

LIBERATING FRANCE

3RD
EDITION

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HTAV

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REVOLUTIONS—AN INTRODUCTION

A study of revolutions is important because it allows us to look at how critical moments in history alter the function of nations and their societies, and the lives of generations of people. They allow us to examine issues of power—who has it and who doesn't—and to explore what happens when there is a radical shift in power.

STUDYING REVOLUTIONS

The study of Revolutions is based on the understanding that revolutions 'represent a great rupture in time and are a major turning point in the collapse and destruction of an existing political order which results in extensive change to society.'¹ Often revolutions involve a transfer of power from the oppressor to the oppressed, from the privileged to the less privileged. In some instances, a revolution is a response to hierarchical authority and its inequalities, while in others a revolution can be a response to colonial oppression.

Typically, revolutions are driven by strong ideological beliefs about how society should operate. Central to these beliefs are ideas about equality and control, and how a government should balance these. It is important to note that while revolutions are considered primarily political events, there are also significant economic, social and cultural factors that need to be considered. In the context of Revolutions, these are examined through the lens of key historical thinking concepts.

¹ VCAA, VCE History Study Design 2022–2026.

WHAT IS A REVOLUTION?

The term 'revolution' is used widely and often loosely. Consider for example, how advertisers frequently refer to products as 'revolutionary' to generate a sense of something being special or beneficial or even necessary. Understanding what a revolution is—and what it is not—is crucial in a study of Revolutions. This is no easy feat as sometimes the term 'revolution' is used by different people to mean different things. This is evident when we consider the differences between a revolution and other forms of conflict such as a rebellion, a revolt or a coup, and the ways in which these terms are sometimes randomly assigned to different events.

THE CAUSES OF REVOLUTION

The causes of revolution are often complex and overlapping. It can be useful to consider the long-term and short-term **causes**, and the **triggers**, of revolution. If you consider the metaphor of a revolution as a fire, the descriptions to the right outline the role of each of these.

The path towards revolution is never a smooth one. Rarely do you see revolutionary tension steadily rise; rather it ebbs and flows as those in power attempt to put an end to discontent (through a combination of repression and reform). This results in periods of escalation and de-escalation of revolutionary beliefs and action. Identifying a series of crisis points in the lead up to revolution can help you more clearly see this process.

Of course, one of the challenges in a study of Revolutions is to evaluate the various factors that cause revolution. How are these factors related? Are some factors more significant than others? To what extent? Does this change over time? Why?

THE CONSEQUENCES OF REVOLUTION

Seizing power is only one of the hurdles a revolutionary party or movement faces. All too often, the threat of further revolution or counter-revolution drives the new government's decisions and actions. Revolutionary ideals may be compromised. Arguably, the consequences of revolution can be unintended—this study asks you to identify the intended and unintended effects of revolution and evaluate how these impacted different groups of people at the time. You should compare the perspectives of people within and between groups and evaluate the positive and negative consequences of living in the 'new society'.

CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

Ultimately, the concepts of cause and consequence are used to understand not just the dynamics of a revolution but also to analyse the extent to which revolution resulted in change. The rhetoric of revolutionary leaders, parties and movements is often utopian—they promise a better life with greater freedom, less hierarchical control and more equality—but do they deliver? Sometimes the new regime ends up every bit (or even more) repressive than the regime it supplanted.

In comparing the political, economic and social dimensions of life in the 'old' and 'new' societies, this course of study invites an appraisal of the changes and continuities a revolution brought to society. What changes were evident? Were they positive or negative? What stayed the same (continued)? Why? Did life change for all groups in society or just for some? How do we know?

LONG-TERM CAUSES

The sources of fuel needed to stage a revolution are long-held political, economic, social and cultural structures, often based on issues of equality and control. These act to interrupt the status quo—much like chopping down a tree interrupts the ecology of a forest system.



SHORT-TERM CAUSES

Unresolved and growing over time, these structures generate grievances and resentments that metaphorically become the fuel for the revolutionary fire.



TRIGGERS

The spark that ignites a revolution can be planned or unplanned; it can be an **event** or the actions, or inactions, of an **individual** or a group. Regardless, the trigger often galvanises revolutionary **movements** into action. Sometimes that action involves a mass-movement, whilst at others it offers an opportunity that smaller groups can utilise to seize power.



SIGNIFICANCE

As you examine the causes and consequences of revolution, and the resultant changes and continuities, Revolutions also asks you to evaluate the relative significance of these. Were some movements, ideas, individuals and events more significant than others? Why/Why not? When assessing significance, consider:

Scale	How many people did it affect?
Duration	How long did it last?
Profundity (how profound something is)	What intensity of change did it produce? Deep impact or surface-level change?

PERSPECTIVES AND INTERPRETATIONS

Significance is a relative term. One must always ask—significant to whom? In answering this, consideration must be given to:

- the **perspectives** and experiences of different groups of people at the time. Were certain movements, ideas, individuals and events seen as more significant by certain groups? Why/why not?
- the **interpretations** of others (often historians) after the time. Have views of significance changed? Why/why not?

Ultimately, the complexities and moral dilemmas found in the study of revolutions makes for rewarding analysis and evaluation. As a student of Revolutions it is your job to grapple with these concepts and construct your own evidence-based historical arguments.

written by Catherine Hart

THE REVOLUTION TAKES SHAPE

(MAY–4 AUGUST 1789)

CHAPTER 7

‘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.’

—Tennis Court Oath, 20 June 1789

The meeting of the Estates-General at Versailles in May and June 1789 launched an intensive series of dramatic and revolutionary events. Responding to this challenge to his sovereignty, the king called a Royal Session. Locked out of their meeting hall, on 20 June the deputies took the Tennis Court Oath, vowing not to disband until they had written a Constitution for France.

As the price of bread soared to its highest point and the king built up 30,000 troops around Paris, on 14 July the people of Paris took up arms and seized control of the royal dungeon, the Bastille.

Forced to accept events, the king arrived in Paris on 17 July to meet Bailly, the mayor of the new municipal government, and the commander of the new National Guard, Lafayette. As the crowd cheered ‘Long live the king, Long live the nation’, France’s constitutional monarchy was born.

As rumours of foreign invasion circulated, the Great Fear arose, causing violence to escalate still further. Against this background of fear and turbulence, many of the deputies of the privileged orders rose to their feet in the National Assembly on the night of 4 August to voluntarily renounce their feudal privileges.

KEY QUESTIONS

- Did the calling (or convocation) of the Estates-General make the revolution inevitable?
- To what extent were revolutionary developments triggered by Louis XVI’s decisions—or his inability to make any decisions—in May–August 1789?
- What revolutionary actions were made by the deputies to the Estates-General in the period 5 May–4 August 1789?
- How did sovereignty shift during the period 5 May–4 August 1789?
- What was the significance of the actions of the crowd of Paris on 14 July 1789?
- What did the actions of the rural popular movement achieve by 4 August 1789?



Source 7.01 Study for the Tennis Court Oath by Jacques-Louis David, 1791.

THE ESTATES-GENERAL CONVENES, MAY 1789

Barbara Lutterell: ‘A rival sovereign will had loomed into view, threatening the foundations of the monarchy.’

At the end of April 1789, the deputies elected to the Estates-General began arriving at Versailles. The deputies had been selected by different means:

- First Estate—by a mix of direct and indirect voting
- Second Estate—by direct vote, with all male nobles over twenty-five voting for their representatives
- Third Estate—indirectly, with all males over twenty-five entitled to vote for electors, who then met in each district to elect their deputies.

Historian David Andress has estimated that some 4 to 5 million men were eligible to participate in these elections.¹

Most of the Society of Thirty became deputies. The Comte de Mirabeau and Abbé Sieyès were elected for the Third Estate. Almost half of the Third Estate deputies were lawyers, including Target, Mounier, Barnave and Robespierre. There were some noblemen and a few priests, but less than twenty of the 600 deputies representing the Third Estate were from the lower orders.

The deputies were treated differently, according to their Estate, and social distinctions were strictly observed. On 2 May, Louis XVI received the deputies, one Estate at a time:

- Deputies for the clergy were received first. They had a private audience with Louis XVI in the Hall of Mirrors behind closed doors.
- Deputies for the nobility went next. They had an audience with Louis XVI in the Hall of Mirrors, too—but with the doors left partly open.
- Deputies for the Third Estate waited for over three hours for their audience with the king. They were taken to a lesser salon, rather than the Hall of Mirrors.

According to historian Simon Schama, the Third Estate deputies passed before Louis in a single file ‘like a crocodile of sullen schoolboys’ and were then dismissed.²



Source 7.XX The opening of the Estates-General, 5 May 1789, in the salle des Menus-Plaisirs at Versailles.

On 4 May, the deputies to the Estates-General walked in procession to the Church of St. Louis to celebrate mass. Once more, the social differences of the delegates were made apparent by their clothing.

- The Third Estate went first, wearing costumes made from plain black cloth.
- The Second Estate came next, wearing satin suits and gold or silver waistcoats.
- The First Estate came last: the parish priests wearing plain clerical coats, the bishops wearing scarlet and purple ceremonial clothing.

The Third Estate delegates resented the way clothing and the whole procession had been used to divide people into higher and lower estates. But as Simon Schama puts it: 'The more brilliantly the first two orders [estates] swaggered, the more they alienated the Third Estate and provoked it into exploding the institution altogether.'³

The arrival of Louis XVI was greeted with shouts of 'Long live the King'. However, as American observer Gouverneur Morris noted: 'The Queen received not a single acclamation.'⁴



Source 7.XX 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, 5 MAY

The next day, 5 May, the opening ceremony for the sitting of the Estates-General took place at the Hôtel des Menus-Plaisirs. The deputies had great hopes that Louis XVI would lead them in a program of reform—but they were about to be disappointed.

There were three speakers:

- First, Louis XVI made a short speech of welcome. He referred to the 'much exaggerated desire for innovations', and expressed the hope that the delegates would work with him for the welfare of France.
- Next, Barentin, Louis XVI's Keeper of the Seals, also spoke about 'dangerous innovations'.
- The final speaker was Jacques Necker. Necker had been reinstated as Controller-General of France, and he made a three-hour speech about the state of the nation's finances.

Necker informed the Estates that the deficit stood at 54 million *livres*, and that this could be covered by increases in taxation. Necker's speech bored the whole audience, including the king—who fell asleep.

So, the ceremonial welcome was over, with no firm plans or policies emerging from the speeches. The sole directive was that the finances must be stabilised and put in order. There was no suggestion from Necker that any new form of taxation needed consensus. Nor was there any mention of the two crucial questions:

- Would the deputies sit together or separately, by estate?
- Would voting be by head or by estate?⁵

This lack of leadership and direction proved to be a massive mistake.

DISPUTE OVER CREDENTIALS, 6 MAY

On 6 May 1789, the deputies met in their separate estates to verify their credentials. The whole question of voting by estate or by head still not settled.

Members of the First Estate and Second Estate met in separate halls, and began the process of checking the credentials of their deputies and forming committees. However, the representatives of the Third Estate demanded that every deputy should present their credentials to the full body of deputies, assembled in one place. Until this was conceded, they refused to undertake the process of verification. They knew that if verification was done by estate, then voting would also be done by estate, rather than by person.

Mirabeau suggested a move of passive resistance: the deputies of the Third Estate should sit and wait in the *salle des Menus-Plaisirs* for the other estates to rejoin them.

Meanwhile, in the nobles' assembly, a motion by Lafayette that the three estates should verify their mandates together was massively defeated, 141 votes to 47.⁶ The clergy followed the same pattern, but with some disagreement: 133 deputies voted for separate representation, while 114 voted against.⁷ It was a stalemate.

For a full three weeks, the deputies of the Third Estate met, talked and debated—but they would not organise themselves, elect leaders or adopt any rules of procedure. They did not want to do anything that made it look like they had accepted their separate status. The Third Estate made one decision: they would refer to themselves as 'the Commons'. They also made one appointment: an astronomer named Jean-Sylvain Bailly was elected to control the debates. Bailly had overseen the elections of the 407 Third Estate deputies from Paris, and was a well respected and popular figure.

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 [Marie-Antoinette] 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.

Source 7.XX Comtesse d'Adhémar, *Souvenirs sur Marie-Antoinette, Archduchesse 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.

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 deputies?
- 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?



↑ Jean-Sylvain Bailly.

HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Source 7.xx and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 What were Marie-Antoinette'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 d'Adhémar's perspective on the Third Estate. Find a contrasting perspective from this book and compare it with her view.

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'.

HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Source 7.XX and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Outline what the aristocracy wanted from Louis XVI.
- 2 According to Georges Lefebvre, what were the nobles most horrified about?
- 3 Evaluate Georges Lefebvre's account in light of other evidence and interpretations. To what extent does it fully explain the nobles' motivations?

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Why were the deputies so disappointed at the opening sitting of the Estates-General on 5 May?
- 2 Why did the Third Estate refuse to undertake the process of verification? What did they want to happen?
- 3 In which group, according to Schama, was 'the separation between rich and poor ... most bitterly articulated'?

THE THIRD ESTATE GAINS MOMENTUM

As May progressed into June, further attempts were made to break the deadlock over credentials. 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 had a different political strategy in mind. He proposed to the Commons that it should summon the clergy and the nobles to join with the Third Estate—or to forfeit their rights as representatives of the nation.

This was a revolutionary move. Sieyès was not asking the deputies of the clergy and the nobles to join the Third Estate, but to recognise that they were all representatives of the French nation, a power that was complementary to the monarchy, as well as being its rival. The authority of Louis XVI had not only been challenged, it had been rejected by a group that saw itself as representing a different authority—the authority of the people.

By 10 June, the deputies of the Third Estate had decided to send a delegation to the First Estate. They hoped to encourage the more liberal deputies among the clergy to join the Third Estate. The delegation was led by Gui-Jean-Baptiste Target, 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.⁸

This was an astute political move, as the First Estate deputies were already divided: the upper clergy favoured separate voting, but many of the lower clergy identified with the Third Estate.

According to historian Simon Schama, 'it was in the Church, more than any other group in France, that the separation between rich and poor was most bitterly articulated'.⁹ Although the wealthiest bishops may have had an annual income of 50,000 *livres*, the standard annual stipend for a village priest was just 700 *livres*. These priests were not only impoverished, but they lived within their communities—unlike many of the upper clergy—and were well aware of the sufferings of the poor. Of the 303 clerical deputies, almost two-thirds were ordinary parish priests.¹⁰ Many of them were liberal in their thinking, and eager to join the Third Estate.

However, the majority of the clergy was reluctant to join with the 'Commons', as the Third Estate deputies now called themselves—and so the delay continued.

The other privileged estate, the nobles, were not keen to unite the three estates and, according to historian Georges Lefebvre, were 'horrified' by the idea that they could lose their status.

Georges Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France*

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 ...

DECLARATION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, 17 JUNE 1789

Declaration of National Assembly, 17 June 1789: 'The Assembly ... recognizes that [it] is already composed of deputies sent directly by at least ninety-six per cent of the nation ... and that it, and it alone, may interpret and present the general will of the nation ...'

On 12 June 1789, the Commons began the process of verification—but with a difference. The deputies were not verified on the basis of their estate, but as representatives of the nation. On 13 June, three members of the clergy joined the Third Estate. They were greeted with thunderous applause and shouts of approval. More clerics followed them on 14 June and, on 17 June, the Commons declared themselves the National Assembly of France:

The Commons

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.

Historian Michael Adcock claims that with this declaration, the Commons had 'both conceptualised the idea of the nation, and actually facilitated the momentous transfer of sovereignty from the King to the Nation'.¹¹

This declaration of the National Assembly was the critical moment in the constitutional revolution taking place among the deputies at Versailles.

THE EFFECTS OF LOUIS XVI'S INDECISION

The Declaration of 17 June marked the beginning of the real Revolution—and it was largely a result of Louis XVI's indecision. The king had not made any ruling in December 1788 about whether voting at the Estates-General would be by head or by estate, and had thus turned the issue into a dispute.

However, one reason the king had not intervened over the six weeks from May to June 1789 was that his eldest son, the seven-year-old dauphin, was dying of tuberculosis. The dauphin died on 4 June, after two years of illness. So during a critical period of public responsibility both the king and queen were suffering from deep personal grief.

But as Louis XVI had made no decision about voting, the Commons gradually hardened their position. If the king had agreed to common verification and voting by head, the deputies in the Commons would have had a meaningful political voice within an assembly that represented all three estates. Louis XVI's inaction inflated the issue, and the Commons gradually moved towards challenging the king's authority, urged on by a growing crowd of spectators from Paris who had little sympathy for the noble orders.

On 19 June, the clergy voted to join the National Assembly, and endorsed the declaration of 17 June. The spectators applauded them, calling out 'Long live the good Bishops! Long live the priests!'¹²

However, when the new National Assembly arrived at the *salle des Menus-Plaisirs* on 20 June to begin their discussion, as arranged, they found the doors locked and signs announcing that a *Séance Royale* (or Royal Session) would be held on 23 June, presided over by the king.

← **Source 7.XX** Cited in 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 did not have the money to buy 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.'

THE TENNIS COURT OATH, 20 JUNE 1789

J.H. Stewart: 'All members of this Assembly shall immediately take a solemn oath not to separate ... until the constitution of this kingdom is established and consolidated upon firm foundations.'

Find they were locked out of their meeting room, the Commons suspected that Louis XVI was about to take action against them in some way. Led by Parisian deputy Dr Joseph Guillotin, the deputies moved to a nearby indoor royal tennis court. There were no seats—just an armchair and a bench. Two of the deputies stayed at the door to keep out the crowds that tried to follow them in.

Sieyès suggested moving the whole National Assembly to Paris, but a young deputy from Grenoble named Jean-Joseph Mounier intervened. Mounier called on the deputies to swear an oath that they would never separate until France had a constitution. Each deputy took the oath individually in front of Jean-Sylvain Bailly—who was standing on a table that had been made by pulling a door from its hinges. Arms raised in a Roman salute, the 600 deputies swore the Tennis Court Oath. Only one man dissented. The oath said:

The Tennis Court Oath

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.

The Tennis Court Oath is historically significant. It was the first formal act of disobedience against the monarchy, and it was signed even by those members of the Commons who had opposed adopting the name National Assembly on 17 June. Signing the oath was a dramatic moment that took on iconic status within the Revolution, and it was immortalised by revolutionary painter Jacques-Louis David.

← *The Tennis Court Oath* by Auguste Couder, 1848.

DID YOU KNOW?

Royal tennis is played indoors using small racquets and balls made from cork. Royal tennis is older than lawn tennis, and is still played by enthusiasts today.

THE *SÉANCE ROYALE*, 23 JUNE 1789

Mirabeau: 'We shall not leave except by the force of bayonets.'

On 23 June 1789, Louis XVI announced at the *Séance Royale* that the decision made on 17 June by members of the Third Estate—that is, the decision to form the National Assembly—was null and void, and that all decisions made by them after that date were illegal and unconstitutional. He announced that the estates should meet separately unless he permitted them to meet together.

However, the king also announced some minor concessions:

- The question of equal taxation would 'be considered'.
- New taxes would only be levied with the consent of the Estates-General.
- Privileged tax status could be surrendered voluntarily, but otherwise all feudal dues, manorial dues and church tithes were to stay as they were.

Finally, Louis XVI made some promises. He would:

- extend the system of provincial assemblies to the whole of his kingdom
- abolish censorship of the press
- abolish the use of *lettres de cachet* for arbitrary arrest and imprisonment.

The king then ordered the deputies to disperse and to meet the next day in their separate estates. Then he withdrew, followed by the nobility and most of the clergy, who were not willing to challenge the king's authority.

However, the National Assembly deputies and their clerical supporters remained seated. When de Brézé, the Master of Ceremonies, ordered them to go, Mirabeau stood up and said, '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'.¹³ De Brézé was immediately backed up by Bailly and Sieyès. Bailly said: 'The assembled nation cannot be given orders.'¹⁴

The deputies of the National Assembly then took a vote: 493 deputies vowed to stay, and 34 voted to obey the king.¹⁵ Thus, the new National Assembly rejected royal authority, confirmed the Tennis Court Oath and proclaimed that its members were 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!'¹⁶

It was a huge victory for the National Assembly—and it was soon to be followed by another.

On 24 June, the soldiers sent to prevent the National Assembly from entering its meeting room shifted their loyalty to support the Assembly, telling Bailly: 'We too, are citizens.'¹⁷ On 25 June, forty-seven liberal nobles—including the king's cousin, the Duc d'Orléans—joined the National Assembly.

On 27 June, Louis XVI capitulated, and ordered the estates to meet in common and to vote by head. The nobility, Lafayette among them, with the rest of the clergy, joined the rebel deputies within the National Assembly. British traveller Arthur Young, writing in his diary on the events to 27 June, concluded: 'The whole revolution now seems over and the business complete.'¹⁸

However, in the eyes of Louis XVI and his ministers, the business was far from complete. They concluded that the failure of the *Séance Royale* on 23 June was Necker's fault. Necker had proposed the *Séance Royale*, as he hoped to persuade the king to

→ **Source 7.XX** Cited in John Hall Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution* (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 88.



CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 What did the deputies swear in the Tennis Court Oath?

CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE

- 1 Discuss the potential consequences if Louis XVI had decided to use the army to dissolve the Estates-General.
- 2 Outline the errors in judgement made by Louis XVI in the second half of June 1789.

make some concessions to the Third Estate at the Session. However, other royal ministers, persuaded by the king's brother, Artois, wanted Louis XVI to assert his authority and cancel the Third Estate's 'insubordinate' decrees. On 22 June, the queen added her support to Artois—and Necker was defeated. As a result, Necker was absent on the day of the Royal Session, and sent in his resignation. Afterwards, the king persuaded Necker to stay 'in the interests of public tranquility'.¹⁹

But now that royal authority had failed, Louis XVI's ministers advised him to quell the reform movement by sacking Necker and using armed force:

- 26 June—six regiments were ordered to Versailles.
- 1 July—ten regiments were moved from the provinces to the outskirts of Paris.

ESCALATING TENSIONS IN PARIS

Mirabeau: 'A large number of troops already surround us...These preparations for war are obvious to anyone and fill every heart with indignation.'²⁰

Even as Louis XVI had made concessions to the Third Estate, fear had increased that he would seek reprisals against the population. As the number of troops massed around the city grew, the government protested that the 18,000 troops massed around the city were there 'to protect Paris from disorder, not to overawe it'.²¹

The National Assembly was not sure of Louis XVI's intentions, and 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.'²²

The National Assembly petitioned the king to withdraw the troops, but Louis XVI refused. On 10 July he suggested that:

- the troops were there to protect the Assembly
- the deputies might need to be moved further from Paris if there were riots.

However, as fears grew, so did the determination of the National Assembly and the people of Paris to resist the king's authority.

A REVOLUTIONARY TRIGGER: NECKER'S DISMISSAL, 11 JULY 1789

On 11 July 1789, Jacques Necker was dismissed without notice.

Many people felt that Necker's dismissal was the Louis XVI's way of declaring war. Necker had always been popular with the people and had acted consistently since being reappointed financial controller in 1788. He had worked hard to limit the effect of the bread crisis by importing foreign grain, reimposing price controls and subsidising the cost of bread in Paris.

Louis' letter of dismissal arrived at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. It ordered Necker to leave Versailles secretly and return to Switzerland. By 5 o'clock, Necker and his wife had departed.

On the afternoon of 12 July, the news that Necker had been sacked reached the National Assembly and the Palais Royal. In Paris, frenzied crowds of people spilled

onto the streets and looted shops—particularly shops that sold guns. 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, Necker's dismissal brought a crowd of several thousand people to listen to speakers condemning the king's actions and calling for action.

One of the most vocal speakers was 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.²³

On 12 July, the monastery of St Lazare—which was used as a prison and a grain and arms store—was looted. Crowds released the prisoners, stole the grain and flour, then looted the building. The looters were joined by the *Gardes françaises*—an elite regiment of the French army.

The *Gardes françaises* had to decide whether to engage in battle or retreat. They retreated. But despite the retreat, rumours spread through the city that the king's troops were slaughtering Parisians. 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. The stones from the demolished buildings went into a growing pile, and would later be used against the troops. Historian Simon Schama has described that night as a 'largely unobstructed riot':

Simon Schama

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.

On 13 July the electors of Paris took over municipal power and formed a civil militia, the *Garde bourgeoise*, and over 12,000 men enrolled. The deputies of the National Assembly, fearing they might be closed down, kept a presence in the *salle des Menus-Plaisirs* on eight-hour shifts throughout the day and night. Reports came through that Mirabeau, Sieyès, Lafayette, Le Chapelier and Lameth were to be arrested, so they decided to stay overnight in the chamber, reasoning that their arrest there was less likely.²⁴

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

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Source 7.XX *The Beginning of the French Revolution, 12 July 1789*, by Jean-Baptiste Lesueur. The first uprising of the French Revolution in Paris was caused by the sacking of Jacques Necker. The busts of Necker and the Duc d'Orléans are paraded on spikes.

Source 7.XX Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1989), 387.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Marquis de Sade (from whom we get the word 'sadism') was a prisoner in the Bastille in July 1789. Having heard news of the unrest in Paris from his wife, he began to shout out to the crowd 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.



KEY INDIVIDUAL

JACQUES NECKER (1732–1804)

Source XXX *Jacques Necker* by Joseph-Siffred Duplessis, c. 1781.

Jacques Necker was a Protestant and citizen of Geneva who lived in France, and made his fortune from banking. He was regarded as a brilliant banker who was particularly successful in negotiating large loans.

In 1776, Necker was appointed to succeed Turgot, and he remained Director of Finances until 1781. At first, he won favour as he financed the American war by borrowing money rather than increasing taxes. Necker's intention was to balance the cost of the interest on loans by reforming the French financial system. Necker:

- introduced central accounting procedures—the first steps towards establishing a central treasury
- commissioned a survey of venal offices—aiming to replace them with salaried officials accountable to the king
- began the process of setting up provincial assemblies of landowners—with the aim of weakening the power of the parlements.

In 1781, Necker persuaded the king to allow him to publish a public account of France's finances—the *Compte rendu au roi*. This had never been done before, as France's financial arrangements were considered the king's private business. But Necker knew that publicity would make it easier to get loans, and he wanted to reassure individual investors and bankers in both France and Europe that France could repay the loans it was seeking.

Unfortunately, Necker had created many powerful enemies through his reforms—including the royal ministers for war, the navy and foreign policy—and he was forced to resign. Just like his predecessor, Turgot, all of his financial reforms were undone by his successor.

Necker kept himself in the public eye while he was out of office by writing a series of public letters that stirred up public opinion and attacked the reform proposals of one of his successors, de Calonne. But Necker was recalled in 1788, after France had reached a state of bankruptcy and the finance minister, Brienne resigned. Louis XVI believed that Necker was the only one who could restore the government's credit and raise new loans.

In 1789, during the opening session of the Estates-General, the deputies were disappointed with Necker's speech as he did not announce any new reforms. As the Estates-General continued, Louis XVI became furious with Necker, and blamed him for mismanaging royal strategy.

However, the French public believed in Necker's independence and integrity, and that he had kept away from the court factions at Versailles. On 11 July, Necker's carriage was seen leaving Paris. On 12 July, the news of Necker's dismissal was generally known on the streets. This acted as a major trigger for the storming of the Bastille on 14 July.

On 17 July, Louis XVI recognised the legitimacy of the Paris Commune, and announced that Necker was being recalled. Necker entered Paris in triumph—and then tried to accelerate the tax reform process. But faced with opposition from the National Constituent Assembly—which had its own ideas about tax reform—Necker resigned in September 1790 to general indifference, and returned to Geneva.

KEY POINTS

- Necker had a brilliant reputation as a banker who was expert in raising loans, and was Director General of Finances 1776–1781.
- Financed the American war through loans, rather than raising taxes. He introduced a series of reforms to meet interest payments.
- Dismissed in 1781 because of unpopularity with the court and royal ministers.
- Mounted public attacks on de Calonne's reforms in 1787 during the Assembly of Notables.
- Reappointed by Louis XVI when bankruptcy was declared in 1788, and gave advice over the running procedure for the Estates-General. Did not announce any reforms in his opening speech at the Estates-General.
- Dismissed from his position on 11 July 1789, which triggered the storming of the Bastille. He was later reappointed.
- Worked with the National Constituent Assembly. Attempted to push through tax reform and borrow further money. Resigned in September 1790.

THE FALL OF THE BASTILLE, 14 JULY 1789

Lord Dorset, British Ambassador to Paris: 'Thus ... the greatest Revolution ... has been effected with ... the loss of very few lives: from this moment we may consider France as a free country; the king a very limited monarch, and the nobility as reduced to a level with the rest of the nation.'

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, the Bastille held only seven prisoners: four counterfeiters, two 'lunatics' and one *débauché* (or 'person of abandoned moral values'). There was only one political prisoner. But to the unruly mob, the Bastille was a potential source of weapons and, more importantly, the gunpowder they needed for the muskets they had looted from the Hôtel des Invalides.

Armed with two cannon taken from the Hôtel des Invalides, the crowd marched on the Bastille. Once there, they raised a flag of truce and sent a deputation to demand that the governor, Marquis de Launay, hand over the arms and ammunition they wanted. The Marquis de Launay refused, but did make a concession: the cannon that directly overlooked the Rue Saint-Antoine would not be fired unless the Bastille itself came under attack. Having reached a compromise, the delegation withdrew.

Meanwhile, the crowd was concerned that the Marquis de Launay had detained their representatives. They had lowered the drawbridge that led into the inner courtyard and, as the delegation departed, around forty members of the crowd rushed into the courtyard.

Shots were fired—although it's not clear who fired first—and ninety-eight civilians died, and another seventy-eight were wounded, while six soldiers were killed.²⁵ Then the *Gardes françaises* arrived to join the rioters. Supported by a few hundred armed civilians, the *Gardes françaises* positioned five cannons taken that morning from the Invalides to fire on the courtyard gate.

At first, the Marquis de Launay threatened to blow up the Bastille rather than surrender it. However, his men persuaded him to surrender. At the same time, a delegation from the Hôtel de Ville (or 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.

The Marquis de Launay ordered the main drawbridge lowered, and was taken prisoner. Six members of his garrison had died defending the Bastille. Lieutenant Louis Deffle, one of a contingent of thirty-two Swiss Guards who had been sent to reinforce the Bastille, was one of those made prisoner. He later recalled what happened next.

A Swiss Guard recalls the fall of the Bastille

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.



Source 7.XX *The Taking of the Bastille*, anonymous engraving, 1789–1791.

Source 7.XX Christopher Hibbert, *The French Revolution* (UK: Penguin, 1980), 8.



Source 7.XX Destruction of the Bastille after the victory won over the enemies of liberty on July 14 1789, unattributed engraving, 1789.

Source 7.XX Reay Tannahill, *Paris in the Revolution: A Collection of Eye-Witness Accounts* (London: The Folio Society, 1996), 28.

Source 7.XX *C'est ainsi qu'on se venge des traîtres* (This is how we take revenge on traitors), 1789. French soldiers carry the heads of Marquis de Launay and Jacques de Flesselles on pikes.



HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Source 7.XX and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Identify the symbolic elements of this engraving—who do the individuals represent?
- 2 What is significant about the central character wielding a sword?
- 3 Who does the artist of this engraving wish to denigrate in this engraving? How does the artist convey this?
- 4 Analyse the significance of popular movements in challenging the existing order in 1789.

The Marquis de Launay was killed on his way to the Hôtel de Ville. An out-of-work cook named Desnot tried to stab him, and de Launay responded by kicking him in the testicles. 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.

Edward Rigby

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.

WHO STORMED THE BASTILLE?

Many thousands of people took to the streets on 14 July 1789. According to historian George Rudé most of the 600-strong crowd 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'.²⁶ (This militia was the *Gardes bourgeoise*, which would later become the National Guard.)

In terms of occupations, the members of the militia were craftsmen, joiners, cabinetmakers, locksmiths, cobblers, shopkeepers, jewellers, manual workers and labourers. The largest occupational group was cabinetmakers, of whom there were ninety-seven. Eighty were soldiers. The oldest person was seventy-two; the youngest only eight. There was only one woman, a laundress.

This group of people 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 public ceremonies held annually on 14 July to celebrate

what has been achieved by the Revolution—the *Fêtes de la Fédération* (Festivals of Federation).

THE SYMBOLIC POWER OF THE FIRST *JOURNÉE*

The activities of the Paris crowd on the *journée* (day) of the Fall of the Bastille had greater significance than demolishing a symbol of tyranny and protecting the National Assembly from the threat of foreign troops. The crowd itself took *agency* (or initiative) for the first time in the French Revolution.

Afterwards, the people of Paris considered they had 'saved' the Revolution, and protected the work of the National Assembly from being destroyed by the king. They were proud of their actions and content—but then they came to expect benefits from the Revolution. The people began to understand that they had power if they acted as one.

From July 1789, the Paris crowd began to take on an identity and would intervene at crucial moments in a series of revolutionary *journées*. In particular, the radicalisation of the Paris crowd would drive the Revolution forward during the years 1792–94.

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 Louis XVI's diary, written in his own hand, the entries for July 1789 read: '13th, Nothing. 14th, Nothing.'²⁷ The king was a keen hunter, so these entries likely refer to his lack of hunting success on those days than to political events.

The night the Bastille was stormed, Louis XVI was woken from his sleep by his Grand Master of the Wardrobe, the Duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, who told him about the day's events in Paris. 'It is a revolt,' Louis is reported to have said, to which the Duc replied, 'No, Sire, it is a revolution'.²⁸

These two anecdotes present a picture of a man unaware of the dangers posed to his throne by a people's Revolution, but this needs to be thought about in context. Louis XVI was a divine right monarch—he believed that God had appointed him to rule. He would not have considered that a 'revolt' in Paris would challenge his position or his royal authority. It is likely that he viewed the 'revolt' as yet another working-class disturbance, like the bread riots, rather than the first step towards a great revolution.

However, on 15 July, when Louis XVI visited the National Assembly, he seemed less confident about his fate. His visit was 'so astonishing, so disconcertingly naked, that it amounted to abdication'.²⁹ According to historian Simon Schama, the king arrived at the National Assembly on foot, with no retinue and not even a single guard. He was flanked by his brothers, the Comte de Provence and the Comte d'Artois. Louis XVI then:

- announced that Necker would be recalled
- confirmed that the remaining royal troops would be withdrawn from Paris
- denied he had any plans against the deputies of the Assembly.³⁰

The capitulation of Louis XVI sent a strong signal to the conservative nobility.

DID YOU KNOW?

Stones from the Bastille were made into jewellery, and became a popular way for women to demonstrate their support for the Revolution.

journée a day of violent crowd action that achieves political change

agency initiative, activity of an individual or group to shape events and gain results

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.

Source 7.XX This 1789 engraving by James Gillray shows the triumphant return of Necker. The aristocrats holding Necker aloft have been identified by historian Michael Adcock as Lafayette and the Duc d'Orléans.



FURTHER URBAN AND RURAL UNREST

The crowd in front of the king (17 July 1789): 'Vive le roi! Vive le nation!'

THE MUNICIPAL REVOLUTIONS: PARIS, 13–17 JULY

On 13 July, the day before the fall of the Bastille, a new municipal government had been formed in Paris. It was an attempt by the electors—the men who had chosen the Third Estate deputies for Paris—to prevent Paris falling into a state of anarchy.

Of the 407 electors, 180 were lawyers, which gave the new 'permanent committee' an overwhelmingly bourgeois character. Jean-Sylvain Bailly, who had been the first president of the new National Assembly, presided over this new local government as Mayor of Paris.

On 15 July, a National Guard was formed to keep order and to defend Paris from attack if needed. The National Guard was under the command of Lafayette, the hero of the American war. The guards wore cockades (ornamental ribbons) that combined the red and blue colours of Paris with the white of the monarchy.

On 17 July Louis XVI, escorted by Lafayette, came into Paris to reaffirm the promises he had made to the National Assembly on 15 July to the National Assembly, that:

- the remaining royal troops would withdraw from the city of Paris
- the deputies of the National Assembly need not fear for their personal safety.

The king was greeted on the steps of the Hôtel de Ville (town hall) by Bailly and accepted the revolutionary cockade offered to him.

After formally endorsing the appointments of Lafayette and Bailly, Louis XVI was persuaded to appear on the balcony, wearing for the first time the new revolutionary cockade of blue, white and red. The crowd cheered: 'Vive le roi! Vive la nation!'

At this moment, the constitutional monarchy of France was born.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Why is 14 July considered France's national day? Why is it so important?
- 2 If the crowd was so quick to chant 'Vive le roi – long live the King', then who or what were they protesting against?

DISCUSSION

As a class or in a small group, discuss the following questions:

- The fall of the Bastille is not the first or last day of the revolution. Discuss why this day is celebrated more than others. Could you argue that other days were more important?
- To what extent was the direct action taken by the Paris crowds responsible for the continued existence of the National Assembly?
- Was the Paris crowd an ally of the Estates-General or a potential threat to its existence?



Source 7.XX *The King Arriving at the Hôtel de Ville, July 17 1789* by Pierre-Gabriel Berthault and François-Louis Prieur.

THE RURAL REVOLT CONTINUES

However, popular unrest was not confined to Paris. People in the provinces followed the events in Paris closely; they 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 in the provinces had led to inflated prices and fed into general discontent with the actions of royal authorities. As tensions grew in Paris, they were matched by unrest in the provinces. Among the unrest in the larger cities:

- Nantes and Lyon—crowds invaded the tax offices
- Rennes—the armoury was invaded and weapons stolen, which forced royal troops to surrender
- 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 Louis XVI. Aristocrats were forced to give up their venal posts or risk attack. And, just as in Paris, there were attacks on grain stores and grain transports and those who dealt in grain were under threat.

People everywhere 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, 20 JULY–6 AUGUST 1789

From late 1788 and the writing of the *cahiers de doléances*, many peasants had refused to pay tax. Peasant unrest had been heightened by the bad harvests of 1788, the threat of starvation and the increased burden of feudal dues—and this led to a breakdown of old rules.

In March and April 1789, the peasants began to revolt against the honorific privileges of the nobility. As food became scarcer, there were more local uprisings. Starving peasants:

- grazed their stock on common land
- broke down enclosures
- refused to pay their tithes and feudal dues.

During the weeks after the fall of the Bastille, a new element was added to the revolutionary mix. People in the countryside became possessed by what the historian Georges Lefebvre calls 'the Great Fear'—the belief that the nobility were plotting to destroy the revolution.

The Great Fear was partly caused by:

- the fear that peasants would be punished for their actions
- the rapidly increasing number of beggars
- the arrival in country areas of soldiers redeployed from the capital.

According to rumours, the nobility were going to hire bands of 'brigands' (robbers) who would seek out rebellious peasants and kill anyone who had supported the revolution. Nobles were fleeing to neighbouring countries, and this only added to the fear—as the nobles were expected to return with foreign troops. In towns and villages, people began to form into groups and to arm themselves.

Historian Georges Lefebvre claims that the Great Fear was based on fear of the brigand:

Georges Lefebvre on the Great Fear

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 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.

There were many rumours about invading foreign armies. People claimed to have seen battalions of Austrians within the French borders.³¹ These rumours were just as unfounded as rumours that nobles were hiring brigands to beat up peasants.

Historians investigating the specific path of the Great Fear show that it broke out in pockets, with news travelling from village to village at several kilometres an hour—that is, at walking pace.³² Then, when neither the brigands nor the foreign troops arrived, armed peasants struck out at their local nobility.

TARGETS OF PEASANT VIOLENCE

In the 1780s, a French lord could collect monetary and material payments from his peasants, and enjoyed a raft of privileges (see pages XX for a refresher).

Peasants who were struggling to survive deeply resented the nobles' honorific privileges. They looked with anger at the pigeons and rabbits that 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'.³³

Simon Schama

... 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.

Source 7.XX Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1989), 323.

As well as the game that were hunted and trapped, dovecots, wine presses and ovens were destroyed, as they were symbols of exploitation that was no longer tolerated. Today, we might consider such actions as minor crimes, but in the late eighteenth century they were punished with flogging, branding and banishment, which would separate the peasant from his family, his farm and his neighbourhood—and most likely condemn his family to starvation. These game riots are evidence of the deep anger of the peasants in 1789, and perhaps an indicator of their desperation.

Source 7.XX Georges Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France*, trans. Joan White (London: New Loft Books, 1973), 210.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1973, historian 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.'



Source 7.XX Destruction of the tithe barns and attacks on nobles in order to destroy the *terriers*.

Groups of peasants attacked the châteaux and manor-houses of the wealthy. Their goal was to destroy the *terriers*—documents that listed the dues they owed to feudal lords. By destroying the records, they hoped to avoid payments in future. In some cases, the houses were burned 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 that was the cause of anger, not the master.

The real significance of the Great Fear was that it:

- armed the people of the countryside
- pressured the nobility to reform.

Historian Georges Lefebvre claims the Great Fear allowed the peasantry to realise its strength:

Lefebvre on the Great Fear

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.

Source 7.XX Georges Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France*, trans. Joan White (London: New Loft Books, 1973), 211.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 What was the Great Fear?
- 2 Why were honorific privileges so deeply resented by peasants?

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?

THE NIGHT OF 'PATRIOTIC DELIRIUM,' 4 AUGUST 1789

Simon Schama: '... the creation of a cult of self-dispossession ... [which] became a demonstration of honest patriotism.'

When news reached Paris about the attacks on the châteaux, the National Assembly met to discuss how to re-establish order. A committee was set up to investigate the causes of the attacks and to offer a solution. The committee's spokesman reported back about the 'disgraceful brigandage':

Report to the National Assembly

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.

Source 7.XX William Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 115.

THE YEAR 1789: HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

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 National Assembly could consider the necessary reforms.

But it was all too late, as the more progressive members of the nobility had already worked out—to save anything, they needed to voluntarily give up their privileged status. 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 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 Vicomte 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 that had been sacred for hundreds of years:

- a bishop proposed an end to hunting rights
- a nobleman called for the abolition of tithes
- country nobles were deprived of manorial rights
- courtiers were stripped of their pensions
- parish priests lost their fees for church services
- bishops were told they could no longer have multiple parishes
- towns gave up municipal privileges
- magistrates declared that justice should be free.

Venal offices were swept aside and replaced with 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'.³⁴



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. However, the reality was a little different—another three years would pass before the National Convention abolished the last remains of the feudal regime.

HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Source 7.XX and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 How does the artist celebrate the new unity of the estates?
- 2 Explain the symbolism of the objects being destroyed.
- 3 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. Use evidence to support your response.

Historians such as George Rudé and Albert Soboul see the French Revolution as a struggle between classes, based on changes in the distribution of wealth. Soboul's judgement on the period up to the Decrees of 5–11 August 1789 was that the peasant revolution 'ruled out any possibility of compromise with the feudal aristocracy and forced the bourgeois revolution onwards'.³⁵ Although George Rudé came to a different conclusion, he also 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'.³⁶

However, both Rudé and Soboul ignore the vital role that the liberal nobility and the radicalised clergy played in the revolution.

William Doyle argues that the turning point in the Revolution was when Louis XVI followed advice not to use armed troops to restore order, as it led to the monarchy losing power. As a result, the people of Paris involved in the uprising realised they had a clear political role to play.

William Doyle

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.

Peter McPhee also argues that popular protest became politicised as a result of the events of mid-1789.

Peter McPhee

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.

Notably, McPhee makes a 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 aims, most of the deputies viewed such actions with horror. Differences in beliefs and values were not only to affect the relationship between the National Assembly and the politically active urban workers, but lead to sharp divisions within the Assembly and between Paris and the provinces.

Source 7.XX William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 111.

Source 7.XX Peter McPhee, *The French Revolution 1789–1799* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002), 62.

CONTINUED ...

Simon Schama has focused directly on the outcomes of 1789:

Simon Schama

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.

Schama concludes 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 de Launay and de 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:

François Furet

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.

The outcomes of revolutions are never simple.

In destroying one form of government and social hierarchy, revolutions create different structures—and 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 new challenges emerge.

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Using Sources 7.XX–7.XX, other historical interpretations and your own knowledge, respond to the following.

- 1 Summarise the main views put forward by these historians about the outcomes of the French Revolution.
- 2 Work out whether the historians see the outcomes of the revolution in positive, negative or neutral terms. Justify your decision with quotes from the extracts provided.
- 3 Determine your own opinion on the outcomes of the revolution. Which of these historians best sums up your view?

KEY SUMMARY POINTS

- The meeting of the Estates-General at Versailles in May and June 1789 was a disappointment to all three estates.
- Disagreement over voting by head or by estate led the Third Estate to form their own National Assembly. On 20 June, when the National Assembly deputies were locked out of their meeting hall, they took an oath—the Tennis Court Oath—and vowed not to disband until they had written a constitution for France.
- Louis XVI called a *Séance Royale* to give his views on decisions made at the Estates-General.
- Meanwhile, as the price of bread soared to its peak and Louis XVI built up 30,000 troops around Paris, the people of Paris took up arms on 14 July and seized control of the royal fortress: the Bastille.
- The king could not rely on his troops, as many of them sided with the rioters.
- The Parisian crowd saved the National Assembly from closure, thus forcing the king to accept a constitutional monarchy.
- Legislative authority was placed in the hands of elected representatives of the people.
- Peasants attacked property and feudal records during the rural revolt and the Great Fear.
- On the night of 4 August, the nobility and the clergy voluntarily renounced their feudal privileges.
- Financial and honorific privileges were removed, and serfdom was abolished.
- Feudal and seigneurial dues were abandoned by the privileged estate; by the monarchy in the case of the *corvée*, by the Catholic Church in the form of tithes and by the landowners in the form of *banalités*.

ESSAY

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

Choose one of the following individuals and discuss their role in challenging or maintaining the power of the existing order:

- Louis XVI
- Marie-Antoinette
- Jacques Necker
- Abbé Sieyès
- Marquis de Lafayette.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

- 1 Evaluate the significance of Louis XVI's political beliefs and actions in 'causing' the revolution. Use evidence to support your response.
- 2 Evaluate the significance of Necker's dismissal as a cause of revolution. Use evidence to support your response.

CAUSES OF REVOLUTION

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

- Long-term causes of revolutionary action, including economic and political crises

- Ideas that challenged divine right monarchy
- Public anger at entrenched social and economic inequalities
- The actions of key movements and individuals, including Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette, the Society of Thirty, the Duc d'Orleans and Abbé Sieyès.

EXTENDED RESPONSE

Write a 250–350-word extended response to four of the topics below. Each response should include a clear contention, arguments supported by relevant evidence and a clear conclusion.

- Explain why the divine-right, autocratic monarchy was so unpopular in France by 4 August 1789.
- Explain the significance of the economic and fiscal challenges faced by France by 4 August 1789.
- Explain how the Assembly of Notables and other nobles contributed to short-term causes of revolution.
- Evaluate the significance of the French clergy as contributors to social and political change by August 1789.
- Evaluate the harvest crisis of 1788–89 as a turning point.
- Analyse the political consequences of the government's failure to reform by August 1789.

➔ **Source 7.XX** Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (UK: Penguin, 1989), 859.

➔ **Source 7.XX** J. Markof, cited in G. Kates, ed., *The French Revolution: Recent Debates and New Controversies* (London: Routledge, 1998), 244.