

CHY4U Unit 2 - French Revolution - The Trial of Louis XVI

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Sources:

<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-worldhistory/chapter/the-reign-of-terror/> (plus some adaptations by Ms. Gluskin)

<https://18thcenturyreadingroom.wordpress.com/2007/04/23/item-of-the-day-trial-of-louis-xvi-1793/>

<https://alphahistory.com/frenchrevolution/trial-execution-of-louis-xvi/>

<https://pages.uoregon.edu/dluebke/301ModernEurope/Robespierre.pdf>

<https://alphahistory.com/frenchrevolution/attack-on-the-tuileries/>

Legislative Assembly

745 members

- Mostly middle class, few clergy or nobles
 - 260 constitutional monarchists (right, bourgeois, wealthy - felt the revolution had already met its goal of changing the form of gov't)
 - 136 Jacobins (left) - actually included some Girondins as well - revolution has not yet done enough, king cannot be trusted
 - 345 unaffiliated (mostly supported left but not always)

Short-Term Background Facts

- a) "Louis **vetoed** two decrees proposed in November: that the *émigrés* assembled on the frontiers should be liable to the penalties of death and confiscation if they remained so assembled and that every non-juring clergyman must take the civic oath on pain of losing his pension and potential deportation." **How does this fact show us more about Louis' true feelings about the revolution?**
- b) The war (vs. Austria) was going poorly at first. Many blamed Louis, his ministers and the Girondins.
- c) "The Legislative Assembly passed decrees sentencing any priest denounced by 20 citizens to immediate deportation, dissolving the King's guard on the grounds that it was manned by aristocrats, and establishing a camp of 20,000 national guardsmen (Fédérés) near Paris. The King vetoed the decrees and dismissed Girondins from the Ministry."
 - Girondins offered to save the monarchy if Louis allowed them to become members of his cabinet (ministers).
 - Austrian and Prussian soldiers invaded France.

August Uprising

- Paris radicals attacked the Tuileries Palace where Louis had lived since being brought to Paris from Versailles by the people in Oct. 1789.
- Louis and his family had been brought back to the Tuileries after their flight to Varennes.
- The Paris mob demonstrated their anti-royalist feelings.
- There was an uprising in August 1792 that killed the king's guards and took the king prisoner.
- Not all members of the Assembly were around, mostly Jacobins.
- They (those present in the assembly) **suspended** the monarchy.

National Convention

- New National Convention first met in Sept. 1792.
- Their first act was to eliminate the monarchy and create the republic.

Trial Proceedings

- Trial began in December 1792.
- 33 charges against Louis - establishing tyranny and destroying liberty.

Some Charges

“You have long eluded the execution of the decree of the 11th of August, respecting the abolition of personal servitude, the feudal government and tithes. You have long refused acknowledging the rights of man;

You have taken an oath, at the Federation of the 14th of July, which you did not keep. You soon tried to corrupt the public opinion,

For a long time you had meditated on a plan of escape. A memorial was delivered to you on the 18th of February, which pointed out the means for you to effect it; you approve of it by marginal notes.”

“You threw confusion and disorder in the army.”

“Why did you defer so long to inform the legislative body, that 50,000 Prussians were marching against France?”

Louis' Defense

- a) Louis's lawyer argued for his life to be saved.
- b) He said the monarchy was inviolable.
- c) He answered each charge and ended with: "Hear history say, that Louis, exalted 20 years upon the throne, gave an example of morals, justice, and economy, He abolished servitude in his dominions; the people wished for liberty—he gave it to them.—The glory cannot be disputed to him, that he has ever anticipated the desires of the people —I stop—history shall finish—Think that history shall pass a sentence on your judgment."
- d) He criticized the National Convention for being Louis' accusers and his judges: *"You want to pronounce on the fate of Louis, yet it is you yourselves who accuse him! You want to pronounce on the fate of Louis, yet you have already declared your views! You want to pronounce on the fate of Louis, yet your opinions are already spread across Europe!"*

Transcript:

<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/evans/N19556.0001.001/1:3?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>

Trial 1 Results

- 693 voted yes to guilty
- 75 voted not guilty for other reasons
- Girondins wanted a national referendum on the penalty - with their base of support in the nation, not just Paris, they were afraid of appearing too radical
- Robespierre argued that no such referendum should occur because Louis was already guilty
 - His view carried the day

Penalty Votes (2 days later)

721 voters

- 34 death with conditions
- 2 life in prison in chains
- 319 imprisonment until the end of the war, then exile
- 361 death without conditions

Louis was executed Jan. 1793

Reactions in Europe to the Execution

- European monarchies were horrified, obviously afraid for their own thrones and lives and terrified by the thought of their own populations rising against them.
- The war expanded as France declared war upon Britain and the Netherlands.

How the Revolution Proceeded

- Robespierre became leader of the Committee of Public Safety which essentially took over the function of government during the Terror.