

FRANCE 1500 - 1799

The situation in France in the early 16th century: The Bubonic Plague and 100-year war had decreased the population of France. This gave both land and work opportunities to the serfs which meant that they could get out of serfdom. Now cash rents came to replace old feudal dues and obligations...

Centralization: The king in Paris tried to centralize the power. He did this by putting France under one jurisdiction ("Royal Law"). He also made French the common language within the administration and in the courts. Finally he set up a standing army which was paid by taxes (the *taille*). Several conflicts with Spain made it necessary for the king to increase the royal incomes. He did this by:

- *Selling public offices.* This created a new class: "*Nobility of the Robe*". The problem with this system was that it was just a temporary income and later it seems like the office became hereditary within the family – and the family was tax-exempt!
- *Bishops and Abbots appointed by the king:* According to the "*Concordat of Bologna*" the Pope had the right to receive the first year income from new bishops and abbots in France but it was the French king that elected them! This custom lasted to the French Revolution 1789.

Protestantism a threat: John Calvin was French but he had to flee to Switzerland to avoid problems with the Catholics. Calvin wrote in French and he tried to influence the Catholic clergy, the wealthy middle-class and the artisans. Calvinism was mostly spread in the cities. The French Calvinists were called Huguenots. In 1559 they had established 40 well-organized Churches, 2150 mission stations and about 1/10 of the population had converted to Calvinism.

Weaker kings: During the years 1559-1589 France had several weak kings which came to affect the royal influence. The old French nobility – "*Nobility of the Sword*" took advantage of this situation. Some of them became Calvinists. They started to openly fight the Royal House. The real issue was power. They wanted some of their old feudal power back (they wanted France to be more like Germany – a divided country with lots of small independent states). The weakness of the kings and the ambitions of the old nobility created social disorder – we see lots of riots among the common people.

Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre August 24th 1572: Through the marriage between the king's sister Margaret of Valois and the leader of the Huguenots Henry of Navarre a peaceful solution seemed to be in reach between the two groups. The problem was that the king's mother (and the of course also Margaret's mother), Catherine of Medici had other plans. The night before the wedding the leader of the Catholic Nobility (Henry of Guise) murdered one of the Huguenot leaders (Gaspard de Coligny). This started the slaughter of over 12000 Huguenots between August 25th and October 3rd. This led to war between the king, the Catholics and the Huguenots.

The war of the Three Henry's: Catholic Henry of Guise together with other Catholic noblemen (the "Holy League") planned to replace the French king Henry III and the Valois Dynasty. Between 1572 and 1589 lots of religious riots took place. Both Henry of Guise and Henry III were assassinated. Now Henry of Navarre was the heir to the throne which at first neither the French Catholics nor Philip II of Spain approved. He was accepted after some years of struggling/fighting and by becoming Catholic.

Henry IV (1589-1610): Henry and his prime-minister the "*Duke of Sully*" paved the road to French Royal absolutism. Henry did not forget the Huguenots. He issued the "*Edict of Nantes*" (which

protected the liberties of the Huguenots; liberty of conscience and liberty of public worship + they were allowed to have their own fortified towns – over 200...). The Duke of Sully repaired the bad finances and increased the royal power by:

- *Establishing a new annual tax (the Paulette):* A tax paid by the people who had purchased any juridical or/and financial office
- *Establishing trading companies* who received state subsidizing (like the manufacture of fine textiles and tapestries)
- *Building new roads* which were necessary if you wanted to control the country...
- *Building new canals*
- *Improved agriculture*
- *Encouraged a French settlement in “the New World ” – at Quebec*

After Henry IV was assassinated in 1610 (by a Catholic fanatic) his wife Queen Margaret de Medici led the government (1610-1624). Her (and Henry's) son Louis XIII was only 8 years old at that time. Margaret let the old nobility influence her which once again created tension, disorder in France and hardship for the Huguenots. The old nobility also got her to establish better relations with Spain, the sternest Catholic country in Europe.

In 1622 *Armand Jean du Plessis* was made a cardinal – **Cardinal Richelieu**. Two years later he became Chief Minister. The new king, Louis XIII disliked the cardinal but he also realized that he was indispensable. Therefore Richelieu became virtually the ruler of France. He succeeded in his two main aims: **to strengthen the power of the king in France** and to **make France supreme in Europe...**

How did he strengthen the power of the King in France?

- He step by step destroyed the political rights of the Huguenots - He attacked the “capital” of the Huguenots – La Rochelle – and forced them to give up their rights to give up their privilege of maintaining fortified towns with their own troops
- He ordered all nobles castles to be destroyed if they were not necessary for the national defense
- The nobility also lost the jurisdiction over local districts. They were given to “*intendants*” – appointed Royal Officials – who kept an eye on the kings enemies

How did he succeed on making France supreme in Europe?

- He weakened the power of the Hapsburgs – by participating in the 30-year war
- To be able to carry his policies out he put heavy tax loads on the French common people who more and more came to resent the system of Royal absolutism

In 1642 Cardinal Richelieu died and Louis XIII died the year after 1643. Richelieu had trained a cardinal to be his successor– the Italian-born Jules Mazarin. During the childhood of Louis XIV therefore it was Cardinal Mazarin who ruled.

During his rule the nobility tried to gain control but this civil war was crushed by Mazarin. This civil war is referred to as **the Fronde...** Mazarin died in 1661 and Louis XIV (22 years old) decided to take over and establish his personal rule over France. He came to rule France to 1715 and he personified the absolute ruler of it's time!

Famous quotes about Louis XIV:

“L’État, c’est moi” (“I am the state”) “Le Roi Soleil” (the Sun King)

Louis XIV ruled with unlimited power. He basically played God's agent on earth. He truly believed in this divine right of the king and he had the ambition to make his reign very glorious. People would flatter him all the time (one cook committed suicide when the fish to the kings'

dinner didn't arrive in time...). Louis XIV spent many hours in consultation and over paper work. Some of the reforms of Louis XIV were:

1. He increased the power of the intendants...
2. He reorganized the army to make it more efficient
3. He strengthened the French Navy
4. He decided to have the palace at Versailles built. The Louvre in Paris had been the old Royal Castle now he moved it outside Paris (10 miles). The palace took 32 years to complete. It could house about 10,000 people when it was ready. It was very luxuries with mirrors, mosaics, priceless carpets and tapestries and a giant park with several different themes.
5. He made his officials and many of the nobility move to Versailles where their sole purpose was to serve and amuse him... In this way he made them dependent and he could keep an eye on them.

But he also made some mistakes:

1. Moving to Versailles was a way to isolate the king – from the contact with the French people
2. Versailles cost a lot of money which meant more loans. The finances of France became weaker which would have an affect on her foreign policies
3. He raised the taxes to be able to keep his court which made him and his court unpopular
4. He revoked the “*Edict of Nantes*” which deprived the Huguenots of their freedom of worship. Ten thousands of prosperous, industrious citizens immigrated to Prussia, England and the English colonies in America...

He also had a capable economic adviser – **Jean Colbert**. Jean Colbert believed in **mercantilism**...

EXPLANATION from wikipedia - Mercantilism is an economic theory that holds the prosperity of a nation dependable upon its supply of capital, and that the global volume of trade is "unchangeable." Economic assets or capital, are represented by bullion (gold, silver, and trade value) held by the state, which is best increased through a positive balance of trade with other nations (exports minus imports). Mercantilism suggests that the ruling government should advance these goals by playing a protectionist role in the economy, by encouraging exports and discouraging imports, especially through the use of tariffs.

MORE from wikipedia - The height of French mercantilism is closely associated with **Jean-Baptiste Colbert**, finance minister for 22 years in the 17th century, to the extent that French mercantilism is sometimes called *Colbertism*. Under Colbert, the French government became deeply involved in the economy in order to increase exports. Protectionist policies were enacted that limited imports and favored exports. Industries were organized into guilds and monopolies, and production was regulated by the state through a series of over a thousands directives outlining how different products should be produced. To encourage industry, foreign artisans and craftsmen were imported. Colbert also worked to decrease internal barriers to trade, reducing internal tariffs and building an extensive network of roads and canals. Colbert's policies were quite successful, and France's industrial output and economy grew considerably during this period, as France became the dominant European power. He was less successful in turning France into a major trading power, and Britain and the Netherlands remained supreme in this field.

Foreign policies under Louis XIV - his ambition was to increase his own glory which resulted in several wars:

1667-1668 War of Devolution (or War of the Spanish Netherlands). France invaded the Spanish Netherlands (Belgium). A coalition of Holland, England and Sweden stopped the invasion. This resulted in France (Louis XIV) buying off England and Sweden and then start a new war...

1672-1678 War against the Netherlands. France attacked the Netherlands (again...). The Dutch resisted the attack and managed to get some new allies; Austria and Spain. France was once again stopped.

1680's - Louis XIV now focused on the border districts along the Rhine. This action alarmed several states in Europe who formed an alliance - the "**League of Augsburg**" to go against him.

1688-1697 War of the League of Augsburg. This war was France against Austria, England, Sweden and several German states. Louis XIV gained a few border territories but he also faced heavy losses in men and money.

1702-1713 War of the Spanish Succession. Charles II of Spain died 1700 leaving no male heirs. He willed his title and possessions to Louis XIV's grandson Philip. Most nations in Europe refused to acknowledge this. War broke out between France and several European states: England, Dutch Netherlands, Austria and Prussia. The war was fought both in Europe and in the American colonies (In England and the US it's called **Queen Anne's War**). At the **Treaty of Utrecht 1713** France lost Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and the Hudson Bay territory to England. Spain ceded Gibraltar to England. Austria received Naples, Milan, Sardinia and the Spanish Netherlands (which now became Austrian Netherlands). Philip became king of Spain but the crowns of the two countries were never to be united.

In 1715 Louis XIV died. He left France with an empty treasury and in large debts...

LONG-TERM & SHORT-TERM CAUSES OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

- **Enlightenment** - especially the writings of **Montesquieu, Rousseau, Voltaire** and **Diderot's encyclopedia**. It's interesting to see that the country that had fostered these men and their ideas was one of the ones furthest away from adopting them. Several countries had enlightened absolute rulers but France just had absolute rulers who refused to reform the country.
- **Poor economy.** The French monarchy had operated for over a century without resorting to a legislature. Since 1614, French kings had managed their fiscal affairs by increasing the burden of the ancient and unequal system of taxes, by borrowing money, and sometimes by selling noble titles and other privileges; however, because noble titles exempted the holder from future taxes, the purchasers of titles were effectively buying an annuity. The clergy was also tax exempted and the top of the Third Estate could buy tax exemptions. This meant that the rest of the Third Estate paid nearly all taxes (which did not give the state a lot of incomes). Here is a description from wikipedia about the taxes: Taxation relied on a system of internal tariffs separating the regions of France, which prevented a unified market from developing in the country. Taxes such as the extremely unpopular ***gabelle*** were contracted out to private collectors ("***tax farmers***") who were permitted to raise far more than the government requested. These systems led to an arbitrary and unequal collection of many of France's consumption taxes. Other taxes the peasants were required to pay included a tenth of their income or produce to the church (***tithe***), a (***taille***) to the state, a 5% property tax (***vingtième***) and a tax on the number of people in the family (***capitation***). Further royal and ***seigneurial taxes*** were collected in the form of compulsory labor (the ***corvée***). The peasants also had numerous obligations to their landlords - rent in cash (***cens***), a payment related to their amount of produce (***champari***), and taxes on the use of the nobles' mills, wine presses or bakeries (***banalités***). In good times, the taxes were burdensome; in harsh times, they were devastating.
- **French and Indian War 1754-1763:** The French and Indian War in Europe known as the "**Seven Years War**" (England declared war on France 1756...) saw the British pitted against the French, the Austrians, and the Spanish. The war in the Americas started inauspiciously. George Washington was forced to surrender Fort Necessity in the Ohio

Valley in 1754. The following year, British general Edward Braddock attempted to attack the French held Fort Duquesne. British troops were ambushed by the French and the Indians. Braddock was mortally wounded. It fell upon George Washington to extricate both British and Colonial forces from the wilderness. In 1758, William Pitt came out of retirement and took over the British war effort. He directed additional war efforts in North America. He gave the colonists much greater independence in pursuing the war effort. This increased the enthusiasm among colonialists toward the war. (Also in 1758, the first Indian Reservation in America was founded – 3000 acres in New Jersey). By the end of 1758, the British had begun to turn the tide in the war in North America. In September 1759 the British attacked Quebec. After a five day battle, British and American forces captured Quebec, ending French control of Canada. This loss cost France a lot of prestige as well as money...

- **Extreme inequality.** France was still organized as a feudal society. Every male person belonged to one out of three estates. The **First Estate** consisted of the **clergy** (Church). The **Second Estate** consisted of the **nobility** and the **Third Estate** was everybody else. The Third Estate was basically divided into three groups; the **upper level (bourgeoisie** - intellectuals, lawyers, doctors, merchants and businessmen - some very rich), the **city wage-earners** (skilled artisans, servants, laborers - they often lived on the very edge of poverty) and the **peasants** (over 80% - France had 5.3 million of Europe's 30 million male peasants.). The First Estate owned 10% of the land even though they were only 0.5% of the population. The Second Estate received all the best positions within the government and the army This group consisted of less than 1%.
- **Inequality in front of the law.** Many public officials had to buy their positions from the king, as well as the right to keep this position hereditary; they of course tried to have these expenses repaid by making a profit out of their appointment. For instance, in a civil lawsuit, judges had to be paid some fees by the parties (the *épices*); this put justice out of reach of everybody but the wealthy classes.
- **Political ambitions among the bourgeoisie.** This group resented the fact that they could not receive any privileges without paying for them and they were completely excluded from any political career.
- **Weak absolute monarchs.** **Louis XV** ruled from 1715-1774. His main interest was pleasure - he paid no attention to the need of the people and he therefore never initiated any reforms. Louis XVI might have some interest in governing but as the textbook describes him - "*he lacked a forceful personality, had no will power, and was afraid to offend people in direct contact with him*". You can find the following text in wikipedia about the failure to reform: During the régimes of Louis XV (reigned 1715-1774) and Louis XVI (reigned 1774-1792) several ministers, most notably Turgot and Necker, unsuccessfully proposed to revise the French tax system to tax the nobles. Such measures encountered consistent resistance from the *parlements* (law courts). Members of these courts bought their positions from the king, as well as the right to transmit this position hereditarily (the so-called *Paulette* tax). Membership in such courts, or appointment to other similar public positions, often led to the elevation into the nobility (the so-called *noblesse de robe* – "nobility of the robe", as opposed to the nobility of ancestral military origin, the *noblesse d'épée*, nobility of the sword). While these two categories of nobles were often at odds, they both sought to keep in place their privileges. Because the need to raise taxes placed the king at odds with the nobles and the high bourgeoisie, he typically appointed as his finance ministers, (to use *François Mignet's* term) "rising men", usually of non-noble origin. Turgot, *Chrétien de Malesherbes*, and *Jacques Necker* successively attempted to revise the system of taxation and to make other reforms, such as Necker's attempts to reduce the lavishness of the king's court. Each failed in turn. In contrast, *Charles Alexandre de Calonne*, appointed finance minister in 1783, restored lavish spending more reminiscent of the age of Louis XIV. By the time Calonne brought together the *Assembly of Notables* on February 22, 1787 to address

the financial situation, France had reached a state of virtual bankruptcy: no one would lend the king funds sufficient to meet the expenses of government and court. According to Mignet, the loans amounted to "*one thousand six hundred and forty-six millions... and... there was an annual deficit... of a hundred and forty millions [presumably of livres].*" Calonne was succeeded by his chief critic **Étienne Charles de Loménie de Brienne**, **archbishop of Sens**, but the fundamental situation was unchanged: the government had no credit. To try to address this, the assembly "sanctioned the establishment of provincial assemblies, a regulation of the corn trade, the abolition of *corvées*, and a new stamp tax; it broke up on the 25th of May, 1787."

What were the immediate causes?

- **Acute economical problems.** France in 1789, although facing some economic (and especially fiscal) difficulties, was one of the richest and strongest nations in Europe. The problem with the wealth was the poor distribution (described above). The wealthier classes (upper clergy, nobility and the richer bourgeoisie) owned most of it and they did not pay tax - so the state did not have an annual income and France was so deeply in debt as to be effectively bankrupt. Extravagant expenditures by Louis XVI on luxuries such as **Versailles** were compounded by heavy expenditures on different wars...
- **American Revolution (American War of Independence).** The debt described above increased even more when France 1778 joined the Americans in their struggle for Independence. This decision also had a political impact - Many Frenchmen admired the colonists rebellion and their fight for political rights - independence. This was especially true among the educated bourgeoisie!
- **Famine.** Wikipedia gives us the following information: These problems were all compounded by a great scarcity of food in the 1780s. A series of crop failures caused a shortage of grain, consequently raising the price of bread. Because bread was the main source of nutrition for poor peasants, this led to starvation. The two years previous to the revolution (1788-89) saw bad harvests and harsh winters, possibly because of a strong El Niño cycle caused by the 1783 Laki eruption at Iceland... A normal worker earned anywhere from 15 to 30 sous a day while skilled workers received 30 to 40 sous. A family of four would need about 2 loaves of bread a day to survive. The price of bread rose by 88 percent in 1789, going from 9 sous to 14.5/15 sous. Many peasants were relying on charity to survive. The peasantry became a class with the ambition to counteract social inequity and put an end to food shortages. The "*bread riot*" evolved into a central cause of the French Revolution. Mass urbanization coinciding with the beginning of the industrial revolution led residents to move into French cities seeking employment. French cities became overcrowded and filled with the hungry and disaffected. The peasantry suffered doubly from the economic and agricultural problems.

Unable to collect more taxes or borrow money Louis XVI had to call the **Estates-General** in. This old semi-feudal body had not been called in since 1614 - now it was 1788! The nobility was very much behind this development since they thought they would be able to better their positions in the French autocracy. The first meeting was going to take place in May 1789.

In 1614 the Estates-General consisted of three "orders" - one for each Estate. Each order had the same number of representatives and they voted as one body. That meant that the clergy (**First Estate**) had one vote, the nobility (**Second Estate**) had one vote and the rest (**Third Estate**) had one vote. Several more liberal reformers protested against this traditional order. Their **first demand** was to have as many representatives as the other two Estates together. The king yielded to their will. The **second demand** was that each representative's vote should be counted instead of a "*body vote*" remained unsolved.

When they were supposed to meet the Third Estate refused unless their second demand - to meet as one big body with an individual vote for each representative was accepted. After weeks of arguing the Third Estate (plus a few members of the clergy) invited the others to create a **National Assembly**. On June 20th 1789 they met (on an indoor tennis court) and they vowed not to disband until a new constitution had been written for France. This event is called the "**Tennis Court Oath**". After some resistance the king gave in and ordered the two other Estates to join the Third Estate in the **National Assembly**. The old Estates-General had ceased to exist! Meanwhile the king also ordered royal mercenary troops to surround Versailles and Paris...

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY 1789-1791: Due to the famine and the economic depression the king and his action became the target of the people. Crowds in Paris started to go out and look for weapons. A misunderstanding led them to storm an old fort, **the Bastille**, in their search for weapons at **July 14th 1789**. The mob stormed the place and killed the small garrison but did not find any weapons (they had been misinformed). Ever since this day the 14th of July has been **the French National Day**. The king ordered his royal troops to leave.

In many rural areas the peasants revolted. They refused to pay any taxes, attacked castles and manor houses of the nobility, destroyed records of feudal dues and in some cases burned the manors to the ground. The French Revolution had started.

The National Assembly made several reforms. They declared that **feudalism was abolished and all manorial dues ended**. They also issued a "**Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen**" (August 27th 1789) which said that the government should be based on the fundamental principles of liberty, equality, and natural rights. To be able to pay off some debts the National Assembly seized Church land. Louis XVI tried to escape June 1791 with his family but was caught (at Varennes - a Swedish aristocrat, Axel von Fersen "the younger", helped in the planning and execution of this escape attempt). This escape attempt raised the question about monarchy and what to do with the French Royal family.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY 1791-1792: The new French constitution was presented in September 1791. France now became a constitutional monarchy. Laws were to be made by a Legislative Assembly. The king could delay legislation but he could not veto it absolutely. This was a constitution that was designed for the new influential group - the bourgeoisie. One evidence for this is that all privileges had been taken away but you still had to own property to be able to vote. Only 50,000 people of the total population (24-26 million people depending on which source you use) qualified.

Several noble emigrants (émigrés) put pressure on the Royal houses of Europe to restore order in France. Emperor Leopold II of Austria (Habsburg) was the French Queen, Marie Antoinette's, brother. He and the Prussian King issued the "**Declaration of Pillnitz**" in August 1791 where they declared that it was the duty of **all monarchs** to restore order in France! This was not a declaration of war - rather the opposite since both countries (Austria/Habsburg Empire and Prussia) knew England and Russia were not interested in war against France and without them these two countries could not start.

The problem was instead the revolutionaries in France. They believed France would soon be attacked and they would lose what they gained. They formed a party that declared that starting a surprise war was the only way to solve the problem. The influence of this war party was so strong that the new Legislative Assembly declared **war against Austria** (Habsburg Empire) April 20th 1792.

The Royal family was imprisoned in August. In September over 1,000 royalists were executed (the "**September Massacre**"). The Legislative Assembly was abolished and a new National Constitutional Convention was elected. This election was based on **universal suffrage** - the bourgeois revolution had now become more radical...

NATIONAL CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION 1792-1795: At the very first meeting it **proclaimed France a Republic** and defied all royalty. It declared it was going to spread the ideas of the revolution "liberty, equality and fraternity" all over Europe. Soon French armies attacked the Austrian Netherlands (Belgium) and areas south of the Rhine. **By 1793 France was in war with almost all of Europe;** England, Prussia, Austria (Habsburg Empire), the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Sweden, and Sardinia. These countries are usually referred to as the "**First Coalition**" against France.

The pressure of the war (French armies suffered several defeats), lack of food and high bread prices, rebellions within the country (émigrés aided by more conservative peasants, especially in the west), and open struggle in the National Constitutional Convention (between the more moderate members - the **Girondins** against the radicals - the **Jacobins**) led to the Jacobin party defeating the Girondins. The Girondists now also became "*Enemies of the State*"...

In December 1792 Louis XVI was tried for treason. In January 1793 he was sent to the guillotine. He was soon followed by many more. In **April 1793** executive authority was given to a group of twelve members who were elected by the National Constitutional Convention. This group was called the **Committee of Public Safety** and the leader of the group was **Maximilien de Robespierre**. It was he and his group that launched the "**Reign of Terror**". Between August 1793 and July 1794 more than 40000 persons died. One of the first ones sent to the guillotine was the Queen - Marie Antoinette. Most of the people killed during this period were not part of the old aristocracy or clergy - it was ordinary citizens.

The Committee of Public Safety tried to solve the economic problems with a **strict program of price controls**. The war against the First Coalition had to be won so the Committee of Public Safety launched a program of **national mobilization** - the "**levée en masse**". By spring 1794 France had over 800000 soldiers - the largest army in Europe and they did not fight for a king but for the **survival of the new Republic!** They fought for a cause. The new army started to win several important victories against a weak and divided coalition. Already at summer 1794 the nation was saved (but it took to 1797 until the war was officially over). Since there was no real danger more people wanted to get rid of the harsh dictatorship of the Committee of Public Safety. In July 1794 Robespierre and his followers were sent to meet the same destiny as the king and queen - they were "*shaved by the national barber*". With this the "Reign of Terror" ended.

DIRECTORY 1795-1799: In October 1795 France got a new constitution (again). A two-house legislature was established. They elected a body of five men called **Directors**. Once again voting restrictions based on property was introduced. The bourgeoisie was back. The royalists were frustrated and so were the workers who had experienced a short period when they were given the right to vote. The war, even if it was basically won, did still cause tension and the economy was not getting better - the inflation continued.

At the free elections of 1797 several royalists were elected which now threaten the latest constitution. The Directory then called upon a young General for help. His name was **Napoleon Bonaparte**. With the support of his army he restored order in Paris and helped the Directory declare the elections null and void. The Directory thereby violated its own constitution... In **1797 France signed a peace treaty with Austria** (Habsburg Empire) in **Campo Formia**. This treaty gave France the Austrian Netherlands, considerable territory on the Rhine and some regions in northern Italy. This did not calm the French people who faced more economic problems and a corrupt inefficient Directory. In **1798 a Second Coalition** was formed (Britain and Russia) against France. This gave an opportunity for a successful young General - Napoleon Bonaparte...