The French Revolution

Why Revolution was likely:

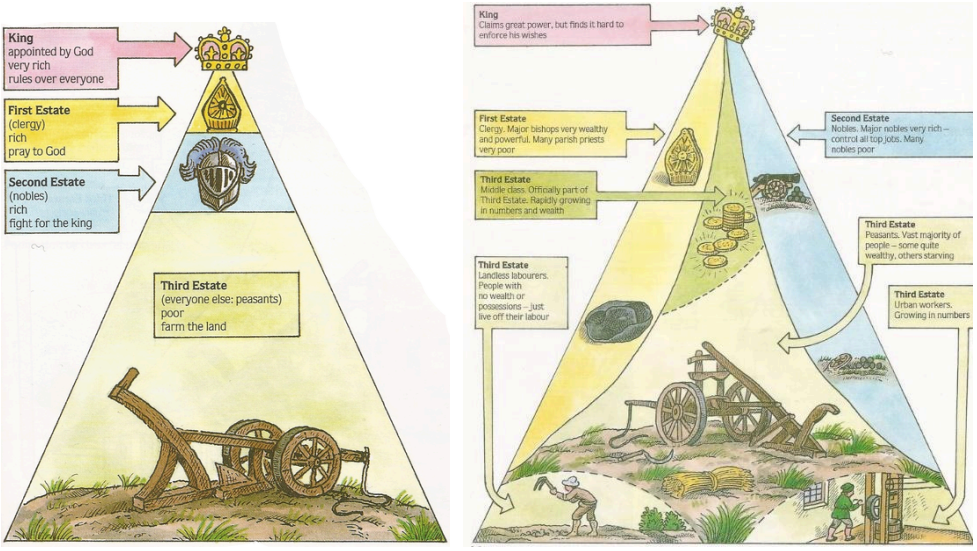
The old feudal order, the '*ancien regime*' of powerful great landowners (aristocracy), had slowly been decaying in the face of Protestant individualism and international merchant capitalism. The political form of feudalism, the absolute monarch, had been replaced or weakened in the economically advanced countries of Britain and the Netherlands. Even where 'enlightened' absolute monarchs still ruled, their enlightened reforms throughout the 18th century, often weakened the institution of absolutism itself.

And then, there were the radical new ideas. Beginning with the Scientific Revolution, the application of reason resulted in rapid developments in our understanding of the natural world. When this same rational approach was applied to the science of society and politics, the works of Locke, Voltaire and Rousseau condemned the idea of the 'divine right of kings' to the dustbin of history. If kings remained in power, it was not because it was rational for them to do so, but because they were willing to reject reason itself. Those, like Voltaire, who had seen alternatives to absolutism up close, were full of praise for constitutionalism. Others like Rousseau knew exactly what he thought was wrong with absolute monarchy.

The Seven Years' War was, in many ways, the last of the wars of religion. The Protestant nations of Britain and Prussia defeated the largely Catholic forces led by France. The economic consequences of French defeat and her subsequent successful, though expensive, support of the American revolutionaries, almost bankrupted the French state. But above all, it was the example of the American revolt, an ordinary people overthrowing a 'tyrannical monarchy', that was most important about 1776. The Marquis de Lafayette the young French noble who went to fight with the Americans against the British at the age of 19, 'returned home to his native land full of ideas about liberty and republics.' The radical ideas of Tom Paine's *Common Sense* and Jefferson's *Declaration of Independence,* 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal', provided a rational but revolutionary basis for the legitimating the power of the state. Democracy was to be the future.

Long-term Causes of Revolution

Social: A gradual breakdown of the system of the three estates.



First Estate: Catholic clergy, making up 0.5% of the population; very rich, owned about 10% of all the land and benefitted from the tithe which raised about 100 million a year. However, salary also

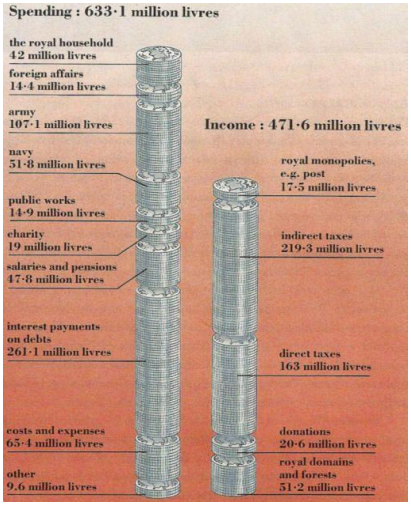
fluctuated between city and countryside. A priest in Paris, for instance, might be earning 10’000 livres a year, whereas one in the countryside only 750.

Second Estate: nobility, aristocratic landlords. They made up about 1.5% of the population and were also very rich, owning 25% of the land. But there were significant inequalities within the nobility. For example, the Marquis de Mainvillette earned 20’000 livres a year, but the 23 poorest noble families earned less than 500.

Third Estate: everyone else. The Third Estate could be very wealthy (bankers, manufacturers, merchants), but it also included other members of the middle class like shopkeepers and officials, as well as urban workers and landless peasants.

By the 1780s the Estate system was no longer working. The development of capitalism and the resultant growth of population and towns gave rise to new social classes - the urban working class (proletariat) and merchants and businessmen (bourgeoisie) - who didn't fit into the traditional three estates. The population of France in 1715 had been 19 million, in 1789 it was 26 million. The bourgeoisie, in particular, were increasingly important, not least because they might be very rich but have no political power whatsoever. France remained an absolute monarchy, supported by the First and Second Estates. It was a system of mutual support which resisted change. The monarch ruled through divine right which the Catholic Church reinforced. The Church in return benefitted from the tithe, land ownership, exemption from taxation and its own legislative body to advise the king. The aristocracy provided regional governance, law, and order and in return it was also exempt from many taxes, received feudal dues and had its own legislative body to advise the king. It was this social system that many French people believed needed to change.

Economic: As capitalism developed in the 18th century, countries that had embraced the changes began to dominate world trade. This economic strength was matched by military might, the Seven Years' War was won by countries that had future orientated 'capitalist' economies. The losers incurred debt and pressure from their people for reform and modernise. Those who wanted to change the political system did so because they wanted a government more responsive to the needs of new businesses. But the ruling classes, the aristocratic landlords, still wanted a political system to govern in its traditional feudal interests, so they were resistant to reform. As the economic situation worsened, the state could only pay its debts by raising more from taxation. The diagram shows you how bad the French government's financial situation was in 1786.



The problem with increasing the taxes (impots in French) was that it fell disproportionally on the poor. The aristocracy and the church were often exempt or found a way of evading payment of taxes. The main tax on land or income was called the taille. Everyone paid it except the clergy and nobles. In addition, the peasants who made up about 80% of the population, still had to pay the traditional

feudal taxes like the tithe or taxes to use the lord's mill or wine press etc. In addition, they still had the traditional labour service called the *corvée* which meant they had to give up their time to help maintain roads or bring in the lord's harvest. The average family paid about 10% and 15% of its annual earnings in tax. From the 1730s to 1789 the cost of living rose 45% in France, but wages rose only 22%.

Cultural: The ideas of the Enlightenment were particularly widespread in France. As we have seen the most important of the Enlightenment political philosophers were French, they are known to history as the philosophes. They were public intellectuals, widely read but also heard in the many salon soirées hosted by prominent ladies amongst the French social elites. They strongly endorsed progress and tolerance, and distrusted organised religion (most were deists) and feudal institutions. Many also contributed to Diderot's *Encyclopédie*. Perhaps most importantly, the radical ideas of the philosophes had recently inspired a successful revolution in America. And nothing helps an idea spread quickly better than an idea that has been applied successfully.

Thomas Hobbes and John Locke shared a conviction that the legitimacy of any form of government had to be justified through rational thought and not, as it had in the past, by resort to theology or tradition. It was not enough for a government to claim that its right to rule rested on the will of God or the simple fact that it had always been thus. The proper form of government could be reasoned, according to Hobbes and Locke, and this very reasoning was the foundation of the right to rule.

While they embarked on their enquiry from different premises which, in turn, led them to different conclusions, what they had in common was perhaps more important. Both were convinced that the proper application of human reason could lead to the best form of government without recourse to archaic tradition or arcane theology. Perhaps more importantly, they both conceived of the relationship between the ruler and the ruled as a social contract. The contract theory approach to political philosophy would dominate discussion in the coffee houses and salons of Europe for the century leading up to the French Revolution and help structure the essential debates within the Revolution itself.

Throughout his life, **Voltaire** would use his pen to mock and skewer ideas and people he believed contemptible and laud and praise those who espoused and lived his ideas of personal freedom. In many ways, Voltaire was a combination of Hobbes and Locke. He believed, as did Locke, in the human ability to learn and the idea that reason should guide all decisions of state. He shared with Hobbes a very low opinion of humans in their natural state, and their inability in this natural state to govern themselves. It was this lack of faith in the uneducated masses, which confirmed Voltaire as a fervent opponent of indiscriminate democracy. Who should rule, but the educated and able, according to Voltaire. So long as they ruled according to Enlightenment principles— progress, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of thought, organized and rational policy—Voltaire did not care how much power they had.

If Voltaire was the intellect of the Revolution, **Jean Jacques Rousseau** was its heart, and like many matters of the heart his contribution was ambiguous, contradictory, and fraught with double meaning. He shared several ideas regarding the relationship of the individual to the state with Voltaire and John Locke. He believed that humans, by virtue of being human, were imbued with certain inalienable rights. His later writings were based on contract theory. For Rousseau society was based on a social contract among all citizens. But whereas Locke and Hobbes saw this contract as an agreement between the rulers and the ruled, Rousseau saw it as an agreement between the citizens themselves. This civil society was to be ruled not by kings or governments or bureaucracies but rather by an amorphous concept he called the General Will. The General Will was Rousseau's notion of what was good or desirable for a society as determined by the population as a whole and not just individual interests.

Political: There is little doubt that Louis and his wife Marie Antoinette were not ideal monarchs for a time of crisis. Louis was not interested in ruling and their personal difficulties and extravagance did much to undermine their authority. But the fact that at Versailles they lived a life of extraordinary opulence, surrounded by sycophantic courtiers, and were literally detached from the French people in a 1000 room palace, 18km from Paris, was not their fault. This was how it had always been. Unlike in many other European countries the French state had not been significantly changed. The only nominal legislative body (parliament) was the Estates General which had three separate assemblies for each of the Three Estates: the clergy, nobility, and the rest. It had no power in its own right - unlike the English parliament it was not required to approve royal taxation or legislation - instead it functioned as an advisory body to the king. It was appointed and dismissed by him, and it hadn't met since 1614.

In reality, France was governed by the thousands of noblemen who lived alongside Louis XVI at Versailles. In the absence of any checks and balances on their power, this rule became increasingly despotic. One of the best examples of this was the widespread use of lettres de cachet or sealed letters. Lettres de cachet were royal warrants ordering the exile or imprisonment of the person named in it. The king could sign these and give them to his ministers to use as they wished, it was up to them to put a name in it. Quite often they were used by ministers to imprison rivals or critics of the government. Voltaire, for example, received two lettres de cachet. They could be entirely arbitrary, without either justification or right of appeal. During the reign of Louis XVI 14,000 such letters issued. For many, Lettres de cachet were a potent symbol of the injustice of the King's rule.

Short-term Causes

The Assembly of Notables refuses a tax reform	Genevan financier (and father of Germaine de Staël) Jacques Necker, appointed in 1777-1781, did more than anyone to try to resolve the French financial situation. He introduced important tax reforms, reduced the size of Louis state expenditure, and even tried to make the king abolish feudalism. He was very popular. But the American wars, which he made possible through further loans rather than taxation, did much to ruin his careful policies. He was sacked in 1781 and moved to Coppet where he bought a rather nice chateau. By 1786, Louis had run out of money. He was unable to borrow any more. Charles de Calonne, his new finance minister, came up with a simple solution. As things stood, the richer a person was, the less tax he or she paid. Calonne said another tax was needed. Everybody should pay this new tax, even the clergy and the nobles. To try to get the nobles on his side, Calonne called together some nobles to agree to his new tax on land. This Assembly of Notables met in 1787, but Calonne's idea was rejected, and he was dismissed. The king then dismissed the nobles and tried to force the Paris Parliament to agree to the new law. They refused and insisted that only the Estates General could approve such a measure.
Louis backs down and agrees to call the Estates General	Over the next year, the crisis worsened. There were riots in many towns and Louis still needed money. In August 1788, he made the following announcement: 'We need an assembly of our faithful subjects to help us get over our difficulties with money. We have decided to call a meeting of the estates of all the provinces so that they may tell us their wishes and problems. Every kind of abuse will be reformed.' This was a dangerous promise that raised people's expectations. The Estates-General, was to meet in May 1789 for the first time since 1614. This was what many people had wanted for years.
The Estates General meets	On 13 July 1788 a massive hailstorm had destroyed cornfields, vegetable plots, orchards, and vineyards all over central France. This was followed by a drought. As a result, the harvest in 1788 was very poor. The drought was followed by the coldest winter in living memory. Rivers froze over, stopping watermills from grinding flour.

amidst a social and economic crisis	Blocked roads prevented food from reaching markets. And when the snow suddenly thawed in the spring, floods ruined huge areas of farmland. The price of bread increased dramatically, leaving people with less money to spend on other essentials. This led to a fall in demand for many goods which resulted in unemployment and even less demand. There were riots and strikes in may parts of the country. At this point, in the spring of 1789, electors were invited to draw up lists of complaints they wanted the Estates General to discuss with the king. These cahier de doléances were produced all over France and listed in detail everything the people thought was wrong with country. Most importantly, they raised expectations still further that the Estates General was going to solve France's problems. It's a tradition that has recently been resurrected by Le mouvement des Gilets jaunes.
The Third Estate defies the King	When the Estates-General met in the Palace of Versailles in May 1789, there were 1,201 deputies, or representatives. They were divided up as follows: First Estate - 300 deputies. Second Estate - 291 deputies. Third Estate - 610 deputies However, each estate had only one vote, so any ideas put forward by the Third Estate could be rejected if the clergy and the nobility were opposed to them. The Third Estate felt it was absurd that the nobles and clergy could outvote them. On 17 June 1789, the Third Estate declared that they were in charge. They called themselves the National Assembly. On 20 June, Louis locked them out of the hall, so they went instead to the indoor royal tennis court at Versailles. There they swore an oath and promised to keep together until France was governed fairly. This was known as the Tennis Court Oath which was immortalised in the famous painting by Jacques Louis David (below). On 9 July, Louis gave in and ordered the other two Estates to join them. So far, the power struggle had been fought with words. It was soon to become violent.
The Storming of the Bastille	Setting up the National Assembly was a great victory for the third estate but a defeat for the king. Louis XVI had lost control of the Estates General. Riots in nearby Paris showed that he risked losing control of the capital too. Urged on by the queen and members of his court, Louis ordered 20,000 royal troops to move into the area around Paris. He said this was to keep order there, but most people suspected that the troops were going to break up the National Assembly. People in Paris started to feel afraid. Their fears grew on 12 July. News came from Versailles that Louis had sacked the popular finance minister, Necker, and replaced him with a hardliner who opposed the third estate. People assumed that Louis was about to crack down on the National Assembly. Angry and frightened crowds started looking for weapons to defend themselves against the king's troops. The search for weapons went on for two days. Crowds broke into arms stores and stole thousands of guns. On the morning of 14 July rumours went round that there were tonnes of gunpowder in the Bastille, an old fortress in the cast end of Paris. The rest, as they say, is history.

The Storming of the Bastille Account

Even these limited reforms went too far for Marie Antoinette and Louis' younger brother the Comte d'Artois; on their advice, Louis dismissed Necker again as chief minister on 11 July. On 12 July, the Assembly went into a non-stop session after rumours circulated he was planning to use the Swiss Guards to force it to close. The news brought crowds of protestors into the streets, and soldiers of the elite Gardes Françaises regiment refused to disperse them.

On the 14th, many of these soldiers joined the mob in attacking the Bastille, a royal fortress with large stores of arms and ammunition. Its governor, Bernard-René de Launay, surrendered after several hours of fighting that cost the lives of 83 attackers. Taken to the Hôtel de Ville, he was executed, his head placed on a pike and paraded around the city; the fortress was then torn down in

a remarkably short time. Although rumoured to hold many prisoners, the Bastille held only seven: four forgers, two noblemen held for "immoral behaviour", and a murder suspect. Nevertheless, as a potent symbol of the Ancien Régime, its destruction was viewed as a triumph and Bastille Day is still celebrated every year. In French culture, some see its fall as the start of the Revolution.

Losing Control: 1789-1791

The National Guard and the Paris Commune: Louis XVI considered sending his army into Paris to recapture the Bastille. His war minister, however, warned him that the soldiers would probably refuse orders to do so. Louis therefore had to give up control of Paris. In July 1789 he ordered his army back to its barracks. To keep order in Paris he allowed the people to set up their own military force, the National Guard. To run the city, leading officials of the third estate formed a new local government, the Paris Commune. Towns and cities all over France followed the example of Paris. Rioting crowds attacked town halls, forced out the royal officials, and set up their own communes and National Guard units.

The Great Fear: The violence then spread into the countryside, where unemployment was high, and millions were hungry. Many thousands of people had left home to seek work or to beg and were now wandering around the countryside looking for food. Farmers lived in fear of gangs of wanderers who stole food from their fields and damaged their farms. As harvest time approached, rumours swept the countryside that nobles were trying to starve the people by hoarding grain. The rumours also said that nobles were paying the gangs of wanderers to attack farms and terrorise the peasants. Angry peasants responded to the rumours by refusing to pay their feudal dues. In many places they broke into their lords' homes and burned records of their dues. As the violence spread, fear of gangs increased. Villagers who thought they saw gangs rang the church bells to warn neighbouring villages. The warnings, passed from town to town, spread the panic to many parts of France. By late July, the whole country was gripped by a 'Great Fear'.

The Assembly begins its work*:* The deputies in the National Assembly were scared by the violence of the peasants. They took drastic measures to end it. On the night of 4 August, noble deputies, one by one, announced that they would give up their feudal rights and dues. By the next morning hunting rights, tithes, the corvee, and the rights of the mill and the oven had all been abolished. Feudalism was dead. Three weeks later, the Assembly made another important change to French society. It issued a 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen'. This stated that all men were free and equal in rights. It said people should have the right to speak and write freely. It changed the laws of arrest and imprisonment and banned torture. Above all, it said that power in France belonged to the entire people, not just the king.

The October March*:* Louis XVI disliked these decisions of the Assembly. He refused to sign them, which meant they could not become law. Then, early in October, he brought more soldiers to Versailles to add to his bodyguard. Again, it looked as if he was going to break up the Assembly by armed force. When news of this reached Paris, crowds of market women gathered in the streets. They marched through the city, collecting weapons. On 5 October, armed with knives, sticks, rifles and two cannons, they marched to Versailles to protest. Supported by National Guardsmen, they complained to the king about the high price of bread and about the extra soldiers in Versailles. They asked him to leave Versailles and come with them to live in Paris. This would allow them to keep an eye on his activities. Louis did not want to go. He changed his mind when a group of the women smashed their way into his palace, killed two bodyguards and threatened to kill the queen. On 6 October Louis, Marie Antoinette and their oldest son travelled in a coach to Paris, surrounded by a crowd of 60,000 people. The Palace of Versailles was locked and boarded up. From then on they lived in the Tuileries Palace in the centre of Paris.

Reforms of the National Assembly*:* The deputies of the National Assembly followed the royal family to Paris, where they took over an old riding school as a meeting place. Over the next two years the

Assembly made many new laws, changing the way France was organised and run. The August Decrees abolished feudalism and other privileges held by the nobility, notably exemption from tax. Other decrees included equality before the law, opening public office to all, freedom of worship, and cancellation of special privileges held by provinces and towns. Over 25% of French farmland was subject to feudal dues, which provided most of the income for large landowners; these were now cancelled, along with tithes due to the church. The intention was for tenants to pay compensation for these losses, but the majority refused to comply, and the obligation was cancelled in 1793.

The revolutionary leaders in the National Assembly were now divided about what should happen to the King. Many moderate deputies, known as **Girondins**, still wanted Louis to have a place in France's new constitution. More radical deputies, known as **Jacobins**, felt that the King could not be trusted and should be deposed. Many ordinary citizens supported the Jacobins. A series of events in France gradually led to the Jacobins becoming more influential.

14 September 1791: The new constitution - The King accepted the new constitution which had been written by the National Assembly. Louis was still allowed to veto new laws, but most of his powers were removed. At the ceremony for the new constitution, Louis was forced to sit on a simple chair rather than a throne.

20 April 1792: War declared on Austria - To the east of France was the huge Austrian Empire. It was ruled by the Emperor Leopold, Marie Antoinette's brother. Leopold was protecting nobles who had fled from France and who were plotting against the Revolution. On 20 April 1792, the National Assembly declared war on Austria. But the war started badly for France.

20 June 1792: The sans culottes attack the Tuileries - The sans culottes were working people in Paris who hated the monarchy. They thought that ordinary people like themselves should have power. The sans culottes suspected that Louis actually wanted France to lose the war with Austria. On 20 June 1792, a crowd of 8,000 armed sans culottes (right) broke into the Tuileries. They forced the King to wear the red cap of liberty and to toast the people of Paris. The mob had spared the King's life, but this was another humiliation for Louis

25 July 1792: The Brunswick Manifesto - By July 1792 Prussia had joined Austria in the war against France. The leader of the enemy forces was the Duke of Brunswick. On 25 July he signed a document known as the Brunswick Manifesto. This stated that if the Tuileries was attacked again the invading armies would totally destroy Paris, The sans culottes were outraged, as you can see from some of the popular cartoons of the time below. On the streets of Paris the King and Queen became even more unpopular.

10 August 1792: Massacre at the Tuileries - At the beginning of a hot August, rumours spread that the King was secretly supporting the invading foreign armies. Early in the morning of 10 August, around 10,000 angry revolutionaries from all over Paris marched towards the Tuileries. They broke into the palace and began to massacre the King's soldiers, (the Swiss Guards) and servants. The royal family fled and took refuge at the National Assembly. Out of the nine hundred Swiss Guards defending the king, only three hundred survived, and of these an estimated two hundred either died of their wounds in prison or during the September Massacres that followed.

2-6 September 1792: The September Massacres - At the beginning of September, there was panic in Paris. People feared that the Prussians were about to capture the city. Rumours spread that the priests and nobles in the overcrowded prisons were plotting to escape, kill the citizens of Paris and hand over the city to the Prussians. On 2 September, the sans culottes began the brutal murder of the prisoners. The massacre lasted for five days. Nearly 1,500 prisoners were killed. The Revolution had become much more violent.

21 September 1792; The royal family imprisoned - To most revolutionaries the King now seemed like a useless burden to France. Six weeks after the massacre at the Tuileries a new Assembly (now called the Convention) voted to abolish the monarchy and set up a republic. The people would elect their own rulers and the King would no longer play any part in the government of France. The Convention decided that Louis and his family should be locked away. The King and his family spent the autumn of 1792 imprisoned in two floors of a damp tower in the centre of Paris. It was called the Temple. Life in the Temple was not pleasant. The prison guards showed the royal family a lack of respect. They called the King simply 'Louis'. Each day, when the royal family took their afternoon walk in the Temple grounds, hundreds of people shouted insults at them.

The Trial and the Execution of the King: The King had been deposed and imprisoned, but some of the revolutionaries thought that the Convention had not gone far enough. As long as Louis was alive there might be a counter-revolution. Some of the Jacobin deputies in the Convention demanded the trial and execution of the King. Their demands gained more support at the end of November when an iron box containing the King's documents was discovered at the Tuileries. It was clear from some of the King's letters in this box that he had been plotting to overthrow the Revolution. On the morning of 11 December, soldiers arrived at the Temple to escort Louis for trial at the Convention. The King, dressed in a green silk coat, stood before the Convention until the President gave him permission to sit down. Over thirty charges against Louis were then read out. These included: Using force against the National Assembly; Secretly plotting to overthrow the Revolution; Accepting the Constitution which he despised; Attempting to escape from France; Bankrupting the country.

On 4 January the Convention reached its verdict. 693 deputies voted for Louis' guilt. Some deputies were absent, but not one deputy voted for Louis' innocence. The question of the penalty that Louis should pay caused more disagreement.

Some deputies wanted the King to be imprisoned for life. Others felt that he should be banished to America. But in the end just over half the deputies thought the King should pay with his life. On 17 January Louis XVI was sentenced to death.

The King was executed on 21 January 1793. The guards in the Temple woke Louis at around 6am. The King dressed in simple clothes. He took off his wedding ring and asked his valet to give it to Marie Antoinette. Louis was placed in a closed carriage and taken through the damp, foggy streets of Paris to the Place de la Revolution. The people lining the streets watched in silence. The steps to the scaffold were so steep that Louis had to lean on his priest for support. The executioner cut the King's hair roughly. Louis then attempted to address the 20,000 people in the square: "I die innocent of all the crimes of which I have been charged. I pardon those who have brought about my death, and I pray that the blood you are about to shed may never be required of France."

But the King's words were drowned out by a roll of drums. The executioner strapped Louis to a plank and pulled the cord on the guillotine. The blade hissed down and sliced through the King's neck. The executioner pulled Louis' head from the basket and showed it, dripping with blood, to the people.

Causes of the Terror

The execution of Louis XVI shocked millions of people all over Europe. Louis' fellow monarchs were outraged. One by one, in the first months of 1793, they joined forces with Austria and Prussia in their war against France. The aim of this coalition, or alliance, was to destroy the new French Republic.

Defeat in War: Far from scaring the revolutionaries in France, this made them more warlike than before. They wanted to fight these 'tyrants', as they called all kings, and spread the revolution to the rest of Europe. Rather than wait for the coalition to attack them, they declared war on its three latest members - Britain, Holland and Spain. France was now at war with most of Europe.

Disaster immediately struck the French armies. Austrian forces beat them in a series of battles in the Netherlands. The French commander, General Dumouriez, abandoned his men and went over to the Austrian side. France seemed on the verge of defeat.

Inflation and Shortages: The war was only one of many difficulties facing the new government. A major problem was the high price of food. Prices were rising because, to pay for the war. the government was printing huge amounts of paper money called assignats. But the more bank notes it printed, the less they were worth: the currency was suffering from inflation. By February 1793 a bank note was worth only half the amount printed on it. As well as being expensive, bread was also scarce because farmers did not want to sell their grain for bank notes that were losing their value. Hungry sans culottes began raiding shops and food stores to get the food they could not buy.

Rebellion: A third major problem hit the government when, to defend the country, it ordered an extra 300,000 men to join the armies. This order was deeply unpopular. In the Vendée in western France, where many people were royalists, thousands of peasants joined in an armed rebellion against the government. In Paris, the war led to a conflict between two groups of politicians in the Convention: the Girondins, who held most of the important posts in the government, and the Jacobins, who were supported by the sans culottes. The Jacobins blamed the Girondins for France' s defeats on the battlefield, and for allowing food prices to rise. On 2 June an angry crowd of sans culottes broke into the Convention and expelled the leading Girondins. This triggered a string of revolts in the royalist provinces which supported the Girondins. By summer 1793, sixty out of eighty-three departments had joined the rebellion against the government. The Vendée south of Nantes was particularly impacted. Tens of thousands of civilians, royalists, Republican prisoners, and sympathisers with the revolution or the religious were massacred by both armies.

Death of Marat: No-one better personified the violence that was engulfing the revolution and no other death better encapsulated the divisions that were pulling France apart, than the person and death of Jean-Paul Marat. Marat was born in Boudry in Neuchatel, now part of Switzerland. Typically, his family was French Huguenot (Protestant) in origin and for most of his 20s he lived in England and practiced as a doctor. From the outbreak of the revolution, he dedicated himself entirely to spreading the ideas of the radical wing of the revolution that after 1792 became known as Jacobin. His newspaper *L'Ami du peuple* was highly critical of post revolutionary authorities and until the death of the king, Marat was often forced into hiding or exile. His time spent hiding in the Parisian sewers worsened his already debilitating skin disease. After the beheading of the King, Marat turned his newspaper on the Girondins, and it was this attack that led to his assassination by Charlotte Corday. Marat was in his bath (because of his skin condition) on 13 July 1793, when Corday appeared at his flat. She gave him a list of supposed Girondin traitors, and he promised to have them all guillotined. She then stabbed him through the heart with a kitchen knife that she had hidden in her dress.

His death was immediately turned into a political martyrdom by the Jacobin Committee of Public Safety. David's idealised painting, that depicts Marat in Christ like form, was part of a process that turned Marat into a secular saint. After the revolution, Marat's reputation fell; the memorials to him were destroyed and his remains were removed from the Pantheon. However, over 100 years later, after the October Revolution 1917 in Russia, Marat's name was rehabilitated by the Bolshevik government. Marat became a popular name for Russian babies and Russian streets and Battleships were also named after him.

The Terror

The Law of Suspects: The Terror began with a 'Law of Suspects' in September 1793. As a precursor to the encouragement of denunciations common in 20th century authoritarian states such as Stalin's Russia and Hitler's Germany. Groups of citizens in every town had to draw up lists of people they suspected of opposing the government. Almost anyone could fall under suspicion. The Law said that 'suspects were people who by their behaviour, their contacts, their words, or their writings, showed

themselves to be ... enemies of Liberty.' In the year that followed, over a quarter of a million suspects were arrested and put in prison. Many suspects were sent to Paris for trial by the Revolutionary Tribunal. This was a special court set up to deal with political offences. Its judges could impose sentences of imprisonment, deportation, or death. Around half the sentences they passed were death sentences.

The Guillotine: Death sentences were carried out by beheading prisoners with a recently invented machine. Known as a guillotine after the person who first suggested using it, Doctor Guillotin, it was meant to be quicker and less painful than the methods of execution used before the Revolution.
Around 17,000 suspects were executed by guillotine during the Terror. One of the first to die was Marie Antoinette whose trial began on 14 October 1793, and two days later she was convicted by the Revolutionary Tribunal of high treason and executed by guillotine on the Place de la Révolution. Even Tom Paine, who had been elected to the Convention was arrested, imprisoned, and sentenced to death. He narrowly escaped death when his gaoler mistakenly failed to bring him to the place of execution.

The Committee of Public Safety took very strong measures to crush the revolts in the countryside. Over a hundred Representatives of the Convention were sent to the provinces with instructions to do anything necessary to restore order. When the guillotine proved too slow to execute captured rebels, he had them drowned in boatloads in the river Loire (left). At least 2,000 died in these drownings at Nantes. In Lyons, nearly 2,000 rebels were executed. To speed up the executions, prisoners were lined up in front of open graves and blasted into them with cannon fire.

The Terror begins its work: It must be remembered that the terror was an emergency measure set up to crush the counter-revolution and to win the war. In August 1793 the Convention ordered a 'Mass Levy' of the French people. This meant that every citizen had to take an active part in the war effort. Unmarried men had to join the armies to fight. Married men were to make weapons for them. Women were to make tents and serve in hospitals. Children were to make bandages and gunpowder.

The Mass Levy increased the French armies to 800,000 men, nearly three times the size of the Coalition's armies. Representatives of the Convention made sure that strict discipline was kept. Generals who did not win battles were replaced by younger officers who had proved their ability in action. The Committee also tried to halt the rise in food prices with a Law of the Maximum in September 1793. This said that the prices of forty goods, such as corn, flour, firewood, and oil, must stay fixed until further notice. So too must people's wages. Breaking the Maximum carried the death penalty.

The Church: As part of a process or 'dechristianisation' the Terror led to the disappearance of the Christian religion in many parts of France. Claiming that Christianity was no more than 'superstition', sans culottes closed churches, robbed them of their bells and silver, and sacked their priests. In many towns, a 'Cult of Reason', based on revolutionary ideas such as Liberty and the worship of Marat took the place of Christianity. A Festival of Reason was held in the Notre Dame Cathedral, which was renamed 'The Temple of Reason'.

As part of the campaign against Christianity, the Convention introduced a new calendar that logically decimalised time. Years were no longer counted from the birth of Christ but from September 1792, when the Republic was founded. 1792 was re-named Year One, so the Terror took place in Year Two. Each year was divided into twelve thirty-day months with names describing their weather or growing seasons. Months were divided into three ten-day weeks. Sunday was abolished. The Calendar was used for about 12 years and was also used in other areas under French rule, including Belgium, Luxembourg, and parts of the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Malta, and Italy.

Results of the Terror: The Committee of Public Safety achieved what it set out to do. It saved France from collapse. By mid 1794 the French armies had driven their enemies right out of France and had occupied the Austrian Netherlands. The Representatives on Mission had crushed all the revolts in the provinces. And although prices were still rising, the Committee had managed to avoid a famine. The price of success had been high. Between 35,000 and 40,000 people had been executed or had died in filthy, overcrowded prisons. Everybody's rights and freedoms had been severely limited. Prices were still rising. And the Committee had became a kind of twelve-man dictatorship.

The Thermidor Reaction: By the summer of 1794 the Committee was very unpopular. Many deputies in the Convention disliked it because they thought it was too powerful. Some disliked it because they feared ending up under the guillotine. Others disliked it because they could not see any need for the Terror now that the revolts were over, and France was winning the war. Even the sans culottes, its strongest supporters, were unhappy because their wages were held down by the Maximum law, while prices were still rising.

On 27 July 1794-9 Thermidor, Year Two in the new calendar - the Convention decided to get rid of the Committee's leading member, Robespierre, along with his supporters. Robespierre had spoken of the existence of internal enemies and conspirators within the Convention and the governing Committees. But he refused to name them, which alarmed the deputies who feared Robespierre was preparing another purge of the Convention. Twenty-one were arrested and guillotined the following day. A further ninety-six were executed the day after. With Robespierre dead, the Convention reduced the power of the Committee, freed hundreds of suspects, abolished the Maximum and got rid of the Revolutionary Tribunal. The Terror thus came to an end.