



Name: _____ Date: _____ Period: _____

Directions: Actively read the article below and answer the questions on the right.

Chapter 18 Section 1: The French Revolution Begins

Background to the Revolution

French society had changed little since medieval times. Feudalism established the privileges and obligations of the three main social classes. Although there were clergy and wealthy landowners in the American colonies, there were no laws giving them special status, unlike the class system in France. This social injustice caused unrest in eighteenth-century France.

How did feudalism impact France?

France's Three Estates

Since the Middle Ages, France's population had been divided by law into one of three status groups, or estates. The First Estate consisted of the clergy, the Second Estate the nobles, and the Third Estate everyone else. Thus the Third Estate included anyone from the lowliest peasant to the wealthiest merchant.

The First Estate, or clergy, numbered about 130,000 out of a total population of 27 million and owned about 10 percent of the land. The clergy were radically divided. The higher clergy-cardinals, bishops, and heads of monasteries-were from noble families and shared their outlook and interests. The parish priests were often poor and from the class of commoners.

What are the three estates? Identify and describe each one.

The Second Estate, or nobility, numbered about 350,000 and owned about 25 to 30 percent of the land. They played a crucial role in society in the 1700s. They held leading positions in the government, in the military, in the law courts, and in the Roman Catholic Church. Despite controlling most of the wealth of the kingdom, neither the clergy nor the nobles had to pay the *taille*, France's chief tax.

Unlike the First and Second Estates, the Third Estate was divided by vast differences in occupation, level of education, and wealth. Peasants made up 75 to 80 percent of the Third Estate and owned about 35 to 40 percent of the land; middle-class members of the Third Estate owned the rest. At least half of the peasants had little or no land to live on.

All peasants owed certain duties to the nobles, which were a holdover from medieval times when serfdom was widespread. For example, a peasant had to pay a fee to grind his flour or press his grapes because the local lord controlled the flour mill and wine press. When the harvest time came, the peasant had to work a certain number of days harvesting the noble's crop. Peasants fiercely resented these duties.

What duties did peasants have that they resented?

Another part of the Third Estate consisted of urban craftspeople, shopkeepers, and workers. These people, too, were struggling to survive. In the 1700s, the price of consumer goods increased much faster than wages, which left these urban groups with decreased buying power. The struggle for survival led many of these people to play an important role in the revolution, especially in Paris.

The bourgeoisie, or middle class, was another part of the Third Estate. This group included about 8 percent of the population, or 2.3 million people. They owned about 20 to 25 percent of the land. The bourgeoisie included merchants, bankers, and industrialists, as well as professional people-lawyers, holders of public offices, doctors, and writers.

Who are the bourgeoisie?

The middle class was unhappy with the privileges held by nobles. They did not want to abolish the nobility, however, but to better their own position. Some bourgeoisie had managed to become nobles by being appointed to public offices that conferred noble status. About 6,500 new nobles had been created by appointment during the 1700s.

Why were the bourgeoisie drawn to the ideas of the Enlightenment?

The bourgeoisie also shared certain goals with the nobles. Both were drawn to the new political ideas of the Enlightenment. In addition, both groups were increasingly upset with a monarchical system resting on privileges and on an old and rigid social order. The opposition of these elites to the old order led them to take drastic action against the absolute monarchy of Louis XVI.

Financial Crisis

Social conditions, then, formed a long-standing background to the French Revolution. The immediate cause of the revolution was the near collapse of the French budget. Although the economy had been expanding for fifty years, there were periodic crises. Bad harvests in 1787 and 1788 and a slowdown in manufacturing led to food shortages, rising prices for food, and unemployment.

How was the immediate cause of the revolution the economy?

On the eve of the revolution, the French economy was in crisis. Despite these problems, the French king and his ministers continued to spend enormous sums of money on wars and court luxuries. The queen, Marie Antoinette, was especially known for her extravagance and this too caused popular resentment. When the government decided to spend huge sums to help the American colonists against Britain, the budget went into total crisis.

How did King Louis XVI make the economic crisis worse?

With France on the verge of financial collapse, Louis XVI was forced to call a meeting of the Estates-General, representatives of all three estates meeting together, to raise new taxes. The Estates-General had not met since 1614 because French kings were so powerful.

From Estates-General to National Assembly

Louis XVI called a meeting of the Estates-General at Versailles on May 5, 1789. In the Estates-General, the First and Second Estates each had about 300 representatives. The Third Estate had almost 600 representatives. Most of the Third Estate wanted to set up a constitutional government that would make the clergy and nobility pay taxes, too.

Why did the Third Estate want to change the voting system of the Estates General?

From the start, there were arguments about voting. Traditionally, each estate had one vote - the First and Second Estates could outvote the Third Estate two to one. The Third Estate demanded instead that each deputy have one vote. Under this new system, with the help of a few nobles and clerics, the Third Estate would then have a majority vote. The king stated that he favored the current system.

What is the Tennis Court Oath?

On June 17, 1789, the Third Estate boldly declared that it was the National Assembly and would draft a constitution. Three days later, on

June 20, its deputies arrived at their meeting place, only to find the doors had been locked. They then moved to a nearby indoor tennis court and swore that they would continue meeting until they had a new constitution. The oath they swore is known as the Tennis Court Oath.

What is the Bastille?

Louis XVI prepared to use force against the Third Estate. On July 14, 1789, about 900 Parisians gathered in the courtyard of the Bastille - an old fortress, used as a prison and armory. The price of bread had reached record highs, so the crowd was hungry and agitated. According to rumor, the king's troops were coming, and there was ammunition in the Bastille. A group of attackers managed to lower the two drawbridges over the moat. Members of the French Guard joined the attack. After four hours of fighting, the prison warden surrendered. The rebels released the seven prisoners and cut off the prison warden's head. Angered that there were no munitions, the crowd demolished the Bastille brick by brick. Paris was abandoned to the rebels.

Louis XVI was informed that he could no longer trust royal troops to shoot at the mob. The king's authority had collapsed in Paris. Meanwhile, all over France, revolts were breaking out. Popular hatred of the entire landholding system, with its fees and obligations, had finally spilled over into action.

What was the Great Fear?

Peasant rebellions became part of the vast panic known as the Great Fear. The peasants feared that the work of the National Assembly would be stopped by foreign armies. Rumors spread from village to village that foreign troops were on the way to put down the revolution. The peasants reacted by breaking into the houses of the lords to destroy the records of their obligations

How did the National Assembly react to the Great Fear?

End of the Old Regime

The National Assembly reacted to news of peasant rebellions and rumors of a possible foreign invasion. On August 4, 1789, the National Assembly decided to abolish all legal privileges of the nobles and clergy.

Declaration of the Rights of Man

On August 26, the National Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. Inspired by the English Bill of Rights of 1689 and by the American Declaration of Independence and Constitution, this charter of basic liberties began with "the natural and imprescriptible rights of man" to "liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression."

What is the Declaration of the Rights of Man?

Reflecting Enlightenment thought, the declaration proclaimed that all men were free and equal before the law, that appointment to public office should be based on talent, and that no group should be exempt from taxation. Freedom of speech and of the press were affirmed.

The King Concedes

In the meantime, Louis XVI remained at Versailles. Used to the absolutist system, he stubbornly refused to accept the National Assembly's decrees. On October 5, however, thousands of Parisian women-described by an eyewitness as "detachments of women coming up from every direction, armed with broomsticks, pitchforks, swords, pistols and muskets"-marched to Versailles. Some of the women then met with

How did women force the king to accept the National Assembly's decrees?

the king. They told him that their children were starving because there was no bread. These women forced Louis to accept the new decrees.

Now the crowd insisted that the king and his family come to Paris to show support for the National Assembly. If the king was not under their close watch, they feared he would rouse the kings and princes from other countries to oppose reform. On October 6, the king and his family returned to Paris. As a goodwill gesture, they brought wagonloads of flour from the palace storehouse.

Church Reforms

Under the old regime, the Catholic Church had been an important pillar of the social and political system. The revolutionaries felt they had to reform it too. The new revolutionary government had another serious motivation, however: the need for money. By seizing and selling off Church lands, the National Assembly was able to increase the state's revenues.

Finally, the Church was formally brought under the control of the state. A law was passed called the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. It said that bishops and priests were to be elected by the people, not appointed by the pope and the Church hierarchy. The state would also pay the salaries of the bishops and priests. Because of these changes, many Catholics became enemies of the revolution.

New Constitution and New Fears

The new Constitution of 1791 set up a limited monarchy. There was still a king, but a Legislative Assembly would make the laws. The new body was designed to be conservative. First, only the so-called "active" citizens—men over 25 who paid a certain amount of taxes—could vote. All others were considered "passive" citizens with equal rights but no vote. Second, the method of choosing its 745 deputies meant that only relatively wealthy people would serve. Not only the clergy, but also government officials and judges, would be elected. Local governments were put in charge of taxation. The influence of the new government began to spread throughout France.

By 1791, the "ancien regime," or old order, had been destroyed, but the new government did not have universal support. Political radicals and economically disadvantaged people wanted more reform. The king detested the new government's regulation of the Church and his loss of absolute power. While Louis resisted the new constitution, family members and advisers urged him to take more action.

In June 1791, the royal family attempted to flee France in disguise. They almost succeeded in reaching allies in the east, but they were recognized and were captured at Varennes and brought back to Paris. In this unsettled situation, the new Legislative Assembly met for the first time in October 1791 and amended the constitution to allow for trying the king if he turned against the nation. Although Louis XVI publicly swore to uphold the new constitution, the constitutional monarchy seemed already doomed.

Why did the people want the king to come to Paris?

Why did the Catholic Church need to be reformed?

What was the impact of the Constitution of 1791?

Why were many people upset with the new government?

War with Austria

Over time, some European leaders began to fear that revolution would spread to their countries. The rulers of Austria and Prussia even threatened to use force to restore Louis XVI to full power. Insulted by this threat and fearing attack, the Legislative Assembly decided to strike first, declaring war on Austria in the spring of 1792. The French fared badly in the initial fighting. A frantic search for scapegoats began.

Rise of the Paris Commune

In the spring of 1792, angry citizens demonstrated to protest food shortages and defeats in the war. In August, Paris radicals again decided the fate of the revolution. They declared themselves a commune - a popularly run city council- and organized a mob attack on the royal palace and Legislative Assembly.

The French Revolution was entering a more radical and violent stage. Members of the new Paris Commune took the king captive. They forced the Legislative Assembly to suspend the monarchy and to call for a National Convention. This time they wanted a more radical change. All the representatives who would decide the nation's future would be elected through universal male suffrage, in which all adult males had the right to vote. This would broaden the group of voters to include men who did not meet the initial standards for citizenship established by the Assembly.

Many members of the Paris Commune proudly called themselves sans-culottes, meaning "without breeches." They wore long trousers, not the knee-length breeches of the nobles, which identified them as ordinary patriots without fine clothes. Often, sans-culottes are depicted as poor workers, but many were merchants or artisans-the elite of their neighborhoods. The revolution was entering a more radical phase because of the threat of foreign intervention to reestablish the monarchy and because economic conditions in France showed little improvement. This led to calls for new measures to be taken to secure the future of the revolution and improve the living conditions of the people in France.



Why did France declare war on Austria?

How did Paris radicals decide the fate of the revolution?

Who are the sans-culottes?

Why was France entering a radical stage of the revolution?

Key Vocabulary:

Intervention, suffrage, radical, scapegoat, amend, detested, seizing, affirmed, resentment, hierarchy, abolish, opposition, injustice