

# FRENCH REVOLUTION – RADICALIZATION

**1614** The last meeting of the Estates-General. At this time the three estates met separately, and one vote was given to each of the estates which meant that the Third Estate always was outvoted.

**1789 May** Before this meeting its important to see that the three estates agreed on certain changes – a new constitution:

- *An assembly should be able to pass laws*
- *An assembly should be able to control taxation*
- *All estates condemned the absolute rule of the monarchy*
- *Large sections of the nobility and clergy agreed that they were willing to abandon financial privileges*

The Estates-General met on May 4<sup>th</sup>. After Necker had talked about the necessity of taxation the nobility and clergy decided to meet separately.

**1789 June** On the 17<sup>th</sup> of June the Third Estate titled itself the “National Assembly” and claimed that they represented the true interests of the French nation. On June 20<sup>th</sup>, 1789 the Third Estate found their building closed (for planned alterations). They gathered in the closest available building – an indoor Tennis Court. Here they took an oath – “The Tennis Court Oath” – to never dissolve as an assembly until a new constitution had been established. This is the first sign of a radicalization!

As more clergy and nobles joined the Third Estate the king took the decision that the three estates should join and sit together. Voting would now be one per head (individual voting instead as a group).

From the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 1789 the number of royal troops round Paris increased.

**1789 July** By July 4<sup>th</sup> over 30 000 soldiers had been called to Paris. This made the ordinary people of Paris react – especially the sans-cullotes. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of July the National Assembly started to work as a governing body and a constitution-drafter. It started to call itself the “Constituent Assembly”. With the dismissal of the popular Finance Minister Necker the 11<sup>th</sup> of July the events in Paris escalated. A rumor of a coup spread. Here we can see a radicalization of events in Paris:

- *The people of Paris started to plunder any place for food, guns and supplies. The Royal troops did nothing to stop this.*
- *A “bourgeois militia” (National Guard) was set up by the electors of Paris*
- *The Hotel des Invalides was stormed and the militia received around 30 000 muskets but no powder – that had been taken to the Bastille for safer storage*
- *The Bastille was stormed July 14<sup>th</sup>. Nearly hundred people died (only one defender) during the storming. The crowd therefore lynched the commandant of the Bastille and some of the defending officers*

What were the immediate results of the July events in Paris?

- *The people of Paris had now armed themselves*
- *The Royal Army remained passive – no intervention*
- *Louis XVI recognized the new authorities – the National Assembly, the Commune of Paris and the National Guard. He had now lost his authority as an absolute monarch in Paris.*
- *In rural France peasants started revolts after the news of what happened in Paris. The peasants stopped paying taxes and feudal dues as well as attacking grain convoys and some castles where they suspected grain was being hoarded. Where the terriers were found – they were burned. The king now lost his absolute authority over provincial towns and rural France.*
- *Some of the nobility started to emigrate*

**1789 Aug.** August Decrees and the Declaration of Rights. During an outbreak of “patriotic drunkenness” all privileges and tithes were renounced. In the August Decrees the feudal system of the old regime (ancien régime) were swept aside. Equality of taxation, status and entry into the professions became a principle:

**AUGUST DECREES** – the following were abolished:

- *tithes (la dîme) – land tax*
- *financial privileges*
- *tax exemptions*
- *seigneurial courts*
- *the feudal system*
- *venality (selling positions...)*
- *guild restrictions*
- *personal subjection to a lord*
- *corporate and provincial privileges*

A few weeks later another decree put an end to the old regime – the Declaration of the Rights of Man! This is a declaration of a worried middle class (bourgeoisie) that wants to make sure that their property isn't threatened.

Kings reaction – Louis XVI refused to accept the two decrees, new Royal troops arrived round Paris and the white royal flag of the Bourbons replaced the revolutionary tricolor at Versailles. At the same time the bread price continued to rise...

**1789 Oct. Women's march on Versailles** (The "October March")! On October 5<sup>th</sup> 7000 women marched to Versailles (followed by 20 000 men from the Paris National Guard). The crowd besieged the palace, invaded the Assembly and in a dramatic and violent confrontation, they successfully pressed their demands upon King Louis XVI. The next day, the crowd compelled the king, his family, and most of the French Assembly to return with them to Paris. The king now accepted both the August Decrees and the Declaration of Rights of Man. These events ended the king's independence and signified the change of power and reforms about to overtake France. The French Revolution seemed to become a popular revolution which became alarming for the Assembly. Had the revolution become too radical? To counter attack the radicality the Assembly decided to:

- *impose martial laws*
- *draw up a constitution*
- *reform the government*
- *set up new committees to replace corrupted town councils*
- *set up militias (National Guards) to protect the revolution*

**1789-91 CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY.** During this time France worked as a constitutional monarchy. He officially still had "supreme power" but could only veto laws for up to four years. The Assembly now worked on:

Local administration (decentralization)

Voting rights (only males above 25 – active citizens)

Law (a more efficient, uniform and humane system of law and justice)

Finance and economy (a mixture of enlightened ideas and suppression)

Result of the reforms – the **bourgeoisie gained!**

- *abolition of guilds*
- *internal tariffs were abolished*
- *ban on forming unions (Le Chapelier)*
- *strikes were made illegal*
- *free trade was introduced*
- *a voting qualification based on increasing wealth*
- *dominated local administration*
- *abolition of titles*

The Church lost land but gained some reforms:

- church property was sold for the nation
- assignats (paper money) were issued for the buying and selling of church land
- tithes abolished

- pluralism abolished
- “don gratuit” (“free gift” of taxation) abolished
- annates (payment to the Pope) abolished
- some monastic orders abolished
- equal rights for protestants
- each département would have a bishop
- clergy should be elected
- the Pope had no saying in the acceptance/rejection of bishops

When the Assembly tried to force the clergy to take an oath to the Constitution the clergy protested. France became divided in this question something the counter-revolutionaries would use later....

**The flight to Varennes.** On the night of the 20/21 June the king and his family tried to leave France in secret. They were caught at the border and brought back to Paris. The king got his rights suspended until he agreed on the new constitutional changes. We can now also see a rift between the idea of creating a Constitutional Monarchy or dethrone the king and create a Republic.

## THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

The National Constituent Assembly solved itself on 28 September 1791. Upon Robespierre's motion it had decreed that none of its members would be eligible to the next legislature. The elections of 1791, held by census franchise, brought in a legislature that desired to carry the Revolution further. Prominent in the legislature were the Jacobin Club and its affiliated societies throughout France.

The Legislative Assembly first met on 1 October 1791. It consisted of 745 members, mostly from the middle class. The members were generally young, and since none had sat in the previous Assembly, they largely lacked national political experience. They tended to be people who had made their name through successful political careers in local politics.

The rightists within the assembly consisted of about 260 "Feuillants", whose chief leaders, Gilbert du Motier de La Fayette and Antoine Barnave, remained outside the House, because of their ineligibility for re-election. They were staunch constitutional monarchists, firm in their defense of the King against the popular agitation.

The leftists were of 136 "Jacobins" (still including the party later known as the Girondins or Girondists) and Cordeliers. Its most famous leaders were Jacques Pierre Brissot, the philosopher Condorcet, and Pierre Victurnien Vergniaud. The Left drew its inspiration from the more radical tendency of the Enlightenment, regarded the émigré nobles as traitors, and espoused anticlericalism. They were suspicious of Louis XVI, some of them favoring a general European war, both to spread the new ideals of liberty and equality and to put the king's loyalty to the test.

The remainder of the House, 345 deputies, generally belonged to no definite party. They were called "*the Marsh*" (Le Marais) or "*the Plain*" (La Plaine). They were committed to the ideals of the Revolution, hence generally inclined to side with the Left but would also occasionally back proposals from the Right.

(SOURCE: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legislative\\_Assembly\\_\(France\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legislative_Assembly_(France)) )

**NOTE:** *The declaration of the rights of women and of the female citizen*

**ASSIGNMENT:** You need to explain the radicalization of the French Revolution after the formation of the legislative assembly. What ideas of the previous years influenced this radicalization and what new events and ideas pushed the revolution towards its most radical phase – the Terror?