

THE REVOLUTION TAKES SHAPE

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

KEY PEOPLE

LOUIS XVI (1754–1793)

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



MARIE ANTOINETTE (1755–1793)

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



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

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



ABBÉ SIEYÈS (1748–1836)

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



COMTE DE MIRABEAU (1749–1791)

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



MARQUIS DE LAFAYETTE (1757–1834)

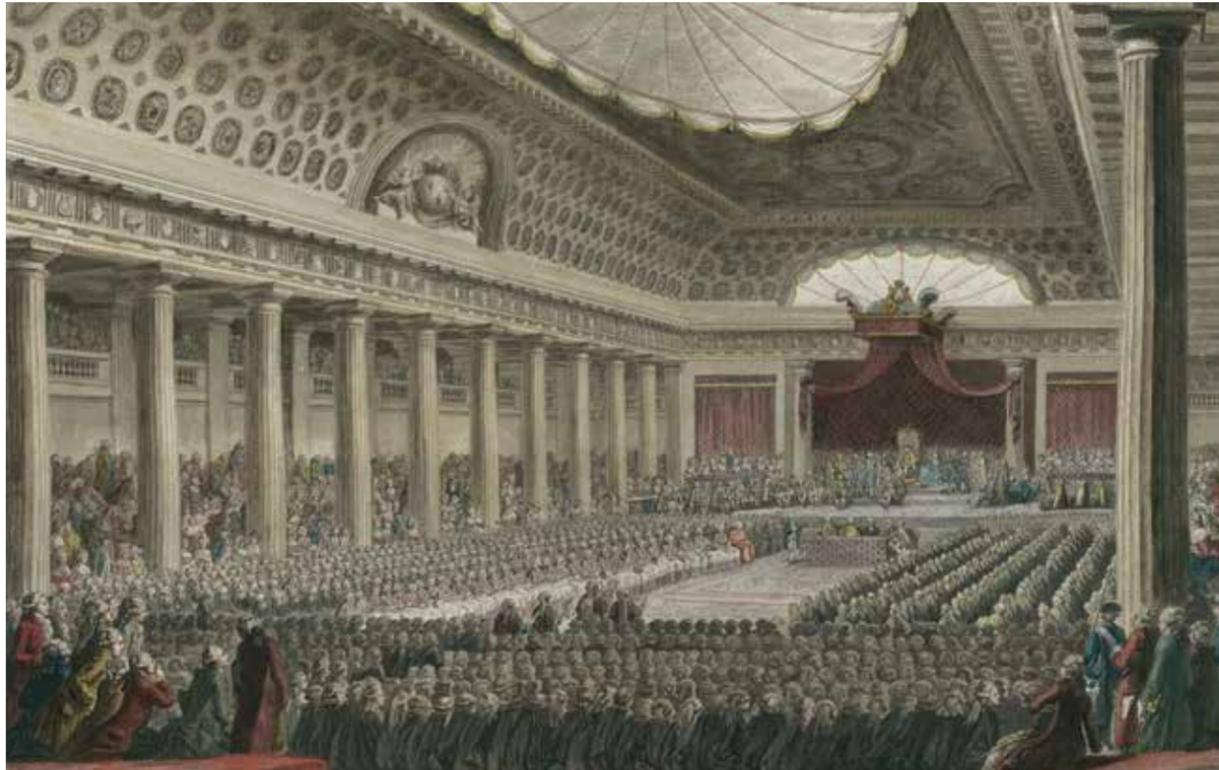
- Dubbed 'a hero of two worlds' for leadership in America and France.
- A 'courtier against the court' and an 'aristocrat against privilege'.
- Member of Society of Thirty and vice-president of National Assembly.
- Tried to convince king to reform, pinning tricolour cockade on him (Jul 1789).
- Commander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



CAMILLE DESMOULINS (1760–1794)

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





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

INTRODUCTION: THE ESTATES-GENERAL

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

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

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

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

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

DID YOU KNOW?

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



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

LOUIS FAILS TO OFFER REFORM

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

² Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (UK: Penguin, 1989), 346.
³ Schama, *Citizens*, 336.
⁴ Schama, *Citizens*, 339.
⁵ Christopher Hibbert, *The French Revolution* (UK: Penguin, 1980), 50.



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

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

What followed was greatly disappointing to the assembled deputies, who were hoping that Louis would lead them in a program of reform. The king made a short speech of welcome. In it, he referred to the ‘much exaggerated desire for innovations’ and expressed the hope that those present would work with him for the welfare of France. The next speech was made by Barentin, the king’s Keeper of the Seals, who talked also of ‘dangerous innovations.’ The final speaker was Jacques Necker, who made a three-hour speech on the state of the finances. Having bored the whole audience, including the king (who fell asleep), the ceremonial welcome was over, with no firm plans or policies emerging from the speeches. The sole directive coming from the government of the king was that the finances must be stabilised and put in order.

DISPUTE OVER CREDENTIALS

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



Jean-Sylvain Bailly.

⁶ Schama, *Citizens*, 346.
⁷ Schama, *Citizens*.

ACTIVITY

BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

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

DOCUMENT

COMTESSE D’ADHÉMAR ON ‘THE KING’S ATTITUDE’

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

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

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

SOURCE ANALYSIS

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

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

ACTIVITY

AN APPEAL FOR UNITY AMONG DEPUTIES

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

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

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

⁸ Comtesse d’Adhémar, *Souvenirs sur Marie-Antoinette, Archiduchesse d’Autriche, Reine de France, et sur la Cour de Versailles* (4 vols, 1836), III, 156–7, cited in Leonard W. Cowie, *The French Revolution: Documents and Debates* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 45.
⁹ Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 54.
¹⁰ Schama, *Citizens*, 348.
¹¹ William Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1980), 99; Timothy Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture* (USA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 29.
¹² Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 102.

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

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

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

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

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

POPULAR MOVEMENTS: THE RÉVEILLON RIOTS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE THIRD ESTATE GAINS MOMENTUM

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

THE REVOLUTION TAKES SHAPE: DECLARATION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

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

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

DID YOU KNOW?

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



INTERACTIVE TIMELINE
ON REVEILLON RIOTS

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

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

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

DID YOU KNOW?

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

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

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

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

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

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

ACTIVITY

CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE

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

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

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

¹⁹ Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 59.

THE TENNIS COURT OATH

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

DID YOU KNOW?

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

THE ROYAL SESSION

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

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

²¹ Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 60.

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

DID YOU KNOW?

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

DID YOU KNOW?

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

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

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

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

ACTIVITY

CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE

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

ESCALATING TENSIONS IN PARIS

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

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

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

NECKER'S DISMISSAL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



KEY PEOPLE:
CAMILLE DESMOULINS

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

24 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 62.

25 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*.

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

27 Schama, *Citizens*, 364.

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

29 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 64.

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

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

32 Schama, *Citizens*, 382.

DID YOU KNOW?

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

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

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

THE FALL OF THE BASTILLE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHO STORMED THE BASTILLE?

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

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



DID YOU KNOW?

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



The Taking of the Bastille, engraving.

³³ Schama, *Citizens*, 387.

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

³⁵ Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 8.

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

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



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

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

38 Rudé, *The French Revolution*, 45.

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

40 Schama, *Citizens*, 420.

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



ACTIVITY

REVOLUTIONARY TRIGGERS

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

REACTIONS TO THE FALL OF THE BASTILLE

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

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

DID YOU KNOW?

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

THE MUNICIPAL REVOLT: PARIS

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

41 Schama, *Citizens*.

SOURCE ANALYSIS

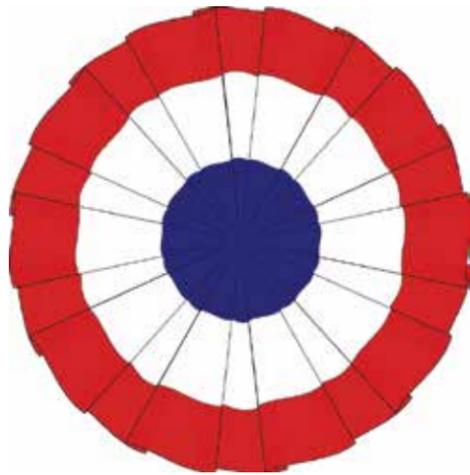
Examine ‘The Awakening of the Third Estate’ and complete the tasks below.

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



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

ACTIVITY



The revolutionary tricolor cockade.

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

KEY EVENTS OF 1789:
TIMELINE ACTIVITY



THE MURDERS OF DE SAUVIGNY AND FOULON

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

ACTIVITY

POPULAR MOVEMENTS

Discuss the following questions.

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

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

⁴³ Schama, *Citizens*, 406.

THE RURAL REVOLT

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

THE GREAT FEAR

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

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

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

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



KEY EVENTS: THE HARVEST CRISIS



HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS: THE GREAT FEAR

DID YOU KNOW?

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

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

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

TARGETS OF PEASANT VIOLENCE

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

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

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

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

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

Great Fear. It was the system, rather than the master, which was the cause of anger.

The significance of the Great Fear was that it armed the people of the countryside and created pressure on the nobility for reform. In Lefebvre's words,

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

TURNING POINTS

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

ACTIVITY

THE NIGHT OF 'PATRIOTIC DELIRIUM'

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

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

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

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

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

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

45 Schama, *Citizens*, 429.

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

47 Schama, *Citizens*, 322.

48 Schama, *Citizens*, 323.

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

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

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

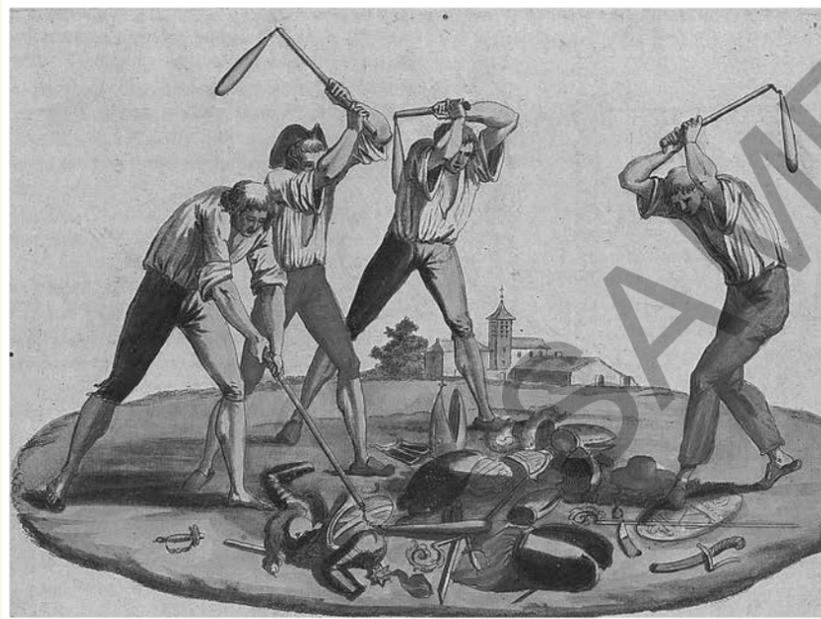
It seemed that the old regime was to be swept away overnight, and as news of the so-called Night of Patriotic Delirium became known in the countryside, many peasants certainly believed this. The realities were a little different, however – another three years passed before the National Convention abolished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

ACTIVITY

SOURCE ANALYSIS

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

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



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

⁵¹ Schama, *Citizens*, 439.

THE AUGUST DECREES

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

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

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

DID THE DECREES FULFILL THEIR PROMISE?

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



VIDEO ON THE
AUGUST DECREES

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

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

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

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

DID YOU KNOW?

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



Abbé Grégoire (1750–1831).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1789: HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

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

Topic:

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

SOURCE ANALYSIS

Examine the representation and complete the tasks below.

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

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



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

THE DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF MAN AND CITIZEN

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

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

The Declaration read:

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

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

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

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

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

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

DID YOU KNOW?

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



MORE ON THE DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF MAN

66 Cited in Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 114.
 67 Preamble to The American Declaration of Independence, 4 July 1776, cited in R.R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America 1760–1800* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1959), 212.
 68 McPhee, *A Social History of France 1789–1880*, first edition (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 37.
 69 McPhee, *A Social History of France*, 36.

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

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

PODCAST ON
DECLARATION OF
RIGHTS OF MAN



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

FEATURE

THE DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF MAN AND CITIZEN



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

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

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

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

SOURCE ANALYSIS

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

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

ACTIVITY

DID YOU KNOW?

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

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNMENT

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

The Fundamental Principles read:

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

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

KEY IDEAS

Make a copy of the extract from the Fundamental Principles of Government above. Highlight phrases in the extract that express the idea of popular sovereignty. In a different colour, highlight phrases that confirm the authority of the king. What was the new status of Louis XVI? Was he a citizen like everyone else, or was he still above the law?

ACTIVITY

⁷¹ Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 115–6.
⁷² Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*.

REVOLUTIONARY SYMBOLISM

This engraving is one of the many congratulatory salutations received by the National Assembly early in the revolution.

This image is complex and rich with symbolism. The King, as constitutional monarch, is placed in the centre, sword of justice raised, and bathed in the rays of enlightenment emanating from the writings of the philosophes. Liberty, clad in a rich cloak trimmed with ermine, towers behind him saluting those ideas with one hand, while in the other she holds the thunderbolts of freedom⁷³ which smite the demonic privileged of the old regime, the monarchs, priests and lawyers, and the tyranny of absolutism symbolised by the fortress crashing to the ground.

The altar of the nation is inscribed with the Rights of Man. Cherubs play with the broken chains of despotism at the feet of Liberty. There are many

references to the wealth of France derived from overseas trade with its colonies: the merchants were indeed pleased with the Constituent Assembly for the Decree on the Colonies in March 1790 which did not interfere with their lucrative overseas monopolies, nor with their slave trading practices. From the New World, shown to the left, it seems that the King is supplicated by those in the Nation who are not yet free – the African slave and the American Indian are still fettered, even though they, too, are part of France. Across the water are the scales of justice, evenly balanced, and the sword and musket laid down in peace beside the French rooster suggest that even if all is not fully resolved in the colonies, on the land of France herself, the Mother of Liberty, the Revolution is over, that harmony, justice and liberty are reigning.

⁷³ Schama gives a fascinating account of the link between lightning and liberty (*Citizens*, 43–4). See entry on *lightning bolt* in the Glossary of this book.



The Regeneration of the French Nation in 1789, engraving, ca. 1789–90, dedicated and presented to the National Assembly 13 July 1790. Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

THE OCTOBER DAYS

By October 1789, there were deep suspicions about the king's acceptance of the Revolution. Louis XVI had not been to Paris since 17 July, when he had been welcomed by his people and had attached the new tricolour cockade to his hat. Since then, the king had failed to ratify the new legislation, including the Decrees of 4 August and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. This left both pieces of legislation in limbo, meaning that they did not have the status of laws. The Assembly demanded that the king publicly confirm its decrees. These demands were met by silence, leading to the general belief that Louis, influenced by Marie Antoinette, was planning to move against the Revolution. The rumours gained credibility when Louis summoned the Flanders regiment to Versailles.

The troops were welcomed with a banquet given by the Household Guards. The visit of Louis and Marie Antoinette to the celebration encouraged the expression of loyalist sentiments and calls for the overthrow of the Revolution. Soldiers tore off their red and blue cockades, grinding them underfoot, while the ladies of the court, wearing white lilies in honour of the monarchy, handed out white cockades to the (by this time drunk) soldiers.

When the news reached Paris, it precipitated a response: while Versailles feasted, the people of Paris were hungry. Bread prices were high and there were shortages of other foodstuffs. News that the military had insulted the emblem of the Revolution aroused anger. On 5 October, the crowds gathered in the market place: the king must be brought back to Paris where, among his loyal subjects, he could be removed from the corrupting influence of the court. Neither Lafayette and his National Guard, nor Bailly, as Mayor of Paris, could control the determination of the crowd to march to Versailles.

THE WOMEN'S MARCH TO VERSAILLES

The demonstration originated at the Hôtel de Ville, where women had come to demonstrate against the high price of bread. Here, a soldier of the National Guard and 'veteran' of the taking of the Bastille, Stanislaus Maillard, told the women that the Commune was powerless and that 'as they only wanted to go to the National Assembly to demand justice and bread, they should go without arms' to Versailles.⁷⁴ This having been deemed a satisfactory solution, the women began to march. From the Hôtel de Ville, the demonstration moved to the Champs Elysées, where the marchers were joined by other groups of women.

The fishwives, powerful women who could gut and fillet a fish with quick strokes of their knives, abandoned their trade as the bell tolled for the march to begin. The owners of market stalls, shopkeepers, prostitutes and passers-by swelled the crowd until finally there was a force of some 6000 people, the majority of them women. Armed with knives, pikes, swords and some muskets, they demanded bread, the passing of the decrees of the Assembly and access to the monarch in person. Amongst the crowd, agitators paid by the Duc d'Orléans urged them on. Lafayette and his National Guards could do little more than follow the crowd in the hope of gaining control when emotions had been worn out by the long walk. By five o'clock, they had reached Versailles and by half-past-five, they had entered



POPULAR MOVEMENTS:
THE OCTOBER DAYS

DID YOU KNOW?

Dislike of Marie Antoinette was widespread in Paris. She was characterised by cartoonists and pamphlet writers as a spendthrift and an unfaithful wife, as in this verse:

*Louis, si tu veux voir
Bâtard, cocu, putain,
Regard ton miroir
La Reine and le Dauphin.*

Translation: 'Louis, if you want to see a bastard, a cuckold and whore, look in your mirror, at the queen and the dauphin.'

⁷⁴ Reay Tannahill, *Paris in the Revolution: A Collection of Eye Witness Accounts* (London: The Folio Society, 1996), 31.

FEATURE

In 1789, Théroigne de Méricourt was an affluent courtesan, a strong supporter of the revolution and a warrior for women's rights. She was a dramatic character, notorious for being well-armed and for wearing a man's riding habit. Popular myth had her riding flamboyantly at the head of the women on their March to Versailles. Méricourt herself, however, claimed in her *Confessions* (1791) that she was already at Versailles, living there through the summer in order to better attend the sittings of the National Assembly.⁷⁵ Lafayette, hastily summoning some 20 000 of the National Guards, set out after the women. Unable to turn them back, he and the Guard accompanied them in the hope of maintaining some sort of order.



Théroigne de Méricourt leading the March of the Women to Versailles. Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

⁷⁵ Frank Hamel, *A Woman of the Revolution: Théroigne de Méricourt* (New York: Brentano's, 1911), 94.



Women's March on Versailles, 5–6 October 1789.

At two o'clock in the morning, a crowd of women invaded the palace and found the queen's bedchamber, shouting 'Death to the Austrian! Where is she? Where is the whore? We'll wring her neck! We'll tear her heart out! We'll fry her liver!' On their way through the palace, one of the bodyguards tried to prevent their entry. He was decapitated with an axe. At the door of the queen's bedchamber, as she hastily escaped through a secret door leading to the king's apartments, another guard was killed by a blow to the head. Outside, a larger crowd called for the king to show himself to his people.

Lafayette's rather self-satisfied account demonstrates the extreme danger facing the royal couple. Writing in the third person he recounted the events of the day:

'Madame' said he [Lafayette] to the Queen, 'what is your personal intention?' 'I know the fate that awaits me,' she replied nobly. 'But my duty is to die at the feet of the King and in the arms of my children.' 'Very well, Madame, come with me.' 'What, alone on the balcony? Did you not see the gestures they made at me?' 'Yes, Madame. Let us go.' And appearing with her in the face of those waves which still roared ... Lafayette – unable to make himself heard – had recourse to a gesture which was hazardous but decisive. He kissed the Queen's hand. The multitude, struck by this act, cried 'Vive le Général! Vive la Reine!' ... From that moment, peace was restored.⁷⁷

CONSEQUENCES OF THE WOMEN'S MARCH

The 'March of the Women' was a significant turning point in the revolution. The next day, escorted by Lafayette and the National Guard, the royal family left Versailles for Paris. In front of and behind them rode the National Guard, with Lafayette personally escorting the royal carriage. Behind them came the royal ministers and the deputies of the Constituent Assembly; then the Flanders regiment and the Household Guards, escorting wagon-loads of grain and flour. Along the route, crowds accompanied them and shouted into the carriage, 'Long live the baker! Long live the baker's wife and son!' Loaves of bread were brandished on the tip of pikes and bayonets. Lafayette estimated that there were

⁷⁷ Tannahill, *Paris in the Revolution*, 33.

DID YOU KNOW?

It took two to three hours for carriages to get to Versailles from Paris. It would have taken the women who marched there on 5 October 1789 about six hours to get to Versailles.

QUIZ ON THE WOMEN'S MARCH TO VERSAILLES



the hall of the National Assembly. Here the new president of the Assembly, Jean Joseph Mounier, attempted to keep peace, with little effect.

Calls for order went unheeded. The crowd would not withdraw until it had been heard. Mounier went to consult the king, who agreed to meet the women provided Mounier accompanied them. A deputation of twenty went to meet him, but only six were allowed in for the audience. The meeting went well, as Christopher Hibbert has recorded:

The King walked into the room, looking rather nervous, to ask the women what they wanted. 'Sire,' replied one, a pretty girl who sold flowers at the Palais-Royal, 'We want bread.' 'You know my heart,' the King told her. 'I will order all the bread in Versailles to be collected and given to you.' At these words the girl fainted. Revived by smelling salts, she asked to be allowed to kiss the King's hands. 'She deserves better than that,' His Majesty said, and took her into his arms.⁷⁶

The women outside were not convinced. While good King Louis might be sincere, his wife and her circle were not. The delegates returned and received a written declaration from the king. This satisfied many and the demonstration broke up, some women staying at Versailles, but many making the long journey back to Paris. The arrival of Lafayette with 20 000 National Guardsmen and some representatives of the Commune of Paris seemed to mark the end of the matter.

It was now eleven o'clock and the king had been hunting that day. Although his ministers had advised him to leave Versailles for his own safety, he chose to stay. He received Lafayette and the Commune delegates and agreed that he would ratify the August Decrees and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen and other decrees passed by the Assembly. However, when they asked him to return to Paris, he made no response. Then he made his way to bed. The queen also retired to her bedchamber.

⁷⁶ Christopher Hibbert, *The French Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1980), 99.



Tuileries Palace

60 000 in all. The crowd carried on pikes the heads of the guards who had been killed, in full view of the royal carriage. When Bailly met them at the gates of Paris at Passy to present the keys to the city, a man fired four rifle shots over the queen's head. The royal family was now to be lodged at the Tuileries Palace in the heart of Paris, prisoners of the people they once ruled. A new wave of emigration by the nobility and officers in the royal army followed. Mounier, too, though President of the National Assembly, left Paris and returned to his native Dauphiné.

The next day, Gui Target suggested that the king's title be changed. Instead of 'King of France and Navarre,' he would become 'The King of the French.' But, as Simon Schama observed, 'the condition on which he would be hailed as King of the French was his own virtual imprisonment.'⁷⁸ Louis was not the only prisoner, however. The people of Paris were convinced that they had once more saved the Revolution with this second revolutionary *journée* because, in Peter McPhee's words, 'The Revolution of bourgeois deputies had only been secured by the active intervention of the people of Paris.'⁷⁹ After the removal of the king to Paris, the deputies of the National Constituent Assembly unwillingly followed, setting up their meeting place in the Manège, a former riding school of the Tuileries Palace. Thus, the March of the Women made the deputies equally captives of the people. There were, in fact, now three sources of power within Paris: the king, whose position was increasingly weak; the deputies of the Constituent Assembly, who were the representatives of the people; and the *menu peuple*, the ordinary people of Paris, whose capacity for violence had now been twice demonstrated and who were increasingly a force to be reckoned with. Accordingly, on 21 October 1789, the Assembly passed the Decree on Martial Law. Proposed by Mirabeau, it stated that 'while liberty strengthens empires ... licence destroys them,' and ordered that if the public order was disturbed, a red flag was to be hung from the window of the Hôtel de Ville or displayed by the National Guard. If the crowd then failed to disperse immediately, it would be committing a criminal act and armed force could be used to restore order.

The Declaration of Martial Law was the first indication of the deputies' desire for the Revolution to end and for a restoration of law and order, as opposed to the crowd's determination to achieve its goals by direct action. By mid-1791, these people of the crowd would even have a new name, the *sans-culottes*, which reflected both their social class – men without the knee breeches and stockings of the middle class – and their role as armed and active defenders of the people's revolution.

ACTIVITY

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Why were the deputies now, to some extent, prisoners of the people?
2. What division between the Assembly and the *menu peuple* is revealed by the Declaration of Martial Law?

DID YOU KNOW?

Jules Michelet, a nineteenth-century historian, wrote of the March of the Women to Versailles: 'Men made the 14th of July; the 6th of October was the day of the women. Men took the royal Bastille, women took royalty itself.'

KEY PEOPLE: THE COMTE DE MIRABEAU



⁷⁸ Schama, *Citizens*, 470.

⁷⁹ McPhee, *The French Revolution*, 62.

DOCUMENT

GEORGE RUDÉ, *THE CROWD IN THE FRENCH REVOLUTION*, 1959

The march to Versailles on 5 October [1789], by ending in the King's return to the capital, completed the Paris revolution of July ... The King's refusal to give his assent to the Declaration of the Rights of Man and to the Assembly's famous resolution of 4 August, which eventually led to the abolition of the feudal system of land-tenure, the long struggle over the 'veto', and the constant intrigues to abduct the King to a safe distance from Paris, showed how precarious as yet were the gains of the July revolution.

[The result of] the October insurrection was to consolidate these gains. By placing the King under the watchful eye of the majority in the National Assembly, the Paris city government, and Districts ... it established the ascendancy of the constitutional monarchists which, in Paris, found its reflection in the long rule of Bailly as mayor and of Lafayette as commander-in-chief of the National Guard. It must, of course, be added that by placing the Assembly itself under the equally watchful eye of the Parisian *menu peuple*, whose more active elements began to crowd the tribunes and, often, to influence its debates, it opened the way for further developments that were neither foreseen, nor in the event welcome, by the victors of October; but this, of course, lay still in the future.⁸⁰

Menu peuple: The ordinary people of Paris. (Note that Rudé does not yet refer to them as *sans-culottes*.)

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Read the extract from George Rudé and complete the tasks below.

1. Why, according to Rudé, were the gains of the July revolution 'precarious'?
2. How did the constitutional monarchists, such as Bailly and Lafayette, establish their 'ascendancy' once the Louis XVI returned to Paris?
3. Identify one or more other political consequences of the king's return to Paris, as suggested by Rudé.
4. Evaluate Rudé's view that the October insurrection had unforeseen consequences that the revolutionaries would come to regret. What signs were there in October 1789 that 'the people' might themselves pose a danger to France?

ACTIVITY

CONCLUSION

What had the revolution achieved by October 1789? Royal authority had been limited by the creation of a National Assembly, bringing an end to royal absolutism. Legislative authority had been placed in the hands of elected representatives of the people. Privileges, both fiscal and honorific, had been removed. Serfdom, where it continued to exist in France, had been abolished. Feudal and seigneurial dues had been abandoned by the privileged order; by the monarchy in the case of the *corvée*, by the Gallican Church in the form of tithes and by the land-owners in the form of *banalités*. In the two years that followed, the National Constituent Assembly, as it became known, would give France a new constitution, reorganise the taxation system and eradicate internal customs barriers, bring in a more rational administrative system, reform the justice system and introduce juries, make laws affecting labour, restructure the army, and determine a common system of weights and measures. Even language

⁸⁰ George Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1959), 61.

was reformed, as efforts were made to replace local dialects with French as the common mode of communication.

For all these advances, problems inherited from the old regime remained. Suspicions were high that there would be a royalist reaction to the new order. The queen, particularly, was seen as a malign influence on Louis XVI. The new government was to be always chronically short of money. Personal taxation, once people had ceased to pay it, became almost impossible to reinstate and efforts to improve the situation through the issue of paper currency, the assignats, proved futile.

CHAPTER REVIEW

POPULAR MOVEMENTS – DIAGRAM

Create a diagram or graphic organiser showing how the following popular movements helped to cause the French Revolution between May and October 1789:

- The Revéillon Riots
- The Storming of the Bastille
- The Great Fear
- The October Days 1789.

VIDEO ON THE
STORMING OF THE
BASTILLE



KEY PEOPLE AND IDEAS – PARAGRAPHS

Write a paragraph on each of the topics below, citing evidence.

Topics:

- What were the direct ‘triggers’ of the October Days 1789?
- What were the long-term causes of the revolution?
- Discuss the contribution of a significant individual (the Comte de Mirabeau / Louis XVI / Marie Antoinette / Camille Desmoulins / the Marquis de Lafayette) to the revolutionary events of May–October 1789.
- Discuss the contribution of the liberal nobility to the revolutionary events of May–October 1789.
- Discuss the extent to which the ideas of popular sovereignty and equality had been implemented in France by October 1789.

KEY EVENTS – MEMORY TASK

Make a copy of the Section A Overview and Section A Timeline and memorise the key events in the period 1774–1789.

CONSTRUCTING AN ARGUMENT – ESSAY

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

Topics:

- ‘The Great Fear, Revéillon Riots and murders of civilians in 1789 showed that the so-called revolutionaries were merely exploiting public anger and ignorance.’ Discuss.
- Evaluate the significance of food in the French Revolution of 1789.
- How significant was the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen as an expression of revolutionary ideas?