Grade 10 - History
Topic 3

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION 1789
The French Revolution Timeline of Events

Until 1789 rule by Kings

States Generals
Called 1789

Fall of the Bastille,
July 1789

New Constitution
1789 - 1791

Republic
1792

Extremists in
Power 1793

Reign of Terror
1793 - 1794

The Directory
1795

Napoleon First
Consul
1799

King Louis XVI of France
[http://www.biography.com/people/louis-xvi-9386943]

Liberté • Égalité • Fraternité
RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

Napoleon Bonaparte
[http://www.biography.com/people/napoleon-9420291]
CONDITIONS IN FRANCE BEFORE 1789

The French Revolution was the result of conditions in France in the century preceding 1789. The causes are usually considered under the following headings:

POLITICAL CAUSES

A. **THE WORKING OF THE GOVERNMENT**

The government was **despotic**, i.e. the King had absolute power. However, there were two other powerful organisations in France:

i. **The power of the Church**
   a. The Catholic Church owned a **large amount of land**.
   b. It was very **wealthy**.
   c. It was not subjected to ordinary laws; it had its own legal system.
   d. It did not pay official taxes but gave ‘presents’ to the state on a voluntary basis.
   e. It was socially and educationally very important.

ii. **The Parlements of France**
   a. These were **special courts of law** that had the right to register all and therefore could refuse to register a law made by the King.
   b. The King could use his power of ‘Lit de justice’ whereby he could in theory force the Parlements to register the law, but in fact he was afraid to use this power in case he upset the Parlements.
   b. The King nominated the members of the Royal Council and they were responsible to him.
   c. The King and the Royal Council attended to **all matters of administration and the result was chaos**.
   d. The provinces of France were administered by **Royal Intendants appointed by the King** and therefore responsible to him.
   e. Although France had a **States – General (Parliament)** it had not met since 1614 and therefore the people of the country had no say in how the country was governed.
   f. Opposition to the King was punished by ‘**Lettre de Cachet**’ which permitted imprisonment without a trial for an indefinite period. The King also had the right to confiscate private property.

B. **ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE**

a. The King ruled by proclamation.
   b. There was no uniform system of laws in France. Therefore an offence in one area was permitted in another area, leading to great confusion.
   c. The supreme court of justice was the **Parlement of Paris** whose members were paid magistrates.
C.  **THE CHARACTER OF THE KING**

This system depended on a strong King. Louis XVI was not a strong King. He was well-meaning but very weak. His greatest fault was his inconsistency which resulted in the fact that he followed a vacillating policy – he introduced reforms and then withdrew them, he appointed ministers and then dismissed them. After the meeting of the States General this policy led to his downfall.

Many historian claims that his wife, Marie Antoinette influenced her husband in such a way that she was responsible for some of his worst mistakes. The people of France hated her.

II  **SOCIAL CAUSES**

The years before the French Revolution were called the time of the Ancien Régime (meaning ‘The Old Rule’). The people of France were divided into groups and these groups were completely cut off from one another. At the head of the State was the King and under him were three “Estates” as follows:

1.  **The First Estate of the Clergy**

The Upper Clergy, the Bishops, etc were very rich and owned one fifth of all the land in France. They also received money from a tax called the Tithe which was paid on farm produce and this was between one twelfth and one twentieth of all the food produced in France. They also received money on property owned by rich people on which a church tax was charged. They themselves did not pay any taxes at all, but they were expected to make voluntary contributions which of course were usually avoided. At the time of the Revolution, they numbered about 130 000.

The Upper Clergy spent much time attending the King. They had no sympathy for the common people and many of them did not believe in the religion which they preached. They were even allowed to govern themselves with their own laws and this explains why so many people turned against religion during the Revolution.

On the other hand, the Lower Clergy such as the parish priests worked hard and were very poor. For this reason they sympathised with the lower classes. Altogether the Clergy constituted about 0.5% of the population.

2.  **The Second Estate of Nobles**

Before the Revolution, this Estate numbered about 400 000 or 1.5% of the population. During the Middle Ages, the Nobles carried out duties, some of which were very important and in exchange they had been given privileges, but during the 18th Century they had very few duties, but still kept all the privileges. Many of them stayed at Versailles, the Royal Palace, in order to be near the King from whom they asked favours. The wealthier ones were land lords who owned three tenths of the land of France, but they never went near their tenants who were ruled by managers who were often both harsh and dishonest.

The Nobles held all the high positions in the government and in the Army and Navy. Sometimes their intellect did not justify this. (This did not apply to the Artillery where it was essential to have properly trained officers and this is how Napoleon, who was not a Nobleman, managed to become a French Officer). Pay in the Army and Navy was very poor and the Nobleman-officer was not allowed to do any other work, so many of them were really very short of money. However, they did not have to pay taxes except indirect ones which they usually managed to avoid and those of them who owned farms received dues from the tenants (and also had hunting rights over their farms).
3. **THE THIRD ESTATE**

This Estate was divided into two groups:

i  **The Bourgeoisie and**

ii **The Peasants**

i  **The Bourgeoisie (3 million)**

These people formed the middle class. They were mostly business and professional men such as lawyers, doctors, merchants, bank managers, etc. They had no sympathy for the peasants, but they were nevertheless important to them because they were the best educated people in the country and the only ones who read the books which attacked the Ancien Regime. (The Nobles did not want to read such books; the Clergy were not allowed to read them and the peasants could not read – they were usually illiterate).

The Bourgeoisie had many grievances:

a. Because they were not privilege, they could not hold high positions in the Army, Navy or Church.

b. Although the business men were often wealthy they had no say in the running of the country.

c. They had no freedom of speech, press or religion and they could be arrested simply by the power of a Lettre De Cachet.

d. They resented the many restrictions on trade such as the Guilds and the Custom dues.

The leaders of the Revolution were drawn from this class largely because they felt that they should have a proper share in a government, which was denied them.

ii  **The Peasants (22 million)**

This was the lower class of the Third Estate. They were nearly all small farmers who had little or no education and who had to work very hard to make a living.

They represented the bulk of the population of France and carried a crushing load of taxation because although they had the lowest incomes they paid most of the taxes. They possessed one third of the country’s land, but paid 82% of the land’s income tax, e.g.:

a. They paid a direct tax to the state (the Taille). This was usually half of their earnings.

b. They also had to pay a salt tax (the Gabelle) i.e. every person over 7 years of age had to buy 7lbs of salt per annum.

c. The peasants paid a Tithe to the Church.

d. They paid feudal dues to the Nobles.

e. They paid the Banalite for using the landlord’s wine press and mill.

f. They were forced to work on the roads for a fortnight every year by a law – called the Corvee.
In addition

g. The peasants were not allowed to hunt or fish even on their own land because this privilege belonged to the Nobles alone. They were unable to claim for any damage done to their property and were not allowed to fence their land.

h. They could be conscripted into the Army in which they were forced to serve six years, (unless they bought themselves out.)

Even so, the French peasants were much better off than the people in Poland and Russia, many of whom were serfs with no rights at all.

iii ECONOMIC CAUSES

The Government received the following taxes:

1. The Property tax from which the Clergy and Noblemen were exempt.
2. The Indirect taxes such as the Gabelle.
3. The Customs Duties.

But the finances of France were in a bad state for the following reasons:

1. EXEMPTIONS

The Nobles were free from the property tax and could usually avoid the other taxes. The Wealthy middle class could buy exemptions, so most of the state taxes fell onto the poor people who already paid taxes to the Church and the Nobles and who could not afford to be taxed anyway.

2. THE SYSTEM OF TAX COLLECTION

The peasants had to pay a crushing burden – over 80% of their income in some cases, yet the state was still not receiving sufficient money. Tax collection was carried out by “farmers” for a fixed sum which usually meant that the state received only one third of what was paid by the populace. There was no standard system of tax collecting.

3. TRADE GUILDS

These restricted industry by keeping it in the hands of small groups – much to the annoyance of business men at large.

4. THE EXTRAVAGANCE OF PREVIOUS KING

When Louis XVI came to the throne, he took over heavy debts because the last two kings had taken part in long and expensive wars. Louis XIV had also spent a huge fortune on building the enormous Palace of Versailles and Louis XV had wasted much money on court favourites.

5. THE AMERICAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

France had fought in this war on the side of the colonists and now had a debt of £ 50 000 000 to pay (R 1 000 000 000).
6. **THE COST OF COLLECTING TAXES WAS HIGH** – e.g. one third of Gabelle was spent on troops to prevent salt smuggling.

7. During **7 YEARS WARS (1756 – 1763)** France lost her colonial Empire in Canada and India, and therefore income from colonial trade was lost.

8. The government borrowed money. Her **DEBT** was so great that half state income per annum was used to pay the interest on loans.

9. In 1788 a **FREE TRADE TREATY** was signed with England. Cheap English goods were sold in France. This was a great blow to French Industry and many factories were forced to close down leading to even greater loss to the French Government.

**ATTEMPTS TO REFORM THE FINANCES OF FRANCE**

The King did make changes to economise but he was weak and did not want to incur the wrath of the Church and the Nobles. In his attempts to reform, he employed the following:

1. **TURGOT** (1774 – 1776)

   He was called the Controller-General. He supported the Physiocrats who believed in free trade and the abolition of tolls and Guilds. He was vigorously opposed by the Nobles as he attempted to save money by applying stringent economy measures, particularly with regard to court expenditure. He was dismissed at the insistence of Marie Antoinette.

2. **NECKER** (1776 – 1781)

   He was called the Director of France and he carried out a strict economy.

   He published a balance sheet which showed that the American War of Independence and the greed of the Nobles had destroyed France. For this he too was dismissed on the Queen’s orders.

3. **CALONNE** (1781 – 1788)

   He tried to re-instate Turgot’s policy by increasing taxation and distributing it more evenly. But the Nobles were not prepared to make sacrifices and he was dismissed.

4. **BRIENNE** (a few months of 1788)

   He found that he could do nothing because of the opposition ‘in high places’ and so he resigned.

5. **NECKER** (recalled 1788 – 1789)

   When he returned he found France to be bankrupt. There was also a food shortage and thousands of people were starving.

   Necker insisted on summoning the States-General.

   He hoped that this would bring about a peaceful solution to the problem, but actually it proved to be the starting point of the French Revolution.
iv. INTELLECTUAL CAUSES

a. MONTESQUIEU (1689 – 1755)

A student of politics who had a brilliant academic mind.
He criticized the French form of government and praised the British constitution because it gave liberty to the individual.
He studied the various parts of the government and the functions of these parts, e.g. parliament, kings, judges, etc.
His two books, ‘Persian Letters’ and ‘The Spirit of the Law’ played an important part in fermenting the revolution, as many revolutionary theories had their origins in its pages.

b. VOLTAIRE (1694 – 1779)

A brilliant historian, author and dramatist.
He attacked the Church because he considered it the enemy of progress and enlightenment. (He remained a Christian.)
He was not a democrat.
He did not believe in social equality and looked to the autocrats to introduce the necessary reforms. “I would rather be ruled by one lion than by a hundred rats.”
The Church could not forgive him for his criticism and he fled the country to avoid arrest.
He lived most of his life in exile or on France’s borders.
When he returned to Paris he was hero-worshipped for he had fought injustice so bravely.

c. ROUSSEAU (1712 – 1778)

A poet and a musician who preached the equality of man.
His greatest political work ‘Du Contrat Social’ sketches his ideas of the basis of government.
He suggested that France rid herself of the monarchy for the King had become a tyrant.
He said that the ruler got his power not from God, but from the people.
Rousseau was largely responsible for the Spirit of the Revolution.

d. DIDEROT AND THE ENCYCLOPAEDISTS

This group led by Diderot did much to spread new ideas. There were 34 volumes in which the progressive ideas of the time were made available to the reading public in a condensed form. Many philosophers contributed articles which criticised the conditions of the Ancien Regime and the power of the Church. Diderot demanded reforms in administration, the system of taxation and the laws.

e. QUESNAY AND THE PHYSIOCRATS

This group’s particular field of criticism was the economic situation prevailing under the Feudal system. They claimed that France’s prosperity lay in the hands of the farmers who should be freed, especially from oppressive taxation. Furthermore they advocated abolishment of Church ownership of land, called for the taxation of the First and Second Estates and pressed for free trade (without State interference).
OTHER FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO A REVOLUTION

1. **AMERICAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE**

   France sent an army to help the Americans win their independence. French soldiers returning from this war were full of ideas about liberty and democracy. They realised that it was possible to overthrow an unpopular and oppressive government by revolution.

2. **FAMINE, COLD AND ECONOMIC DISTRESS**

   The harvest of 1788 was a failure. Wheat became scarce and expensive. Few peasants could afford to buy wheat and they starved. This was followed by a bitterly cold winter 1788/89 when rivers froze throughout France.

   Many townsmen were unemployed as a result of the Free Trade Treaty with England. The numbers of poor, cold, starving people in Paris grew as country people flocked to the city in search of food and shelter. They became the Paris ‘mob’ – bored, restless and easily led.

A diagram summarizing the causes of the French Revolution:

[http://www.topicscape.com/mindmaps/46]
FAMINE AND COLD
- 1788 harvest failure
- 1788/9 bitterly cold winter
- Townsmen unemployed
- Poor cold starving people = Paris ‘mob’

SOCIAL
- Feudal system
- 3 Estates
  - First Clergy - privileges
  - Second Nobility
  - Third Bourgeoisie - rich wants rights
- Peasants – poor attached to land

POLITICAL
- Absolute monarch
  (Louis XVI made laws and passed judgements)
- Old Order
  (Divine right of Kings)
- Highly centralised despotic government
- Ruled by royal edict
- Lettre de Cachet

ECONOMIC
- France bankrupt
- Nobility live in luxury (Versailles)
- Wars
- Poor system of taxation

CAUSES OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

RELIGIOUS
- Church riddled with corruption
- Church participated in suppressing people
- Church duties neglected
- Division between upper & lower clergy

AMERICAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE
- Soldiers return from war-ideas about liberty & democracy
- Saw possible to overthrow oppressive government

INTELLECTUAL
- Ideas (Philosophers)
  - Montesquieu
  - Voltaire
  - Diderot
  - Rousseau
- All men are equal must be free and have Rights within the law
**EVENTS IN FRANCE : 1789**

**MAY 5** The States General met at Versailles. Representation was: First Estate 300; Second Estate 300; Third Estate 600. The Third Estate was disappointed to find that the three Estates were meeting separately. This meant that any reforms suggested by them could be outvoted 2 – 1.

### The States General

- Some texts also refer to it as the Estates General
- Meeting similar to an SRC meeting at school where issues were addressed and sometimes resolved.

#### Why was the States General called?

Necker the director of France at the time had convinced Louis XVI to call the States General as he thought it would resolve the peace in France and settle the increasing anger of the peasants. France was in utter turmoil at this point and the peasants had lost their patience with the government.

#### What happened during the meeting?

- Had not met since 1614
- First meeting of new century was on 5 May 1789
- 1201 representatives summoned to the great hall of Versailles and almost double that in spectators.
- Representatives were summoned at 8:00 am and the king only arrived at 1:00 pm
- This annoyed third estate even more as they felt it was a true reflection of the king’s disregard for his people.
  - The king gave a speech
  - Swiss banker (in charge of finances) spoke for three hours on the state of France’s finances a fact already evident to the general public, that France was in major debt and the Ancien’ Regime could not cater for he needs of the country any longer and a great change was in need.
  - Most of the audience would not have understood the facts and figures anyway as they were uneducated.
  - Bourgeoisie were annoyed as there was no mention of a change was mentioned in the day’s proceedings.

#### The results

The results of the states general were completely the opposite of what Necker and the king had expected. They completely back fired the peasants had lost their patience and it became one of the short term causes of the French Revolution.

#### Reasons why the States General was not effective

1. The representatives did not have freedom of speech and could have been imprisoned for going against the king and his laws (which were the main issues the public wanted to resolve).
2. The representatives were treated like slaves:
   a. had to enter separately to the nobles and clergy.
   b. wear black clothing to separate themselves from them.
JUNE 17  The Third Estate met and declared themselves the National Assembly and prepared to act for the nation. They invited the other Estates to join them, a few of the Clergy did so.

JUNE 20  The Third Estate found that they were locked out of their debating chamber. They retired to a nearby tennis court and took an oath that they would not disband until they had given France a new constitution. (Laws by which a country is governed.) This was known as the Tennis Court Oath.

JUNE 23  The King held a royal session of all Three Estates and insisted that they should meet separately. The Third Estate refused to leave the hall.

JUNE 27  The King gave way and ordered the Clergy and Nobles to join the Third Estate. They met two weeks later and declared themselves the National Constituent Assembly. This was a great triumph for the Third Estates. Despite this victory there was a considerable amount of unrest because rumours were circulating that:

a. The King was about to dissolve the Assembly using force.
b. The King was concentrating troops at Versailles.

JULY 11  NECKER (Controller-General) who was a popular figure with the people was dismissed. This suggested that the King was going to take a firmer line. The result was unrest in Paris where bread riots took place. The people were encouraged by fiery speeches to take up arms and defend themselves.

Results:

a. A municipal government was set up by the bourgeoisie in Paris to maintain law and order.
b. A civic guard known as the National Guard was formed to protect property against looters.

JULY 14  The Paris mob attacked the Bastille, the symbol of despotism, to collect arms. They broke into the building and freed all the prisoners. The fall of the Bastille meant the end of Royal Despotism and the transfer of power to the National Assembly.

In the Provinces peasant risings occurred. Attacks were made on the castles of the Feudal lords and many of the Nobles fled from France. (known as ‘émigrés’.)

OCTOBER 5  The hunger march to Versailles by the women took place. They demanded bread. The Royal family had to be protected by Lafayette and the National Guard.

OCTOBER 6  Louis XVI and his family accompanied the mob back to Paris and took up residence in the Tuileries. The Constituent Assembly followed and thereafter all their meetings were held in Paris. Control of the Revolution fell into the hands of the Radicals in Paris.
REFORMS BROUGHT ABOUT DURING 1789

The Constituent Assembly had several important tasks to perform

a. To restore peace in the provinces.
b. To abolish feudal privileges.
c. To give France a new constitution.

AUGUST 4

A nobleman in the Assembly proposed that peace could only be restored if the nobility renounced their feudal privileges. The nobles in the Assembly did so and it was laid down that:

a. There was to be equal taxation.
b. There was to be equality before the law.
c. There was to be equal opportunity, the sale of government posts was abolished.
d. At the same time decrees were issued which abolished serfdom, the system of corvee, all feudal services due to the landlord and all feudal customs.

The result was that the Ancien Regime ceased to exist.

DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF MAN: 26 AUGUST 1789

The Assembly had to provide France with a constitution based on the ideas of the writings of the Philosophers. The influence of Rousseau can be seen in their decisions. They drafted the Declaration of the Rights of Man as a preamble to the constitution. It stated the natural rights of man as well as condemnations of evils under which the French had lived during the Ancien Regime.

NATURAL RIGHTS

1. It stated that “all men are born free and remain free and equal in rights”.
2. All men are entitled to freedom of speech, worship and oppression.
3. No man should be accused, arrested imprisoned except by a legal process – this meant that the Lettre de Cachet was invalid.
4. A man was innocent until proved guilty.
5. The use of torture during trials was abolished.
6. Property was declared to be the ‘inviolable and sacred’ right of every man.

SOVEREIGNTY OF THE PEOPLE

The declaration stated that France was not the personal property of the King. All the authority of the government came from the people. The declaration stated:

“Law is the expression of the general will. All citizens have the right to take part in its formation.”

“All sovereignty resides essentially in the Nation.”

It also stated that the right of consenting to taxation resided in the people or their representatives.
Before the end of 1789 changes were made with regard to the Church:

**NATIONALISATION OF CHURCH LAND: 2 NOVEMBER 1789**

1. The tithe was abolished.

2. The wealth of the Church was surrendered to the State and all its land was taken over by the State. The land was sold by public auction.

3. The clergy became servants of the State, and had to take an oath of allegiance to the State. Their salaries would be paid by the State and Bishops and Priests would be elected by the citizens.

4. 1790: CIVIL CONSTITUTION OF THE CLERGY: Civil Constitution of the Clergy, was an attempt to reorganize the Roman Catholic Church in France on a national basis. It caused a schism within the French Church and made many devout Catholics turn against the Revolution.

[http://www.gilderlehrman.org/sites/default/files/swf/lapidus/_images/panel3_1.jpg]  
[http://www.gilderlehrman.org/sites/default/files/swf/lapidus/_images/panel3_2.jpg]
1791 THE FLIGHT TO VARENNES

Although Louis XVI had agreed to all the reforms carried out by her Assembly, he was unhappy about some of them, especially the control of the State over the Church. He decided that he wished to leave France to seek foreign aid. Mirabeau tried to dissuade him but after the latter’s death, Louis made plans for his escape. With his family he left the Tuileries by coach and made his way to the German border. He was recognised by the postmaster of a small village and when the coach reached Varennes on 21 June, Louis was arrested and taken back to Paris where he was virtually a prisoner.

The attempted escape had serious results as the French people felt that Louis had betrayed the revolution. Before he left Paris he had written a letter withdrawing his agreement to all the decrees issued by the Assembly. Many people demanded that the King should be deposed and that France should become a republic.

1792 THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

In September 1791 the National Constituent Assembly completed its work on the Constitution and dissolved itself. It also said that its members could be re-elected. When the new Assembly met in October 1791 it was dominated by members of a political club called the Girondins. They believe that war against France’s enemies would serve two purposes:

1. It would unite the people of France behind their leaders.
2. It would show the King up as a traitor and enable them to depose him.

The Emperor of Austria and the King of Prussia issued a statement that the fate of the monarchy in France was the concern of all European monarchs. (They were afraid that the same sort of trouble would face them in their own countries.)

In April 1792, the Girondins persuaded Louis to declare war on Austria. The French army was routed by the Austrians, and the King dismissed some of the Girondin ministers. Control of the Assembly passed into the hands of another political group called the Jacobins. Danton, one of their leaders, took steps to deal with anyone suspected of Royalist sympathies. More than 1 500 people died in what was known as the September Massacres.
THE ABOLITION OF THE MONARCHY

The King was suspected of having betrayed the French army and the crowds invaded the Tuileries and Louis was forced to seek the protection of the Assembly. On 21 September 1792 the Monarchy was abolished and France declared a republic.

In 1792 Louis was put on trial on a number of charges – one on having conspired with foreign powers against the new government of France. He was sentenced to death and executed on January 21 1793.

The execution of Louis XVI.

1793 THE FORMATION OF THE FIRST COALITION AGAINST FRANCE

In September 1792 the French armies won a decisive victory over the Prussians at Valmy. This was followed by a French invasion of the Austrian Netherlands. This was a threat to Britain who became less sympathetic towards the revolutionaries in France. The execution of Louis caused great indignation in Britain and other countries in Europe.

In February 1793 France declared war on Britain. Holland and Spain formed an alliance with Britain so now France was at war with Britain, Holland, Spain, and Austria, Prussia and Sardinia. The French armies were soon defeated.

1793 – 1794 THE REIGN OF TERROR

The defeat of the French armies led to a state of emergency in France and anyone who was not loyal to the republic was dealt with very harshly. A Revolutionary Tribunal was set up to deal with this. Suspects were tried and executed. France was plunged into any orgy of bloodshed. 3000 were executed in Paris alone in a few months.
Among them were Marie Antoinette and Danton.

Robespierre, also a Jacobin took control of the Government and the bloodshed continued until the National Convention opposed him. He was arrested and executed. The Reign of Terror ended.

A new constitution was drafted for France and the government was to be controlled by five Directors.

**THE REIGN OF TERROR 1793 – 1794**

**REASONS FOR THE TERROR**

The Foreign Threat \[\Downarrow\] \[\text{Inflation}\] \[\Downarrow\] \[\text{The Threat at Home}\]

1. **The Foreign Threat**

   By March 1793 France was at war with most of Europe, and was on the verge of defeat. This caused riots and threatened revolution inside France itself.

2. **The Threat at Home**

   There was still serious opposition to the Jacobins inside France. The Brissotins were the largest political opposition and their support came mostly from the provinces. There was serious rioting both in the country and the cities until the Jacobins arrested all the leading Brissotin members of the government. Instead of quelling the riots, they intensified and France was in turmoil.

3. **Inflation**

   Money had been overprinted and inflation soared. By February 1793 money was only worth \(\frac{1}{2}\) of the amount printed on it. Food, and other goods, was in short supply and the people of Paris began rioting – they raided warehouses and shops and sold the goods off at their own prices.

   In April 1793 the COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC SAFETY was established to deal with this desperate situation. The control of this Committee was in the hands of the Jacobins – and the Committee consisted of a group of gifted, but ruthless men. The most widely known member was ROBESPIERRE.

**HOW DID THE COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC SAFETY DEAL WITH THE PROBLEMS?**

1. **The Foreign Threat**

   The Committee organized a massive war effort. Everyone had to help, and an army of 850 000 was raised. The plan worked and towards the end of 1793 the French Army had a series of victories.

2. **The Threat at Home**

   The Committee of Public Safety ordered the ruthless suppression of countrywide revolts. In Lyons nearly 2 000 rebels were shot and the houses of the rich destroyed. In Nantes mass drownings were ordered, about 1 300 people were drowned. By this time the revolts collapsed, but the Committee was still afraid of any signs of opposition. Members of Jacobin clubs throughout the country reported on those whose loyalty they suspected.

   Until the LAW OF SUSPECTS (September 1793) a person could be arrested for simply lacking
enthusiasm for the Revolution. The accused were brought before REVOLUTIONARY TRIBUNALS who worked quickly and allowed no right of appeal. During the “Great Terror” of June/July 1794 only one in five brought before the Paris Tribunal was found innocent. The rest, some 1 285 people, were sent to the guillotine.

3. Inflation

The Committee was less successful in its attempts to control prices. The GENERAL MAXIMUM LAW was passed which fixed the price of food, clothing, fuel, drink and the wages of the sans-culottes! But food shortages led to a black market where prices could not be controlled.

The end of the Reign of Terror

The sans-culottes bitterly resented the wage-freeze and the alliance between the sans-culottes and the Jacobins began to break down. Generally people were tired of the fear and the killings and on 27 July 1794 delegates of the Convention found the courage to vote for the arrest of Robespierre and his colleagues. The sans-culottes, who might have kept the Committee in power, did not rally to its defense. Robespierre’s popularity had declined; and on 28 July he was guillotined, along with 21 supporters. The Reign of Terror was over, and so was the French Revolution.

BASTILLE DAY: 14 July

Bastille Day, the French national holiday, commemorates the Storming of the Bastille, which took place on 14 July 1789 and marked the beginning of the French Revolution. The Bastille was a prison and a symbol of the absolute and arbitrary power of Louis the 16th’s Ancien Regime. By capturing this symbol, the people signaled that the king’s power was no longer absolute: power should be based on the Nation and be limited by a separation of powers.

Although the Bastille only held seven prisoners at the time of its capture, the storming of the prison was a symbol of liberty and the fight against oppression for all French citizens; like the Tricolore flag, it symbolized the Republic's three ideals: Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity for all French citizens.

It marked the end of absolute monarchy, the birth of the sovereign Nation, and, eventually, the creation of the (First) Republic, in 1792.

Bastille Day was declared the French national holiday on 6 July 1880, on Benjamin Raspail's recommendation, when the new Republic was firmly entrenched. Bastille Day has such a strong signification for the French because the holiday symbolizes the birth of the Republic.
**GLOSSARY – FRENCH REVOLUTION – PEOPLE AND GROUPS**

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<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bourgeoisie</td>
<td>People who were not noble, but who had greater status and wealth than peasants – merchants, lawyers, shopkeepers: the people who seemed to be controlling and gaining most from the Revolution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Émigrés</td>
<td>Those members of the French nobility who left France during the Revolution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nobility</td>
<td>Privileged group which, despite great variation in the wealth of its members, was superior in status to the rest of society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sans-Culottes</td>
<td>Blanket term given to the radicals of Paris, most of whom were drawn from the class of artisans and small shopkeepers. The name derives from the artisan custom of wearing longer trousers instead of aristocratic knee-breeches.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Guard</td>
<td>A company of volunteers formed in Paris in July 1789 to defend the gains of the revolution against aristocratic plots.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lafayette</td>
<td>First commander of the National Guard, he lost support when he ordered troops to fire on anti-royalist demonstrators in the Champ de Mars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marat</td>
<td>Leader of the sans-culottes movement. Regarded as the chief instigator of the September Massacres. He was assassinated in July 1793.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danton</td>
<td>He was founder member of the Committee of Public Safety. Known as one of the revolutions most powerful orators. He was guillotined in April 1794.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robespierre</td>
<td>Leading Jacobin. He is best known for his use of the ‘Terror’ as a means of strengthening the revolutionary will of the people. He was guillotined on the Place de la Revolution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacobins</td>
<td>Group of radical deputies which was set up in 1789. They took the name Jacobin from the monastery where they met. Radical middle class group dominated by Robespierre. By 1793 they dominated the Committee of Public Safety.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girondins</td>
<td>A label loosely applied to a group of moderate republicans from the provinces. Parisians suspected that they were unenthusiastic about economic and social reform.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republicanism</td>
<td>During the Revolution, used to describe the belief that France should cease to be a monarchy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monarchy</td>
<td>A system of government headed by a single individual whose right to rule is based on inheritance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tricolour</td>
<td>The red, white and blue flag of Paris which became the national flag of France after the fall of the Bastille. Worn in the form of a cockade by the revolutionaries.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### LIST OF POLITICAL TERMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absolutism</td>
<td>A system of government in which the ruler is unchecked by any limitations and in which authority is vested absolutely and unconditionally in his hands. See also “Autocracy”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancien Regime</td>
<td>See “Older Order”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aristocracy</td>
<td>Members of a more affluent society or nobility who are considered to be superior to the rest of the nation owing to their birth; the privileged class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bourgeoisie</td>
<td>The rich and educated middle class. Literally the townsfolk or “burgesses”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clergy</td>
<td>Officialdom of the Roman Catholic Church. Also “Upper” and “Lower” clergy: division in the Church before the French Revolution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>A document or act which determines the principles by which a state must be governed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitutional</td>
<td>A system of government in which the powers of Monarchy the monarch are limited and determined by the constitution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monarchy</td>
<td>A state which has a king or queen as its head.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Order</td>
<td>The entire system of absolute monarchy and the division of the people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proletariat</td>
<td>The working masses who possess very little.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radicals</td>
<td>A party of group of people who intend making drastic changes in the existing form of government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reactionaries</td>
<td>Person who wish to revert to former conditions, and are therefore opposed to progress. (See also “conservatism”.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebellion</td>
<td>A revolt against the government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic</td>
<td>A state which has a president as its head and in which the power of authority is normally vested in the electorate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revolution</td>
<td>An overthrow of the government, usually in a violent manner. A revolutionary is, therefore, a person who advocates the use of force to change the existing system of government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royalist</td>
<td>A supporter of the monarchy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>Derived from the word demos – people. A system of government in which the people rule themselves by means of elected representatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Despotism</td>
<td>A system of government in which the ruler controls all government powers. A despotic ruler is therefore an autocrat. An enlightened despot uses his powers to the advantage and in the interest of the state and nation.</td>
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