

The French Revolution was, like most revolutions, one of great upheaval & turmoil. Many groups, both social & political had their own goals and agendas in either supporting or opposing the Revolution.

Of course, the one "group" with the strongest reason to oppose a Revolution was the crown. Louis XVI, as an absolute monarch, believed he was destined to rule by divine right. Unfortunately, the crown was in serious trouble, in more ways than one. Financially, the crown was deep in debt and verging on bankruptcy. Abroad, France had expended many resources to support the American Revolution against the British. As a result, France owed money to banks in several other countries. One-half of the country's budget went just to pay the interest on these loans.

At home, the crown was plagued by

✓ clergymen were, for the most part, tax exempt. Many of the upper bourgeoisie enjoyed little or no taxation, also. Louis' tax collectors were, for the most part, private businessmen who kept a large portion of the money they received in taxes and, on occasion, made "advances" to the crown from these monies. What few taxes that actually made it to the crown were collected from the lower bourgeoisie and peasant who could ill afford taxation.

For help in this financial crisis, Louis XVI turned to his financial adviser a man named Colonne. Colonne proposed a land tax proportional to the value of land, a move that would force the nobility to assume part of the country's tax burden. Of course, the nobility refused to have any part of the plan.

Colonne then persuaded Louis XVI

to convene the Assembly of Nobles in an effort to solve this financial crisis. The Assembly denounced Colonne as trying to remove the nobles' privileges and was forced to Resign.

Louis XVI's next step, and perhaps his fatal mistake, was to convene the Estates General. This had not happened in many decades. The Estates General was comprised of the 1st Estate (the clergy), the 2nd Estate (the nobles), and the 3rd Estate (everyone else).

The nobility, or 2nd Estate, saw this as an opportunity to further their own agenda. The nobles wished only to keep all their privileges and, at the same time, weaken the crown. They believed that the 1st Estate, or clergy, would side with them in voting against the 3rd Estate. Unfortunately for them, this was not true.

17th. ch. 201 + 202. Louis XVI.

Representation, they were given twice the delegates. Their numbers now equalled the 1st & 2nd Estates combined. But, the Nobles wanted to keep the vote by order rather than by head. When many clergy, and even some nobility, joined with the 3rd Estate to form the National Assembly, the 2nd Estate knew their attempt to control the 3rd Estate had failed. Many nobles fled the country.

The upper bourgeoisie, which now controlled the National Assembly, was then locked out of the meeting place. Not to be daunted, they convened in a nearby indoor tennis court. There, the Assembly swore the "Tennis Court Oath", not to disband until they had written a Constitution for France. Thus, was born the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, which guaranteed that all men are born free and equal.

The Declaration also guaranteed the freedom of Religion, freedom of the press, equal taxation and equality under the law. France now had a Constitutional monarchy. But, the Revolution was just beginning.

The lower bourgeoisie, while supporting the National Assembly, were still plagued by high prices, food shortages and unequal taxation. When Louis XVI appeared to not accept the Assembly and its new constitution, the lower bourgeoisie feared an attack by the crown on the Assembly. They had to protect themselves and their families. To do so, they raided places where arms and grains were stored. The most famous armory to be raided was the Bastille.

On 14 July 1789, the Bastille, both a prison and an armory, was attacked by thousands of citizens in the

lower Bourgeoisie. One hundred armed citizens were killed before the guards and officials surrendered but the Bastille had fallen.

Worried that Louis XVI would try to escape the country's gain help from foreign sources, thousands of Parisians, most by women, marched on the Palace at Versailles. There, they seized the King's his family, forcing them to return to Paris, where they were placed on "house arrest". Louis XVI was now a prisoner of the Revolution.

The National Assembly changed their name to the Convention and new delegates were elected. The Convention was soon split by two factions, the Jacobins and the more moderate Girondins. The Convention formed the Committee for Public Safety and the Jacobins wrestled control of the Convention (and the Committee) from the Girondins and

✓ had many arrested and executed. The Committee for Public Safety, led by a man named Robespierre, tried and convicted Louis XVI of treason. In Jan. of 1793, he was guillotined.

✓ Robespierre wanted to create a "Republic of virtue" through political reeducation of the French. To do so, he began the Reign of Terror, perhaps the bloodiest part of the Revolution.

Revolutionary armies were formed to control the distribution of grain and hunt down hoarders. Tribunals were formed throughout the country to try enemies of the state. One such tribunal tried, convicted & executed Marie Antoinette in Oct 1793.

Robespierre also formed a new civic religion, a "cult of reason", and abolished all churches. Soon, it became obvious to the Convention that Robespierre was out of control.

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✓ The Reign of Terror ended with Robespierre's arrest and execution in 1794. But, France still had a long way to go.

✓ A new government, the Directory, took control but still suffered turmoil, international wars and food shortages. Not until 1799, when Napoleon took control, would France's Revolution be over. Tens of thousands lost their lives.

Perhaps the bloodiest Revolution in history, this period changed the lives of people in France, and world-wide, forever.

very good essay