country. Food prices were rising ever more and resentment towards the nobility and the monarch was reaching feverish levels.

- There were rumours that nobles had been hoarding food.
- Pamphlets were flooding Paris. A demagogue like Camille Desmoullins, was able to stir the mob with his brilliant eloquence. Desmoullins would later edit an important revolutionary paper.
- Rabble-rousing orators were claiming that the National Assembly was nothing more than a middle-class body which was happily compromising with the privileged classes.
 - It was being accused of wasting time talking about constitutional reforms while the country starved.

It was against this background that the focus of the revolution began to switch to the actions of the general population, summarised in Figure 7.1. The 'general population' included what was soon termed 'the Paris mob'. Into the fray now came the sans-culottes (though the term was not widely used in a political context until the 1790s).¹

Figure 7.1 Contribution of popular movements to the end of 1789



¹ The term sans-culottes referred to the common people of the lower classes. Originally a term of ridicule from the upper classes, it became recognised as a term to identify those opposing the aristocrats. The name sans-culottes referred to one's dress. Aristocrats wore 'fashionable' culottes, silk knee-breeches; the working-class wore pantaloons or trousers.

The Reveillon Riots

In April 1789, a wallpaper manufacturer called Reveillon was accused of making unsympathetic comments towards some sans-culottes and of planning to cut the wages of his workers. This angered the people and he was attacked. Up to three thousand people were soon involved in the rioting stemming from this. His house was burnt down. Ironically, Reveillon had a good reputation for treating his workers well, and it is perhaps significant that none of his workers took part in the riots.

- The motives of the mob were at first economic but they soon branched out to political ideas.
- Rumours were spreading that the Estates General would come under threat from the privileged classes.
- The house of another manufacturer, Henriot, was also attacked; almost three hundred people were shot in these various disturbances.

One of the main sources of revolutionary propaganda at this time was the Palais Royal, headquarters of the followers of the Duc d'Orleans. They distributed political tracts to the sans-culottes, and also were beginning to win over sections of the army to the revolutionary cause.

(This was a dangerous moment for the regime. The point at which military support for a regime disappears means the end for the regime. Tsar Nicholas II of Russia faced a similar situation in February 1917).

The storming of the Bastille

In early July tension was building up and the presence of up to 18 000 troops in Paris was causing great nervousness amongst the people. Distrust of the king was near universal and with so many soldiers in Paris, his intentions were being questioned.

The dismissal of Necker on 11 July increased popular anger. Necker was almost an idol of the mob. The people liked him as they believed he was one of the few people in the regime sincere about bringing on reform.



Anarchy was now threatening Paris:

- disreputable men were moving into the city and bandits were roaming the streets;
- agitators from self-seeking adventurers to revolutionary idealists were busy stirring up the people;
- riots broke out on Paris streets and guns were taken from the arms depository at the Hotel de Invalides.²

The attack on "the Bastille", Paris' infamous prison, came on 14 July. During earlier times, the Bastille had a reputation for the use of torture and long terms of imprisonment. Voltaire himself had once been a prisoner there. The Bastille was a symbol of hated royal power and it was an

² A figure of 28 000 muskets were taken, according to some sources.

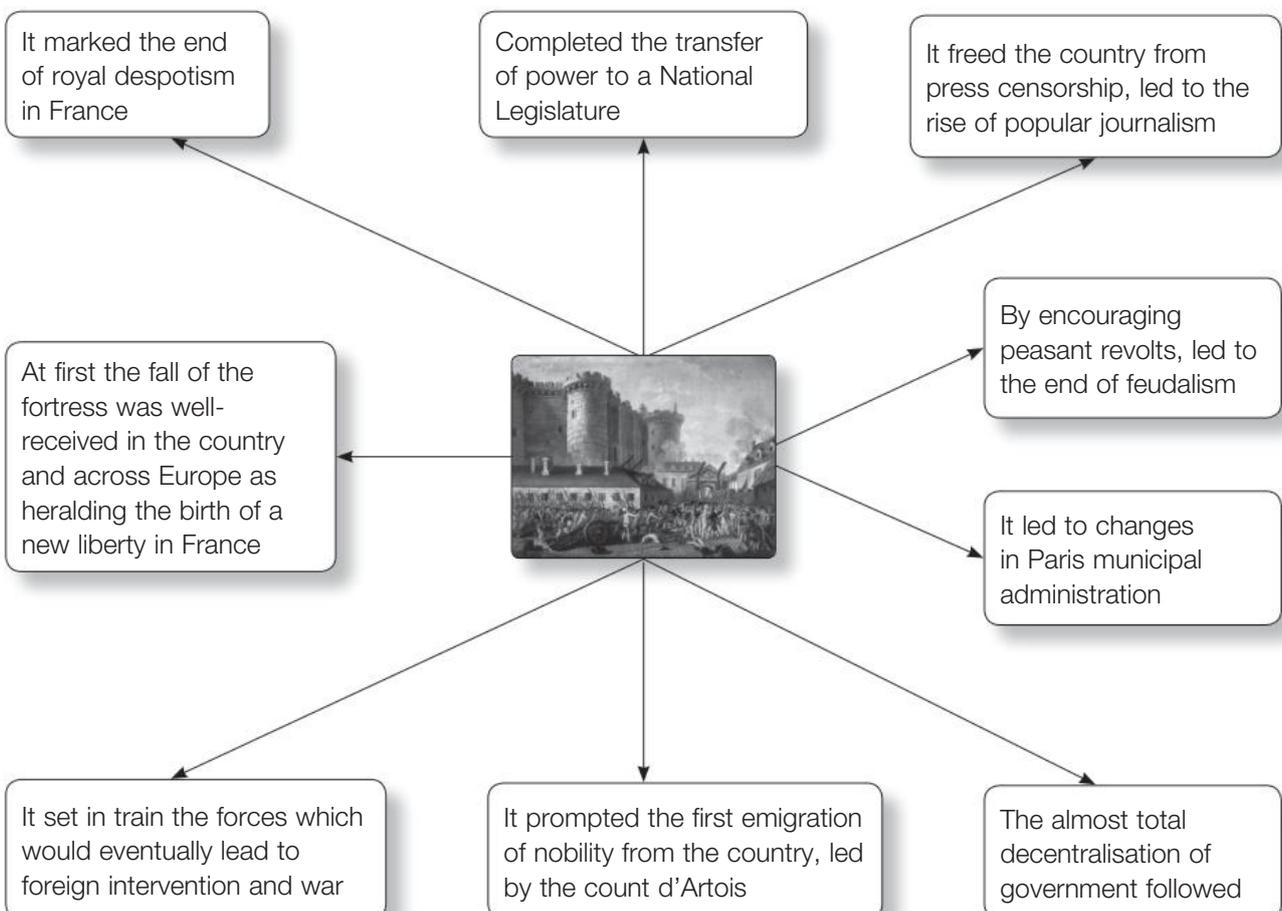
obvious target for the mob. However, the purpose of the attack was not to free prisoners but to capture the weapons contained there.

The governor of the Bastille, the Marquis de Launey, at first refused to hand over the gunpowder and arms that the mob was demanding. Shots were fired and somebody on the inside opened the gates and soon the drawbridge was lowered. The storming resulted in 200 casualties. Launey finally surrendered.

- The crowds released the prisoners being held there – all seven of them: four forgers, two lunatics and one dissolute nobleman.
- The Bastille was then destroyed almost brick by brick.
- Launey had been persuaded to surrender by the mob who said he would be safe. However, he was brutally murdered and his head soon adorned a pike.
- Other leading figures were to suffer a similar fate in the days to come.

Louis realised how serious the situation had become and he withdrew his troops from the city, promising that the people and the National Assembly were no longer threatened. However, this did not stop the creation of the *Gardes Bourgeois* – a National Guard whose purpose was to quell violence and restore order. Lafayette, hero of the American War, was put in charge. Upset by so much violence, Lafayette at one stage offered to resign his post; there were others in the National Assembly less upset by the violence.

Figure 7.2 Significance of the fall of the Bastille



The rebels were now in command of Paris and a committee was formed at the Hotel de Ville which became a kind of town government or commune.

The storming of the Bastille is an iconic moment in the history of the revolution. Far worse violence would occur in the near future but the actions of 14 July had great significance. This is summarised in Figure 7.2.

The Great Fear

Violence was not confined to Paris. Across the country food issues and high prices were radicalising the population. Many people had stopped paying taxes and the actions that had been taken against the upper classes in Paris created widespread excitement. The example of the Bastille was followed as anarchy began to spread into the provinces with many chateaux – “the 40 000 bastilles” – attacked. Feudal records were taken and burned.

Crowds in small towns and villages invaded grain depositories and attacked guards stationed there. Some of the king’s soldiers refused to stop some crowds taking the grain. This was a dangerous moment; if the king was losing the support of his military, he was truly doomed.

The paranoia of the people increased enormously throughout 1789 due to a poor harvest, high food prices and the suspicion that the king might be about to cancel the Estates General. This atmosphere became known as “the great fear”:

- it was feared the king and the privileged orders would act to stop the revolution;
- there were rumours that ‘brigands’, people hired by aristocrats to kill rebels, were spreading across the country;
- stories were told of brigands descending on isolated villages;
 - in the north east they were referred to as the Mazarines;
 - in the centre of the country they were called la bande anglaise.

The ‘great fear’ abated but the role of the countryside should never be underestimated, though Paris is often seen as the mover of events. The English historian, Lewis Namier, commented: It was the agrarian movement that rendered invincible the French Revolution of 1789. By showing their total opposition to feudalism, French peasants forced the National Assembly to deal with the question of destroying it. ³

The October Days

While people across France were hungry, Versailles feasted. A regiment brought in from Flanders to protect Versailles was given a banquet on 1st October. Boasts were made of pending counter-revolutionary moves. However, on 5th October, a Paris crowd/ mob, comprising mainly women, marched to Versailles. After some resistance, they were allowed to meet the king.

- The king did not generate the hatred that his wife Marie Antoinette and the inner circle did, and the meeting was fairly cordial. The king issued a declaration and most of the crowd dispersed.

³ See Chapter Ten.

- Louis announced his acceptance of the August Decrees and the Declaration of the Rights of Man (see Chapter Ten) but chose to stay at Versailles.
- The next day, an angry mob stormed the palace and were clearly set on killing Marie Antoinette. Several guards were killed but the queen escaped.

Then followed “the March of the Women”:

- the royal family was escorted back to Paris by the National Guard, led by Lafayette;
- the royal family were now effectively prisoners held in The Tuileries;
- the National Assembly also moved to Paris.

Again, the common people had shown that they were not afraid to show their power, and mob action had been decisive. There were now three sources of power: a weakened king, the National Assembly and the common people.

After October, economic conditions gradually improved and the number of popular disturbances fell.

- Moderate elements controlled the new government in Paris;
- the National Guard under Lafayette was able to curb some of the excesses;
- for a time, the sans-culottes became relatively quiescent, as did the peasants.

Exercise 7.1 Place the events on the left in the correct chronological order.

1st event		The Great Fear
2nd event		The dismissal of Necker
3rd event		The March of the Women
4th event		The Reveillon Riots
5th event		The storming of the Bastille
6th event		The mob storms Versailles
7th event		Royal family forced into the Tuileries
8th event		Murder of Marquis of Launey

Exercise 7.2 Indicate if each of the following statements is true or false.

1	Demagogues like Camille Desmoullins were effective in arousing the mob with their speeches.	TRUE/ FALSE
2	The sans-culottes were aristocrats who proudly flaunted their expensive fashions.	TRUE/ FALSE
3	Reveillon was an early revolutionary leader who led riots in his home town in April 1789.	TRUE/ FALSE
4	The main concern of Paris mob action in mid-1789 seemed to be the acquisition of armaments.	TRUE/ FALSE
5	Thousands of people were killed or wounded during the storming of the Bastille.	TRUE/ FALSE
6	The governor of the Bastille, the Marquis de Launey, was brutally murdered despite surrendering.	TRUE/ FALSE
7	The storming of the Bastille led to the first significant emigration of French nobles who feared the violence.	TRUE/ FALSE
8	The 'great fear' was justified as numerous gangs of brigands were murdering supporters of the revolution.	TRUE/ FALSE
9	Marie Antoinette and others of the inner circle were murdered during the October Days.	TRUE/ FALSE
10	From October 1789, the royal family were effectively imprisoned in the Tuileries.	TRUE/ FALSE

What do the historians have to say about ‘The contribution of popular movements’?

1. David Thomson: *Europe Since Napoleon*

Thomson explains why the situation in 1789 had become so volatile. There was a long-term economic malaise which was leading the country into bankruptcy, and there was a constitutional crisis, perhaps an odd phrase for a country that did not have a constitution. However, it was the suffering of the common people that tipped the scales towards violence. Thomson shows that the average price of consumer goods between 1785 and 1789 were 65% higher than for 1726-1741; average money wages were rising only a third as fast as prices and the cost of living rose most steeply for those near subsistence level. And on top of this harvests of 1787 and 1788 failed.

*“...This brought extreme social distress, which forced many desperate and hungry men into the few large towns. It was this that introduced the element of violence, because it made the Paris mob and led to the peasant riots of the countryside in 1789...”*⁴

2. Alfred Cobban: *A History of Modern France, Vol 1: 1715-1799*

Cobban describes in detail the October 1789 procession from Versailles to Paris, with the king being escorted to the capital by the National Guard, led by Lafayette, and the heads of two guards on pikes. Wagons were carrying flour and corn. Cobban makes ominous predictions.

*“...In the October days the capital took possession of king and Assembly. For the next five years Paris was to dictate the course of the Revolution, and the Paris mob, which the patriots of 1789 had used for their purpose, was to prove, as they were to discover in due course, a weapon that could be employed by more than one party and to more than one end...”*⁵

4 Thomson, D, *Europe Since Napoleon*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1966, p 28

5 Cobban, A, *A History of Modern France, Vol 1: 1715-1799*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1961, p 159

(C) The role of individuals

Chapter Eight

Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette

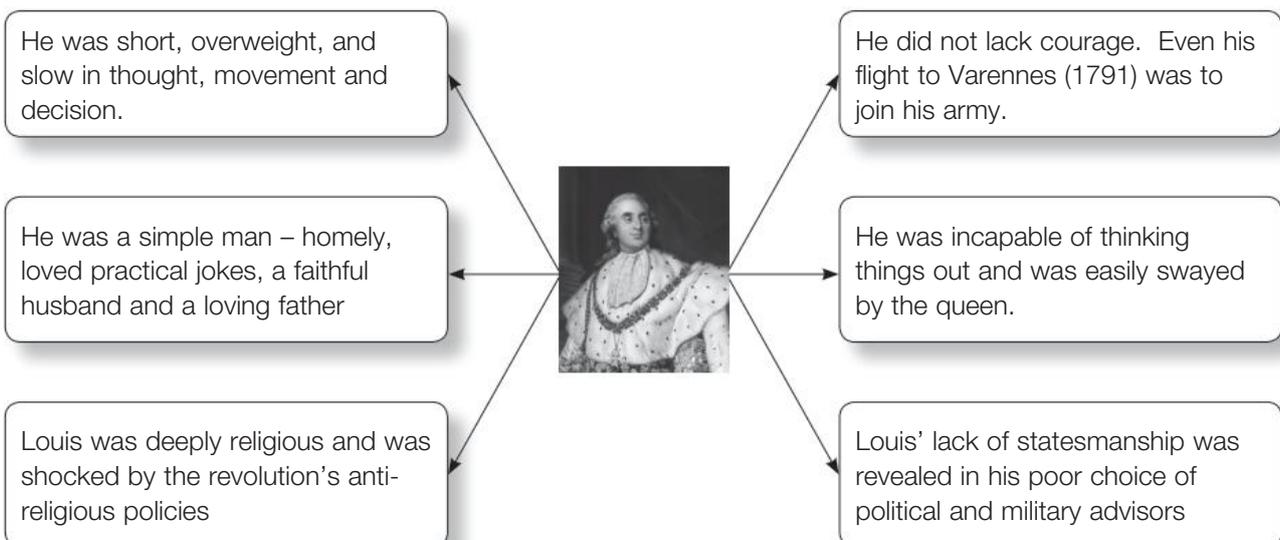
King Louis XVI

Louis was king in name, in power but unfortunately for him, not in character. He was not an evil man; the term 'tyrant' would not sit easily on his shoulders. It would be fair to say that he was a man full of good intentions but he could never be relied upon to carry out those intentions. At each stage of the revolution, he would encourage reform and then draw back. Inconsistency was his hallmark. Louis was a man who was mildly interested in kingship, mildly interested in reform but above all he was a man who was interested in hunting and blacksmithing. Louis' hesitancy and his temporising would eventually see him caught up in the political torrent that enveloped France, and it would lead to the destruction of the monarchy and his execution.



- Louis was born in 1754. He was the son of the Dauphin ¹, Louis, son of King Louis XV.
- His father died in 1765 and so Louis became heir.
- In May 1770, Louis married the daughter of Maria Theresa of Austria, Marie Antoinette. She was fifteen years old. It would take Louis almost seven years to consummate the marriage.
- Together they would have four children, and it is believed that Marie Antoinette also suffered two miscarriages. ²
- When his grandfather, Louis XV, died in 1774, Louis inherited the title of King Louis XVI.

Figure 8.1 Aspects of Louis XVI the man



¹ The Dauphin was the heir to the French throne. The equivalent in the British monarchy is the queen's eldest son, the Prince of Wales, Prince Charles.

² Only one of their children, Marie-Therese-Charlotte, would live beyond the revolution. She died in 1851.

The reign of Louis XVI fell into roughly three parts:

- 1774-1781: During this time, the young king attempted to do something about the nation's deteriorating finances and tried to limit expenditure. In this he was assisted by Turgot and Necker. This period held out promise. Involvement in the American war was a mixed blessing – it brought military prestige but further eroded French finances.
- 1781-1789: This period witnessed a reaction against the earlier economies and restraints. Louis was strongly under the influence of his queen and his extravagant courtiers.
- 1789-1793: During this period, Louis was buffeted by the developments of the revolution, beginning with the calling of the Estates General and ending with his execution.

(The conduct and fortunes of Louis XVI between October 1789 and January 1793 will be examined in Chapter Fourteen.)

Marie Antoinette

Marie Antoinette and Louis married in 1770 when she was fifteen and he was sixteen. Politically, the marriage was to be a disaster for the king; he was to fall under the fatal influence of his unpopular wife. Marie Antoinette was Austrian. She came to symbolise the hated alliance with Austria which had led to the Seven Years War (1756-63) and the loss of empire. She was to become deeply unpopular amongst the people of France. The main term of abuse hurled at her was the scathingly simple *l'Autrichienne* – the Austrian woman.³

Marie Antoinette and her children



- Marie Antoinette was born in 1755. Her youth was dominated by the Austrian desire to cement an alliance with France and have her marry the Dauphin.
 - Her early years at the French court were unhappy ones. Factional strife at court led to the ascendancy of Madame du Barry who dominated Louis XV.
 - Madame du Barry brought about the dismissal of those advisors who supported the Austrian alliance.
 - Marie Antoinette became isolated at court and she gained little comfort and direction from her husband.
 - This led to her depending increasingly for advice and comfort from the Austrian ambassador, Count Mercy-Argentau.
- However, her affectionate and girlish, light-hearted nature was enjoyed by Louis XV and she was able to maintain her position at court despite the opposition of Madame du Barry.

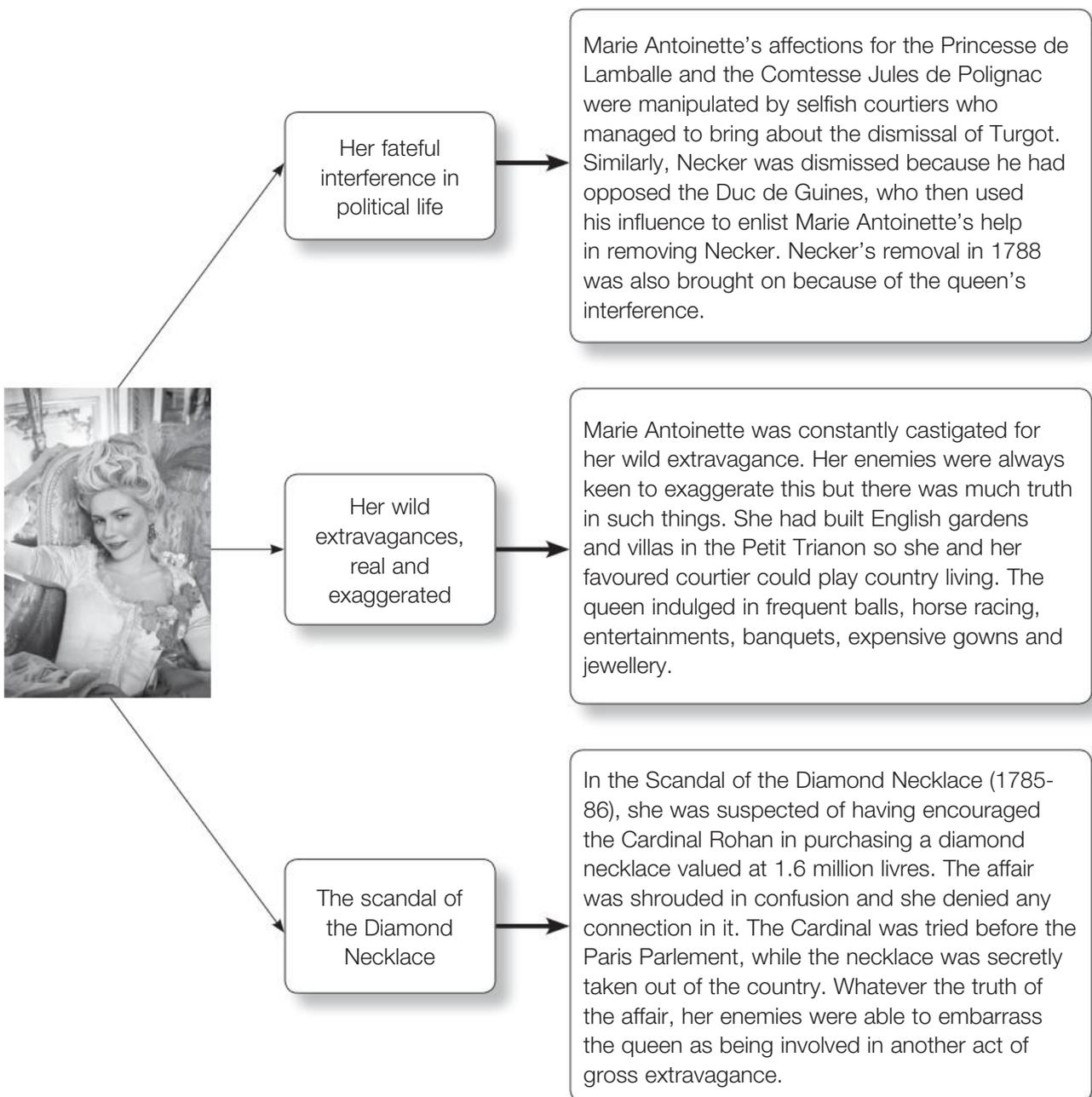
The accession of Louis XVI and his wife was met with enormous enthusiasm throughout the country. However, Marie Antoinette's popularity was short-lived. She was impatient and careless about court life. She soon tired of the company of her dull, and for some

³ A parallel can be seen with what was to happen in Russia before 1917. Tsarina Alexandra was to have a disastrous influence on Tsar Nicholas II. Her German heritage led to her being hatefully called that German woman.

years seemingly impotent husband. This led her to seek the company of the indulgent and extravagant circle of the Comte d'Artois. When told that the people of France had no bread and were starving, she was alleged to have said: *Let them eat cake*. However, there is no evidence that she ever said this.⁴

Marie Antoinette was to have a disastrous impact on the regime, and she cannot be absolved of some responsibility for the events leading to revolution and the eventual destruction of the French monarchy. Arguments supporting this proposition are summarised below in Figure 8.2.⁵

Figure 8.2 Marie Antoinette's role in the fall of the regime



4 Rousseau had credited the phrase to a 'princess' in his "Confessions" but that was written when Marie Antoinette was just a small child. The phrase was never attributed to her until 1843. However, myths are powerful and those who wish to blacken Marie Antoinette's name happily repeat the story.
5 The picture shows the actress Kirsten Dunst as Marie Antoinette in the 2006 film of the same name.

Exercise 8.1 Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

1	How did Louis come to be the king of France?	
2	What positive character traits could it be said that Louis had?	
3	What character flaws meant that Louis was not best suited to be king during such turbulent times?	
4	What was Louis' attitude towards religious faith?	
5	Arguably, why did Louis fail to make progress in economic and financial reforms in the 1780s?	
6	What was Marie Antoinette's background?	
7	Why might Marie Antoinette have chosen to surround herself with indulgent and extravagant courtiers?	
8	In what ways could it be argued that the queen had a disastrous impact on the regime?	
9	Give some examples of Marie Antoinette's extravagances.	
10	Why was the Scandal of the Diamond Necklace of significance?	

Chapter Nine

Other key players

Why things happen in the past is of course the meat of historical analysis. Such analysis is not simply a matter of listing a series of “causes” of an event. It is possible to suggest “*there were seventeen reasons for the French Revolution of 1789*” but such an analysis is unsatisfying.

This is not the place to delve into a deep investigation of the nature of historical causation but some points can be suggested here.

- For some historians, the movement of history is all about determinism. Things happen because of long-term, over-arching developments over which people have little or no control.
 - *Marxist* historians might argue that history is determined by the inevitable nature of class conflict and the power of economic forces. ¹
 - *Whig* historians believe in the nature of progress and see history as a steady journey of improvement. ²
 - There are historians who see the influence of *geography* being the determinant of historical development. ³
- Historians in this vein would argue that individuals have little impact on or control over events. A case could be made that such an analysis suits the lead-up to the French Revolution:
 - the steadily worsening malaise of France’s economic/ financial system;
 - the impact of climate and environmental factors in the 1780s;
 - the domination of military conflict as a normal part of European political history in the 17th and 18th centuries.
- For some historians, the story of the past is all about *contingency*, the chance event, “luck”. When former British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, was asked once by an eager young journalist what it was that determined the policies and ideas the Prime Minister would implement, Macmillan replied, “*Events dear boy, events*”. This view of history is sometimes called the “*Sliding Doors*” view of the past. ⁴
 - Imagine if the driver of Archduke Ferdinand’s car driving through Sarajevo on 28 June 1914 had not taken a wrong turn...
 - Imagine if Al Gore’s votes in Florida during the 2000 US presidential election had been counted differently, would the world have turned out differently...

However, against all this is the view argued by the likes of the English historian GR Elton: people make and do not make decisions. It is this which decides the course of history. So far, we have looked at Louis and Marie Antoinette, various ministers. Let us now consider some significant figures and their role in events leading to revolution.

¹ Historians who follow such a line of thinking are not necessarily Communists.

² The nineteenth century historian, Thomas Macaulay, is such an example.

³ The work of French historian Braudel on the Mediterranean is such an example.

⁴ This is a reference to the 1998 movie whose premise is based on the idea that everything is determined by the chance happening of making it on to a London tube train at a particular moment, or not doing so.

	Dates	Background	Role in the events of the revolution
<p>Duc d'Orleans</p> 	1747-1793	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> he was the cousin of King Louis XVI the son of Louis-Philippe, Duc de Chartres he was exceedingly wealthy annual income of 7 million livres suspected by some early on of coveting the throne for himself despite his high birth, he became a keen supporter of popular democracy during the revolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> he strongly disliked Marie Antoinette and so did not live at court in 1787, he was part of the Assembly of Notables and in the Paris Parlement of 1787, he challenged the king over financial policy he was elected as a noble member of the Estates General and joined the National Assembly his Paris home, the Palais Royal, became a centre of popular opposition to the regime in 1791 he joined the radical Jacobin Club in August 1792, he renounced his title and became Philippe Égalité he supported radical policies, voted for the execution of the king but fell under suspicion when his son, Louis-Philippe, the Duc de Chartres (France's king from 1830-48) joined the Austrians with the French commander, Dumouriez; he was accused of supporting the enemy and arrested on 6 April 1793 He was guillotined in November 1793
<p>Emmanuel-Joseph Abbé Sieyès</p> 	1748-1836	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abbé Sieyès was educated at the Sorbonne and his family assumed that he would pursue a church career. By 1780 he was Chancellor of the Diocese of Chartres. His interest in enlightenment thinking, of men such as Locke, led him into the area of political not religious philosophy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> He opposed the way the Estates General was to be organised and in protest wrote his famous pamphlet, "Qu'est-ce que le Tiers État?" – What is the Third Estate? He was elected to the Estates General as a member of the 3rd Estate. On his motion, the Estates General voted to become the National Assembly. He was a clever man and gained renown as a theorist but he was vain and not a great speaker. He did not gain a strong popular following.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ His lack of noble birth hindered his progress in the church. ■ His nature was cold. He had a sharp mind and did not suffer fools easily. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ He supported the execution of the king but turned against the terror and withdrew from politics. ■ He briefly served on the Committee of Public Safety in 1795, later the Council of 500 and was part of the Directory in 1799. As Napoleon made his moves to power, Abbé Sieyès' influence declined and his later contributions were in the diplomatic field.
<p>Comte de Mirabeau</p> 	1749-1791	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Honore Gabriel Riqueti, Comte de Mirabeau, was the son of Victor, Marquis de Mirabeau. ■ The family had been ennobled in 1685 and had gained its wealth as merchants in Marseilles. ■ His early years were full of adventure and amorous affairs. At one point his father even had him imprisoned for his own good. ■ He once had a death sentence imposed upon him. ■ He spent some time in Holland and England before returning to France and taking up a minor diplomatic post in Prussia. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ At the time of the Assembly of Notables he had a brush with the authorities over his pamphlet "Denonciation de l'agiotage". ■ When the Estates General was called, he presented himself to his 2nd Estate but was rejected due to his infamous past. ■ The 3rd Estate was happy to have him and he soon was dominating the National Assembly which he did much to create. ■ He believed in the main principles of the revolution but he also defended the monarchy. ■ He was opposed to the nobles, who had earlier rejected him. He played a key role in the framing of the Declaration of the Rights of Man. ■ He was scornful of religion and eager to support anti-clerical legislation. ■ From May 1790 to his death in April 1791, he was an unofficial minister at Louis' court. For this his debts were paid (and some accused him of taking a royal bribe in this way). ■ Louis refused to accept his advice, advice which might have saved the monarchy. Arguably, the last hope of the monarchy disappeared with Mirabeau's death in 1791.

<p>Marquis de Lafayette</p> 	1757-1834	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Lafayette came from a noble family and inherited a fortune at age thirteen. He joined the army and became a captain of dragoons in the army. ■ When the American war broke out, he volunteered to fight against the British. ■ In July 1777, the Americans made him a major-general in their army. ■ When he returned to France he was feted as a national hero. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ It is not surprising that Lafayette and the men who returned to France with him, brought home democratic ideas for which they had been fighting. ■ He was part of the Assembly of Notables and called on the king to call the Estates General. ■ He became vice-president of the National Assembly. In the assembly he supported a range of moderate reforms such as the introduction of a free press and religious freedom, the end of imprisonment without trial and an English jury system. The 'tricolour' was his creation. ■ He became Colonel-General of the National Guard that was set up early in the revolution to maintain some sort of order. He sided with the revolutionaries who had marched on Versailles and brought the king back to the Tuileries. ■ He supported the arrest of the king after his flight to Varennes but he opposed the extremes of the mob in the interest of law and order. ■ Late in 1792, he sought to restore a limited monarchy. Accused by the Jacobins of treachery, he fled to Liège where, as a leading revolutionary, he was arrested and spent five years in Prussian and Austrian prisons. ■ Lafayette had given his country great service but the times were not right for men of moderate outlook such as him. ■ Napoleon arranged his release from prison in 1797 but this did not stop him opposing the future emperor. He continued his pursuit of liberal ideas after the restoration of the monarchy in 1815, and even took part in the 1830 revolution. ■ He died in 1834 at the age of 77.
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<p>Camille Desmoullins</p> 	<p>1760-1794</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Born in Guise, northern France, Desmoullins was a talented student. ■ He became a lawyer in 1785, despite a stammer and a temper. ■ Also, in 1785, he became a member of the Paris Parlement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ He became an effective orator and was partly responsible for rousing the mob that stormed the Bastille in July 1789. ■ He was well-known as a pamphleteer and a journalist. His works included <i>La France Libre</i>, <i>The Streetlamps Address</i> to the Parisians and his newspaper <i>The Revolutions in France and Brabant</i>. ■ After the king's flight to Varennes, he supported the monarchy's removal, and took part in the insurrection against it in August 1792. ■ He was a colleague of Danton and was made Secretary-General in Danton's Ministry of Justice. He joined the National Convention and joined the Jacobins against the Girondins but by late 1793, with Danton he had become a leader of the moderate faction. ■ He opposed Jacques Hébert and the left-wing Jacobins for their state control of the economy and the reign of terror. He attacked them in his paper <i>Le Vieux Cordelier</i>. ■ Eventually he lost Robespierre's support and with Danton was arrested in March 1793. He and Danton were guillotined in April 1793.
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Exercise 9.1 Identify the following people. They may appear more than once.

1	My scandalous background meant that many of my social class spurned me in the lead up to the revolution.	
2	I became a national hero in France because of my involvement in the American War of Independence.	
3	I was eventually executed in April 1793, along with another famous revolutionary leader, Danton.	
4	My son was to reign as King of France from 1830 to 1848.	
5	I was the man who wrote a famous pamphlet during the revolution entitled "What is the Third Estate?"	
6	After I fled the Jacobins in 1792, I was captured and spent five years in Prussian and Austrian prisons.	
7	I was suspected of supporting France's enemies following my son's defection, and so I was guillotined in November 1793.	
8	I became one of the leading journalists and pamphleteers during the revolution. One of my papers was Le Vieux Cordelier.	
9	I tried to maintain some limited form of monarchy but Louis rejected by advice and I died in 1791 before I could achieve my goal.	
10	I supported the execution of the king but opposed the excesses of the terror. I was a part of the Directory in 1799.	

Section Two: Consequences of Revolution
(A) The progress of the revolution

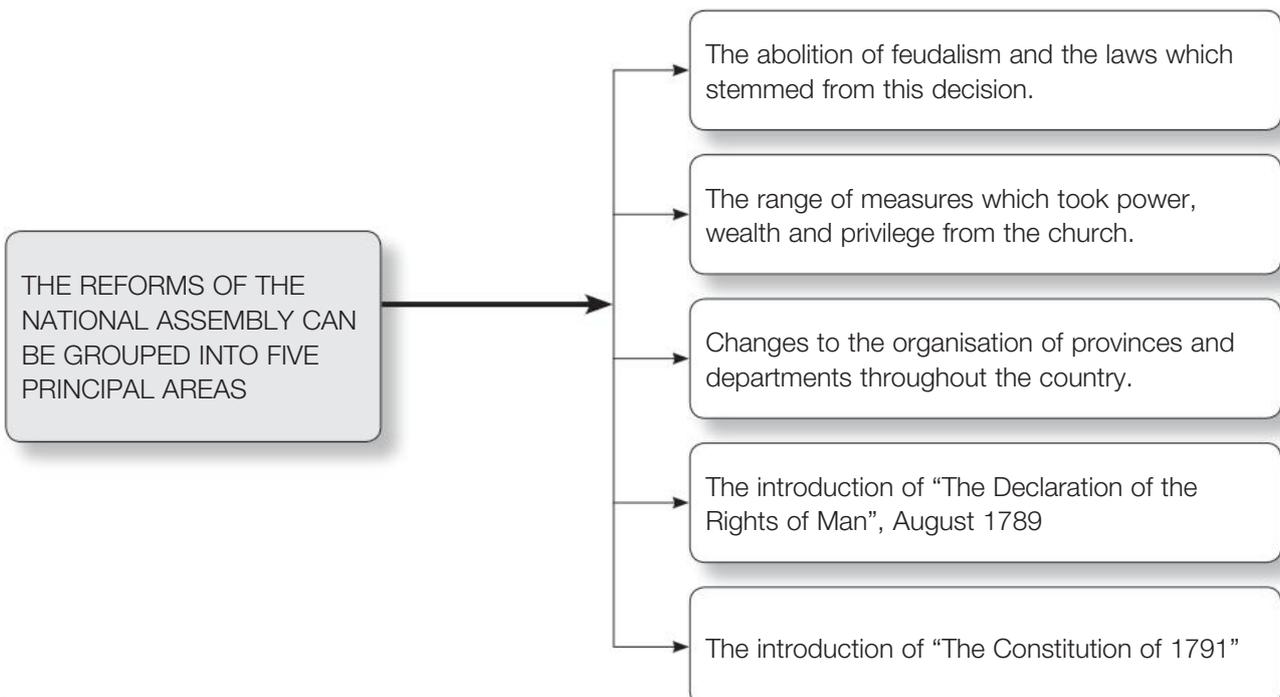
Chapter Ten
The National Assembly: 1789-1791

When the Estates General met in May 1789, it was clear that the 1st and 2nd estates intended to maintain their privileges and control over proceedings. This body had been formed in the Middle Ages, when there was no real middle class to speak of. The voting procedure was “by estates” which of course meant that the two privileged estates could always outvote the 3rd estate. As was explained in Chapter Six, this was totally unacceptable to the 3rd estate, particularly its well-educated, high-taxed members of the bourgeoisie.

As a result, the 3rd estate, along with members of the clergy and a few nobles removed themselves from the Estates General and formed what became known as the National or Constituent Assembly, and assumed the legislative power of the country. On 27 June 1789, the king ordered the members of the 1st and 2nd estates to join them, and so the National Assembly became a legal body.

The National Assembly was an inexperienced body and at first much time was wasted wrangling about procedure and the direction of reform. This partly explains the growing disorder in Paris which would result in the storming of the Bastille. ¹ The National Assembly was eventually forced into action. The series of reforms introduced by it was not insignificant. These reforms are summarised in Figure 10.1, and will be explained in more detail later in this chapter.

Figure 10.1 The reforms of the National Assembly



¹ See Chapter Seven.

(1) The Abolition of Feudalism

With growing violence and disorder across the country, the National Assembly took the only action it could and abolished feudalism. This was done with no provisions made for compensation. On 4 August 1789, one nobleman after another stepped forward and, often emotionally, announced the surrender of their privileges. Within a week, the Assembly announced a series of measures which brushed aside the privileges and rights of nobles and clerics which had been such a mainstay of the *ancien régime*:

- feudal taxes and privileges such as special hunting rights were removed;
- various offices and posts which had been reserved for nobles, and which often meant nothing, were ended; offices of state and the army were now declared open to all;
- the notion of equal and fairer taxation was accepted;
- justice was now to be free for all;
- jury trials were set up for criminal offences;
- the guillotine became the only form of execution.

In vain, Mirabeau urged caution, warning against the total destruction of the old regime before something had been worked out to take its place. What the Assembly achieved in August 1789 was not simply reform but a new beginning for a social revolution that would become the modern France.

Legal and economic reforms were introduced following the abolition of feudalism:

- anybody elected to a municipal office could retain that office for only a limited time and was not allowed to be re-elected;
- hereditary and clerical titles were abolished;
- a single tariff was brought in to simplify trade;
- a new system of weights and measures was introduced though it would take a few years for this to settle down;
- the old taxes were removed and new ones introduced on land, profits and movables.
- the 14 June 'Le Chapelier Law' forbade the existence of workers' guilds and associations; workers' rights were curtailed by this reform and would make them more exposed to exploitation by employers.

(2) The attack on the church

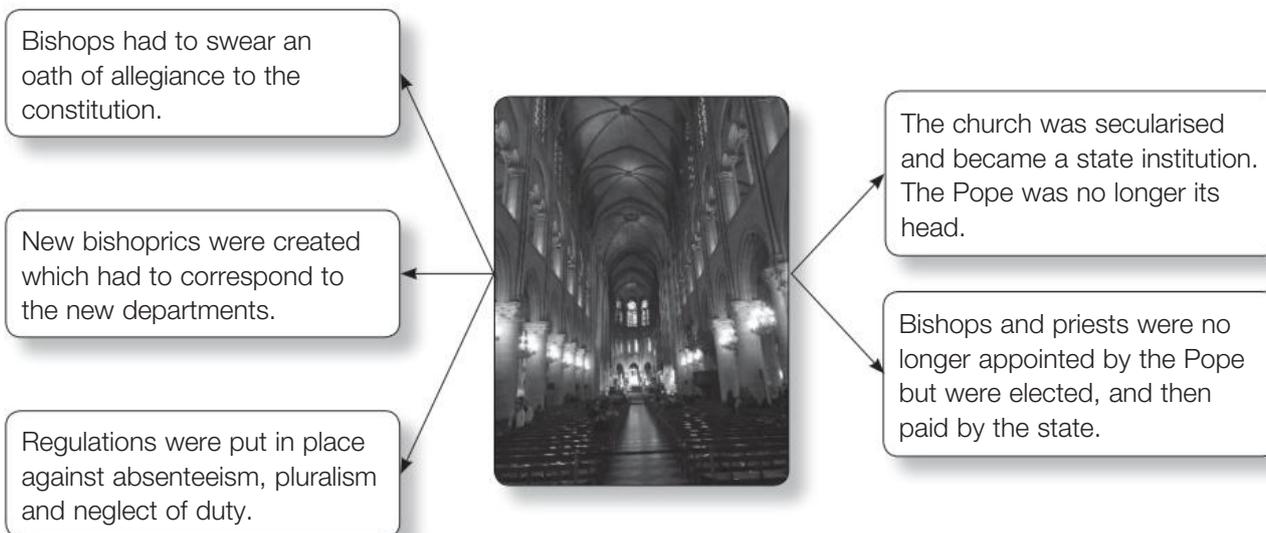
It was not only the nobles who experienced the tide of revolution. A series of measures were quickly enacted against the church.

- church property across the country was appropriated by the state;
 - to replenish the treasury, assignats (a form of paper money) was issued on the security of confiscated church property;
 - within a few years, so much paper money was issued, its value steadily fell in relation to metallic coin.
- the system of the payment of church tithes was ended;

- in April 1790 religious toleration was declared;

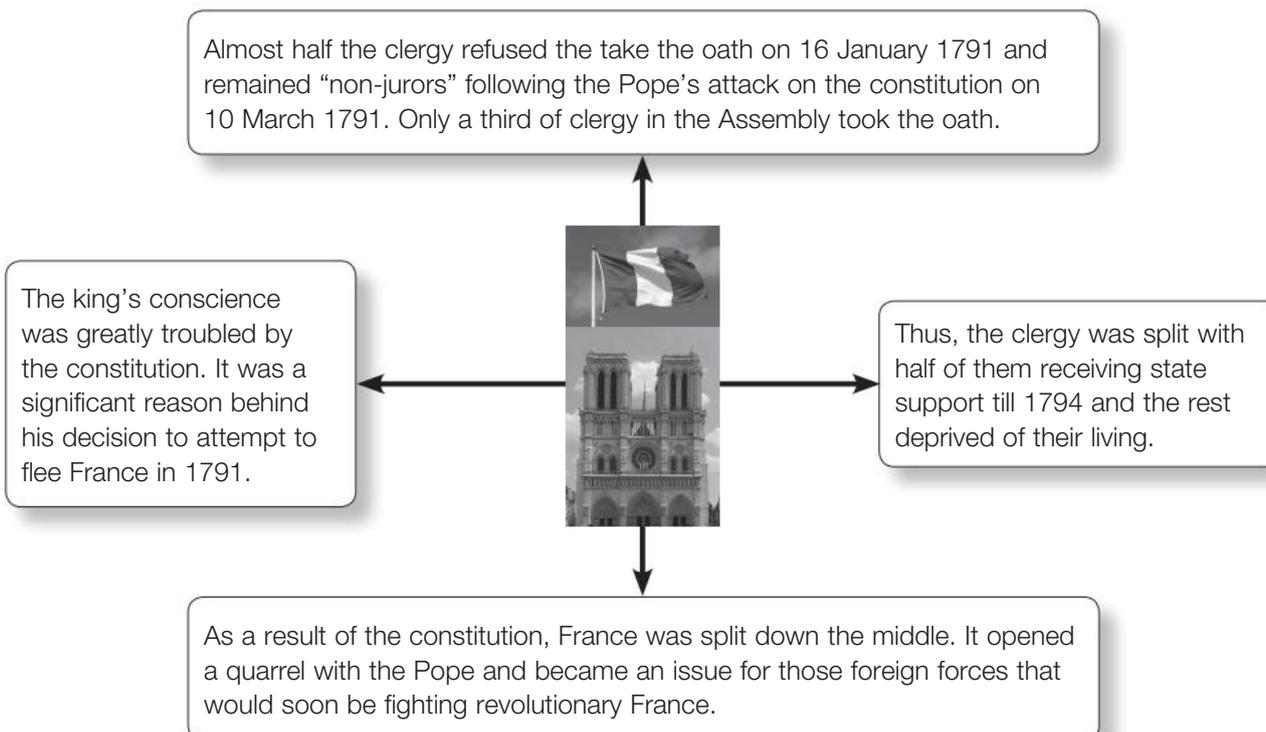
The Civil Constitution of the Clergy, enacted on 12 July 1790, had a wide-ranging impact. Its key points are summarised in Figure 10.2.

Figure 10.2 The Civil Constitution of the Clergy



However, the changes to church organisation were not always received with universal approval. Particularly in rural areas, priests were often seen as the mainstays of the community and there was resentment at these high-handed moves against them. Many clerics refused to swear the oath. The king, who was a very religious man, opposed these changes and became an enemy of the revolution. The impact of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy is outlined in Figure 10.3.

Figure 10.3 Impact of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy



The breach that had been brought about by the Civil Constitution of the Clergy remained a running sore within the country until Napoleon fixed things with his Concordat of 1801.

(3) Provincial organisation

The old provincial organisation of France was swept away. The former self-contained provinces were abolished and replaced with 83 departments, each of which had its own local government. The 113 ancient bishoprics of the old regime were now dissolved and were replaced with ones that matched the new 83 departments.

(4) The Declaration of the Rights of Man

The Declaration of the Rights of Man, proclaimed on 26 August 1789, is perhaps one of the most famous and important documents in history. It aimed to remove the abuses of the old regime, and replace them with the principles of freedom, equality, justice and democracy. It was composed by Lafayette and Jean-Joseph Mounier. It reflected the ideas of the enlightenment and was similar in some ways to the American Declaration of Independence of 1776.

Here are the seventeen clauses of the Declaration. ²

1. *Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good.*
2. *The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.*
3. *The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. No body nor individual may exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from the nation.*
4. *Liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else; hence the exercise of the natural rights of each man has no limits except those which assure to the other members of the society the enjoyment of the same rights. These limits can only be determined by law.*
5. *Law can only prohibit such actions as are hurtful to society. Nothing may be prevented which is not forbidden by law, and no one may be forced to do anything not provided for by law.*
6. *Law is the expression of the general will. Every citizen has a right to participate personally, or through his representative, in its foundation. It must be the same for all, whether it protects or punishes. All citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, are equally eligible to all dignities and to all public positions and occupations, according to their abilities, and without distinction except that of their virtues and talents.*
7. *No person shall be accused, arrested, or imprisoned except in the cases and according to the forms prescribed by law. Any one soliciting, transmitting, executing, or causing to be executed, any arbitrary order, shall be punished. But any citizen summoned or arrested in virtue of the law shall submit without delay, as resistance constitutes an offense.*

² Prepared by Gerald Murphy (The Cleveland Free-Net - aa300) Distributed by the Cybercasting Services Division of the National Public Telecomputing Network (NPTN).

8. *The law shall provide for such punishments only as are strictly and obviously necessary, and no one shall suffer punishment except it be legally inflicted in virtue of a law passed and promulgated before the commission of the offense.*
9. *As all persons are held innocent until they shall have been declared guilty, if arrest shall be deemed indispensable, all harshness not essential to the securing of the prisoner's person shall be severely repressed by law.*
10. *No one shall be disquieted on account of his opinions, including his religious views, provided their manifestation does not disturb the public order established by law.*
11. *The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man. Every citizen may, accordingly, speak, write, and print with freedom, but shall be responsible for such abuses of this freedom as shall be defined by law.*
12. *The security of the rights of man and of the citizen requires public military forces. These forces are, therefore, established for the good of all and not for the personal advantage of those to whom they shall be intrusted.*
13. *A common contribution is essential for the maintenance of the public forces and for the cost of administration. This should be equitably distributed among all the citizens in proportion to their means.*
14. *All the citizens have a right to decide, either personally or by their representatives, as to the necessity of the public contribution; to grant this freely; to know to what uses it is put; and to fix the proportion, the mode of assessment and of collection and the duration of the taxes.*
15. *Society has the right to require of every public agent an account of his administration.*
16. *A society in which the observance of the law is not assured, nor the separation of powers defined, has no constitution at all.*
17. *Since property is an inviolable and sacred right, no one shall be deprived thereof except where public necessity, legally determined, shall clearly demand it, and then only on condition that the owner shall have been previously and equitably indemnified.*

Exercise 10.1

1. Select three of the clauses which you think most clearly represent a break with the old regime. Explain why you chose them.

2. Which articles do you think most clearly reflect enlightenment thinking? (a check of Chapter Four might help with this question).

3. Select three clauses which you consider to be the most important. Give reasons for your selection.

(5) The Constitution of 1791

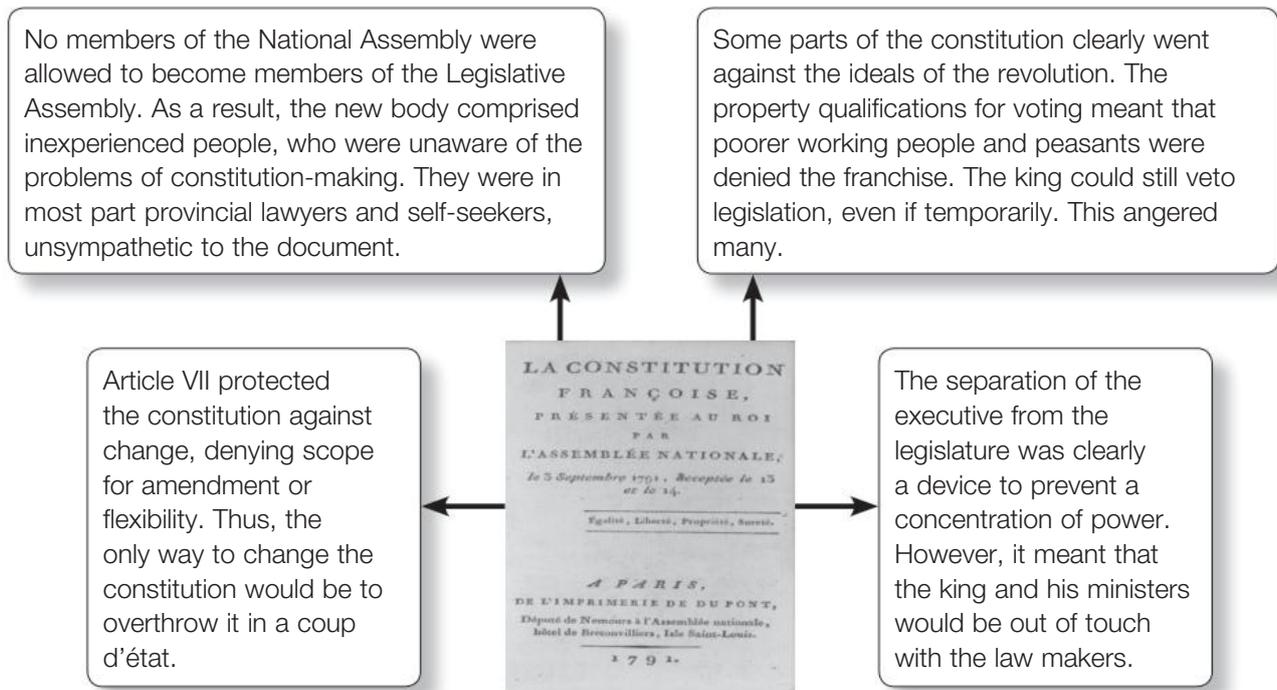
A new constitution was introduced, incorporating many of the ideals of the Declaration of the Rights of Man. It was eventually accepted by the king on 18 September, 1791. In essence it limited the powers of the king and decided on the form of the legislature.

- The king now ruled by the grace of god and by the constitutional law of the state:
 - the king and his ministers formed the main executive;
 - the king had a six months suspensive veto over laws introduced by the Legislative Assembly;
- A Legislative Assembly, a single chamber comprising 745 deputies, became the law-making body:
 - it was to be elected every three years;
 - there was a property qualification for voters;
 - there was a separation of the executive and the legislature, as no minister was allowed to be a member of the Legislative Assembly;

- the constitution guaranteed various rights for the people:
 - the right to assemble and offer petitions;
 - private property was to be respected;
 - judges had to be democratically elected

The Constitution of 1791 suffered from a series of flaws, as outlined in Figure 10.4.

Figure 10.4 Flaws in the 1791 Constitution



The Royals' Flight to Varennes

Louis soon realised that he had become a prisoner of the revolution and from early 1790 was seeking to leave the country. He knew he could rely on the support of Marie Antoinette's brother, Leopold II of Austria, and of Spain's Charles IV to help restore him to power. Louis was also angered by the terms of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. The royal family had tried to escape in April 1791 but had been stopped by the Parisian crowd. Another attempt was made on 20 Jun 1791.

In disguise the family managed to escape the Tuileries. However, after only twenty hours they were recognised in Varennes, taken captive and four days later forced back to Paris. The king's unsuccessful "flight to Varennes" was of major importance:

- the king had shown himself to be an enemy of the revolution;
- he lost the support of moderates, and his action played into the hands of the most extreme revolutionaries;
- the fact he heading towards foreign forces meant he could now also be labelled not only an enemy of the revolution, but also an enemy of France;
- debate now commenced on what to do with him? Depose him? Replace him by another family member? Try him and execute him?

The massacres on Le Champ de Mars

Various political clubs were appearing in Paris and beyond.³ Some of the more radical of these such as the *Jacobins* were pushing for a national vote on what should happen to the king, following his failed attempt at escape. A petition had been drawn up by another radical club, the *Cordeliers*. These groups believed in more “direct democracy” and were gaining wide support amongst the *sans-culottes*.

Spurred on by the clubs, large crowds gathered on the *Champ de Mars*. The Paris mayor feared the possibility of widespread violence and called out the National Guard to disperse the crowd. The crowd refused to obey orders to break up, and so on Lafayette’s command, the National Guard shot into the crowd. Fifty people were killed. The “Flight to Varennes” and the “Massacre on Le Champ de Mars” did much to fuel anti-royal sentiment, and spur on the movement for the complete end of the monarchy, and eventually the king’s execution.

Exercise 10.2 Indicate if each of the following statements is true or false.

1	The abolition of feudalism and its attendant privileges was one of the earliest reforms of the revolution.	TRUE/ FALSE
2	Paper money or assignats, replenished the treasury, using confiscated church property as security.	TRUE/ FALSE
3	Under the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, the Pope retained his influence and position in France.	TRUE/ FALSE
4	The Civil Constitution of the Clergy received rapturous support across France and faced virtually no opposition.	TRUE/ FALSE
5	The Declaration of the Rights of Man reflected very little of the enlightenment thinking of the 18th century.	TRUE/ FALSE
6	The Constitution of 1791 retained the position of the king and gave him a suspensive veto.	TRUE/ FALSE
7	The 1791 Constitution tried to avoid a separation of powers between executive, legislature and judiciary.	TRUE/ FALSE
8	Men who had been members of the National Assembly were not to be allowed into the Legislative Assembly.	TRUE/ FALSE
9	The king’s “flight to Varennes” had surprisingly little impact on policy and thinking during the revolution.	TRUE/ FALSE
10	The massacre on Le Champ de Mars did much to enflame anti-royal thinking in France.	TRUE/ FALSE

³ See Chapter Eleven.

What do the historians think about “The National Assembly: 1789-1791”?

1. A Goodwin: *The French Revolution*

Goodwin examines the terms of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and highlights the consequences of the reform. A major division was created between the various members of the church which would have a major impact on the revolution.

*“...The opposition between the “constitutional” and “non-juring” or “refractory” clergy brought into existence rival factions, whose antagonisms were to prove irreconcilable. The schism first made counter-revolution practical politics by providing it with popular support... It was Louis XVI’s religious scruples, aroused by the papal denunciation (of the law), which finally converted him to the necessity of risking his personal safety and the fate of the French monarchy on the chance of a successful escape to the eastern frontier...”*⁴

2. George Rudé: *Revolutionary Europe 1783-1815*

Rudé suggests that the impact of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was more traumatic for France, and in particular its clergy. Many of its provisions, he argues, were acceptable to the clergy at large. However, the Assembly rushed the new law through quickly without adequate consultation, and more importantly, the Pope came out and strongly denounced the reform. Once the Pope had spoken, those who accepted his authority, or who simply followed their own conscience and refused to swear the oath that was part of the reform...:

*“...became by inevitable stages, the declared opponents of not only the Civil Constitution but of the Revolution itself, and, as such, identified by “patriots” with aristocracy and counter-revolution. From this followed, in turn, the tragic and fateful sequence of emigration, proscription and even massacre of “refractory priests, the civil war in the Vendée, terror and counter-terror...”*⁵

4 Goodwin, A, *The French Revolution*, Hutchinson University Library, London, 1965, pp 100, 101

5 Rudé, G, *Revolutionary Europe 1783-1815*, Fontana, London, 1966, p 118

Chapter Eleven

The Legislative Assembly: 1791-92

On 20 April, 1792, the Legislative Assembly declared war against Austria "*In rightful defence of a free people against the unjust aggression of a king.*" A month later it declared war on Sardinia. In July, Prussia declared war on France. The story of the Legislative Assembly is closely bound up with the events of the war. In this chapter, occasional references will be made to the events of the war when appropriate. However, the issue of the war will be dealt with separately and more fully in Chapter Thirteen.

The Legislative Assembly came into being in October 1791 following the completion of the 1791 Constitution. Due to the restrictions in the franchise established by the National Assembly (see Chapter Ten), the Assembly was strongly middle-class. It would continue in existence until September 1792. Failure to maintain order and mishandling of the war would result in the Legislative Assembly having a brief life and being forced to introduce a new constitution.

The period of the Legislative Assembly was marked by several key developments:

- the emergence of political parties (see below);
- the war (see Chapter Thirteen);
- decrees were passed against emigré nobles and non-juring clergy:
 - nobles were given a time-limit in which to return to France or face confiscation of property and a death sentence;
 - clerics refusing the oath of allegiance faced deportation;
- the steady move towards republican government which would result in the dethronement of Louis XVI
- the growing paranoia that began to infect the entire country;
- the appearance of extreme violence within France.

The appearance of political parties

By 1792, specific political groupings had appeared within France. For want of a better word, these were 'parties'. However, it should be noted that these were not carefully, tightly organised parties that we are used to in a modern democracy such as Australia. The parties were more loose groupings of like-minded people. It was not unusual for a person to move from one grouping to another.

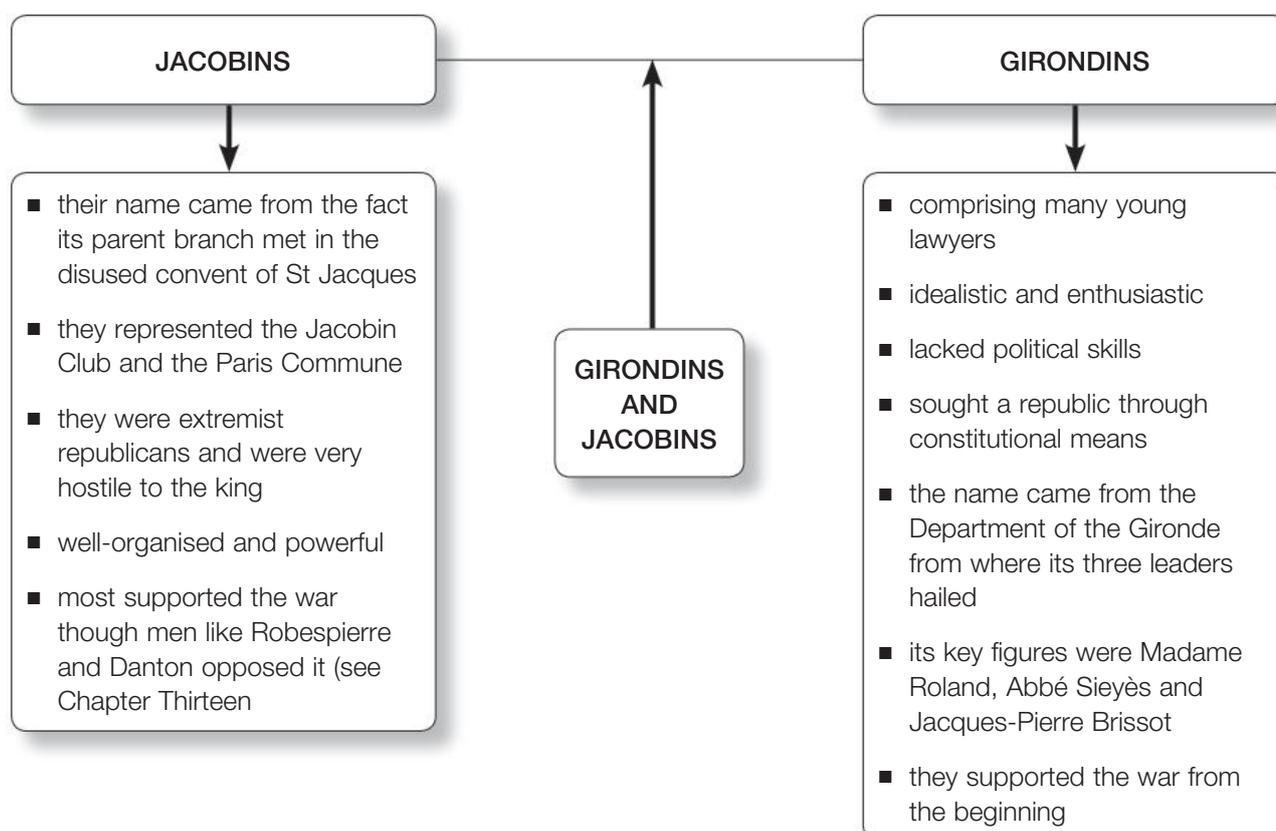
Three main groupings existed in the Legislative Assembly:

- One group was the Royalists or 'Feuillants':
 - these were mostly middle-class people who looked for leadership towards people like Lafayette;
 - they were moderate and felt that revolution had gone far enough;

- they were satisfied with the Constitution of 1791 and believed that the king still had a key role to play in the governance of the country.
- Another group could be loosely referred to as the Centre:
 - these were unattached members in the Assembly;
 - they were small in number, timid and had no influence.
- The third and by far more influential grouping were the republicans. The republicans would gradually evolve into two main groupings who would dominate the course of the revolution over the next three years. They were:
 - the Gorondins
 - the Jacobins

Figure 11.1 summarises the main aspects of these groups.

Figure 11.1 The Girondins and the Jacobins



The spread of paranoia across the country

France during the time of the Legislative Assembly was a country on edge. One factor that explains this was the war. However, there were also significant internal developments that contributed to this atmosphere. France's economic problems, not surprisingly, continued to worsen. The value of assignats fell, the 1791 harvest was a disaster and soon grain stores across the country were being raided by hungry people.

As the situation deteriorated, the influence of the working-class *san culottes* increased. They were fierce supporters of the revolution, sought immediate equality, and had no compunction about using violence to achieve their goals. On 20 June 1792 ¹, over 8000 demonstrators took to the streets. They demanded the return of the Girondin Ministry which had been sacked by Louis a week earlier, and they now demanded the end of the king's suspensive veto. This crowd invaded the Tuileries and petitioned the king. Louis would no doubt have been extremely fearful at this moment but he exuded calm which seemed to quieten the crowd, and, if only briefly, probably led to an increase in his popularity.

Over the next two months, the national paranoia grew and with it a further escalation of violence.

11 July	The Legislative Assembly announced <i>La Patrie en danger</i> – the country is in danger. Invasion was becoming a major possibility. Could revolutionary France defend itself?
13 July	The Legislative Assembly declared a state of emergency. Pikes were issued to ordinary citizens as a people's defence was hastily organised. People were now on the lookout for potential traitors and anyone who might be suspected of opposing the revolution or assisting the enemy.
25 July	The (Austrian) Duke of Brunswick issued a statement (<u>The Brunswick Manifesto</u>) declaring that if King Louis XVI or any of his family was harmed, Paris could expect severe retribution. Not surprisingly, this angered the Paris mob, and the king was now believed to be working with France's foreign enemies.
6 August	Crowds met to demand the king's abdication, a demand which the Legislative Assembly rejected.
9 August	The Paris Commune was replaced by a new "Revolutionary Commune".
10 August	The Tuileries Palace was invaded on command of the Revolutionary Commune. 20 000 <i>san culottes</i> and <i>fédérés</i> ² took part in this action. The palace guard were helpless to stop this action. The mob ran amok, ransacking rooms and looting. Many of Louis' staff and his Swiss Guard were killed and there were hundreds of casualties. The Legislative Assembly was powerless in the face of the <i>san culottes</i> and the popular Revolutionary Commune. The monarchy was suspended; the royal family were taken and placed in the Temple Prison.

The September Massacres

On 2 September 1792, Prussian forces captured the town of Verdun. ³ Widespread panic now engulfed Paris; Verdun was the last defence before Paris. It was believed that Prussian troops could be in the city within days. Thousands of volunteers rushed to the front to prevent the advance of the enemy Prussian troops.

¹ The 20 June 1792 was the third anniversary of the Tennis Court Oath and the first anniversary of the Flight to Varennes.

² The *fédérés* was a volunteer citizen body that had been established earlier in the year to help protect the city.

³ See Chapter Thirteen

The fall of Verdun and the exit of so many volunteers from the city now caused widespread panic. There were fears that those anti-revolutionary groups left in the city – prisoners, clergy, nobles – would use the opportunity provided by these events to turn on supporters of the revolution. As a result, the mob raised the call to “kill all the traitors”. Hundreds of sans culottes invaded the prison and slaughtered all they could find who were suspected of being traitors either to the revolution or to France.

The Legislative Assembly was powerless to do anything. This slaughter, which became known as “the September Massacres”, continued for four days. Over 1400 people were murdered in Paris, and the killings spread into the provinces.

It was against this background that the elections for the “Convention” were held. The Convention met for the first time on 21 September 1792.

Exercise 11.1 Place the events on the right in the correct chronological order.

1st event		Brunswick Manifesto
2nd event		First meeting of the Convention
3rd event		Declaration of war on Austria
4th event		Opening of the Legislative Assembly
5th event		Prussian capture of Verdun
6th event		Invasion of the Tuileries
7th event		Announcement of La Patrie en danger
8th event		September Massacres
9th event		Establishment of the Revolutionary Commune
10th event		Flight to Varennes

Exercise 11.2 Use the terms below to complete the following passage.

The _____ Assembly had developed out of the Estates _____. It was followed in October 1791 by the _____ Assembly. That body would eventually, itself, be superseded by the _____ in September 1792. By 1791, specific groupings, or parties were beginning to appear. One group, the Royalists or _____, were _____, believed the work of the _____ was over, and wanted the _____ to have a continuing role in the government of France. The two main _____ groups were the Girondins and the Jacobins. The _____ were more moderate, contained figures like _____ and _____, and they _____ the war. The _____ were more radical, much better _____, and were far more _____ to the king. They contained men such as _____ and _____.

JACOBINS – MODERATE – NATIONAL – ROBESPIERRE – ORGANISED – GENERAL
 – REVOLUTION – HOSTILE – FEUILLANTS – GIRONDINS – LEGISLATIVE – DANTON
 – BRISSOT – CONVENTION – ABBÉ SIEYES – REPUBLICAN – KING – SUPPORTED

What do the historians have to say about ‘The Legislative Assembly: 1791-92’?

1. Eric Hobsbawm: The Age of Revolution 1789-1848

Hobsbawm attempts to analyse what was happening in France at this time by having a close look at how different social classes were behaving. He argues that in most ‘bourgeois revolutions’, moderate liberals tend to pull back from extremism into the conservative camp.

- However, he points out that what made the French Revolution different was that the liberal middle class was prepared to remain revolutionary.
 - These, he says, were the Jacobins whose name came to stand for ‘radical revolution’ everywhere.

Hobsbawm provides a Marxist perspective as to why this happened. He argues that the Jacobins ‘could afford radicalism’ because there was no real working class.

- The ‘working class’ in France were mostly non-industrial wage-earners.

“They hungered, they rioted, perhaps they dreamed: but for practical purposes they followed non-proletarian leaders”.⁴

⁴ Hobsbawm, E, *The Age of Revolution 1789-1848*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1997, p 63

- The only alternative to bourgeois radicals, says Hobsbawm, were the ‘Sans-culottes’:
*“a shapeless, mostly urban movement of the labouring poor, small craftsmen, shopkeepers, artisans, tiny entrepreneurs and the like”.*⁵

The Sans-culottes he suggests provided the actual demonstrators, rioters and builders of the barricades. If they had any developed ideology at the time, Hobsbawm suggests it was a vague and contradictory ideal that sought:

- respect for small private property;
- opposition to the rich;
- support for government-guaranteed work, wages and social security for the poor man;

*“an extreme, egalitarian and libertarian democracy, localised and direct.”*⁶

Hobsbawm sees shades of later 19th century American populism in this.⁷

5 ibid

6 ibid

7 Might one also see shades of early 21st century populism in such thinking. A discussion point in class, perhaps.

Chapter Twelve

The Convention: 1792-95

The story of the Convention is closely bound up with the events of the war. In this chapter, occasional references will be made to the events of the war when appropriate. However, the issue of the war will be dealt with separately and more fully in Chapter Thirteen. Several significant personalities dominate the period of the Convention, notably Marat, Danton and Robespierre. These figures will be referred to in this chapter but each will be given more detailed treatment in Chapter Fifteen (Marat), Chapter Sixteen (Danton) and Chapter Seventeen (Robespierre).

The story of 'The Convention' is a complex and bloody one. It involves:

- a worsening war situation and then military victory;
 - the creation of the republic;
 - the execution of the king and queen;
 - terror, bloodletting and civil war;
 - the introduction of major reforms, some long-lasting, some ephemeral;
 - the short-lived domination of the revolution by major figures;
 - an eventual reaction against the radicalism of the time.
-

The Legislative Assembly had failed to keep order and was managing the war badly. It was forced to summon a Convention to draw up a new constitution. Its tenure ended in September 1792. The Convention met for the first time on 21 September 1792; it would continue until October 1795.

There were three main political groupings within the Convention.

- The Girondins:
 - the Girondins wanted a republic, but one achieved through constitutional means.
 - they were stronger in the provinces than in Paris;
 - they sought a less-centralised form of government;
 - its leaders included Roland, Vergniaud, Brissot.
- The Mountain:
 - these were the extreme Jacobins;
 - they represented the common people;
 - they sought a republic, with no qualms about the amount of violence that would be required to achieve this;
 - they were supported by the Paris Commune;
 - its leaders included Danton, Marat, Robespierre.

- The Plain:
 - this was a smaller group of ineffective deputies;
 - they were led by Barère;
 - they tended to represent lower middle-class, professional people;
 - this was an opportunistic group which tended to side with the stronger side, which meant moving towards the Jacobins.

22 September 1792

The first act of the Convention was to depose the king and declare a republic. This was to mark Year 1 of the Republic.

October 1792

A Committee of General Security was set up.

December 1792

The king was placed on trial, accused of plots against France, providing funds to the émigrés, and trying to subvert the constitution. ¹

January 1793

King Louis XVI was executed.

11 March 1793

A Revolutionary Tribunal was set up to speed up pending trials against those suspected of opposing the revolution or of treachery.

March 1793

Representatives en mission were created. These were revolutionary officials who were sent out to the provinces to ensure that the Convention's instructions were being obeyed beyond Paris.

- The *Representatives en mission* reported on rebellious provinces and kept an eye on the situation at the front.
- They had wide powers. They were able to consolidate the Jacobin hold on provincial communes.
- Up to 50 000 revolutionary committees were set up across the country.

The creation of all these committees increased the surveillance of the French population. It created fears of counter-revolution and led to the rise of paranoia within the country. This in turn both justified and necessitated the use of terror.

¹ The details of the king's trial and execution will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter Fourteen.

March 1793

The start of the La Vendée revolt.

6 April 1793

The Committee of Public Safety was set up. Its purpose was to restore order and carry on the war more effectively. It had nine members and it exercised wide powers. It proceeded to maintain revolutionary authority through the use of terror.

April 1793

The Girondists attempted to impeach Marat (see Chapter Fifteen). General Dumouriez defected to the enemy (see Chapter Thirteen). The Girondists now became the target of the mob.

Late May 1793

A mob of 30 000 invaded the Tuileries and demanded the arrest of 29 Girondists leaders.

1 June 1793

The National Guard surrounded the Convention. Barère sided with 'The Mountain' and so the fate of the Girondists was sealed. The mob now demanded that the Convention assert itself. Against the background of the menace of the mob and the continuing threat of foreign invasion, a three-cornered power struggle now ensued:

- Robespierre and the extreme Jacobins wanted to take the revolution wherever it had to go, for fear of eventual internal and external retribution;
- Danton came to believe that the terror could destroy all the gains of the revolution;
- Hébert led the most desperate and violent elements of the sans culottes in their pursuit of power and plunder.



Jacques Rene Hébert (1757-1794) was a popular journalist became a leader of the most radical sans culottes.

The newspaper he set up, 'Le Pere Duchesne', became the most widely read paper in Paris. It was written in a basic style and was clearly aimed at his sans culotte support base. He attacked all whom he perceived as enemies of the revolution and in 1793, he sought the arrest of the Girondins.

In September 1793, his supporters invaded the Convention, demanding action on food prices. He was soon attacking Danton, and then Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety. He and many of his followers (often referred to as Hébertists), were arrested, given a 'show trial' and executed in March 1794.

A powerful executive now took control comprising the Committee of Public Safety and the Revolutionary Tribunal. It took the reins with dictatorial powers and extended its term of office indefinitely.

June 1793

There were anti-revolutionary rebellions in the south west and south of the country, centring on Bordeaux, Marseilles and Toulon. A Popular Commission of Public Safety was set up that preached opposition to the rulings coming out of Paris. Forty Jacobins were tried and executed. This *Federalist Revolt* was essentially a provincial reaction to the centralised ruling of Paris. It brought on more terror from the revolutionary authorities.

13 July 1793

The former physician and scientist, now revolutionary journalist, Jean-Paul Marat ², a strong supporter of the sans culottes, was murdered in his bath by Charlotte Corday.

1 August 1793

Jean-Baptiste Carrier was ordered by the Committee of Public Safety to enforce the 'pacification' of the La Vendée region. Its complete physical destruction was expected.

5 September 1793

"Let terror be the order of the day!" An armée revolutionairre was established with the purpose of collecting grain supplies and rooting out counter-revolutionaries. The definition of a 'counter-revolutionary' was becoming vague in the extreme. Almost anyone could be accused of being a counter-revolutionary.

17 September 1793

The Law of Suspects was passed. Local Watch Committees could accuse and arrest anyone for a host of alleged crimes that included such offences as not being able to justify one's means of existence or anyone who was perceived as not showing consistent devotion to the revolution.

September 1793

Hébert and his violent sans culotte followers invaded the Convention and demanded action on food prices.

October 1793

The Girondist leaders were executed.

Marie-Antoinette was executed. ³

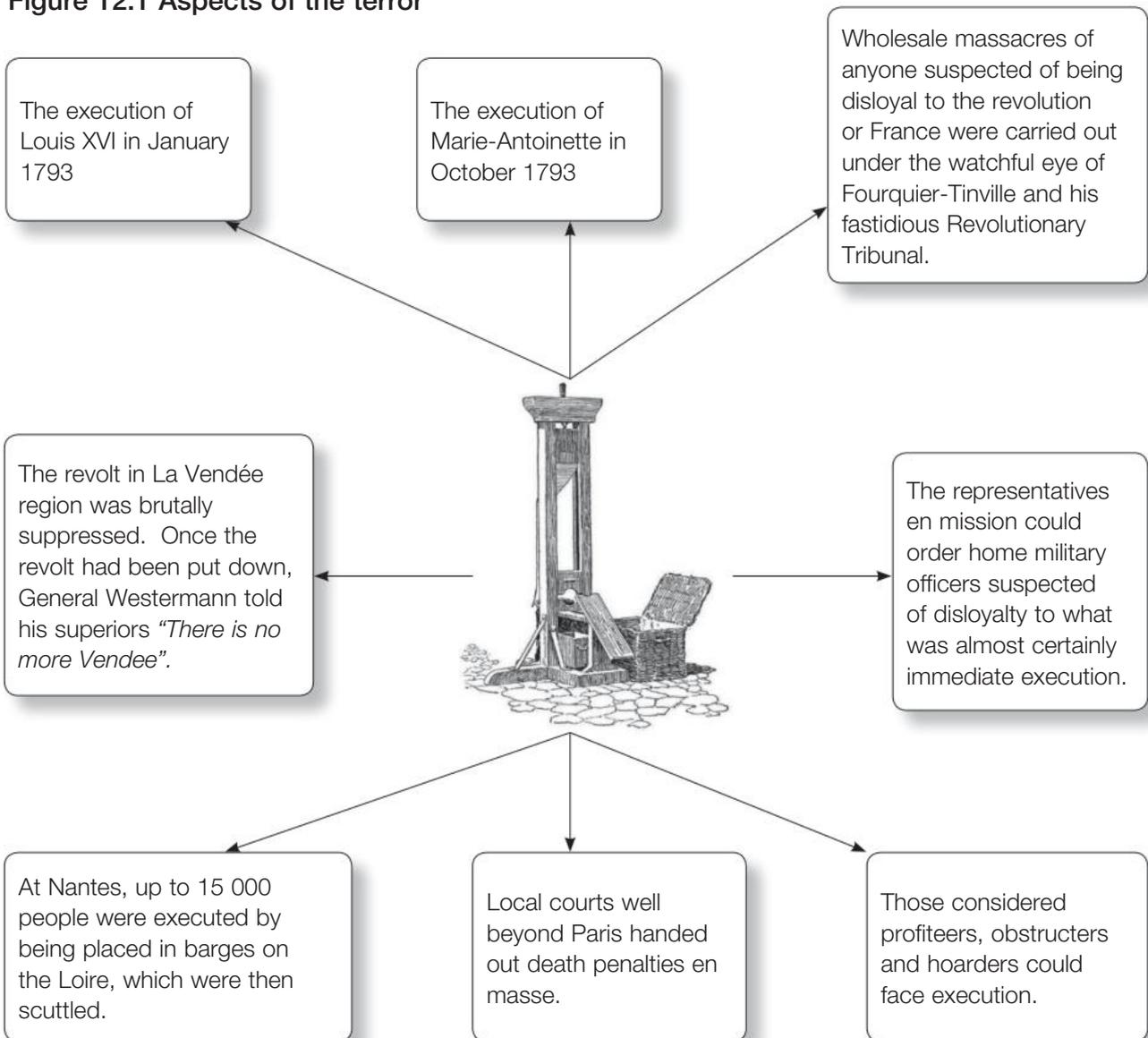
² The career of Marat will be considered in more detail in Chapter Fifteen.

³ See Chapter Fourteen.

December 1793

The Battle of Savenay finally brought the revolt in La Vendée to an end. The suppression of the revolt had been brutal in the extreme.

Figure 12.1 Aspects of the terror



March 1794

The arrest, trial and execution of Hébert and his followers.

26 March 1794

Danton and many of his followers, 'the Indulgents', were arrested. They had become too moderate. They were calling for an end to the terror, raised the idea of talking to France's enemies and promoted the notion of greater decentralisation. Danton's criticism of the terror was seen as criticism of the Committee.

5 April 1794

Danton and many of his supporters were executed. *The revolution was devouring its own!* Danton's execution shocked Paris.

10 June 1794

The 22 Prairial Law was passed. It defined counter-revolutionary behaviour and who was a traitor in the loosest possible manner, including such things misleading public, dampening revolutionary ardour, squandering food and other resources.

In June and July 1794, over 1300 people were executed. However, the people's 'blood lust' was lessening following the execution of Danton. The war was beginning to turn in France's favour and this led to a dampening of the atmosphere of paranoia that had enveloped the country for so long.

26 June 1794

Success in the war was appearing, as seen in The Battle of Fleurus.

27 July 1794

Robespierre threatened Convention deputies with further purging. He was shouted down. Along with Couthon, Hanriot and Louis Saint-Just, he was arrested. Support for Robespierre had evaporated.

28 July 1794

Robespierre and some of his close supporters were executed.

After the terror

On 10 Thermidor ⁴, the death of Robespierre meant the end of the terror but it did not necessarily mean the end of the violence. Retribution was now sought and achieved against supporters of Robespierre, and over one hundred people were executed in the next three days. The various "committees" were reorganised, and even émigrés were invited back to France. Over the next few months, a "white terror" (as opposed to the earlier revolutionary terror) followed, and over 2000 people were killed.

The era of 'the Thermidorian Reaction' resulted in many immediate developments:

- prisoners, including many Girondins, were released and the terror laws were repealed;
- seventy-three moderate Deputies who had been locked up during the terror were now released and retook their places in the Convention;
- the rebels of La Vendée were granted an amnesty;

4 The term "The Thermidorian Reaction" refers to the period from 27 July 1794 to the beginning of The Directory on 1 November 1795. It was named after the month in which the coup against Robespierre took place.

- the Commune was abolished;
- sale of property of émigrés was stopped;
- liberty of worship was allowed and Catholics could now celebrate mass;
- negotiations were being opened with some of France's enemies;
- power was gradually decentralised and the radical policies of the Convention were replaced with more conservative ones;
- the economic and populist measures of the Convention, along with its DeChristianisation measures were dropped;
- the Jacobin Club was closed down;
- the sans culotte groups were broken up.

A return to the monarchy?

Some royalists entertained the idea of royal restoration as they attempted to take advantage of the anti-revolutionary feeling that the terror had generated.

- The Dauphin, the ten-year old son of Louis XVI, had inherited the title of Louis XVII.
- On 28 June 1795, the young boy died at the Temple prison. He had not been treated well during his imprisonment.
- The “throne” now passed to Louis XVI's brother, the Comte de Provence.
 - He showed a total lack of understanding of the situation inside France by demanding, in essence, a return to the ancient regime, and the execution of all those responsible for the death of Louis XVI.
 - The people may have been driven to anger by the events and policies of the terror period, but this did not mean that they wanted a return to old regime.⁵

The end of the revolution

On 5 October 1795 (13 Vendémiaire, Year IV of the republican calendar), Paris was faced with a major royalist revolt led by Richer de Sévigny at the head of 30 000 royalist supporters. Facing de Sévigny were 6000 republican troops headed by Paul Barras, but really under the direction of the young General Napoleon Bonaparte. Using forty cannons, strategically positioned, Napoleon succeeded in quelling the revolt. Republican losses were about one hundred dead and wounded; royalist losses were over three hundred; four hundred civilians also were killed.

This incident was of major significance. It placed the final nail into the coffin of any possible royalist restoration, at least in the foreseeable future. However, of even greater significance, it thrust Napoleon on to the national stage. As the British historian, Thomas Carlyle later put it, Napoleon had given his opponents “a whiff of grapeshot”.

⁵ The Comte de Provence would return as Louis XVIII in 1814, and rule France until 1824 (apart from the one hundred days period of Napoleon's escape from exile).

It could be argued, that this marked the end of the revolution. Three weeks later, on 26 October, the Convention dissolved itself and on 1 November “The Directory” took over the running of the affairs of France. This regime would remain in power until November 1799, and has often been described as one of the most corrupt governments in European history. Disgusted by the antics of The Directory, a coup was staged against it in November 1799. From this emerged “the Consulate”, with the country now ruled by three men – Napoleon, Sieyès and Roger-Ducos. In 1801 Napoleon would become the First Consul. In 1804 he crowned himself Emperor.

Achievements of The Convention

The period of the Convention was a brutal and bloody one. However, this does mean that it was concerned with only terrorising the population. Several measures were introduced that were to have lasting benefit for France, though it would take Napoleon’s period of rule to consolidate many of its reforms.

- A DeChristianisation campaign was introduced in October 1793. “Marianne” replaced the Virgin Mary, cathedrals were ransacked, religious icons destroyed. Religious holidays were removed and replaced with revolutionary ones.
 - Robespierre realised that this campaign had not been successful and so ended it.
 - It would take Napoleon’s Concordat of 1801 to finally settle relations between church and state.
 - This agreement between Napoleon and Pope Pius VII would remain in force for over one hundred years.
- There was a focus on education. Famous institutions were established at this time including the Louvre, the National Library and the Institute of France.
- A metric system of weights and measures was introduced.
- A new Code of Laws was drafted which Napoleon would later refine.

A new constitution was drafted, that of the Year III (1795) which would lead to the establishment of The Directory. The new system would have:

- two houses of the legislature:
 - the Lower House (Council of 500) – its role was to be the proposal of laws and decrees;
 - the Upper House (Council of Elders of 250) – its role was to consider lower house proposals;
- an executive of five men, the Directory – its role was to supervise the execution of the laws passed by the legislature.
- two-thirds of the new legislature were to be chosen from the Convention;
- upper house members had to be married or widowers and at least forty years of age;
- almost all men aged 21 or over could vote to elect members of electoral colleges which then chose members of the legislature.
- one Director and a third of the members of the legislature had to retire each year.

As was mentioned above, The Directory was to be one of the most corrupt and inefficient governments in European history.

Exercise 12.1 Who am I?

1	I published Le Pere Duchesne and was a radical leader of the sans culottes.	
2	I was radical republican and ended up being murdered in my bath.	
3	Thanks to my “whiff of grapeshot”, a royalist rising was put down in 1795.	
4	I was one of the leading Girondin figures at the start of the Convention period.	
5	The Convention gave me the responsibility of suppressing the revolt in La Vendée.	
6	My execution in April 1794 shocked many of the people of Paris.	
7	I was the leader of the non-aligned Plain grouping in the Convention.	
8	Following my trial at the end of 1792, I was executed in January 1793.	
9	I was not particularly welcomed following my nephew’s death but I later become king.	
10	Arguably the most extreme of the revolutionary leaders and was executed in July 1794.	

HÉBERT – ROBESPIERRE – BRISSOT – NAPOLEON – CARRIER – MARAT – DANTON
 LOUIS XVI – COMPTE DE PROVENCE – BARÈRE

Exercise 12.2 Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

1	Name the three main political groupings at the beginning of the Convention period.	
2	What was the Convention's first decision of major significance?	
3	What was the main function of the <i>Representatives en mission</i> ?	
4	What was the purpose of the Committee of Public Safety when it was set up in April 1793?	
5	What was the fate of the sans culotte leader, Jacques Rene Hébert?	
6	What was the Federalist Revolt and where did it occur?	
7	How did the region of Le Vendée enter the story of the Convention?	
8	How did the September 1793 Law of Suspects add to the paranoia of the time?	
9	The revolution was devouring its own. What does this mean?	
10	What was the Thermidorian Reaction that took place from 1794?	

What do the historians have to say about 'The Convention: 1792-95'?

1. Helen Maria Williams: A contemporary English visitor to France

Helena Maria Williams visited Paris in July 1790 on the first anniversary of the fall of the Bastille. Following her visit, she was full of optimism and confidence about France's revolution, calling the celebrations that took place at the time as a "triumph of humankind". However, when she visited Paris again in 1794, during the height of the Terror, she described "a den of carnage, that slaughterhouse of man".

*"...We were obliged to pass the square of the revolution, where we saw the guillotine erected, the crowd assembled for the bloody tragedy, and the gens d'armes on horseback, followed by victims who were to be sacrificed, entering the square. Such was the daily spectacle..."*⁶

2. Gavin Jacobson: There is no more Vendée

In his review of Timothy Tackett's book, *The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution*, Jacobson gives an outline of the various interpretations that have been presented to explain the onset of the terror. He points out that Georges Lefebvre believed it was introduced as a matter of national survival. Younger historians, such as François Furet see the terror as a harbinger of 20th century tyranny, arguing that revolutionary violence is the logical outcome of pre-revolutionary thought. However, perhaps it was more a reaction to crisis and fuelled by emotion as much as by ideology. Jacobson then refers to Patrice Higonnet's argument that Jacobinism could not stand still but required commitment and 'had to attack' those who feared to go further. Tackett makes a distinction between violence and terror, seeing the king's execution as the beginning of the terror. Jacobson concludes by referring to an idea not contained in the book he is reviewing, suggesting that revolutionaries adopt such violent and drastic methods because of their knowledge of how easily republics die. He suggests that if the Jacobins were influenced by the Enlightenment:

*"...it wasn't so much by theories of liberty, economy and constitutionalism as by the discourse of catastrophe, and the idea that no state can avoid the cycle of decline and fall. 'If Rome and Sparta perished,' Rousseau wrote, 'what state can hope to last for ever?'"*⁷

⁶ London Review of Books, 16 March 2017

⁷ Jacobson, G, *There is no more Vendée*, London Review of Books, 16 March 2017.

Chapter Thirteen

The outbreak and course of the war

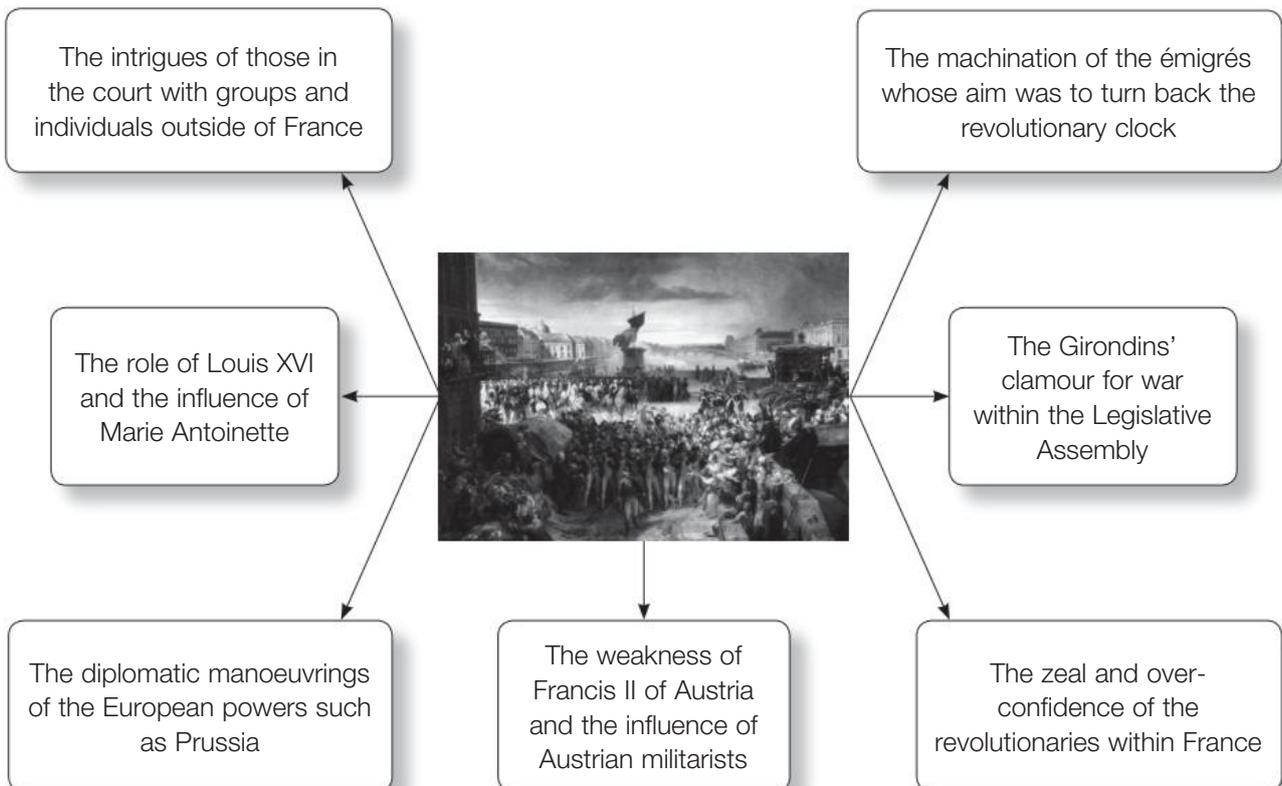
In April 1792, France declared war on Austria. Europe would be at war almost continually for the next twenty-three years, until the final defeat of Napoleon in 1815. No war is inevitable. Very rarely does a war break out because of a specific action. The normal course of events is for tensions and disagreements between powers to be building up over time and then a specific occurrence can spark an outbreak of hostilities. Even then, it is not always correct to argue that a war has “causes”. Rather, several factors can combine that create “an environment that makes war possible”.¹ However, there is often a deeper, more profound reason or reasons why nations are willing to risk war.²

It is interesting to consider such ideas when explaining the outbreak of war between France and the European powers in 1792.

Why war?

In some ways, it is fairly easy to explain why war came in 1792.

Figure 13.1, here, suggests some of the factors that led to war.



¹ A convincing argument can be pursued along these lines regarding World War I.

² Before 1914, issues such as imperialism, the alliance system and the arms race helped create an environment that made war possible. It took the assassination at Sarajevo and the July crisis to provide the spark for war. However, on a deeper level, it could be argued war was the result of fundamental “balance of power issues” – Britain’s fear of a German domination of the continent, Germany’s fear of future Russian power.

However, there was a much deeper cause of the war. At heart, the war of the 1790s was an “ideological war”.³ Inside their own country, the French revolutionaries had abolished the monarchy, the notions of absolute monarchy and divine right. They had brought feudalism to an end. They had shattered the power, wealth and influence of the church. In the place of all that had comprised the ancient regime, the French revolutionaries had established institutions based on popular sovereignty.

However, revolution could not be stopped at the French frontier.

- Armies can be held in check but ideas cannot.
- The thinking of the French Revolution, with its slogans of ‘liberté, égalité and fraternité, would resonate across Europe.
 - The French Revolution challenged the institutions of feudalism and absolutism everywhere.
 - Its ideals were too dynamic, too exciting and too appealing to those masses in other states who still suffered under the yoke of absolute monarchy.
- The French Revolution was like a contagion, a disease whose spread threatened the European status quo of centuries standing.
 - It had to be destroyed. In essence, the war of the 1790s was a struggle to the death.

The French authorities made it clear that this was in fact the nature of the conflict now underway. In December 1792, France announced that in any territory which it might occupy feudalism would be brought to end, and the properties of the church and the aristocracy would immediately be confiscated. The historian David Thomson expressed it in this way:

*“...The ideological conflict became clear. It was a clash between the old order and the new, now locked in a struggle to the death for the whole of Europe...”*⁴

(The ideological nature of the conflict was of course noted at the time. At the end of this chapter, reference will be made to the Anglo-Irish statesman and philosopher, Edmund Burke and his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.)

The road to war

Though the war was to have deep ideological significance, it was the split caused by the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and the activities of the émigrés that was to bring about the transition from internal revolution to international war.

- In March and April 1791, the **Pope openly condemned** the Civil Constitution of the Clergy⁵ and other revolutionary reforms.
- In May 1791 formal relations between France and the Holy See were broken.
- As early as late 1790, counter-revolutionary forces had been gathering in Brussels, Coblenz and Turin.

³ Perhaps there are shades of the reasons behind the post-1945 Cold War here.

⁴ Thomson, D, *Europe Since Napoleon*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1966, p 36

⁵ See Chapter Ten.

- By 1791, an émigré army was being formed in the Rhineland. The Comte d' Artois had established a head quarters in Coblenz and émigré agents were roaming across France, attempting to fan the flames of counter-revolution.
- By now the king's conscience over the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was greatly troubled. This, plus the queen's urging that only foreign intervention could restore the monarchy, led in June 1791 to the abortive **flight to Varennes** and the king's humiliating return to Paris.
- In August 1791, the rulers of Austria and Prussia issued the **Declaration of Pillnitz**. Expressed in a vague fashion, the Declaration hinted at joint foreign intervention to restore the king to the throne, suggesting:

"...efficacious means for enabling the King of France full freedom to set up a monarchical government in conformity with his rights and the welfare of the nation.."

By the end of 1791, war seemed to be edging closer. The king's capture at Varennes now saw him viewed as a traitor who was willing to join foreign armies against France. Royal army officers were deserting and the Girondins were pushing for war in the Assembly. Enemies of the revolution were now being seen as enemies of France. In January 1792, the Legislative Assembly invited Leopold II of Austria to renounce all treaties directed against France. The next month, it ordered émigré properties to be taken.

- Leopold II at first responded to the French demands in a conciliatory way but he died suddenly on 1 March 1792.
- His son, Francis II, succeeded him, a man of less intelligence and who was easily dominated by militarists in the Austrian court. As a result, the French demands were rejected.

Consequently, on 20 April 1792, the Legislative Assembly **declared war** on Austria, and later Piedmont:

"...in rightful defence of a free people against the unjust aggression of a king..."

The course of the war: 1792

France soon found itself up against an alliance of Prussia, Austria and Piedmont. At this time, Russia was more busy attempting to take territory from Poland and Britain decided to remain aloof for the time being.

On 25 July 1792, the Duke of Brunswick, the Prussian military commander, issued the "Brunswick Declaration". It stated that if the royal family's safety was compromised then the people of Paris would be punished severely. The manifesto was a disaster for the king. It proved to the people that the king was working with the enemies of France and was working for the country's defeat. Far from cowing the French people, it angered them and stimulated a desire to defend their land. It would not be long before the phrase "a nation at arms" was being widely used.

However, in mid-1792, things were not going well for the French:

- French forces were weak, poorly-organised, ill-disciplined and many troops were defecting to the enemy;

- in a sense, the king could not lose:
 - if the enemy won, he would be restored to absolute power;
 - if the French won, he would be seen as the leader of a victorious nation;
- some of the Jacobins were strongly opposed to the war at first, including Robespierre:
 - they feared that victory would raise the prestige of “non-revolutionary generals”, and might even promote feelings towards the king;
 - defeat would mean the end of the revolution.

There were divisions in strategic thought between the Prussians and the Austrians. Brunswick preferred a more cautious strategy while the Prussian king, Frederick-William, was keen on a march on Paris.

- On 23 August 1792, the allied armies captured **Longwy** (near modern-day Luxembourg).
- On 2 September 1792, they captured Verdun.
- The French were saved temporarily at Valmy on 20 September 1792, when Dumouriez’s French forces held back the enemy, due in large part to the effectiveness of his artillery and his regular troops:
 - Brunswick hesitated and ordered a withdrawal;
 - his forces were depleted, with thousands suffering dysentery;
 - Dumouriez was allowed to negotiate a suspension of hostilities with the Austrians.

French forces now experienced a series of **successes by the end of 1792:**

- Dumouriez’s success gave the French a breathing space and greatly increased morale amongst the French forces.
- Dumouriez headed north and on 6 November 1792, at **Jemappes** gained success, thanks to his far superior numbers.
 - French forces now overran ‘Belgium’ and advanced into ‘Germany’, taking Aachen.
- By October, French forces, under Adam Philippe de Custine, were moving eastwards across the Rhine Palatinate, capturing Worms, Mainz and Frankfurt, which they held until 2 December.
- Sardinian forces were defeated by French forces under Anne-Pierre Montesquiou-Fézensac in Savoy, and Jacques d’Anselme near Nice.

The ideological flavour of the war was now becoming more apparent. In areas that the French had captured, they began introducing reforms aimed at breaking down feudalism where they found it. Some local populations in areas such as Nice, Savoy and the Rhineland were even seeking annexation by the French! The Convention pushed for expansionist policies at the front:

- Nice was taken over on 31 January 1793;
- soon Belgian provinces became part of France;
- on 17 March 1793 it was the turn of the Rhineland;
- on 23 March Basel became a département.

The course of the war: 1793-1795

The war was now taking on a new character. Britain had remained outside of the conflict but as French designs on the “low countries” (modern-day Belgium and the Netherlands) became clearer, it could no longer stand back. For centuries, Britain had avoided direct involvement in Europe if it could, preferring to pursue its imperial role. However, it would become involved in European war if it feared one nation might dominate the continent, and if a potential enemy power had control over the low countries. ⁶ In early 1793, this is what it saw happening.

- Relations broke down between France and Britain and in February 1793, the Convention declared war on Britain and Holland.
- On 7 March, France and Spain were at war. France now found itself at war with more than half of Europe!

However, this First Coalition was not cohesive. There was no formal alliance agreement, no unified command and no cohesive strategy. The allies were mistrustful of each other. ⁷ Despite this, the war began to turn against the French:

- the Austrians were successful at the Battle of **Neerwinden** on 18 March 1793, and at Louvain a few days later.
- Dumouriez was against the extremism of the Convention inside France. For a variety of reasons, he switched sides and offered to lead his troops on Paris to bring down the Convention.
 - Unable to convince his troops, Dumouriez deserted to the Austrians.
- pro-royalist risings were breaking out (eg in La Vendée);
- Toulon surrendered to an English fleet;
- Piedmontese and Spanish forces advanced into France.

Faced with impending disaster, the Convention decided on drastic measures. As the terror spread across the country, thousands of Frenchmen were forcibly conscripted to defend the country. The first such conscription decree came on 24 February 1793 and ordered the mobilisation of 300 000 men.

On 23 August 1793, a general mobilisation was ordered, this was the levée en masse, the brainchild of **Lazare Carnot**.

- Carnot managed to transform the revolutionary forces.
- He doubled the size of the army, introduced new tactics and paid great attention to supplying his troops.
- Such was his contribution to French success; he became known as the “organiser of victory”.
- Meanwhile a rising Napoleon Bonaparte masterminded the re-capture of Toulon.

⁶ Such concerns would see it fight in 1914 and in 1939.

⁷ An example of this was the distrust between Austria and Prussia after Prussia had worked out an agreement with Russia to take Polish territory.

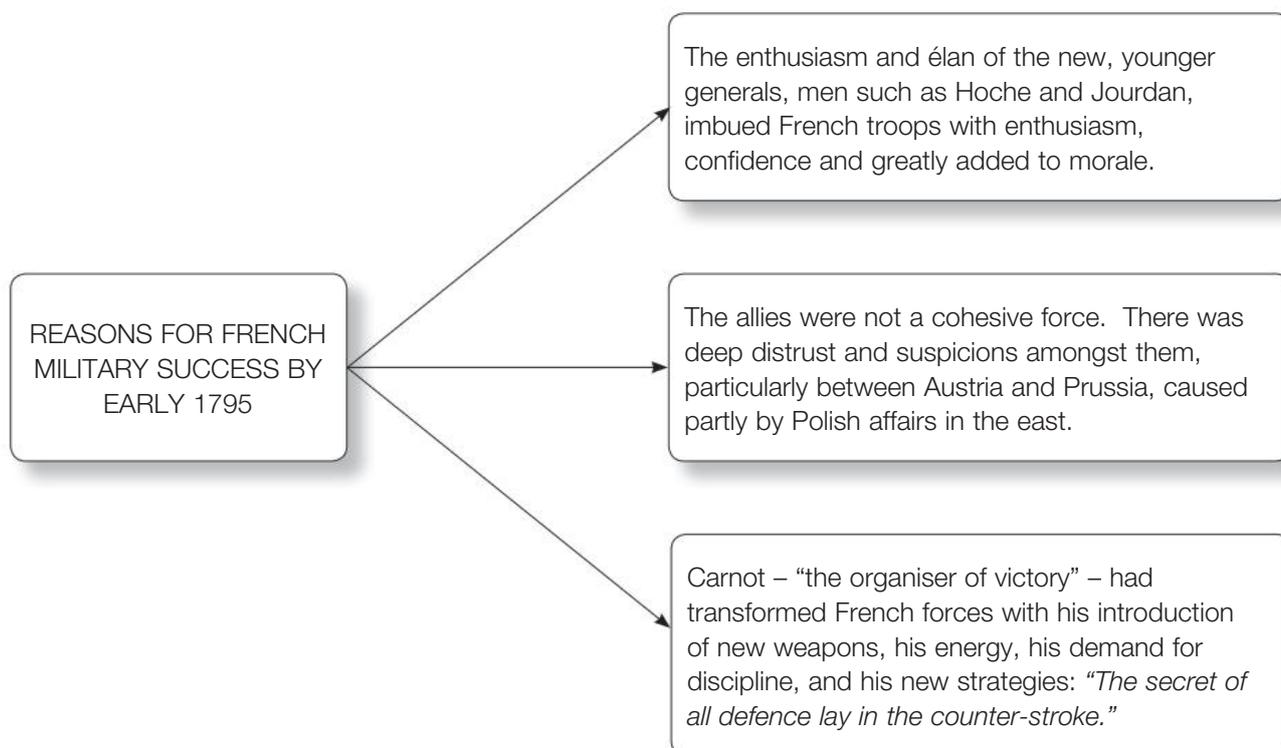
Thanks to Carnot, and other rising commanders such as Jourdan, Hoche and Pichegru, the allied armies were pushed back. It was at this time that a new concept entered military thinking – a ‘nation in arms’. French forces were gripped with nationalism as defence turned to offence.

- In September 1793, French forces under Houchard relieved Dunkirk, a port on the Channel coast besieged by an English force. The British were defeated at the Battle of Hondschoote.⁸
- The French were also successful in the Battle of Wattignies.
- In June 1794, the French under Jourdan defeated an allied force under the Duke of Coburg at the Battle of Fleurus.

Through 1794 and into 1795, French armies were threatening to overrun Europe. Holland was overrun and in January 1795 the French commander, Pichegru, entered Amsterdam.⁹

In the winter of 1794-95, the Prussians were pushed back as far as Ems. The Triple Alliance of Britain, Holland and Prussia was dissolved. Spanish and Piedmontese forces were pushed back across their borders. In April 1795, Prussia signed the Treaty of Basel with France. England, Austria and Sardinia were the only powers left fighting the French. The war was not over but the French were now strong enough to make terms with at least some of its enemies. Figure 13.2 summarises some of the reasons for French military success.

Figure 13.2 Reasons for French military success



⁸ The French commander, Houchard, was later guillotined for failing to achieve an even greater victory.

⁹ The Dutch fleet was ice-bound off the coast and was captured by a detachment of French cavalry!

Exercise 13.1 Place the following events in the correct chronological order.

1st event		France declares war on Britain
2nd event		Prussian capture of Verdun
3rd event		Battle of Fleurus
4th event		Declaration of Pillnitz
5th event		Battle of Neerwinden
6th event		Flight to Varennes
7th event		Prussia and France sign the Treaty of Basel
8th event		Pope condemns the Civil Constitution of the Clergy
9th event		Brunswick Declaration
10th event		Battle of Jemappes
11th event		France declares war on Austria
12th event		Battle of Valmy
13th event		Napoleon retakes Toulon
14th event		Carnot's <i>levée en masse</i>
15th event		Allied capture of Longwy

What do the historians have to say about ‘The outbreak and course of the war’?

1. Edmund Burke: *Reflections on the French Revolution*

Edmund Burke was an 18th century philosopher-statesman and political thinker. He was born in Dublin in 1729, moved to London in 1750 and between 1766 and 1794 served as a member of parliament. He died in 1797. Burke would become a champion of conservative thinking, even into the 21st century. He believed in the importance of virtue in society, he argued that religious institutions were crucial for society and provided moral stability. He argued that there is no substitute for the slow, careful and gradual development of the state. Thus, it is not surprising that he quickly came out as an ardent opponent of the French Revolution, particularly its persecution of the church and what he saw as its destruction of the fabric of society. Burke wrote his *Reflections* before the outbreak of war. However, he argued strongly that events in France presented a fundamental ideological challenge to the rest of Europe.

*“...The usurpation, which, in order to subvert ancient institutions, has destroyed ancient principles, will hold power by arts similar to those by which it has acquired it. When the old feudal and chivalrous spirit of Fealty, which, by freeing kings from fear, freed both kings and subjects from the precautions of tyranny, shall be extinct in the minds of men, plots and assassinations will be anticipated by preventive murder and preventive confiscation, and that long roll of grim and bloody maxims, which form the political code of all power, not standing on its own honour, and the honour of those who are to obey it. Kings will be tyrants from policy when subjects are rebels from principle...”*¹⁰

2. Brian Fletcher: *The French Revolution and its impact on Europe 1789-99*

Fletcher highlights the fact that by the end of 1790s, France, after seven years of war, had managed to annex Belgium, the Rhineland, Savoy, Nice, Piedmont and Geneva. As well as this, there were six republics dependent on France that had been set up in the Netherlands, Switzerland and Italy. Fletcher says that this expansion reflected in part traditional French expansionary motives. But he adds:

*“...Expansion, however, was also marked by a certain crusading zeal and was justified on the grounds that France had a duty to extend the benefits of the Revolution to other parts of Europe...”*¹¹

10 Burke, E, *Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to that event*, p 115

11 Fletcher, BH, *The French Revolution and its impact on Europe 1789-99*, FW Cheshire, Melbourne, 1967, p 40

(B) The role of individuals

Chapter Fourteen

The deaths of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette

King Louis XVI

Even once the events of 1789 had launched France along the path of revolution, Louis XVI was not hated; he was not seen as a tyrant.

- The majority of French people were loyal to the king;
 - this was particularly so amongst the peasantry in the countryside.
- However, the King's abortive attempt to escape from France that ended ignominiously at Varennes in June 1791, and saw him dragged back to Paris changed everything.

As was stated in Chapter Ten, the king's unsuccessful "flight to Varennes" was of major importance:

- the king had shown himself to be an enemy of the revolution;
- he lost the support of moderates, and his action played into the hands of the most extreme revolutionaries;
- the fact he was heading towards foreign forces meant he could now also be labelled not only an enemy of the revolution, but also an enemy of France;

Debate now commenced on what to do with him? Depose him? Replace him by another family member? Try him and execute him?

Agitation for a republic was now fomented by the *Cordeliers*.¹ The early reverses in the war² were reflected in the growing violence within Paris which was seen in the invasion of the Tuileries on 20 June 1792. This was but a prelude to the much more violent attack of 10 August 1792 which saw nearly all of Louis' Swiss Guard massacred. The royal family was forced to flee to the Legislative Assembly.

On 21 September 1792, the Convention deposed the king, declared a republic and initiated a new calendar which saw the beginning of the Year 1.

The Jacobins were becoming the strongest force in the Convention and they now pushed for the trial and execution of the king. On 3 December 1792, Robespierre addressed the Convention saying:

"...It is with regret that I pronounce the fatal truth: Louis ought to perish rather than a hundred thousand virtuous citizens; Louis must die, that the country may live..."

¹ The Cordeliers Club was founded in 1790 by city workmen to maintain order. Early members included Danton and Desmoulins. It drew its strength from the lower classes and became gradually more extreme. It was the first to demand a republic and played a key role in the invasion of the Tuileries on 10 August 1792.

² See Chapter Thirteen.

The king's trial began in December 1792. Correspondence between the king and the Austrians was discovered which immediately meant that he could be declared an enemy of France. He was tried as Louis Capet; the trial lasted for several weeks.

The Girondins were now placed in a difficult position.

- As supporters of the 1791 Constitution, they believed that there was a place for the king in France's future.
- The Convention declared Louis to be guilty of "*conspiracy against public liberty and of attacks in the general security of the state*".
- On the question of execution for the king, the Girondists wanted the question to be decided in a national referendum:
 - this way they could not be accused of royalism;
 - but they were sure the country would vote not to execute the king.

The call for a referendum failed. Voting on the king's fate now took place within the Convention. Should he be exiled, imprisoned or executed? There were thirty-seven consecutive hours of voting. Voting was carried out by *appel nominal*, that is each deputy had to vote separately and might have to provide a reason for the vote.



This of course was a test of courage in the face of the mob. Louis was eventually condemned to death, by one vote!

- The king's execution took place on 21 January 1793 in the La Place de la Revolution.
- As he tried to give one final speech, his words were drowned out by a drum roll.
- The guillotine fell on him to cries of *vive la nation*.
- A crowd of 80 000 strong had gathered to watch the spectacle.

Marie Antoinette

As was outlined in Chapter Eight, Marie Antoinette was not a popular figure in France. It was partly urging from her that had convinced the king to risk leaving Paris in the ill-fated Flight to Varennes. Once the family had been brought back in Paris, it appears that the queen played something of a double-game.

- On the one hand, she conferred with the Constitutionalist who believed that the monarchy still had a role to play in France in the Constitution of 1791:
 - she called the constitution a "tissue of absurdities";
 - however, she had to accept it.
- However, she was also forwarding letters to Leopold II of Austria, and her confidant, Mercy-Argentaui, now Austrian ambassador on The Hague.
- Following France's declaration of war on Austria, she continued to maintain contact with Mercy-Argentaui through another confidant and courier, Count Axel Fersen. She would be accused of passing on the plans of French generals.

So, were these the actions of a duplicitous and traitorous woman or the actions of a devoted wife doing everything she could to save her husband and her family? Her husband was executed on 21 January 1793. For the next nine months, Marie Antoinette remained in prison, at first in the *Tower of the Temple*.



In August, she was moved to the *Conciergerie*. Here, the conditions of her incarceration deteriorated and she was kept under constant watch. She remained separated from her children. Her trial at the hands of Fouquier-Tinville was a travesty of justice. She was accused of everything from organising orgies at Versailles to committing incest with her young son! She won plaudits for the dignity that she showed at her trial, but her composure was never going to be able to prevent the inevitable guilty verdict. Marie Antoinette was executed on 16 October 1793.

- In 1989, the Conciergerie was restored on the bi-centenary of the revolution.
- Visitors can see where Marie Antoinette spent her final days.
- The two pictures here show life-sized models of guards who kept a non-stop watch over her, and a representation of Marie Antoinette at prayer.
- The Conciergerie is situated across the street from Notre Dame.



Exercise 14.1 Complete the following passage using the terms below.

The king's flight to _____ in June _____ was the turning point in the fortunes of the royal family. This action had revealed the king to be the _____ of both the revolution and _____ in the eyes of many. As a result, moves for the creation of a _____ arose, principally first from the _____. The constitution of _____ had expected the king to play a future role. This is certainly what the _____ had in mind at the time. As violence increased in Paris, the _____ was invaded in August _____. The royal family barely _____ but their _____ Guard was massacred. On 21 September _____, the _____ declared France a republic. A new _____ was introduced, announcing the beginning of the Year 1. In early December 1792, _____ announced that the king should be tried. The trial began in December 1792 and the king was referred to as Louis _____. Calls for a _____ to decide on his fate were rejected. After lengthy voting in the Convention, execution was decided. The king was executed in La Place de la Revolution in January _____.

Marie Antoinette was accused of _____ with Austrians such as _____ II and the ambassador _____. She was at first imprisoned in _____ but in August _____ she was moved to the _____. Tried at the hands of _____, Marie Antoinette was accused of some outrageous crimes. Found guilty, she was executed in _____ 1793.

SWISS – VARENNES – CONCIERGERIE – LEOPOLD – FRANCE – 1791
 CONSPIRING – 1793 – TUILERIES – ENEMY – CALENDAR – ESCAPED
 1791 – ROBESPIERRE – FOURQUIER-TINVILLE – OCTOBER – CAPET
 TOWER OF THE TEMPLE – REPUBLIC – REFERENDUM – GIRONDINS
 CORDELIERS – MERCY-ARGENTAU – 1792 – CONVENTION – 1793 – 1792

Chapter Fifteen

Jean-Paul Marat (1743-1793)

Background

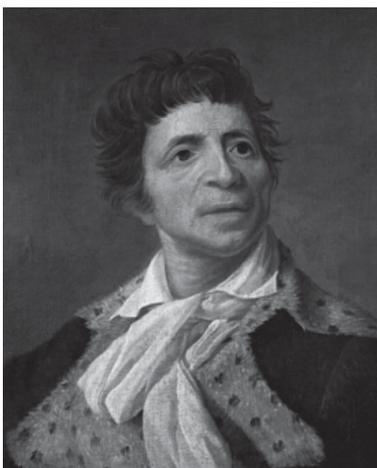
Jean-Paul Marat was born on 24 May 1743 in the principality of Neuchâtel, in modern-day Switzerland. He had mixed parentage, French and Sardinian.

- During his pre-revolutionary years, Marat had established a reputation as a writer of some repute in areas of politics, philosophy and medicine:
 - he had spent some time in England;
 - he had graduated in medicine from St Andrew's University;
 - for a time he was a teacher at a Non-conformist college in Warrington.
- His medical expertise brought him back to France and from 1777 he had medical clients on the edge of the royal family.

With such a background, it might seem surprising that Marat's character did not match his apparent rational and educated background. Once he became a key figure in the French Revolution, he showed himself to be a man who lacked humour and judgment, and his penchant for cruelty and vindictiveness led some to even question his sanity.

Perhaps his character was warped by his misfortunes. Particularly in his later years, Marat was a very sick man. In appearance, he was misshapen and suffered an extremely unpleasant skin disease, which became so bad in his last years, that he was forced to spend much of his time in a bath containing minerals and salts to ease his pain. He often dressed in filthy, evil-smelling rags.

The role of Marat during the revolution



Once the Estates General had been called in 1789, Marat dedicated himself to the cause of the revolution. He was a prolific writer. In January 1789, his work *Offering to the Nation*, was read widely. In September 1789, he began the publication of what was to become his popular newspaper, *L'ami du peuple* (Friend of the People). In his early writings, he urged that the king should be moved from Versailles to the centre of Paris.

Marat was a fanatic with an unwavering belief in equality within the state and 'government of the state by the general will'. He also harboured a fanatical hatred of the aristocracy that stayed with him to the end of his life.

When the constitution was being discussed in the National Assembly, he railed against any idea of a property qualification for voting, arguing that this merely created "*an aristocracy of wealth*". He was a firm opponent of Mirabeau, ¹ a man who had managed to earn the distrust

¹ See Chapter Nine.

of the royal family due to his fiery speeches in the National Assembly, and of the revolutionaries for his support of a continued role of monarchy. Marat was well aware of Mirabeau's skills and ability, commenting thus after hearing news of the man's death: "*O people, render thanks to the gods, your most formidable enemy has fallen.*"

Marat was a strong opponent of the Girondists. In 1792 he described Brissot, one of the leading Girondists, as:

"...apprenticed to chicanery, became a would-be wit, a scandal sheet writer, an apprentice philosopher, a fraudulent speculator, a crook, a prince's valet, a government clerk, police spy, publicist, municipal inquisitor, legislative senator, faithless representative of the people, abettor of the ministerial faction and finally henchman of the despot..."

He opposed the Girondins' support for the war, arguing that far from promoting the cause of revolution abroad, it would simply play into the hands of opponents at home. He was summoned before the Revolutionary Tribunal in mid-April 1793 by the Girondins but was acquitted.

Marat's strict adherence to his ideas made him popular, particularly amongst Paris' sans culottes. Marat was the leading figure behind the September Massacres in 1792². He urged on the violence, calling for 'more heads'. Marat was an influential figure, and a popular one, but he contributed little of lasting value, and gradually his support of revolutionary atrocities aroused fear, revulsion and horror.

Due to his worsening skin condition, he was forced to leave the Convention.

The murder of Marat

Marat is possibly best remembered from the era of the French Revolution due to the manner of his death, and how that death has been immortalised. Due to his illness, by 1793, Marat was forced to spend much of his time in his bath where various salts and minerals eased his pain. On 13 July, a young woman called Charlotte Corday, visited him. Corday was a Girondin zealot who had become sickened by the violence of the revolution, which she believed was exemplified in the person of Marat. She stabbed him as he was working on some papers in his bath. Death came quickly.

Corday was quickly arrested:

- she was charged with treason and given a four-day trial;
- her execution took place on 17 July 1793;
- she stated at her trial that she had killed Marat alone and said: *I killed one man to save 100 000.*

In the short term, her actions had the opposite effect and Marat's murder fed the fears and suspicions in the country, and thousands were rounded up in the growing terror.

² See the historians section at the end of this chapter for an alternative view on this point.

Marat became a martyr of the revolution.

- Louis David's painting of *The Death of Marat* did much to inspire this feeling, presenting him in a far better way that was the reality (see below).
- When Robespierre was organising the *Cult of the Supreme Being*³, Marat was made a virtual saint.
- After his body had been shown to the people, Marat was interred in the Garden of the Cordeliers.
- In September 1794, a vote was taken to place his body in the Pantheon – the temple of the great men of the republic.
- However, in February 1795, it was removed with little fanfare. Following the Thermidorian Reaction⁴, his reputation quickly soured.

Louis David's painting: *Death of Marat*



- Louis David was a member of 'The Mountain', and part of the Committee of General Security.
- His painting was completed in October 1793.
- Marat is shown lifeless in his bath, a deep wound clearly visible. His reclining right hand holds a pen and the left hand holds the letter handed to him by Charlotte Corday

³ See Chapter Seventeen.

⁴ See Chapter Twelve.

Exercise 15.1 Indicate whether each of the following statements is true or false.

1	Marat was an ill-educated street ruffian who in reality had no life until the advent of the revolution.	TRUE/ FALSE
2	For all the violence he supported, Marat was a cool figure, who approached things in a calm and rational manner.	TRUE/ FALSE
3	Marat suffered from a deeply unpleasant skin complaint which had almost immobilised him by the end of his life.	TRUE/ FALSE
4	A significant part of Marat's influence was his ability to rouse the masses through his newspaper publications.	TRUE/ FALSE
5	Marat was a keen supporter of the Girondist position and backed their decision early on to support the war.	TRUE/ FALSE
6	Marat believed in the use of terror to protect the revolution and is often considered to be the man behind the September Massacres.	TRUE/ FALSE
7	Marat died as a result of his severe skin infections that had begun to consume his body.	TRUE/ FALSE
8	Marat's reputation in French history as a hero of the revolution did not last long after his death.	TRUE/ FALSE

Exercise 15.2 Indicate whether each of the following is a fact or an opinion.

1	Marat was a man who was willing to use extreme violence in order to further the aims of the revolution.	FACT/ OPINION
2	Marat was a psychologically deranged individual and he deserves his evil reputation in history.	FACT/ OPINION
3	Charlotte Corday was a Girondist supporter who took the life of Marat in July 1793.	FACT/ OPINION
4	Charlotte Corday was a truly heroic person as Marat had become the personification of evil and violence.	FACT/ OPINION
5	The short-term result of Marat's murder was the intensification of the terror.	FACT/ OPINION

What do the historians have to say about 'Jean-Paul Marat (1743-1793)'?

1. W J Fishman: Jean-Paul Marat

Fishman suggests that Marat's significance in the development of revolutionary thinking was a major one, and continued well after his death. Fishman argues that three key factors came out of the French Revolution which would affect future revolutionaries. There was firstly the belief in the viability of violence controlled by centralised terror; secondly, the idea that *'elitism as a concomitant of violence had, by way of Jacobinism, sustained itself with marginal success'*; and thirdly, the idea that egalitarianism was still the great unfulfilled promise in grand social designs.

*"...These were, perhaps, first perceived by that great revolutionist who played a dramatic role in the attempted execution of all three. He was Jean-Paul Marat..."*⁵

2. A Cobban: A history of Modern France, Vol 1: 1715-1799

Cobban describes the scene the day after Marat's murder. There was a torchlight procession as Marat's body was carried through the street, drum beating and cannon firing. Cobban says the murder provided an ideal excuse for more extreme measures, especially as the war was going badly at this time. Suspects were imprisoned and revolutionary committees in the communes now had real power over life and death.

*"...No more fatal event than Marat's murder could have occurred for the moderates or for any who could be suspected of moderatism..."*⁶

3. A Goodwin: The French Revolution

In his treatment of the terror, Goodwin is clearly no fan of Marat. However, he argues that it is wrong to place the blame for the September Massacres of 1792 on the man's shoulders. Certainly, instructions to extend the September Massacres to the provinces were printed on Marat's presses but Goodwin says that Marat's role in the massacres has been exaggerated, and that an event of such magnitude cannot be blamed on individuals.

*"...The tragedy was directly due to the progress of the Prussian invasion and collective fears of an aristocratic plot in the capital. The massacres lasted for several days, partly because of the impotence of the constituted authorities... In that way the popular frenzy ran its course..."*⁷

⁵ Fishman, WJ, Jean-Paul Marat, History Today, Vol 21, Issue 5, 5 May 1971

⁶ Cobban, A, A History of Modern France, Vol 1: 1715-1799, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1961, p 219

⁷ Goodwin, A, The French Revolution, Hutchinson University Library, London, 1965, p 137

Notes

Chapter Sixteen

Georges Danton (1759-1794)

Historians and filmmakers still argue about him. Was Danton nothing more than an opportunist and demagogue? Or was he an astute political manager? Was he in fact an idealist and a true patriot?

Background

Georges Danton was born in 1759 in Arcis-sur-Aube and came from a respectable bourgeois family. He benefited from a decent education and showed a flair for rhetoric and a strong interest in history, especially of the Roman republic. However, it appears that he was somewhat neglected as a child and grew up to become rough and defiant. As a child, he had two encounters with bulls that left him with a scarred lip and a broken nose; his face was pitted with smallpox. Danton was 'ugly, very physical, a large man with appetites to match'. To his contemporaries, Danton came across as a roaring, gutsy man whose power was more due to his colossal presence than his ideas.



- He was by nature lazy though subject to spasmodic bouts of high energy, and tended to act in an impetuous manner.
- He was extravagant, had a fondness for luxuries and would have been considered by many at the time as immoral.
- He built up a fortune, and was frequently suspected of accepting bribes from France's enemies, from émigrés to help them escape and even from the king.
- These suspicions were on many occasions probably justified but Danton was always quick to defend himself.

"...If any one of you entertains the slightest suspicion about my conduct as minister, if anyone wishes for detailed accounts... let him rise up and say so..."

In 1780 he moved to Paris to take up law. He became strongly drawn to the ideas of the enlightenment writers such as Montesquieu and Rousseau.¹ Before the outbreak of the revolution, Danton had built up an extensive legal practice and from 1787 he worked as an advocate in conseils du roi (royal council). From such work, he gained a good insight into the working of the ancien régime.

Danton married twice:

- His first wife was Gabrielle Charpentier. Her father was a tax official and the owner of a popular café near the law courts.
 - Danton and Gabrielle had a son within a year of marriage but he did not survive boyhood. Two more sons followed.

¹ See Chapter Four.

- Gabrielle died when giving birth to a fourth child; Danton was with the armies in Belgium at the time.
- In 1793, Danton married for a second time. This time his bride was the sixteen-year-old Louise Gély, daughter of one his neighbours.
- To satisfy her family's wishes, they were married in secret by a renegade priest who had refused to take the oath under the Civil Constitution of the Clergy.

The ideas and influence of Danton

Danton's physical presence, his powerful voice and violent oratory marked him out as a natural leader. He was one of the early organisers of the Cordeliers Club, which at one time were more radical than the Jacobins.

- Following the king's failed flight to Varennes, Danton was one of many demanding the king's abdication.
 - Petitioners had gathered to demand this at the Champs de Mars and a massacre at the hands of the National Guard followed.
 - During the repression that followed, Danton fled briefly to England.
- Once back in France, Danton was elected second assistant to the procureur (public prosecutor) of the Paris Commune.
- Danton was behind the attack on the Tuileries in August 1792 and organised the overthrow of the moderates.
- He was also accused of being indifferent to the fate of those murdered during the September Massacres (1792) and did nothing to try and stop the killing. However, in his 1899 biography of Danton, Hilaire Belloc wrote: *"he might have saved his reputation by protesting, though perhaps his protest would not have saved a single life."*

However, there is no denying the flair and passion Danton showed at the time and the inspiration he offered the country during the dire times of the war. He rallied the people against the invading Prussians with his famous utterance:

"...we must dare and dare again – and go on daring – and France is saved..."

The nineteenth century French writer, Lamartine, later wrote that in the autumn of 1792, *"the national heart of France seemed to be in Danton's breast."*²

In September 1792, Danton was elected to the Convention and he became the Minister of Justice, owing to his legal background. He became the leading figure in the Convention and voted for the execution of Louis XVI. In 1793, as a key member of the Committee of Public Safety and the Revolutionary Tribunal, Danton was willing to use terror to suppress opposition to the revolution and to unify France. After the Girondists' failure to impeach Marat in April 1793, and the defection to the Austrians of Dumouriez, the Girondists were purged from the National Convention in late May and early June 1793. Danton was behind this purge of the Girondists, many of whom were to be executed in October 1793. At this time, he was the dominating figure of the revolutionary scene.

² Danton expressed ambitious intentions at this time when he stated: *"The boundaries of France are drawn by nature. We shall attain them on their four sides – the Ocean, the Rhine, the Alps and the Pyrenees."*

The fall of Danton

However, Danton now began to feel that the terror had done its job and he wanted to bring it to an end. He sought to conciliate the various factions and bring in a more stable and peaceful government. Danton's thinking displeased Robespierre. Not only was Robespierre opposed to Danton's new moderation but in his puritanical way, he was disgusted at Danton's love of luxury and his immorality, which Robespierre believed went against the ideals of the revolution.

After the expulsion of the Girondins from the Convention, Robespierre now moved against Danton. Danton the great revolutionary, now showed a lack of judgment, he faltered. Hilary Mantel describes it thus:

*"...he thought of his private life; he (secretly) married again, Louise Gély, the 16-year-old daughter of a neighbour...(However) his secret was soon out. 'I can't live without women', he pleaded. He took to spending time with his bride in a country house he had rented outside Paris. In July, he was dropped from the Committee (of Public Safety)..."*³

Danton had been elected President of the Convention in July 1793 but now, as leader of the Committee of Public Safety, Robespierre moved against Danton. Robespierre turned on 'all and sundry'. In March 1794, Danton and his close supporters, (known as the Indulgents), were accused of a range of offences, including conspiracy to help the Duc d'Orleans. On 5 April 1794, Danton was executed along with Camille Desmoulins and Fabre d'Eglantine. Danton remained defiant to the end.

- The day before his execution, Danton said: *"I have lived entirely for my country. I am Danton till my death; tomorrow I shall sleep in glory."*
- As he went to the guillotine, he called out: *"Show my head to the people; it is well worth it."*

Exercise 16.1 Answer the following questions

1	What was Danton's social and educational background?	
2	Describe Danton's physical appearance.	
3	What seemed to be Danton's attitude to money and the luxuries of life?	
4	Explain Danton's early attitude to the use of terror during the revolution.	

³ Mantel, H, London Review of Books, Vol 31, no 15, 6 August 2009

5	How did Danton contribute to the defence of France against the Prussians in 1792?	
6	Following the purge of Girondists, how had Danton's attitude to the terror changed?	
7	What was Robespierre's attitude to Danton from late mid-1793?	
8	What key event in Danton's personal life took place in mid-1793?	
9	What was Danton's fate in March and April 1794?	
10	Describe Danton's attitude and demeanour at the time of his execution.	

What do the historians have to say about 'Georges Danton (1759-1794)'?

1. Andrzej Wadja: *Danton*

Andrzej Wadja is a film director of Polish origin. He directed the 1982 film *Danton*, starring the French actor Gérard Depardieu. In his film, Wadja focusses on March and April 1794, and the struggle between Danton and Robespierre. Danton comes to believe that there is no longer a need for terror, and is presented as speaking for the people, while Robespierre insists on its continuation. The film concludes with Danton at the guillotine.

- The film is based on a Polish play of 1931 called the 'Danton Affair'.
- Filming began in Poland in 1981 when the "Solidarity" trade union movement was protesting against the Polish Communist regime.
 - Solidarity was outlawed and martial law was imposed under General Jaruzelski.
 - This was done at the behest of the Soviet Union.
- Wadja and his crew moved to France as émigrés and completed the film there with French and Polish actors.

The film represents in part Wadja's opposition to the return of strict, Stalinist-style rule to his homeland. This is an interesting example of how contemporary events can affect the way that the past is interpreted.

2. A Cobban: *A History of France, Vol 1: 1715-1799*

Cobban describes Danton as a “mass of contradictions” – educated and cultured, yet at the same time he was mob orator and agitator. Cobban says that Danton was “a colossus among the petty intriguers and street-corner orators of the factions”. He was a huge man of inexhaustible energy with a forceful personality. Unfortunately, Cobban notes, as Danton did not write out his speeches, little has been passed down of his words. Cobban says that Danton almost certainly took bribes and never hid his fondness for life’s pleasures. This leads him to conclude:

*“...The contradictions running right through Danton’s character rob him of true greatness. He could stir up popular passions and organise revolutionary journées, yet with too much magnanimity and too little hatred in him ever to be really a man of blood, he would endeavour to save the victims of the passions he had himself accused...”*⁴

3. D Coward: *Danton*

David Coward wrote a review of a recent biography of Danton (David Lawday’s “The Gentle Giant of Terror”). Coward is able to highlight how the historian’s stance can affect how we view figures in history. He comments that Wadja presented Danton in his film version as a ‘freedom-loving cavalier’, while the German writer Buchner’s 1835 play, *Danton’s Death*, presents him as world-weary. The nineteenth century French writer, Lamartine, called Robespierre “an idea” while describing Danton as “a man”. Coward highlights Lawday’s preference for Danton over Robespierre in the following way:

*“...Even his most serious charge (against Danton) is a faint damn: Danton was an idealist who lacked the lust for power. It is a short indictment and vanishes under the weight of his commitment to Revolution, the patrie and democratic ideals. When Revolution turned into oppression, inequality and fratricide, Danton remembered what it had once stood for...”*⁵

4 Cobban, A, *A History of Modern France, Vol 1: 1715-1799*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1961, pp 201-2

5 Coward, D, *Danton: The Gentle Giant of Terror*, *The Independent*, 28 August 2009.

Chapter Seventeen

Maximilien Robespierre (1758-1794)

Robespierre: A man for whom ideas were all

The popular perception of Robespierre is of a man who revelled in bloodletting in a fanatical drive to achieve his aims and preserve the revolution to which he had dedicated his life. There is some truth in this description but to fully understand Robespierre, a more nuanced explanation of the man is required.

- For Robespierre the basic problem he faced was how to apply moral principles to the exercise of government.
- He was an idealist.
- Montesquieu had argued that immorality was at the root of despotism while virtue was at the root of a republic.

*"...To find the morality suppressed in the corrupt society of the ancient regime it was only necessary to release the natural virtue of the people..."*¹

- Thus, for Robespierre, political virtue equated with the sovereignty of the people; restoring the sovereignty of the people was to inaugurate a reign of virtue.
- Yet Robespierre saw intriguers all around. He saw people who were seeking to pervert the 'naturally good will of the people'.
- How to deal with this situation? To virtue must be added terror.

In one of his last speeches given in May 1794, Robespierre stated:

"...There are two peoples in France. One is the mass of citizens, pure, hungry for justice and loving liberty. It is this virtuous people which pours out its blood to establish liberty, which overcomes foreign enemies and shakes the thrones of tyrants. The other is that collection of factious intriguers, appearing everywhere, turning everything to abuse, seizing the tribune and often public office, who use the education which their advantages under the ancient regime gave them to deceive public opinion..."

At the end, Robespierre believed that the will of the people was no longer the will of an actual majority. 'That will' was now an ideal that could only be found in:

"...the few generous men who love virtue for its own sake..."

Background and personality

Maximilien Francois Marie Isadore de Robespierre was born in 1758 in Arras in north eastern France. His family was comfortably bourgeois and had had a background in advocacy and the law, going back several generations. Orphaned young, he was small in stature, pale, nervous and had a twitching eye which he often hid behind coloured spectacles when he was in public.

¹ Cobban, A, A History of Modern France, Vol 1: 1715-1799, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1961, p 226



He completed his legal studies in Paris, where he made the acquaintance of Camille Desmoulins. In March 1781, he returned to Arras and was appointed as a criminal judge. However, he discovered that he could not bring himself to hand down a death sentence and so he took up advocacy instead.

Robespierre soon gained a reputation as a man who took his attire very seriously. He was cultured, a man of letters, a gentleman with seemingly simple tastes. Unlike men such as Mirabeau and Danton, Robespierre was upright, chaste and a man of high morals. It would perhaps be true to describe Robespierre as puritanical, which perhaps goes a long way to accounting for the fanaticism that he showed later on.

Robespierre was austere, and unlike Danton, was never tempted to take bribes. This became a major part of his appeal for his loyal followers. He became known as “Robespierre the incorruptible”, a label which was applied to him without any hint of irony. (It was a label that would never have been applied to Danton.)

Robespierre's early influence and role in the revolution

As a young advocate, Robespierre gained the respect of the rural population with the publication of papers dealing with their concerns, such as *L'Address à la nation artésienne* and his *Avis aux habitants de campagne*. He was selected to represent Artois at the Estates General. He arrived at Versailles on 5 May 1789.

- Robespierre soon displayed his trademark fanaticism for enlightenment thinking, in particular the ideas of Rousseau, such as the pursuit for the ideal democracy and belief in the existence of a supreme being.
- Like many leading revolutionaries, Robespierre had been brought up on the classics. Once, when he was asked what sort of constitution he wanted, he replied that he wanted that of Lycurgas.²
 - Sympathy for Lycurgas makes his disdain for others' immorality unsurprising.
- From the beginning of his political career, Robespierre speeches revealed a high moral tone and were delivered in a precise manner:
 - he was not an amazing speaker and spoke quietly.
 - but his speeches were reasoned, concise and logical and gained him popular support.
- In the National Assembly he spoke up against the death sentence. His influence was also crucial in excluding members of the National Assembly from becoming part of the Legislative Assembly.³ Perhaps already, Robespierre was trying to limit the influence of moderates.

² Lycurgas was the legendary (mythical) lawgiver of Ancient Sparta. Lycurgas' constitution imposed on the Spartans a strict, disciplined social and political system in which service and self-sacrifice to the state mattered above all, and in which there was no room for personal self-indulgence.

³ See Chapter Ten.

He opposed the Girondins when they supported the move to war. Robespierre argued against war:

- he believed war could mean a return to a militarist stance in France and thought that battlefield success could only benefit the royal family and the generals;
- defeat in war would of course mean the end of the revolution;
- he joined Marat in opposition to the war, and believed that the revolution's internal enemies should be crushed first.

Robespierre joined the Jacobin Club, which he soon came to dominate as a result of his oratory. What held the Jacobins together was not a class interest but a common ideology. This ideology became increasingly narrow as time passed, and as was explained at the beginning of this chapter, for Robespierre ideas were everything. The Jacobin Club's thinking became narrower and developed its own ritual, tests of orthodoxy, carried out purges and sometimes demanded public confession. ⁴

Robespierre and the Convention

Robespierre was welcomed into the Paris Commune. It was he who presented their petition to the Legislative Assembly on 16 August 1792 calling for a Revolutionary Tribunal and a Convention. He soon joined the Convention as the first deputy for Paris and became one of the leading figures of the Mountain.

- The trial and execution of Louis XVI ⁵ gave Robespierre an opportunity to display his effective oratory.

"...It is with regret that I pronounce the fatal truth: Louis ought to perish rather than a hundred thousand virtuous citizens; Louis must die that the country may live..."

- Along with Danton and Desmoulins, he helped overthrow the Girondists and carried out a purge throughout the country.
- On 27 July 1793, Robespierre was elected to the Committee of Public Safety. In this role, Robespierre was not the author of the terror but once he had managed to have Danton removed from the Committee, he was able to pursue his idealistic ends in what was to be his trademark ruthless manner.

Observers at the time, saw Robespierre as truly dangerous because he believed everything he said. He was almost like the leader of a religious sect, seeking out the faithless like an inquisitor from the Spanish Inquisition.

For Robespierre, principles were everything, men were nothing. Robespierre was a man who was virtuous but certainly not likeable; he was admired or condemned but he was never belittled.

⁴ There are echoes of the behaviour of 20th century dictatorships here.

⁵ See Chapter Fourteen

The fall of Robespierre

In 1794, Robespierre sought to destroy Hébert ⁶ and Danton ⁷.

- Hebert was executed on 24 March 1794, along with some of his supporters. His crime: a desire for decentralisation.
- Danton was executed on 5 April 1794. His crime: growing moderation.

Robespierre now had the opportunity to consolidate supreme power. His idealistic, even mystical policies, diverged more and more from his colleagues. He used his Jacobin following to purge the Paris Commune, and he sent St Just to the frontier to control the armies and remove this power from the Committee. However, Robespierre now went too far even for the Convention. Figure 17.1 summarises the events that led to his final downfall.

Figure 17.1 The downfall of Robespierre

In May 1794, decreed by the Convention, he introduced the worship of the Supreme Being in opposition to the Christianity of Catholicism and the atheism of Hébert. Robespierre took this very seriously. The revolutionaries were keen on parades and celebrations to commemorate the different stages of the revolution. One such occasion was the Fete of the Supreme Being. Robespierre set fire to a huge cardboard figure of atheism which went up in flames, exposing a smoky statue of wisdom.

He retreated from any moderation, believing the guillotine must do its work. The Law of the 22nd Prairial was introduced on 10 June. The definition of counter-revolution now became all-embracing. The punishment for even the minimum crime was execution.

Between 12 June and 28 July 1794, 1285 victims ended up at the guillotine. The country was now gripped by fear. Members of the Convention moved secretly to remove Robespierre – before it was their turn.

Robespierre and twenty-one of his close followers were taken to the guillotine on La Place de la Revolution on 28 July 1794. The terror was over; it had arguably done its job. The revolution was safe and success had been achieved on the battlefield at Fleurus on 26 June 1794.



The Commune rescued him and took him to the Hotel de Ville. The Convention then outlawed the Commune and the released deputies. The Vicomte de Barras led National Guard troops to the Hotel de Ville. Robespierre was arrested, half of his jaw was shot away in the process.

Robespierre took a short break in the country. On his return he addressed the Convention, demanded a renewal of the Committee of Public Safety which of course would be filled with his nominees. Committee members struck quickly. As he rose to speak, he was grabbed, a dagger was put to his throat, and he and his closest supporters were taken to prison.

⁶ See Chapter Twelve.

⁷ See Chapter Sixteen.



- Louis Saint-Just was born in 1767.
- He was a promiscuous and ill-disciplined youth, and even spent time in prison for theft.
- After the fall of the Bastille, he joined a National Guard unit.
- He was a prolific writer, and his 1791 *L'Esprit de la Revolution et de la Constitution de France* was well-received.
- He became a protégé of Robespierre and a significant figure behind the terror.
- In September 1792 he became a member of the Convention and in mid-1793 joined the Committee of Public Safety.
- He played a key role in the arrest of Danton.
- Saint-Just's fate was to join Robespierre at the guillotine on 28 July 1794, a fate that he had condemned many others to before.

Exercise 17.1 Indicate whether the following statements are true or false.

1	Robespierre was a man for whom ideas mattered little as his prime concern was the acquisition of power.	TRUE/ FALSE
2	Robespierre had great physical presence and a powerful voice which helped him dominate the Convention.	TRUE/ FALSE
3	As a lawyer and early politician, Robespierre spoke up strongly against the use of the death penalty.	TRUE/ FALSE
4	Robespierre quickly gained the reputation as a man who was totally incorruptible.	TRUE/ FALSE
5	Robespierre strongly opposed the Girondins and spoke up against the war.	TRUE/ FALSE
6	Despite his republican ideals, Robespierre was against the execution of King Louis XVI in January 1793.	TRUE/ FALSE
7	Belief in the Supreme Being was a key element of Robespierre's thinking.	TRUE/ FALSE
8	The Law of the 22nd Prairial received widespread support across the country and was seen as desirable.	TRUE/ FALSE
9	The arrest and re-arrest of Robespierre proved to be almost as violent as his eventual fate.	TRUE/ FALSE
10	Saint-Just remained a strong opponent of Robespierre's use of terror during his brief revolutionary career.	TRUE/ FALSE

What do the historians have to say about 'Maximilien Robespierre (1758-1794)'?

1. Alfred Cobban: *Aspects of the French Revolution*

In his analytical study of the French Revolution (as opposed to his more narrative account referred to earlier), Cobban suggests that Robespierre perhaps deserves some credit for being 'a man before his time'. There was no figure at the time of the Revolution who went as far as Robespierre in stating what were the essential conditions for a democratic society. His draft declaration of rights included such things as universal rights, equality of rights regardless of race or religion and the use of taxation to smooth out economic inequalities. These points and others lead Cobban to conclude:

*"...such were some of the principles for which he stood, and which are now taken for granted in democratic society..."*⁸

2. Marisa Linton: *Robespierre and the Terror*

Linton argues that Robespierre's reputation became so darkened because he provided a very useful scapegoat for French society; let the horrors of the terror be laid on the shoulders of one man. The men who overthrew Robespierre, people like Elie Lacoste and Collot d'Herbois, had been just as ruthless, if not more ruthless than Robespierre. Once they realised the public had sickened of the terror, and once the war was turning in France's favour (the Battle of Fleurus, 26 June 1794), such men restyled themselves as people who had been exclusively concerned with the war. Thus, Robespierre became the embodiment of the terror in the popular imagination.

*"...The policies of the Jacobin Committees had, after all, been endorsed by the deputies of the Convention. Perhaps this is why he has been so vilified: in holding one individual culpable for the ills of the terror, French society was able to avoid looking into its own dark heart at that traumatic moment. Robespierre, you might say, took the rap..."*⁹

3. Georges Rudé: *Robespierre*

Rudé offers a different interpretation for Robespierre's fall. He argues that Robespierre was attempting to create a republic that would be dominated by small proprietors. However, this was a goal that he could not reach, and the revolutionary government was to fall, not because of disagreements at the top, but because of fundamental differences between the claims of the bourgeoisie and the sans-culottes. Rudé says that in June 1793, Robespierre had sought the support of the people to curb the 'egoism' of the rich. To achieve this, he made concessions to popular demands such as price controls and the introduction of tough laws against hoarders and speculators. However, by the spring of 1794, he was facing demands from property-owners whose support he needed for the conduct of the war. As a result, there was a relaxation of price controls, and so the small consumers and wage-earners were sacrificed.

*"...But, in so doing, Robespierre and his associates fell between two stools, and no one was satisfied. It was the bourgeoisie that overthrew him; but the sans-culottes stood by and refused to intervene. So, in the last resort, he fell victim of his own ideals as much as of the machinations of his enemies..."*¹⁰

⁸ Cobban, A, *Aspects of the French Revolution*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1968, p 190

⁹ Linton, M, *Robespierre and the Terror*, *History Today*, Vol 56, Issue 8 August 2006

¹⁰ Rudé, G, *Robespierre*, *History Today*, Vol 8, Issue 4 April 1958

The French Revolution

Historiographical Overview

History is in essence an imaginative reconstruction of the past. A dialogue takes place between past and present, yet it is we who ask the questions and then we claim to have heard the answers. The writing of history does not take place in a vacuum; there is a context. That context may be personal (the specific background of the historian); it may be temporal (the nature of the times in which the historian lives); it may be historiographical (styles of writing history can change). The reconstruction that takes place can vary over time as new sources of information become available.

History is not static. The actual events that happened in the past of course do not change. However, how we view those events, what interpretation or understanding is applied to them is constantly changing.

And so it is with “The French Revolution”. In the more than two centuries since the French Revolution, many thousands of books and articles have written about those tumultuous events. Novelists, film makers and television mini-series producers have, and will continue to tell the story.



Early works on the French Revolution tended to fall into a “for and against” style. There was little attempt to analyse the causes of what happened to or consider the long-term implications but rather to attack or defend what was happening or what had happened. By the mid-19th century more analytical works were appearing which attempted to “explain” what happened. Marxist historians attempted to place the events of 1789 and after in a “class struggle” context. Revisionist historians in the 20th century were to take a different line to the Marxist view. In more recent times, analysis of the revolution has ranged from a return to traditional narrative histories to works by feminist historians.

What follows in this section is an outline of some of the major writings that have been produced since as early as 1790 about The French Revolution. ¹

¹ This coverage is not meant to be seen as exhaustive. It provide 'an outline', covering some of the main historians.

THE HISTORIAN	BACKGROUND	PRESENTATION OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION
Edmund Burke ¹ (1729-1797)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Anglo-Irish parliamentarian ■ viewed today as the father of modern conservatism ■ believed that all change should be careful, well-considered and occur in a gradual manner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 1790: <i>Reflections on the Revolution in France</i> ■ from the start a thorough-going critic of developments in France during the revolution ■ argued the revolution was too radical and ambitious ■ he warned that forces were being unleashed that could not be controlled ■ this he said would lead to anarchy, extreme violence and ultimately would end up in tyranny
Thomas Paine (1737-1809)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ was British but moved to America and became a strong supporter of the American Revolution ■ his 1776 “Common Sense” was a strong defence of republicanism and representative government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ was an ardent supporter of the revolution ■ attacked Burke’s view of the revolution ■ 1791, 1792: <i>Rights of Man</i> ■ his view was that before 1789 France was a despotic aristocracy and that the only way that the French people could improve their lives was to have a revolution from ‘the ground up’
Thomas Carlyle ² (1795-1881)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ English writer ■ writes in the context of the terrible conditions of Industrial Revolution England ■ attacked by more academic historians, both past and present ■ he blended history and romantic literature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 1837: <i>The French Revolution</i> ■ his version of the French Revolution is full of drama, colour and excitement ■ it is a fun read with lots of use of metaphor and graphic descriptions ■ Carlyle does not hold back from describing graphically the violence of the time ■ he is very judgmental, eg the French monarchy was rotten to the core and got what it deserved ■ highlights the bankruptcy of the French treasury ■ hated the fanatical, ultra-violent time of Robespierre’s rule

1 See historians section, Chapter Thirteen

2 See historians section, Chapter Six.

THE HISTORIAN	BACKGROUND	PRESENTATION OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION
<p>François Mignet (1796-1884)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ his perspective is liberal with the bourgeoisie the true heroes ■ he rails against the corruption and inequality of the time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 1824: <i>History of the French Revolution</i> ■ Mignet is a determinist – in other words he argues that the revolution could not be avoided; it was inevitable ■ his focus is more political, focussing on the arbitrary and decadent state of the monarchical regime ■ he recognises that there were things wrong with the revolution but he forgives the faults and errors ■ bloodshed was due to the conditions of the time but was not the result of savage, violent people ■ on the revolution he states: “<i>It substituted law in the place of arbitrary will, equality in that of privilege; delivered men from the distinction of classes.</i>”
<p>Jules Michelet (1798-1874)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ideologically a very liberal, pro-republican view ■ has an anti-clerical tone (and so is a product of his times) ■ sees the revolution in a very progressive light 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 1847: <i>History of the French Revolution</i> ■ for society to advance the revolution was needed ■ the revolution was judgment day for the ancien régime ■ Michelet shows great trust and faith in the French people, excusing their excesses ■ he argues even the Jacobins acted in good faith to defend the republic “<i>The principal actor is the people.</i>”

THE HISTORIAN	BACKGROUND	PRESENTATION OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION
<p>Alexis de Tocqueville 1805-1859)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ de Tocqueville sees continuity in what happened ■ France tried to end an autocratic regime of the past but ends up with an equally powerful, centralised government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 1856: <i>The Old Regime and the Revolution</i> ■ argues that the revolution was a move for social and political reform ■ it was not intending to change the entire traditional society ■ disagrees with the conspiracy idea of revolution ■ he also argues against the 'forces of destiny' determinist idea ■ when viewing the actions of the people, de Tocqueville is disgusted rather than enthused by their involvement <p><i>"This revolution was prepared by the most civilised but carried out by the most barbarous and rudest classes of the nation."</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ perhaps de Tocqueville's best-known conclusion is: "<i>...experience shows that the most dangerous moment for a bad government is generally that in which it sets about reform...</i>"
<p>Charles Dickens (1812-1870)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ England's most beloved novelist and best-selling author of his day ■ Strong reliance on Carlyle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 1859: <i>A Tale of Two Cities</i> ■ a romantic fictionalised account ■ revolution the result of aristocratic privilege and exploitation of the common people ■ highlights the revolution's descent into violence and mob rule <p><i>"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity..."</i></p>
<p>Baroness Orczy (1865-1947)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ an adventure story ■ she apparently turned to writing novels and short stories 'when the money got tight' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 1903: <i>The Scarlet Pimpernel</i> ■ not history, an adventure story but it became immensely popular and has generated films and TV shows ■ centres on an English playboy who rescues aristocrats in danger ■ provides a negative view of the revolution – aristocrats are decent, honourable chaps while the revolutionaries are coarse and bloodthirsty

THE HISTORIAN	BACKGROUND	PRESENTATION OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION
<p>The Marxist view</p>	<p>From the second half of the nineteenth century, a Marxist view of the French Revolution began to take over as almost an orthodox view. The revolution was driven by the classic Marxist “class struggle” and marked the clash of aristocracy versus the rising bourgeoisie. It was France’s development from the feudal stage of history to the capitalist stage. The revolution’s political aims were to give the bourgeoisie access to political power and government; its economic aims were to bring in reform that would be good for business.</p>	
<p>Georges Lefebvre (1874-1959)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Lefebvre was one of the leading proponents of the Marxist view of the revolution ■ introduces a focus on the revolution by approaching the issue “from below”, looking at how ordinary people behaved when faced with revolutionary ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ he elaborates the Marxist view of the revolution ■ he argues that there were in fact four revolutions: (1) there was the aristocratic revolution of 1787-88 (king versus the aristocracy); (2) the bourgeois revolution (seen as the Third Estate takes over the Estates General); (3) the urban revolution (seen on the streets of Paris from mid-1789 as workers are driven by economic interests); (4) the peasant revolution (see in the peasant attacks on feudal dues and during the Great Fear)
<p>Albert Soboul (1914-1982)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ a professor of History at the Sorbonne in Paris ■ he was Chair of the History of the French Revolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ he sees the revolution as the result of class grievances and struggles ■ Soboul focusses on lower class movements and did much to bring to the fore the role of the sans culottes ■ he sees them as a loose coalition of artisans, labourers, petit-bourgeois ■ he argues that the terror was a response to the war and the dire economic situation of the time ■ the end of the terror and the arrest of Robespierre saw the return to power of the bourgeoisie <p><i>“The purpose of the terror was to defend the nation and the Revolution... It exemplified the Third Estate’s will to defend itself and punish its foes.”</i></p>

THE HISTORIAN	BACKGROUND	PRESENTATION OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION
<p>Alfred Cobban (1901-1968)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ English historian, Professor of History at King's College, London ■ a leading expert on French history ■ a "revisionist" historian who argues against the classic Marxist class struggle view of the French Revolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ in his history Cobban does not seek out class-based motives ■ to him, the revolution was political, but had obvious social consequences ■ the aim of the revolution was not to create a freer form of capitalism as France was already rising as a capitalist economy ■ the revolutionaries did not have clear economic aims and many of the bourgeoisie were not capitalists
<p>Francois Furet (1927-1997)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ shares Cobban's anti-Marxist view ■ falls in line more with de Tocqueville's liberal view of the revolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 1965: <i>La Revolution Française</i> ■ he argues the revolution began as an expression of liberation and democratic principles but was blown off course by 1792 ■ there was no clear leadership ■ rather the revolution became a series of unexpected events ■ terror was part of revolutionary action from early on ■ Jacobin/ sans culotte power was closely connected to mob violence
<p>Simon Schama (1945-)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Schama moves away from a predominantly analytical and interpretive examination ■ his is a narrative history ■ he brings to his history a degree of colour, drama and suspense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 1989: <i>Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution</i> ■ he is light on analysis but his French Revolution is closer to the ideas of a Burke or a de Tocqueville ■ he calls the revolution a "whispering campaign" based on false promises ■ the revolution says Schama was too leaderless and too reliant on violence to result in political change ■ he is more sympathetic to the king than most accounts and despises the likes of Marat and Robespierre ■ he minimises the role of ordinary people and instead political life is the preserve of just a few thousand zealots who behaved like thugs or were manipulated by the mob <p>"...in some depressingly unavoidable sense, violence was the Revolution itself..."</p>

THE HISTORIAN	BACKGROUND	PRESENTATION OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION
<p>Joan B Landes (1946-)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Landes is one of the leading feminist historians who have studied the revolution ■ others include Olwen Hufton, Dominique Gondineau and Marilyn Yalom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ the essential argument of feminist historians is that the revolution was no good for women ■ aristocratic women had some influence but the revolutionary government and organs of power were dominated and controlled by men ■ socially, the ideas of the revolution were conservative ■ restraints on women were not relaxed (as they were during the Russian Revolution, at least at first) ■ gender barriers and differences were reinforced

Notes

Film Study

The French Revolution (1989) ¹

In 1989, the two hundredth anniversary of the French Revolution, a major feature movie was produced in France with an all-star cast. The film has two parts. Part 1 was directed by Robert Enrico, and Part 2 by Richard T Heffron. Both directors were part of the five-man writing team.

The cast includes Klaus Maria Brandauer (Danton), Jean-François Balmer (Louis XVI), Jane Seymour (Marie Antoinette), Andrzej Seweryn (Robespierre), Peter Ustinov (Mirabeau) and Sam Neill (Lafayette).

The film is in French, which is a plus as it clearly adds an authentic touch. The English subtitles are very good.

It is an extremely long film! The two parts combined run for over five hours. The likelihood teachers would show the entire film are small. However, there might be ways of showing the film in sections, as different parts of the “French Revolution topic” are covered in class. Every so often, the film advises viewers of specific times and locations which certainly make viewing easier. Students could be directed to watch some or all of it at home.

Students should always be careful when viewing feature movies dealing with historical topics. However, this film has a great deal going for it.

- As far as historical accuracy goes, this film stays very close to the actual historical narrative. The few occasions it strays or where some dramatic licence occurs can be overlooked.
- The film’s locations shots are realistically handled. The scenes filmed in the Palace of Versailles are most effectively done.
- Details such as costuming, weapons, housing, food and drink are convincing.
- Some teachers might want to take issue with some of the characterisation of the key figures but again, the film handles this well.
- All the key players in the revolutionary story appear, though sometimes conveniently meeting for the purpose of the drama. However, again this does not reduce the value of the film.

Students would certainly gain much from watching all or as much as possible of the film.

- It places all the key events of the revolution in context.
- It can help to “add a face” to a historical character that has been studied.
- Students would also gain a real feel for “France in the 1780s and 1790s”.

¹ The film can be obtained from the usual online stores such as Amazon. The author watched the film on YouTube. As of late 2019, the links on YouTube for the film are:

PART 1: <https://youtube.com/watch?v=8A8mGF7OUA> The Years of Hope (Les Années Lumière)

PART 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-6ruyZFFZs> Les Années Terribles

How to use the film

The film can be used in several ways.

1. **Just viewing.** Students could simply watch the film.
 - a. It is recommended that this not be done until the topic has been studied.
 - b. Some of the scenes in the film deal with specific events, eg the Estates General, the Flight to Varennes, meetings in the Convention.
 - c. Having a knowledge of such things would be of enormous benefit before watching the film.
2. **Thematic Study Guide.** Below there is a “thematic study guide” which teachers could use with students. This study guide will help students consider such things as:
 - a. the general narrative of the revolution;
 - b. the development of the key figures in the story;
 - c. the way in which specific events are covered;
 - d. the way in which the director has chosen to present the events of the revolution.
3. **An extremely detailed Study Guide.** For those who seek to use the film as a detailed revision exercise, the mass of questions provided below will be extremely useful.

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

A) Thematic Study Guide:

Question 1:

- How accurate do you think the overall treatment of the events of the French Revolution has been in the film?
- Do you think the director has managed to achieve a successful realisation of what happened?
- Do you consider that the director has achieved historical accuracy?
- Do you consider the director has managed to succeed in making the film entertaining?

Question 2:

- How has the film presented the key characters?
- Does the treatment of the main figures in the story match what you have learned from studying the French Revolution?
 - Louis XVI
 - Marie Antoinette
 - Necker
 - Mirabeau
 - Lafayette

- Danton
- Robespierre
- Marat
- Desmoulines

Question 3:

- How has the film presented the key events of the French Revolution?
- Does the treatment in the film match what you have learned from studying the events?
- Has the director taken some dramatic licence with certain events?
- Does the film's coverage add to your understanding of what happened?
 - The calling of the Estates General
 - The Tennis Court Oath
 - The storming of the Bastille
 - The Declaration of the Rights of Man
 - The women's march on Versailles
 - The Flight to Varennes
 - The Massacre at Le Champ de Mars
 - The early part of the war

Question 4:

- How do you think the director has handled the events and characters of the French Revolution?
- Do you think he has been even-handed?
- Do you detect any "bias" towards or against any figures? Give reasons for your answers.

PART ONE: THE YEARS OF HOPE (LES ANNÉES LUMIÈRE)

B) Extremely detailed Study Guide

Paris 1774

1. What is happening in this scene?
2. Comment on the king's attitude.
3. Who addressed the king?

Versailles 1788

4. What three reasons are given for France getting further into debt?
5. What two options does Necker offer for France to get out of its mess?
6. 6th March: Why is the priest addressing the people?

7. Name two of the grievances being mentioned.
8. What significant social problem do we see as Desmoulins is walking through Paris.
9. The conversation between Danton and Mirabeau: Why does Danton sound disillusioned?

Versailles 5th May 1789 – Les Menu Plaisirs

10. What meeting is taking place?
11. Desmoulins visits Robespierre's lodgings. What book does he discover?
12. According to Robespierre, how are the Estates expected to vote?
13. What happened to the king's son?
14. What threat is the king being informed of?
15. Why do members of the Third Estate go to the Tennis Court?
16. What oath is sworn at the Tennis Oath?
17. What declaration does Paris mayor, Bailly, make?
18. How does Mirabeau support him?
19. What military forces does the king bring in to back him? What is Necker's opinion of this move?
20. What happens to Necker?
21. What is the popular reaction to Necker's dismissal?

Le Club de Cordeliers

22. How does Danton rouse the crowd?

The Bastille

23. What concession does the Governor make to the Paris Committee?
24. How many prisoners are there in the Bastille?
25. What happened at the Bastille?
26. The troops marching to the Bastille 'fraternise' with the people. What does this mean?
27. What is the king's diary entry for 14th July? Comment on this.
28. What happened to the Governor of the Bastille?

Hotel de Ville

29. Who is Bailly? What is the king's attitude to Bailly?
30. How does Lafayette enter the story?
31. What concessions does the king make?

Versailles: 4th August

32. What decisions are being made? What does this signify?

26th August

33. What is being read out to the deputies?
34. What is the basis of the king's opposition to the 'Rights of Man'?
35. Why does the king summon the Flanders regiment?
36. Why does Mirabeau support a veto power?
37. What impression do we get of 'Mirabeau the man'?
38. What comment does Danton make about Marie Antoinette?

4th October: Aux armes

39. What decision do the women make? What order is given to Lafayette?
40. What demands are made of the king?

6th October 1789

41. What happens on 6th October?
42. Describe the attitude of the people towards Marie Antoinette.

Paris: June 1790

43. Where is the king residing?
44. What device is the king allegedly modifying? Who invented the device?
45. What has Danton been elected to?
46. Comment on Mirabeau's behaviour.

Champs de Mars: 14th July 1790

47. What is being celebrated?
48. What appears to be the popular feeling towards the royal family?

Nancy: August 1790

49. What had happened at Nancy?
50. What claims is Danton making at the meeting?
51. What demands does Danton make?
52. Mirabeau takes a bribe. What is the nature of the bribe? Why is it potentially so valuable?
53. Why is Mirabeau so worried about the possible end of the monarchy?
54. What is the difference of opinion between Danton and Lafayette?
55. What is Marie Antoinette planning?
56. To what is the bishop objecting in his conversation with the king?
57. Why does such violence break out against the church?

21st June 1791

58. What happened to the king?
59. How does Lafayette deal with the situation?
60. What is Robespierre's view of the king's flight?
61. What happened at Varennes?
62. What is the immediate public response to the king's flight to Varennes?
63. What are Danton's and Robespierre's ideas regarding the republic and the monarchy?
64. How is Robespierre's fanaticism brought out?
65. What instructions does Bailly give Lafayette after the declaration of martial law?

17th July 1791

66. Why is the crowd at the Champ de Mars?
67. What happens at the Champ de Mars?

Londres Hiver 1791 (London winter)

68. Why is Marat in the bath?
69. Why is Robespierre not in the Legislative Assembly?
70. What does Marat mean when he says the king is working for them?
71. Why does Danton fear war?

Paris: Club de Jacobins

72. Outline the disagreement between Robespierre and the Girondist, Brissot.

20th April 1792

73. What decision is taken on 20 April 1792?

Frontière Belge (Belgian Frontier): 28th April 1792

74. What is the result of the battle?
75. Who is Marie Antoinette planning to contact?

20th June 1792

76. Where does the crowd invade? What demand do they make?
77. What is the threat being made to Paris by the Duke of Brunswick?
78. What declaration does the Legislative Assembly make?
79. Robespierre changes his mind re-the war but what warning does he give?
80. What does Robespierre now propose?

10th August 1792

81. What action does Danton take in the Commune and whom does he invite to work with him in the next election?
82. Describe the actions of the National Guard who are there to defend the Tuileries.
83. Where does the royal family go for safety?

PART TWO: THE TERRIBLE YEARS (LES ANNÉES TERRIBLES)**C) Extremely detailed Study Guide**

1. What has happened to the royal family?
2. How does the commander emphasise the king's new position?
3. Who now rules France? What is Danton's position?

Lafayette's headquarters

4. How does Lafayette find himself in a difficult position?
5. What decision does he take?
6. What success have the Prussians had?
7. What decision does Danton take? What threat does he make?
8. Why is Desmoulins troubled?
9. What is Robespierre's view?
10. What major success does Prussia have?
11. What actions does 'the mob' take against the royalist prisoners? What event is this?
12. How does Danton attempt to turn the September Massacres into a positive?

Valmy: 20 September 1792

13. What was the result of the Battle of Valmy?
14. Who ends up getting the credit for this?
15. What major decision does the Convention make?
16. What dating reform is introduced?
17. What warning does Robespierre give Danton?
18. "A just and natural conclusion". What does Robespierre mean by this?

The execution of King Louis XVI

19. How does Robespierre justify removing the king?
20. What is Saint-Just's argument for executing the king?
21. Once Louis is informed he is to be put on trial, what does he also have to give up?
22. With what crimes is Louis charged?
23. How does Louis acquit himself at his trial?
24. What is the verdict?
25. What 'irony' is suggested as Louis looks up at the guillotine?
26. What happens when Louis tries to give a final speech?
27. What is the crowd's reaction at Louis' execution?
28. What happens to Gabrielle, Danton's wife?
29. When Danton and Robespierre are walking together, how does Robespierre describe the situation facing the government?
30. What is his view of the moderates?
31. Why does Robespierre demand a Revolutionary Tribunal?
32. How does Danton justify the idea of state-sanctioned terror?
33. Whom does Danton have arrested?
34. What happened to Marat? How does Robespierre explain this?
35. What has Dumouriez done?
36. What happens to Marie Antoinette's son? Why do you think this is done?
37. What type of republic do Brissot and Girondins want? What type of republic does Robespierre demand?
38. How do Danton and Robespierre differ about taking bribes?
39. Danton has handed the fate of the Girondists to the Paris Commune. What happens as a result?
40. What do Danton and Robespierre agree to in the Convention?

Caen (and immediately after)

41. How does the young woman get in to see Marat? (Who is she?)
42. Where is Marat?
43. What happens to Marat?
44. What position has Danton lost?

15 October 1793

45. Of what crime is Marie Antoinette accused? How does she react?
46. Meanwhile, what is Danton doing?
47. What is Marie Antoinette's fate?
48. What is happening in La Vendée?
49. What does Robespierre say is necessary for virtue to succeed?
50. What does the Convention decide to make "the order of the day"?
51. What has happened to Danton?
52. Why is Desmoulins concerned about the terror?
53. Comment on Robespierre and his powdered wig. What point do you think the director is trying to get over?
54. Danton returns. What does he seek when he is speaking in the Convention?
55. What has Hébert been printing about Danton?
56. Who does Robespierre decide to denounce, Hébert or Danton? How does he do this?
57. What is Hébert accused of?
58. What was Le Vieux Cordelier?

The end of Danton

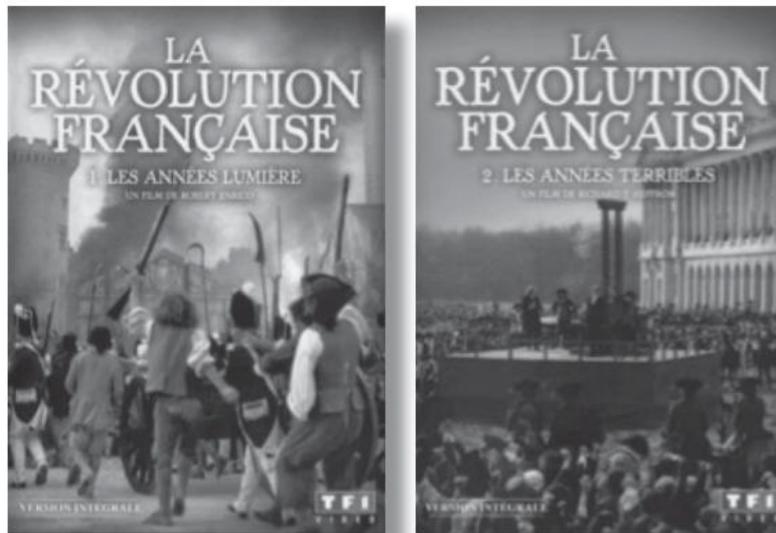
59. What is Robespierre's notion of virtue?
60. What does the Committee of Public Safety say must also happen if Danton is arrested?
61. What is Danton's strategy when he is brought before the Revolutionary Tribunal?
62. Saint-Just's evidence against Danton, Desmoulins and Desmoulins' wife is clearly false. Why does Robespierre say it has to be accepted?
63. What is the popular reaction to Danton's speech and his condemnation?
64. What is the fate of Danton and Desmoulins?
65. What does Danton say to the executioner?
66. How much cheering is there in the crowd when Danton is beheaded?
67. What belief does Robespierre explain to the women over dinner?

8 June 1794

68. What is the nature of Robespierre's celebration?
69. What appears to be the public reaction to the celebration?

The end of Robespierre

70. What does Saint-Just say is the purpose of the Law of Prairial?
71. What does the Committee accuse Robespierre of?
72. What has happened at “Fleurus”?
73. In his speech to the Convention, what does Robespierre say he has discovered?
74. What happens to Robespierre in the Convention?
75. Robespierre and Saint-Just go to the Hotel de Ville, headquarters of the Paris Commune. What decision does the Convention now make?
76. What injury does Robespierre receive?
77. What is the crowd's reaction to Robespierre's execution?



Advice on Constructing Essay Responses

Introduction to essay writing

Essay writing is both a literary and a scientific skill. There is no mystery in writing a good essay. Certainly, some people are better writers than others: they might have a wider vocabulary, they might know more, they might have a better turn of phrase, they might have a better grasp of the issues. However, everyone can come to terms with the basics and write a reasonable essay.

So, what makes for a successful essay?

1. **Answer the question.** This sounds almost trite and an insult to the intelligence, but the majority of poor essay responses simply do not answer the question. Failing to answer the question can be done in a variety of ways. In summary it can happen because:

- a. A student fails to address the issues presented in the question, ie he or she decides to write about something else. For example, in the essay:

“Revolution came to France in 1789 as a result of Enlightenment thinking and the example of the American War of Independence.”

To what extent do you agree with this view?

A student decides to argue that:

- Enlightenment thinking and the example of the American War of Independence had nothing to do with the coming of revolution in France in 1789
- it was the result of the Louis XVI's ineptitude, Marie Antoinette's extravagance and the evils of the ancien régime

A nice line of argument, but it is not answering the question. The student could argue the 'Louis/ Marie Antoinette/ ancien régime' line, but above all he needs to deal with the issue of Enlightenment thinking and the example of the American War of Independence, even if it is to show that these were not the key factors. He cannot simply ignore the focus of the question because he wants to write about something else.

- he could argue that yes, Enlightenment thinking and the example of the American War of Independence were important in bringing about revolution in France in 1789, and show why this is so, and then argue “but of course other factors were also of importance such as.....”
- as a rule of thumb: if you are going to pursue this style of argument, ensure about half of the essay deals with the subject of the question, in this case Enlightenment thinking and the example of the American War of Independence.

b. A student writes about the issues presented in the question, but instead of providing an argument to answer the question, she simply ‘narrates’ or ‘tells a story’. For example, in the essay:

“Revolution came to France in 1789 as a result of Enlightenment thinking and the example of the American War of Independence.”

To what extent do you agree with this view?

A student fails to present an argument, instead she simply narrates:

- she might give a list of Enlightenment writers and their works
- she might describe in some detail what the writers were saying
- she might outline the course of the American War and describe France’s involvement

This is all relevant, factual detail but she is merely telling a story and not presenting an argument which is showing how important Enlightenment thinking and the example of the American War of Independence were in the coming of revolution in France in 1789.

c. A student does not really understand the question and has so little factual detail they are unable to sustain even a narrative response.

d. A student does understand the question and attempts an argument but has so little factual detail that the argument cannot be sustained.

‘c’ and ‘d’ can only be fixed up with solid work and revision on the part of the student; ‘a’ and ‘b’ can be perfected with practice.

2. **Provide an argument in your introduction** which will form the basis of the essay. The introduction is the most important paragraph of the essay; if it is written properly it should leave the marker in no doubt what is going to come up in the essay. So, what does a good introduction involve?

a. Avoid the dramatic ‘setting the scene’ method. For example, in the essay:

“Revolution came to France in 1789 as a result of Enlightenment thinking and the example of the American War of Independence.”

To what extent do you agree with this view?

A student should avoid opening like this:

- Men such as Voltaire, Rousseau and Montesquieu set the intellectual world alight with their writings. They revealed the savagery and inequity of the ancient regime, offered new ways of thinking of how society should be framed and revealed the hypocrisy and superstition of the church. The American War of Independence provided a heroic opening chapter to the adventure of the American Republic in world history.

b. Avoid providing lots of factual detail in the introduction. Introduce the broad areas you will discuss, but leave the detail to the body of the essay. For example, in the essay:

“Revolution came to France in 1789 as a result of Enlightenment thinking and the example of the American War of Independence.”

To what extent do you agree with this view?

This is not a good introduction:

- Voltaire’s works such as his anti-church ‘Philosophical Dictionary’ and ‘Candide’ did much to satirise the France of his day. Led by Diderot, the Encyclopaedists ended up attacking the ancient regime. Rousseau wrote the Social Contract in 1762 in which he said ‘man is born free but everywhere is in chains’. Montesquieu wrote ‘On the Spirit of Laws’ in 1748. American colonists triumphed against their British masters and in this were helped by France who entered the war on the side of the Americans in 1778.....

c. Be careful with length. Two lines is not an introduction, no argument can be properly introduced in such a small space. However, a page and half is too long. With average sized writing, 6-8 lines should be enough to present the argument of the essay.

d. Present an argument in your introduction. There is no ‘right’ answer to a Modern History essay question; the right answer is the argument which you have presented, logically developed and backed up with detailed factual evidence. For example, for the essay:

“Revolution came to France in 1789 as a result of Enlightenment thinking and the example of the American War of Independence.”

To what extent do you agree with this view?

A student might try to argue:

- Enlightenment thinking and the example of the American War of Independence both played a major role in bringing on revolution in France in 1789. French troops fought for the Americans in the name of freedom and liberty and returned home imbued with democratic ideas and began to question their own society. Writers such as Rousseau and Montesquieu were able to both critique the ancient regime and offer alternatives for the revolution’s future bourgeois leaders. However, important though such things were, it was the dire financial situation in France in the 1780s, partly brought on by involvement in the American War, that acted as a catalyst that took France along the revolutionary path.

3. **Provide your essay with a structure.** Your introduction should show where the essay will lead, eg the above introduction might lead to the following structure:

- French troops were involved in the American war of Independence (provide a little factual detail). French troops took in the ideals for which the Americans were fighting, eg no taxation without representation. They were well aware of the content of the Declaration of Independence and could not fail to observe the more democratic nature of American society. When they returned home, it was inevitable that these ideas would spread and people would question the inequities of their own society...
- For many years Enlightenment writers had been attacking the bases of the ancient regime, its absurdities, its inequities, its inefficiencies...
- Not only were these writers attacking the ancient regime but they were offering up ways of thinking of how things could and should be changed. Such thinking was absorbed by the rising bourgeoisie. However, the influence of the impact of such thinking has been questioned by some historians...
- However, it was finance and France's looming bankruptcy which would provide the direct stimulus for revolution. Students can explain how this came about, and provide evidence of failures to reform from the various finance ministers...
- The financial situation forced the calling of the Estates General. Louis' call for the cahiers de doléance brought to the surface grievances felt by people across the country.
- Conclusion: Enlightenment thinking and the example of the American War of Independence were to have to a crucial impact on developments inside France in the 1780s. How could freedom and equality be fought for overseas yet denied at home? Men like Rousseau were able to highlight all that was wrong in France and members of the bourgeoisie took on such ideas. However, it was not these factors which took France along a revolutionary path. It was the financial disaster facing the country which was to prove decisive. Once the Estates General was called, there was no turning back.

(NB: this is only one of a hundred ways of dealing with this question)

So once more, let us examine what makes for a successful essay?

Let us consider the same ideas relating to a later part of the revolution.

1. **Answer the question.** This sounds almost trite and an insult to the intelligence, but the majority of poor essay responses simply do not answer the question. Failing to answer the question can be done in a variety of ways. In summary it can happen because:

- a. A student fails to address the issues presented in the question, ie he or she decides to write about something else. For example, in the essay:

To what extent was Robespierre responsible for the development of the terror during the French Revolution?

A student decides to argue that:

- Robespierre had nothing to do with the development of the terror.
- It was the result of forces that had been unleashed as early as April 1789 over which nobody had control, the growing sense of paranoia and the impact of the war.

A nice line of argument, but it is not answering the question. The student could argue the 'loss of control/ paranoia/ war' line, but above all he needs to deal with the issue of Robespierre, even if it is to show that Robespierre's role was of limited importance. He cannot simply ignore the focus of the question because he wants to write about something else.

- he could argue that yes, Robespierre was important in the development of the terror, and show why this is so, and then argue "but of course other factors were also of importance such as....."
 - as a rule of thumb: if you are going to pursue this style of argument, make sure that about half of your essay deals with the subject of the question, in this case the role of Robespierre in the development of the terror.

b. A student writes about the issues presented in the question, but instead of providing an argument to answer the question, she simply 'narrates' or 'tells a story'. For example, in the essay:

To what extent was Robespierre responsible for the development of the terror during the French Revolution?

A student fails to present an argument, instead she simply narrates:

- she might describe the main aspects of the revolution since 1789
- she might even go on to show what Robespierre was doing in France during this time

This is all relevant, factual detail but she is merely telling a story and not presenting an argument which is showing how important Robespierre was in the development of the terror.

b. A student does not really understand the question and has so little factual detail they are unable to sustain even a narrative response.

c. A student does understand the question and attempts an argument but has so little factual detail that the argument cannot be sustained.

'c' and 'd' can only be fixed up with solid work and revision on the part of the student; 'a' and 'b' can be perfected with practice.

2. **Provide an argument in your introduction** which will form the basis of the essay. The introduction is the most important paragraph of the essay; if it is written properly it should leave the marker in no doubt what is going to come up in the essay. So, what does a good introduction involve?

a. Avoid the dramatic 'setting the scene' method. For example, in the essay:

To what extent was Robespierre responsible for the development of the terror during the French Revolution?

A student should avoid opening like this:

- From its earliest days, the French Revolution was soaked in blood. From the brutality of the storming of the Bastille to the bloodlust of the September Massacres, terror dominated the course of events during the revolution. As fear and paranoia enveloped the nation, and as foreign armies approached Paris, enemies within and without were perceived to be everywhere. The only salvation for the revolution was the implementation of terror...

b. Avoid providing lots of factual detail in the introduction. Introduce the broad areas you will discuss but leave the detail to the body of the essay. For example, in the essay:

To what extent was Robespierre responsible for the development of the terror during the French Revolution?

This is not a good introduction:

- Terror and violence became the hallmarks of the French Revolution. Violence and rioting happened at Reveillon, and the storming of the Bastille was a bloody episode. Fear spread across the countryside which increased a sense of paranoia. As foreign armies approached, the September Massacres removed the chance of royalist prisoners working with foreign enemies. Once the Convention made terror the 'order of the day', the guillotine was made to work overtime, as the revolution began to even devour its own, executing men like Danton. Robespierre's...

c. Be careful with length. Two lines is not an introduction, no argument can be properly introduced in such a small space. However, a page and half is too long. With average sized writing, 6-8 lines should be enough to present the argument of the essay.

d. Present an argument in your introduction. There is no 'right' answer to a Modern History essay question; the right answer is the argument which you have presented, logically developed and backed up with detailed factual evidence. For example, for the essay:

To what extent was Robespierre responsible for the development of the terror during the French Revolution?

A student might try to argue:

- Robespierre did not initiate the use of terror during the French Revolution. However, once he had gained a position of influence in 1793, he was very much behind excesses of the terror which continued until July 1794. No opposition was allowed and moderates were to be removed. However, bloody violence had been a feature of the revolution from the time of the Bastille, and terror became a key part of the revolution from autumn 1792. Fear, and the paranoia caused by the advance of foreign armies were arguably equally important in determining the development of the terror.

3. **Provide your essay with a structure.** Your introduction should show where the essay will lead, eg the above introduction might lead to the following structure:

- Show how terror had become a feature of the revolution, initiated under the Convention, even before Robespierre had assumed his dominating role.
- However, once Robespierre had gained real influence, he was the major force behind the use of terror. Refer to the activities of the Committee of Public Safety and Revolutionary Tribunal
- Consider the scale of executions immediately after Danton's death.
- Show that violence and terror did, however, predate Robespierre's influence. Perhaps go back to the September Massacres.
- Other factors were also of crucial importance in bringing on the terror as well as Robespierre's influence. There was real fear and suspicion of internal enemies as a sense of paranoia enveloped the country. This could be seen in the September Massacres.
- The Convention demanded that "terror be the order of the day". Arguably Robespierre merely took the already existing terror to its awful and bloody logical conclusion.
- Fear caused by the success of foreign armies on French soil convinced many in the Convention that terror was needed to deal with traitors and to unite the country.
- Conclusion: Robespierre was clearly a key figure in the development of the terror. Once he was in a position of major influence, he used revolutionary bodies to silence any whom he saw as opposing the revolution or him personally. However, the terror predated Robespierre's influence and he did not start it. The Convention backed the use of terror to insulate the revolution from internal enemies and unite the country against foreign aggression.

(NB: this is only one of a hundred ways of dealing with this question)

4. **Structure paragraphs carefully.** Some simple rules:

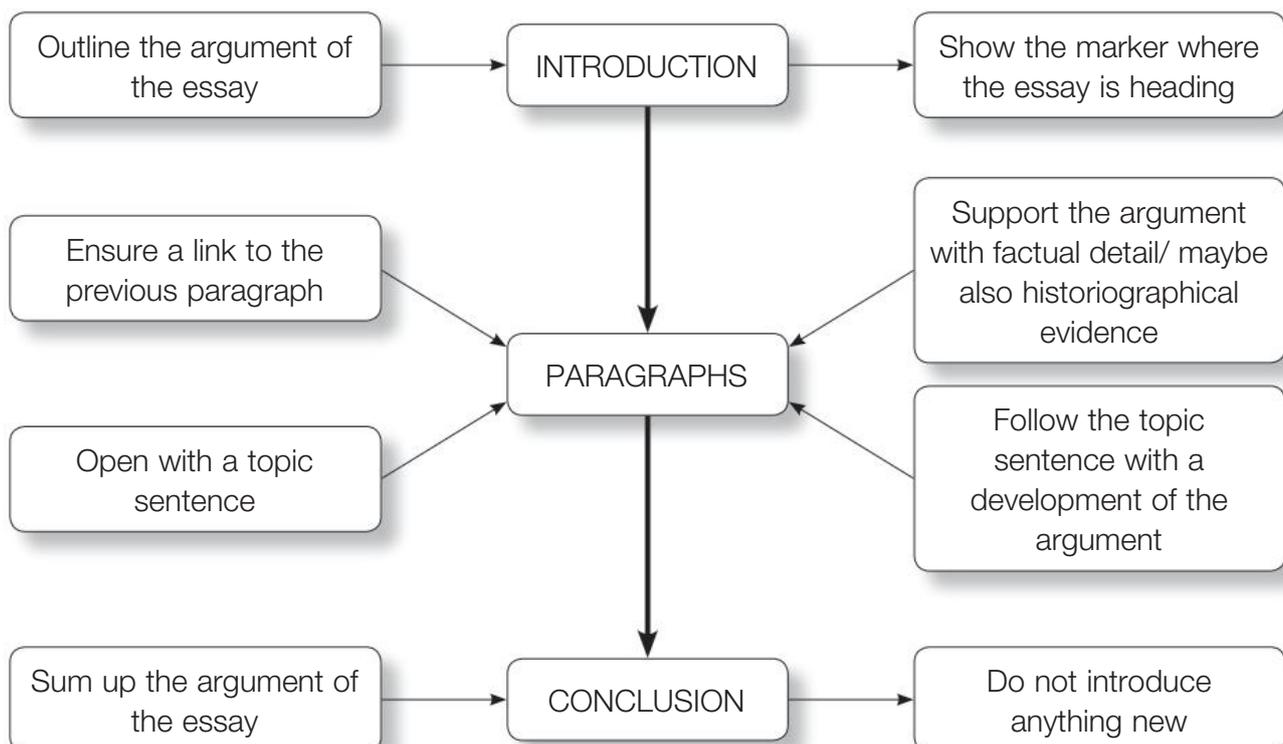
- open with a topic sentence which outlines what the paragraph is going to be about;
- develop the argument presented in the topic sentence;
- support the argument with specific factual detail;
- if appropriate, support the detail with historiographical evidence;
- link your paragraphs – this can be achieved easily with certain stock phrases, eg:
 - “not only was ‘x’ of significance but ‘y’ also had an impact....”
 - “in addition to “a and b”, “c and d” were also to benefit from.....”
 - “in contrast to “e”, “f” reacted quite differently....”

NB: Do not open paragraphs with historiography. The aim should be for the student to show the marker what he knows. Therefore, open with your ideas, back it up with factual detail and then, if appropriate, back up your idea with what a historian has said:

- argument>detail>(maybe) historians’ ideas;
- do not name drop for the sake of it – markers are not fooled or impressed by having lots of historians’ names dropped into an essay when their books have almost certainly never been looked at;
- Fewer historians mentioned is better than lots.

NB: Do not quote, paraphrase! This shows that you understand what the historian is saying; giving a three-line quotation merely shows you have remembered a three-line quotation, whereas paraphrasing the historian’s view in your own words shows that you have understood what you are writing about. The occasional pithy quote of just a few words can be effective.

The diagram below sums up some of the main ideas the have been discussed in this section.



Timeline

1756-63

France defeated in the Seven Years War

1762

Rousseau publishes his "Social Contract"

1770

Louis (XVI) marries Marie Antoinette

1774

Louis XVI ascends the throne following the death of his grandfather Louis XV

1774-76

Turgot is the king's Controller-General

1776

The American colonists announce their Declaration of Independence

1777-81

Necker is the king's Controller-General

1778

France declares war on Britain in support of the American colonists

1783

The Paris Treaty ends the American war – Britain has been defeated

Calonne appointed the king's Controller-General

1787

The Assembly of Notables meets

1788

Necker returns as king's Controller-General, replacing Brienne

1789

The cahiers de doléance are compiled

April: The Reveillon riots

5 May: The Estates General meets for the first time since 1614

Abbé Sieyès write his What is the Third Estate?

23 June: The Tennis Court Oath

27 June: The king accepts the formation of the National Assembly

14 July: The storming of the Bastille

Lafayette becomes head of the National Guard

August: Declaration of the Rights of Man

August: The end of feudalism

Summer/ autumn: The “Great Fear”

October: The march of the women on Versailles; the king is brought to Paris

1790

July: The Civil Constitution of the Clergy

1791

April: Death of Mirabeau

June: The Flight to Varennes

July: Massacre on Le Champ de Mars

August: The Declaration of Pillnitz

September: Introduction of the Constitution

October: The Legislative Assembly comes into session

1792

April: France declares war on Austria

July: The Brunswick Manifesto

August: Lafayette leaves France

August: The invasion of the Tuileries

August: French defeat against Prussia at Longwy

September: Prussian troops capture Verdun

September: Royalist prisoners are massacred in “the September Massacres”

September: First meeting of the Convention

September: French victory at Valmy

November: French victory at Jemappes

1793

January: Execution of Louis XVI

February: France declares war on England and Holland

March: Demouriez deserts to the Austrians

March: La Vendée revolt

April: Establishment of the Committee of Public Safety

April: Impeachment of Marat fails

July: Murder of Marat by Charlotte Corday

July: Robespierre elected to the Committee of Public Safety

August: General mobilisation – levée en masse

August: French forces masterminded by Napoleon Bonaparte recapture Toulon

September: The Convention announces “Let terror be the order of the day”

October: Execution of Marie Antoinette

November: Execution of Duc d’Orleans

1794

March: Execution of Hébert

April: Execution of Danton and Desmoulins

June: 22 Prairial Law passed

June: French victory at the Battle of Fleurus

July: Execution of Robespierre and Saint-Just

July: Beginning of the Thermidorian Reaction

1795

June: The young son of Louis XVI dies in the Temple prison

October: Napoleon’s “whiff of grapeshot” quells a royalist revolt

November: The Directory assumes control of France

Glossary

après moi le déluge	after me the flood
assignats	paper money that had former church property acting as security
bastille	notorious prison in Paris
bourgeoisie	the middle class
brigands	groups allegedly present in 1789 to attack supporters of the revolution
Brunswick Manifesto	Austrian threat to Paris if harm befell Louis XVI or his family
cahiers de doléance	notebooks of grievances
Capet	name used by King Louis at his trial
Civil Constitution of the Clergy	revolutionary reform of the church 1790
Committee of Public Safety	set up April 1793 to restore order, run the war more efficiently, behind the terror
compte rendu	Necker's 1781 financial statement
conciergerie	Marie Antoinette's place of imprisonment August to October 1793
Convention	governing body of France September 1792 to October 1795
Cordeliers	radical working class based group opposed to the monarchy
corvée	forced unpaid labour
dauphin	heir to the French throne
Declaration of Pillnitz	Austrian/ Prussian suggestion that foreign forces might restore the French king
Directory	governing body of France October 1795 to October 1799
émigrés	French nobles who had escaped France
Estates General	meeting involving all three Estates
Federalist Revolt	provincial revolt against the centralised ruling of Paris
fédérés	volunteer force formed to protect Paris
feuillants	royalists in the Legislative Assembly
First Estate	the clergy
gabelle	salt tax
Girondins	republican 'party', moderate than the Jacobins
Great Fear	paranoia that swept France in 1789 amongst revolutionary supporters
Indulgents	terms used to refer to Danton's followers
Jacobins	extreme republican 'party'
L' Ancien Regime	the old regime, pre-1789

La Vendée	region of a major revolt against the revolution, bloodily suppressed
Le Pere Duchesne	Hébert's newspaper
Legislative Assembly	governing body of France October 1791 to September 1792
l'état c'est moi	the state is myself
lettre de cachet	royal writ leading to a person's arrest
levée en masse	French conscripted army
mercantilism	18th century trading system meant to benefit the mother country
Mountain	term used to refer to the extreme Jacobins in the Convention
National Assembly	constitutional body that came out of the Estates General
parlement	judicial body of the nobility
Petit Trianon	Marie Antoinette's palace
Plain	grouping within the Convention led by Barère
Plenary Court	established by Louis XVI after suspension of Paris Parlement
representative en mission	official sent to the provinces and the front to ensure obedience to Paris' edicts
sans-culottes	working class supporters of the revolution, often associated with the Paris mob
Second Estate	the nobility
taille	land tax
Tennis Court Oath	oath taken by the 3rd Estate 23 June 1789
Thermidorian Reaction	period of reaction after the end of the terror
Third Estate	bourgeoisie, urban workers, peasantry
Tower of the Temple	Marie Antoinette's place of imprisonment to August 1793
whiff of grapeshot	Carlyle's description of Napoleon's suppression of the 1795 royalist revolt

Dramatis Personae

Barère, Bertrand	leading figure of The Plain
Bonaparte, Napoleon	general who quelled the 1795 royalist revolt
Brienne+A1:B28	Controller-General 1787-1788
Brissot	leading Girondin supporter
Burke, Edmund	author of Reflections on the French Revolution
Calonne	Controller-General 1783-1787
Cardinal Rohan	embroiled in the 1785-86 diamond necklace scandal
Carlyle, Thomas	19th century English historian of the The French Revolution
Carnot, Lazare	French general, “organiser of victory”
Carrier, Jean-Baptiste	pacifier of La Vendée revolt
Charpentier, Gabrielle	first wife of Danton
Colbert, Jean-Baptiste	finance minister 1661-1683
Compte de Provence	brother of Louis XVI, later Louis XVIII
Comte d’Artois	court supporter of Marie Antoinette
Corday, Charlotte	murderer of Marat
Count Mercy-Argentau	Austrian ambassador, confidant of Marie Antoinette
Danton, George	leading figure of the Jacobins
de Fleury	Controller-General, 1781-1783
Desmoulins, Camille	supporter of Danton, executed April 1794
Duke of Brunswick	Austrian leader, author of Brunswick Manifesto
Dumouriez	French general who eventually defected to the Austrians
Fourquier-Tinville	judge at Marie Antoinette’s trial
Gély, Louise	second wife of Danton
Hébert, Jacques Rene	radical journalist, a leader of the sans culottes
Jefferson, Thomas	main author of the US Declaration of Independence
Jourdan	French general
Lafayette, Marquis de	head of the National Guard
Law, John	Scot, involved in French banking, early 18th century
Leopold II	Austrian ruler
Louis XIV	French King 1643-1715
Louis XV	French King 1715-1774
Louis XVI	French King 1774-1792, executed 1793

Lycurgas	legendary author of the constitution of Ancient Sparta
Madame du Barry	court opponent of Marie Antoinette
Madame Roland	leading Girondin supporter
Marat, Jean-Paul	leading radical Jacobin
Maria Theresa	Austrian queen, mother of Marie Antoinette
Marie Antoinette	wife of Louis XVI
Marquis de Lafayette	fought in the American War of Independence, early revolutionary leader
Marquis de Launey	Governor of the Bastille
Necker	Controller-General 1777-1781, 1788-1789
Reveillon	wallpaper manufacturer, gave his name to the April 1789 riots
Robespierre, Maximilien	leading figure of the Jacobins, later effective dictator of the Republic
Saint-Just	protégé of Robespierre, radical member of the Committee of Public Safety
Sièyes, Abbé	revolutionary pamphleteer
Turgot	Controller-General, 1774-1776
Wadja, Andrzej	director of the film Danton
Washington, George	American leader during the American War of Independence
Young, Arthur	18th century English agriculturalist

Answers to Revision Exercises

Exercise 1.1

1 – The Third Estate; 2 – The First Estate; 3 – The Second Estate (noblesse d' épée);
4 – The Third Estate; 5 – The Third Estate; 6 – The Second Estate (noblesse de robe);
7 – The First Estate; 8 – The Third Estate; 9 – The Third Estate; 10 – The Second Estate
(noblesse de court)

Exercise 1.2

1 – it paid nearly all the tax while the 1st and 2nd Estates lived in luxury and paid very little;
2 – they were wealthy and educated but were denied entry to the top positions in things like
the diplomatic service; 3 – a royal writ that could lead to a person's arrest and imprisonment;
4 – he is disgusted with them; 5 – landowners did not live on their estates and did nothing to
improve them; 6 – it was a compulsory and heavy tax; 7 – the country will soon fall into chaos
and crisis after his reign; 8 – the noblesse de robe; 9 – it could declare a royal edict contrary to
French law; 10 – to list the grievances of the French people

Exercise 1.3

1 – the peasantry, part of the Third Estate; 2 – the First Estate (clergy) and the Second Estate
(nobility); 3 – the Third Estate carries the burden of keeping the country going while the other
two estates live in luxury and do nothing; 4 – personal opinion.

Exercise 2.1

1 – false; 2 – true; 3 – false; 4 – false; 5 – true; 6 – true; 7 – true; 8 – false; 9 – false; 10 – true

Exercise 3.1

1 – opinion; 2 – fact; 3 – fact; 4 – opinion; 5 – opinion

Exercise 3.2

1 – trade in rum, sugar and slaves; 2 – textiles and wineries; 3 – setting up the Banque
Royale and attempting to add liquidity to the economy; 4 – it crashed as revenues were
overestimated; 5 – he was willing to involve them in some aspects of government; 6 – Voltaire,
Rousseau; 7 – high taxation, lack of opportunity for leading jobs; 8 – no, many had bought
landed properties and were rising in social status; 9 – merely whetted the appetite for more
reform; 10 – Danton, Robespierre, Marat, Carnot

Exercise 4.1

1 – Voltaire; 2 – Montesquieu; 3 – Rousseau; 4 – Voltaire; 5 – Montesquieu; 6 – Descartes; 7 –
Rousseau; 8 – Leibniz; 9 – Rousseau; 10 – Diderot

Exercise 5.1

warfare – unfair – extravagance – 1778 – Turgot – economy – royal – restrictions – guilds
– 1781 – Necker – borrowing – bankruptcy – 1783 – shape – dismissed – 1783 – prodigal –
Turgot's – Notables –

Exercise 6.1

1st – Calonne introduces his reform program; 2nd – The Assembly of Notables; 3rd – Revolt of the aristocrats; 4th – Dismissal of Calonne; 5th – Appointment of Brienne; 6th – Paris Parlement becomes focus of anti-royal opposition; 7th – Paris Parlement suspended; 8th – King nominates a Plenary Court; 9th – The day of tiles; 10th – Resignation of Brienne; 11th – Appointment of Necker; 12th – The king calls for cahiers de doléance; 13th – Meeting of the Estates General; 14th – The Tennis Court Oath; 15th – Creation of the National Assembly

Exercise 7.1

1st – The Reveillon Riots; 2nd – The dismissal of Necker; 3rd – The storming of the Bastille; 4th – Murder of the Marquis de Launey; 5th – The Great Fear; 6th – the mob storms Versailles; 7th – The March of the Women; 8th – Royal family forced into the Tuileries

Exercise 7.2

1 – true; 2 – false; 3 – false; 4 – true; 5 – false; 6 – true; 7 – true; 8 – false; 9 – false; 10 – true

Exercise 8.1

1 – his father died so he succeeded his grandfather, Louis XVI; 2 – faithful husband, good father, well-intentioned; 3 – hesitancy, indecisiveness, inconsistency; 4 – deeply religious, offended by the revolution's attitude to religion; 5 – influence of Marie Antoinette and extravagant courtiers; 6 – Austrian, daughter of Maria-Theresa of Austria; 7 – lack of affection from a husband who seemed more interested in things other than a young wife; 8 – due to her influence, reformist ministers like Turgot and Necker were removed; 9 – the Petit Trianon, balls, gowns, jewellery; 10 – it seemed to justify the people's view about her extravagance

Exercise 9.1

1 – Mirabeau; 2 – Lafayette; 3 – Desmoullins; 4 – Duc d'Orleans; 5 – Abbé Sieyès; 6 – Lafayette; 7 – Duc d'Orleans; 8 – Desmoullins; 9 – Mirabeau; 10 – Abbé Sieyès

Exercise 10.2

1 – true; 2 – true; 3 – false; 4 – false; 5 – false; 6 – true; 7 – false; 8 – true; 9 – false; 10 – true

Exercise 11.1

1st – Flight to Varenne; 2nd – Opening of the Legislative Assembly; 3rd – Declaration of war on Austria; 4th – Announcement of La Patrie en danger; 5th – Brunswick Manifesto; 6th – Establishment of the Revolutionary Commune; 7th – Invasion of the Tuileries; 8th – Prussian capture of Verdun; 9th – September Massacres; 10th – First meeting of the Convention

Exercise 11.2

National – General – Legislative – Convention – feuillants – moderate – revolution – king – republican – Girondins – Brissot – Abbé Sieyès – supported – Jacobins – organised – hostile – Danton – Robespierre

Exercise 12.1

1 – Hébert; 2 – Marat; 3 – Napoleon; 4 – Brissot; 5 – Carrier; 6 – Danton; 7 – Barère; 8 – Louis XVI; 9 – Compte de Provence; 10 – Robespierre

Exercise 12.2

1 – Girondins, Mountain, Plain; 2 – deposed the king, set up the republic; 3 – to ensure control of the provinces; 4 – restore order, carry on the war more efficiently; 5 – executed March 1794; 6 – revolts in opposition to Paris that took place in the south west and south of France; 7 – a major revolt occurred, almost civil war, it was brutally suppressed; 8 – almost anyone could be accused of almost anything; 9 – successive revolutionary leaders ended up on the guillotine; 10 – the reversal of the terror and many Convention measures

Exercise 13.1

1st – Pope condemns the Civil Constitution of the Clergy; 2nd – Flight to Varennes; 3rd – Declaration of Pillnitz; 4th – France declares war on Austria; 5th – Brunswick Declaration; 6th – allied capture of Longwy; 7th – Prussian capture of Verdun; 8th – Battle of Valmy; 9th – Battle of Jemappes; 10th – France declares war on Britain; 11th – Battle of Neerwinden; 12th – Carnot's levée en masse; 13th – Napoleon retakes Toulon; 14th – Battle of Fleurus; 15th – Prussia and France sign the Treaty of Basel

Exercise 14.1

Varennes – 1791 – enemy – France – republic – Cordeliers – 1791 – Girondins – Tuileries – 1792 – escaped – Swiss – 1792 – Convention – calendar – Robespierre – Capet – referendum – 1793 – conspiring – Leopold – Mercy-Argentauf – Tower of the Temple – 1793 – conciergerie – Fourquier-Tinville – October

Exercise 15.1

1 – false; 2 – false; 3 – true; 4 – true; 5 – false; 6 – true; 7 – false; 8 – true

Exercise 15.2

1 – fact; 2 – opinion; 3 – fact; 4 – opinion; 5 – fact

Exercise 16.1

1 – bourgeois, comfortable, small-town, good education, pursued law; 2 – a large man, had suffered small pox, considered ugly by some; 3 – enjoyed the good things in life, likely prone to bribery; 4 – terror was necessary to protect the revolution and unite the country; 5 – his inspirational leadership; 6 – felt the terror had done its job, now sought peaceful and stable government; 7 – opposed his ideas on terror, was repelled by Danton's luxurious lifestyle; 8 – married Louise Gély; 9 – arrested, tried, executed; 10 – defiant, unbowed

Exercise 17.1

1 – false; 2 – false; 3 – true; 4 – true; 5 – true; 6 – false; 7 – true; 8 – false; 9 – true; 10 – false