HANDOUT 8

The Birth of the National Assembly

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DID YOU KNOW?

Just before the opening of the Estates-General, Louis XVI was climbing up a ladder to the observatory on the roof of the Marble Court when a rung broke and the ladder began to fall. A workman grabbed the ladder and saved Louis; he was rewarded with a pension of 1200 livres.

The Estates-General meets at Versailles

At the end of April 1789, the delegates to the Estates-General began arriving at the great palace of Versailles. The representatives of the nobility had been chosen by a direct vote (all male nobles over twenty-five had voted for their representatives), those of the clergy by a mixture of direct and indirect voting and those of the Third Estate indirectly. In the case of the Third Estate all males over twenty-five were entitled to vote for electors, who then met in district conventions to elect their representatives. Most of the Society of Thirty became deputies: the young bourgeois Target, the de Lameth brothers, Lafayette, Lally-Tollendal, Clermont-Tonnerre, the Archbishop of Bordeaux, Champion de Cicé, Bishop Talleyrand and Abbé Sieyès. The Marquis de Mirabeau, like Sieyès, was elected for the Third Estate. Of the Third Estate deputies, almost half were lawyers, including Target, Mounier, Barnave and Robespierre. There were some noblemen and a few priests, but of the 600 deputies, fewer than twenty were from the lower orders.

Social distinctions were strictly observed. On 2 May, Louis XVI received all the delegates in the Hall of Mirrors. The clergy were received first. The double doors leading to the Hall of Mirrors were opened but once the delegates were inside they were closed, giving them a private audience with the King. The nobility were next. The doors were opened, but not fully closed behind them. In contrast, the deputies for the Third Estate were made to wait for over three hours for their audience with the King and were not admitted to the Hall of Mirrors; they were taken to a lesser *salon*. Here, in the words of Simon Schama, they passed in single file before Louis 'like a crocodile of sullen schoolboys' and were then dismissed.[1]

On Monday 4 May, the deputies to the Estates-General walked in procession to the Church of St. Louis for the celebration of mass. Here, again, social differences were made apparent. The Third Estate led the way immediately behind the guard, wearing costumes of plain black broad-cloth, with white ruffs and tricorne hats. Then followed the nobility, colourful in satin suits, with lace ruffs and silver waistcoats. Their hats had decorative plumes and swords hung from their belts. The Marquis de Ferrières had grumbled in a letter to his wife that his hat would cost him, at the very least, 180 livres, which was about a third of the yearly income of the lower clergy who made up the majority of the First Estate.[2] Last came the clerical deputies, the parish priests in their plain soutanes (cassocks) and the bishops resplendent in their scarlet and purple episcopal regalia. The deliberate division into higher and lower orders was resented and, as Simon Schama has noted, 'The more brilliantly the first two orders swaggered, the more they alienated the Third Estate and provoked it into exploding the institution altogether.'[3] The King's arrival was greeted with shouts of 'Long live the King,' but, wrote the American observer Gouverneur Morris, 'The Queen received not a single acclamation.'[4]

The Deputies of the Three Orders of the Estates-General in their Ceremonial Dress.
© Photothèque des Musées de la Ville de Paris.

The strict hierarchical order of the old regime was visually expressed through rigid distinctions in dress. The Third Estate deputies bitterly resented the plain dress they were obliged to wear to mark them out from the upper orders.

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ACTIVITY 1

Focus Question

What messages were conveyed to the deputies representing the Third Estate by the formalities of the celebrations?

Louis XVI fails to show leadership

Tuesday 5 May was the date of the opening ceremony for the sitting of the Estates-General. Delegates met at the Hôtel des Menus Plaisirs, normally used for storing theatrical costumes and props for royal entertainment. The King wore cloth-of-gold and a large diamond glinted in his hat, which he carried in his hand. The Queen wore a white dress with silver spangles and a heron plume in her hair. As Louis sat down, he put on his hat, a signal to the privileged orders that they could now place their hats on their heads. The Third Estate deputies, either not understanding the court protocols, or 'led by calculating mischief makers,'[5] took it as a symbol that they could replace their own hats. The King, therefore, took his hat off again, and again, all the deputies copied him. Finally, Louis waited until the Queen was seated and replaced his hat on his head. The American representative, Gouverneur Morris, was consumed with mirth, but the Queen, Simon Schama has reported, 'was white with rage.'[6]

What followed was greatly disappointing to the assembled deputies, who were hoping that Louis would lead them in a programme of reform. The King made a short speech of welcome. In it, he referred to the 'much exaggerated desire for innovations' and expressed the hope that those present would work with him for the welfare of France. The next speech was made by Barentin, the King's Keeper of the Seals, who talked also of 'dangerous innovations.' The final speaker was Jacques Necker, who made a three-hour speech on the state of the finances. Having bored the whole audience, including the King (who fell asleep), the ceremonial welcome was over, with no firm plans or policies emerging from the speeches. The sole directive

1 Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (UK: Penguin, 1989), 346.
2 Schama, *Citizens*, 336.
3 Schama, *Citizens*, 339.
4 Christopher Hibbert, *The French Revolution* (UK: Penguin, 1980), 50.
5 Schama, *Citizens*, 346.
6 Schama, *Citizens*.

coming from the government of the King was that the finances must be stabilised and put in order.

On 6 May, the deputies met in their separate estates or chambers to verify their credentials, with the whole question of voting by estate or by head still not settled. The nobility and the clergy, in their separate halls, began the process of checking the credentials of their deputies. The representatives of the Third Estate, however, demanded that every deputy should present his credentials to the full body of deputies, assembled in one place. Until this was conceded, they refused to undertake the process of verification. The result was a stalemate. For a full three weeks, the deputies of the Third Estate met, talked and debated but, so that they did not appear to have accepted their separate status, would neither organise themselves, elect leaders, nor adopt any rules of procedure. The only appointment that was made was the election of Jean-Sylvain Bailly, an astronomer, to control the debates. As the person who had overseen the elections of the 407 deputies of the Third Estate from Paris, he was a well respected and popular figure.

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ACTIVITY 2

Document Analysis

Read the document below and complete the tasks that follow.

Comtesse d'Adhémar, *Souvenirs sur Marie-Antoinette, Archiduchesse d'Austriche, Reine de France, et sur la Cour de Versailles* (4 vols, 1836), III: on 'The King's Attitude.'

We [the Queen's friends] never ceased repeating to the King that the third estate would wreck everything – and we were right. We begged him to restrain then [sic], *to impose his sovereignty on party intrigue. The King replied, 'But it is not clear that the third estate is wrong. Different forms have been observed each time the Estates have been held. So why reject verification in common? I am for it.'*

The King, it has to be admitted, was then numbered among the revolutionaries – a strange fatality which can only be explained by recognizing the hand of Providence. Meanwhile, Paris was unquiet and Versailles scarcely less so ...

The King, deceived by the Genevan [Necker] ... paid no attention to the Queen's fears.

This well-informed princess knew all about the plots that were being woven; she repeated them to the King, who replied, 'Look, when all is said and done, are not the third estate also my children – and a more numerous progeny? And even when the nobility lose a proportion of their privileges and the clergy a few scraps of their income, will I be any less their king?' This false perspective accomplished the general ruin.[7]

1 What reasons did the King give for supporting the verification of credentials in common?

2 What were the Queen's views of the demands of the Third Estate? What was the 'everything' that would be 'wrecked' by accepting the demands of the Third Estate deputies?

3 How did the Comtesse d'Adhémar explain the King's 'revolutionary' position? What other explanations might there have been?

4 From your own knowledge and the document, briefly explain why the Third Estate insisted on verifying credentials in common. Did the King's acceptance, expressed in this document, lead him to accept the formation of a common chamber for debate and voting? Give reasons to support your answer. (NB. You may find it useful to read about 'Rising tensions in Paris' on page 80.)

5 Which phrases in the document clearly reveal the Comtesse d'Adhémar's support for the Queen rather than the King? What can we tell about the Comtesse from her words and the title of her book? What reservations might we have about the reliability of her account?

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ACTIVITY 3

Focus Questions

1 Referring to the speeches made by Louis XVI and Jacques Necker (page 73–4), determine what role they saw for the Estates-General in their meetings.

2 Why were the deputies of the Third Estate not content with the King's concession that the Third should be doubled?

3 What might have been the result if they had gone through the process of verifying the credentials of the Third Estate deputies?

Invitation to form a National Assembly

The deadlock was broken at the end of May by the decision of the deputies of the Third Estate to send a delegation to the First Estate, hoping to encourage the more liberal deputies amongst the clergy to join the Third. The delegation was led by Gui-Jean-Baptiste Target, the deputy from Dauphiné, who announced that

> The gentlemen of the Commons invite the gentlemen of the clergy, in the name of the God of Peace and for the national interest, to meet them in their hall to consult upon the means of bringing about the concord which is so vital at this moment for the public welfare.[8]

This was an astute political move, because the First Estate deputies were already divided, with the upper clergy favoring separate voting, and many of the lower clergy identifying with the Third Estate. Simon Schama has pointed out that 'it was in the Church, more than any other group in France, that the separation between rich and poor was most bitterly articulated.'[9] While the wealthiest bishops may have had an annual income of 50 000 livres, the standard stipend for a village priest was only 700 livres per year. These priests were not only impoverished, but they lived within their communities, as many of the upper clergy did not, and were well aware of the sufferings of the poor. Almost two thirds of the 303 clerical deputies elected were ordinary parish priests, and of these, around half had addresses in Paris where they lived for most of the year.[10] Many of them were liberal in their thinking and eager to join the Third Estate. The majority, however, were more reluctant to join with the 'Commons,' as the Third Estate deputies now called themselves, and so the delay continued. On 7 May, the nobility voted to proceed with separate verification. The clergy followed, but not without dissent: 133 deputies voted for separate representation, while 114 voted against.[11]

The Réveillon Riots 27 April 1789

The activities at Versailles were taking place against a backdrop of increasing unrest in Paris. As food prices continued to rise and place pressure on the urban workers, political and economic issues fused into resentment of the government and of the privileged estates. In April, the wallpaper

7. Comtesse d'Adhémar, *Souvenirs sur Marie-Antoinette, Archiduchesse d'Austriche, Reine de France, et sur la Cour de Versailles* (4 vols, 1836), III, 356–7, cited in Leonard W. Cowie, *The French Revolution: Documents and Debates* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 45.
8. Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 54.
9. Schama, *Citizens*, 348.
10. William Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1980), 99; Timothy Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture* (USA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 29.
11. Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 102.

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DID YOU KNOW?

Madame de la Tour du Pin recorded in her memoirs that the early spring of 1789 followed a terrible winter, with much suffering amongst the poor. The Duc d'Orléans was noted for his charity towards the poor, she writes, but 'In contrast, whether rightly or wrongly, there was no mention of any charitable gifts from the royal princes or from the King and Queen.'

manufacturer Réveillon had been under attack from a crowd of about 3000 after he had argued for deregulation of the price of bread. The rumour spread that he was trying to cut wages and when he and another manufacturer, Henriot, tried to deny the rumours, they were not believed. The crowd carried a mock gallows and a placard which read 'Edict of the Third Estate, which Judges and Condemns the Above Réveillon and Henriot to be burned and Hanged in a Public Square.'[12] Shouting 'Death to the Rich, death to the Aristocrats,' they marched on Réveillon's mansion. Prevented by the local militia from reaching the house, they attacked Henriot's mansion, looting and destroying his possessions.[13] In the riots that followed, some 300 people were injured as the ***Gardes Françaises*** (elite royal household troops) tried to restore order. Beyond the Réveillon Riots, however, was the wider fear of the urban poor that the rich were plotting to find ways to retain their privileges at the expense of the poor. Rumours spread of a 'grain plot' either by the government itself, or by noble and clerical interests. The bookseller Hardy recorded that even the monarchy was under suspicion:

> Some say the princes have been hoarding grain the better to overthrow M. Necker ... Others said the Director-General of Finances was himself the chief and first of all the hoarders, with the consent of the King, and that he only favoured and supported such an enterprise to get money more promptly for His Majesty.[14]

Food shortages thus became associated in the people's minds with the taxation crisis and with plots to dismiss the Estates-General: if the King could not get the money he needed from the Estates-General, he would dismiss them and sell the grain in order to relieve his financial problems.

The growing unrest in Paris led to attempts to settle the question of representation. On 4 June, Necker suggested that each estate should verify the credentials of its own members, but that the other estates should be able to challenge the results. However, Sieyès proposed to the Commons that it should summon the privileged estates to either join with them or to forfeit their rights as representatives of the nation. This was a revolutionary move, because Sieyès was not asking the deputies to join the Third Estate, but to recognise themselves as the representatives of the French nation, a complementary but rival power to the monarchy. Louis XVI's authority had not only been challenged, but rejected by a group which saw itself as representing a different authority – that of the people.

The Declaration of the National Assembly 17 June 1789

On 12 June, the Commons began the process of verification, beginning with the privileged orders, but the deputies were not verified on the basis of their order, but as representatives of the nation. On 13 June, three clergymen joined them. They were greeted with thunderous applause and shouts of approval. More followed on 14 June and, on 17 June, the Commons declared themselves the National Assembly of France:

> The Assembly, deliberating after the verification of powers, recognizes that this assembly is already composed of deputies sent by at least ninety-six per cent of the nation ... The name of NATIONAL ASSEMBLY is the only one which suits the assembly under the present circumstances ... Because they are sent directly by almost the entire nation ... none of the deputies, from whatever class or order, has the right to perform his duties apart from the present assembly.[15]

The decision marked the beginning of the real revolution and it was largely a result of the indecision of Louis XVI. He had failed to rule on the question of voting by head or by estate in December 1788 and thus made the issue a dispute. He had not intervened over the six weeks from May to June 1789, partly because he was in mourning for the death of his eldest son, the seven-year-old Dauphin, who had died of tuberculosis on 4 June, after two years of illness. The King and Queen were suffering deep personal grief throughout this critical period of public responsibility. As a result of the indecision of the King, the Commons gradually hardened their position. If he had agreed to common verification and voting by head, then the deputies for the Third Estate would have had a meaningful political voice within an assembly representing all three estates. However, Louis' inaction had inflated the issue and gradually the Commons moved towards challenging his authority. In this they were urged on by the growing crowd of spectators from Paris who had little sympathy for the noble orders.

The voice of public opinion was firmly on the side of the rebels and popular journals and pamphlets in Paris made the political situation a matter of common debate. The Englishman Arthur Young wrote,

> I went to the Palais Royal to see what new things were published ... Nineteen-twentieths of these productions are in favour of liberty and commonly violent against the clergy and nobility ... The coffee houses ... are not only crowded within, but other expectant crowds are at the doors and windows, listening ... to certain orators, who from chairs and tables harangue each his little audience. The eagerness with which they are heard, and the thunder of applause they receive for every sentiment of more than common hardness against the present government cannot be believed.[16]

On 19 June, the clergy voted to join the National Assembly, endorsing the declaration of 17 June. The spectators applauded them, calling out 'Long live the good Bishops! Long live the priests!'[17] On 20 June, however, when the new National Assembly arrived at the *Salle des Menus Plaisirs* to begin their discussion, they found the doors locked and placards announcing the calling of a *Séance Royal*, a royal session presided over by the King, to be held on 23 June in order to announce the formation of a National Assembly to be illegal.

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DID YOU KNOW?

The Dauphin's funeral was said to have cost 600 000 livres, at a time when many of Louis XVI's subjects were unable to pay for bread. The Marquis de Ferrières commented to his wife, 'You see, my dear, the birth and death of princes is not an object of economy.'

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ACTIVITY 4

Focus Questions

1. What were the mistakes made by Louis XVI from 1787 which had led to the growth of revolutionary sentiment?
2. What difference might it have made if he had decided to allow voting by head prior to the meeting of the Estates-General?

12 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 328.

13 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*.

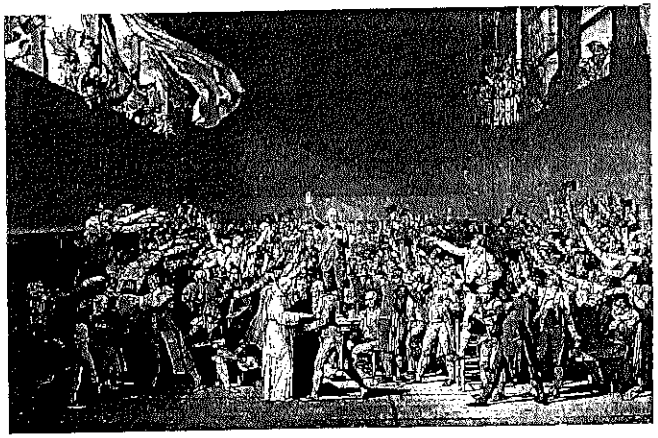
14 D.M.G. Sutherland, *France 1789–1815 Revolution and Counter-Revolution* (London: Fontana, 1985), 61.

15 John Hall Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1951), 87.

16 Arthur Young, cited in Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 104.

The Oath of the Tennis Court 20 June 1789

Indignant at what seemed to be an act of royal despotism and led by Parisian deputy Dr. Joseph Guillotin, the deputies moved to a nearby indoor tennis court. There were no seats, only a single armchair, and a bench. Two of the deputies stayed at the door to keep out the crowds that tried to follow. Sieyès wanted them to move the whole Assembly to Paris, but then Jean-Joseph Mounier, the young deputy from Grenoble, intervened. He called on the deputies to swear an oath between them never to separate until France had a constitution. The oath was taken individually by each deputy in front of Jean-Sylvain Bailly, who stood on a table made from a door pulled from its hinges. Arms raised in a Roman salute, the 600 deputies swore the 'Oath of the Tennis Court.' Only one man dissented, Martin d'Auch of Castelnaudry. The oath said:



The Oath of the Tennis Court, Jacques-Louis David, 1791.

> The National Assembly, considering that it has been summoned to establish the constitution of the Kingdom, to effect the regeneration of public order, and to maintain the true principles of monarchy; that nothing can prevent it from continuing its deliberations in whatever place it may be forced to assemble; and finally, that wherever its members are assembled, *there* is the National Assembly, decrees that all members of this Assembly shall immediately take a solemn oath not to separate and to reassemble wherever circumstances require, until the constitution of this kingdom is established and consolidated upon firm foundations; and that the said oath taken, all members and each one of them individually shall ratify this steadfast resolution by signature.[18]

The deputies then lined up to sign the document. Against his name, Martin d'Auch signed '*opposant.*'[19]

Who was responsible for the Oath of the Tennis Court? It had been suggested by Mounier and drafted by Target, Barnave and Le Chapelier, all lawyers. It is historically significant because it was the first formal act of disobedience to the monarchy and was signed even by those members who had opposed adopting the name of 'National Assembly' on 17 June. A notable absentee was the Marquis de Lafayette. This dramatic moment was to take on iconic status in the Revolution. It was immortalised by Jacques-Louis David, the revolutionary painter, in several different versions which have been analysed in extensive detail by the historian Michael Adcock.[20] (See colour insert for more on David's *Oath of the Tennis Court.*)

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DID YOU KNOW?

Royal tennis, played in an indoor court with solid balls and smaller racquets, is still played today. There are more than forty-five indoor tennis courts throughout the world today, including four in Australia.

17 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 59.

18 Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 88.

19 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 60.

20 Michael Adcock's outstanding analysis of the way in which the representation of this key historical event changed during the course of the Revolution may be found in Michael Adcock and Graeme Worrall, *The French Revolution: A Student Handbook* (Melbourne: ITAV, 1997), 42–5.

The Royal Session 23 June 1789

At the Royal Session of 23 June, Louis XVI, as expected, announced that the decision to form the National Assembly was annulled and that the estates should meet separately, unless he permitted them to meet together. He then announced some concessions: that the question of equal taxation would be considered and that new taxes would only be levied with the consent of the Estates-General. All feudal dues, manorial dues and church tithes were to be left intact, but privileged tax status could be surrendered, if it were done so voluntarily. Finally, Louis promised to extend the system of provincial assemblies to the whole of his kingdom, to abolish censorship of the press and arbitrary arrest and imprisonment (*lettres de cachet*). He then ordered the deputies to disperse and to meet the next day in their separate orders. After this he withdrew, followed by the nobility and the majority of the clergy, who were not willing to challenge royal authority.

The Third Estate deputies and their clerical supporters remained seated. When de Brézé, the Master of Ceremonies, ordered them to go, Mirabeau rose to his full height and pronounced, 'Go and tell those who have sent you that we are here by the will of the nation and we will go only if we are driven out by bayonets.'[21] He was immediately supported by Bailly and Sieyès: the former stated, 'The assembled nation cannot be given orders.'[22] In the vote that followed, 493 deputies vowed to stay, while only thirty-four voted to obey the King.[23] Thus, the new National Assembly rejected royal authority over it, confirmed the Tennis Court Oath and proclaimed its members free from arrest. When the King was told of the deputies' resistance, he is reported to have said, 'They mean to stay! ... Well, then, damn it! Let them stay!'[24]

For the Third Estate, it was a huge victory which was soon to be followed by another. On 24 June the soldiers sent to deny the National Assembly entry to its meeting hall crossed to support the Assembly, telling Bailly, 'We too, are citizens.'[25] On 25 June, forty-seven liberal nobles, including the King's cousin, the Duc d'Orléans, the very highest of the peerage, joined the National Assembly. By 27 June, forewarned that a mob of thirty thousand was about to march on Versailles from Paris, King Louis XVI capitulated and ordered the estates to meet in common and to vote by head. The nobility, the Marquis de Lafayette amongst it, with the rest of the clergy, now joined the rebel deputies within the National Assembly. Arthur Young, commenting in his diary on the events to 27 June, concluded, 'The whole revolution now seems over and the business complete.'[26]

In the eyes of the King and his ministers, however, the business was far from complete. The failure of the Royal Session on 23 June was, they concluded, the fault of Necker. Although he had originally proposed it as a solution, he had absented himself on the day. Now that royal authority had failed, Louis' ministers advised him to quell the reform movement by sacking Necker and using armed force. On 26 June, six regiments were ordered to Versailles and on 1 July, another ten regiments were moved from the provinces to the outskirts of the city of Paris.

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DID YOU KNOW?

Jean-Sylvain Bailly was guillotined on 12 November 1793, on the false grounds that he had aided the royal family to flee Paris. He was brought to the place of execution with his hands bound behind his back, half-naked and freezing. For three hours the crowd abused him, hit him with sticks, threw stones at him and spat in his face.

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DID YOU KNOW?

Mirabeau died a natural death in April 1791, perhaps the only major revolutionary figure other than Sieyès to do so. He suffered from pericarditis, an inflammation of the fibrous sac surrounding the heart. The great orator's last word was 'sleep.'

21 Robert Ergang, *Europe from the Renaissance to Waterloo* (Boston: D.C. Heath and Co., 1954), 655.

22 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 62.

23 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*.

24 Ergang, *Europe from the Renaissance to Waterloo*, 655.

25 Schama, *Citizens*, 364.

26 Arthur Young, *Travels in France during the Years 1787, 1788 and 1789* (New York: Anchor Books, 1965), 179.

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ACTIVITY 5

Focus Question

Suggest two things that might have occurred if Louis XVI had decided to use the army to dissolve the Estates-General.

Rising tensions in Paris

This counter-manoeuvre by the monarchy was not unexpected by the people. Even as Louis XVI made concessions to the Third Estate, the fear that he would seek reprisals against the population increased. What if he reversed his decision? What if the troops which were arriving at Versailles and Paris were to be used against the people? The government, meanwhile, protested that the 18 000 troops massed around the city were there 'to protect Paris from disorder, not to overawe it.'[27]

The Assembly itself was not sure of the King's intentions. It requested that the troops be withdrawn. On 8 July, Mirabeau voiced the fears of those present when he declared, 'A large number of troops already surround us. More are arriving each day. Artillery is being brought up ... These preparations for war are obvious to anyone and fill every heart with indignation.'[28] The decision was made to petition the King to withdraw the troops, but on 10 July, Louis refused, suggesting that the troops were there to protect the Assembly and that, in the event of street-rioting, it might be necessary to move the deputies further away from Paris. As fears grew, so did the determination of the Assembly and the people of Paris to resist. When, on 11 July, Jacques Necker was summarily dismissed, it seemed like a declaration of war.

The letter from the King arrived at 3 o'clock in the afternoon and ordered Necker to leave Versailles secretly and to return to Switzerland. By 5 o'clock, Necker and his wife had departed. The dismissal was politically disastrous, as Gouverneur Morris perceived. In his diary entry for 12 July, he wrote of his alarm and his efforts to urge the Maréchal de Castries to point out the dangers to Louis XVI:

> I tell him it is not too late to warn the King of his Danger which is infinitely greater than he imagines. That his Army will not fight against the Nation, and that if he listens to violent Counsels the Nation will undoubtedly be against him. That the Sword has fallen imperceptibly from his hand, and that the Sovereignty of this Nation is the National Assembly.[29]

In Paris, frenzied crowds of people spilled onto the streets, looting shops, particularly those which sold arms. Shouts of 'Necker and the Third Estate!' rang through the air. Soldiers found themselves retreating under a hail of stones. Groups of men marched through the streets armed with pitchforks, swords or whatever weapon they could find or steal. At the Palais Royal, converted by the Duc d'Orléans into a place of cafés, shops and recreational gardens and open to the public, Necker's dismissal brought a crowd of several thousand to listen to speakers condemning the King's actions and calling for action.

One of the most vocal was the twenty-six-year-old Camille Desmoulins, who urged those assembled to take up arms against the treachery of kings. He urged the crowd to identify themselves as patriots by pulling leaves from the trees: green was to be the identifying mark of patriots and revolutionaries:

> To arms, to arms and let us take a green cockade, the colour of hope ... Yes, yes, it is I who call my brothers to freedom; I would rather die than submit to servitude.[30]

Desmoulins was loudly cheered. On 12 July, the monastery of St. Lazare, used as a prison and a grain and arms store, was looted. Crowds released the prisoners, stole the grain and flour and looted the building. The *Gardes Françaises*, the local militia which should have maintained law and order, joined them. Faced with armed and angry crowds, the King's troops had two choices: engage in battle or retreat. They retreated, but rumours spread swiftly through the city that the King's guards were slaughtering the people. Either on the authority of those at the Palais Royal or on their own initiative, mobs attacked the royal customs houses at the entry points to Paris and demolished them one by one. Their stones went into the growing pile to be used against the troops. Simon Schama has written,

> During that single night of largely unobstructed riot and demolition, Paris was lost to the monarchy. Only if Besenval was prepared to use his troops the following day to occupy the city ... was there any chance of recapture [but] ... told by his own officers that their own soldiers, even the Swiss and German, could not be counted on, he was unwilling to take the offensive.[31]

On the morning of 14 July, crowds invaded the Hôtel des Invalides, which was an arms depository and home to soldier-pensioners. From the Invalides, they removed more arms. Finally, they attacked the great prison of the Bastille.

Camille Desmoulins calls the people to arms at the Palais Royal on 12 July.

27 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 64.

28 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 63–4.

29 Georges Pernoud and Sabine Flaissier, *The French Revolution* (London: Secker and Warburg, London, 1961), 24.

The fall of the Bastille 14 July 1789: the first revolutionary *journée*

The grey Bastille prison loomed over central Paris as a visible symbol of royal authority. It was used to house those prisoners confined as a result of *lettres de cachet* and was thus representative of royal absolutism. On 14 July 1789, it held only seven prisoners: four counterfeiters, two 'lunatics' and one *débauché*, or person of abandoned moral values. Only one prisoner was there as a result of political offences. To the increasingly unruly mob, however, it was a potential source of weapons and, more particularly, gunpowder with which to feed the muskets taken from the Invalides.

Armed with two pieces of cannon taken from the Invalides, the crowd marched on the Bastille. Once there, they raised a flag of truce and sent a deputation to demand that the governor, the Marquis de Launay, hand over the arms and ammunition they wanted. He refused, but made the concession that the cannon which directly overlooked the Rue Saint Antoine would not be fired, unless the Bastille itself came under attack. Compromise being thus reached, the delegation withdrew. The crowd, in the meantime, fearing that Launay had detained their representatives, had succeeded in lowering the drawbridge that led into the inner courtyard; as the delegation departed, around forty members of the crowd rushed across and into the courtyard of the prison. Whether by accident or order, whether from the crowd or from the soldiers, shots were fired. In the resulting action, ninety-eight civilians died and another seventy-eight were wounded, while six soldiers were killed.[32] The *Gardes Françaises* then marched to the fortress to join in the battle. With five cannon taken that morning from the Invalides and

Lafayette presented a key to the Bastille to George Washington in 1790. It is still on display at Washington's home at Mount Vernon. © Photothèque des Musées de la Ville de Paris.

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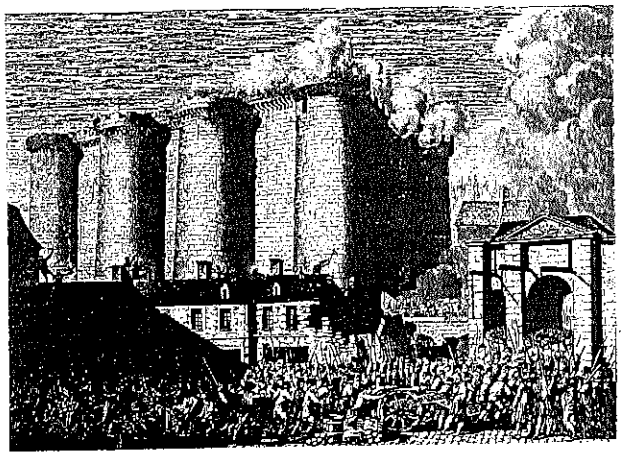
DID YOU KNOW?

The Marquis de Sade was one of the prisoners in the Bastille in 1789. During his exercise periods on the battlements he would shout out obscenities to passers-by. Given news of the outside world from his wife, Sade's addresses suddenly became political from the start of July. When deprived of his walks by authorities, he turned the metal funnel designed to deposit his urine in the moat into a megaphone. Through his window, he would shout out news bulletins to the crowd, saying that the prisoners were being killed and that the 'People' should save them before it was too late. The prison governor, Launay, decided this mischievous agitator should be moved and, around 5 July, sent him to an insane asylum in Charenton. Sade was released in 1790.

30 Schama, *Citizens*, 382.

31 Schama, *Citizens*, 387.

32 Rudé's figures. Schama places the number of civilian dead at eighty-three, with fifteen more wounded, and only one defender dead. Doyle says 'almost a hundred.'



The Taking of the Bastille, engraving. Private collection of Peter McPhee.

supported by a few hundred armed civilians, they positioned the guns to fire on the main gate.

At first, Launay threatened to blow up the fortress rather than surrender it. However, he was persuaded by his men to surrender. At the same time, a delegation from the *Hôtel de Ville* (Town Hall) arrived under a flag of truce to persuade the crowd to stop firing. A white handkerchief was raised on one of the towers, indicating surrender. Launay ordered the main drawbridge lowered and was taken prisoner. Six members of his garrison had died in the defence of the Bastille. Lieutenant Louis Deflue, one of a contingent of thirty-two Swiss guards who had been sent to reinforce the Bastille, was one of those made prisoner. He later recalled:

> They disarmed us immediately. They took us prisoner, each of us having a guard. They flung our papers out of the windows and plundered everything. The streets through which we passed and the houses flanking them (even the rooftops) were filled with masses of people shouting at me and cursing me. Swords, bayonets and pistols were being continually pressed against me. I did not know how I should die, but felt my last moment had come. Stones were thrown at me and women gnashed their teeth and brandished their fists at me.[33]

Launay himself was murdered on his way to the *Hôtel de Ville*. An out of work cook named Desnot attempted to stab him. Launay responded with a kick to the man's testicles, whereupon Desnot shouted 'He's done me in!' Launay was then stabbed with a bayonet and attacked by the crowd, which mutilated his body as he lay on the ground. His head, severed by Desnot with a pen knife, was mounted on a pike and carried in triumph through the streets. An English doctor, Edward Rigby, was in Paris that evening and recorded the scene:

> The crowd passed on to the Palais Royal, and in a few minutes another succeeded it. Its approach was announced by loud and triumphant acclamations, but as it came nearer ... the impression made by it on the people was of a very different kind. A deep and hollow murmur at once pervaded them, their countenances expressing amazement mingled with alarm ... We suddenly partook of this general sensation, for we then, and not till then, perceived two bloody heads raised on pikes, which were said to be the heads of the Marquis de Launay, governor of the Bastille, and of Monsieur Flesselles, *Prêvot de Marchands* [chief magistrate] ... who had tried to prevent the people from arming themselves. It was a chilling and horrid sight.[34]

Who conquered the Bastille?

While many thousands had taken to the streets on 14 July, according to George Rudé most of the crowd of about 600 strong directly involved in the action at the Bastille were 'residents of the Faubourg [District] Saint Antoine and its adjoining parishes; their average age was thirty four; nearly all were fathers of families and most ... were members of the newly formed citizens militia.'[35] (This was the *Gardes Bourgeois*, which was to become the National Guard.) In terms of occupations, they were generally craftsmen, joiners, cabinet-makers, locksmiths, cobblers, shopkeepers, jewellers, manual workers and labourers. The largest occupational group was the cabinet-makers, of whom there were ninety-seven. Eighty were soldiers. One, Antoine Santerre, owned a brewery. The oldest was seventy-two, the youngest only eight. There was only one woman, a laundress. It was this group of people which was recognised by the National Assembly as the *vainquers de la Bastille* – the conquerors of the Bastille. They were issued special certificates and assigned a place of honour at the *Fêtes de la Fédération* (Festivals of Federation), the public ceremonies held annually on 14 July to mark the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille in 1789.

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DID YOU KNOW?

Pierre-François Palloy, known as 'Patriote Palloy,' began demolishing the Bastille on 15 July 1789. The base of the Liberté pillar can still be seen today, in the Square Henri-Galli.

Miniature Bastille carved from a fragment of stone. Musée Carnavalet, Paris.

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DID YOU KNOW?

Stone from the Bastille made into jewellery became a popular way for women to demonstrate their support for the Revolution. Madame de Genlis had a medallion made from Bastille stone, inscribed in diamonds with the word *Liberté*.

The *journée* of 14 July

The activities of the crowd of Paris on the *journée* (day) of the fall of the Bastille had a far wider significance than just the demolition of a symbol of royal tyranny and the immediate protection of the National Assembly from the threat of foreign troops. The crowd itself took agency for the first time in the French Revolution. Henceforth it saw itself as having 'saved' the Revolution, of having protected the work of the National Assembly from destruction by the King. Initially, the crowd was content and proud of its actions, but it came to expect benefits from the Revolution. It began to understand that it had power if it acted as one and from July 1789 the Paris 'crowd' began to take on an identity and a potency which was to intervene at crucial moments in a series of revolutionary *journées*. In particular the radicalisation of this crowd was to drive the Revolution forward during 1792–94.

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ACTIVITY 6

Focus Questions

1. Do you see economic (poverty/hunger) or political reasons (the dismissal of Necker, the King's attempts to dismiss the Estates-General) as responsible for the formation and behaviour of the crowds in 1789? Explain your response.
2. How important were leaders in the events leading to the Storming of the Bastille?

Reactions to the fall of the Bastille

In the diary of Louis XVI, written in his own hand, can be read the entries for July: '13th, Nothing. 14th, Nothing.'[36] As Louis was a keen hunter, these entries are more likely to refer to his lack of sporting success on those days than to political events. On the night of the storming of the Bastille, Louis was woken from his sleep by his Grand Master of the Wardrobe, the Duc de Liancourt, who informed him of events in Paris that day. 'It is a revolt,' Louis is reported to have said, to which the Duke replied, 'No, Sire, it is a revolution.'[37] These two anecdotes present a picture of a man unaware of the

33 Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, 8.

34 Reay Tannahill, *Paris in the Revolution: A Collection of Eye Witness Accounts* (London: The Folio Society, 1996), 26.

35 George Rudé, *The French Revolution* (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 55.

36 Rudé, *The French Revolution*, 45.

37 In some versions of the story, the Duke warns Louis earlier, on the night of 12 or 13 July. This robs the story of its dramatic significance, though not perhaps the prescience of Liancourt.

Louis XVI, Roi d'un Peuple Libre, en Uniforme de la Garde Nationale, R. Duchemin.
© Photothèque des Musées de la Ville de Paris.

The King, invited by Bailly and urged on by Lafayette, accepted the revolutionary cockade, thus acknowledging the validity of the events of 14 July.

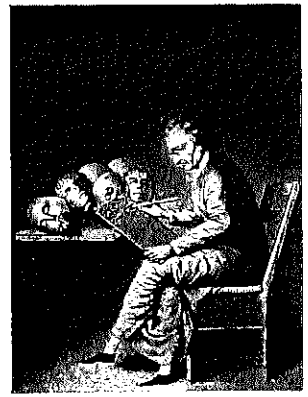
dangers posed to his throne by the fall of the Bastille, but this is worth thinking about in context. Louis XVI was a divine right monarch, believing he was appointed by God to rule. He would not have seen the fall of the Bastille as challenging his own position or his royal authority. It is more likely that he viewed it as yet another working class disturbance, like the bread riots, rather than the prelude to a great revolution. Nevertheless, after the King's visit to the National Assembly on 15 July, which was 'so astonishing, so disconcertingly naked, that it amounted to abdication,'[38] his nobility was less confident about its fate. According to Schama, the King had arrived at the Assembly on foot, with no retinue and not even a single guard. He had been flanked by his brothers, the Comte de Provence and the Comte d'Artois. Louis had confirmed to the Assembly the withdrawal of the remaining royal troops from Paris and expressly denied any design against the safety of the deputies of the Assembly.[39] This capitulation acted as a strong signal to the conservative nobility. Over the next few months, around 20 000 passports were issued to people departing from France, including d'Artois, who left on 16 July. Nor were the deputies of the National Assembly without concerns. Rioting mobs meant attacks on property and they, for the most part, were property-owners.

In an attempt to stabilise the near anarchy of Paris, on 13 July the Electors of the city of Paris had decided to form a new municipal government at the Hôtel de Ville. Of the 407 Electors who had chosen the Third Estate deputies for Paris, 180 were lawyers, giving the new 'permanent committee' an overwhelmingly bourgeois character. The head of this committee, which became known as the First Paris Commune, was Jacques de Flesselles (who was murdered on the same day as Launay for refusing to issue rifles to the crowd). Jean-Sylvain Bailly, who had been the first President of the new National Assembly, was appointed Mayor of Paris, presiding over this new local government. The day after the Bastille fell, a national guard was formed from the *Gardes Bourgeois* to keep order and, if need be, to defend Paris from attack. It was placed under the command of General Lafayette, the hero of the American War. The guards wore tricolour ***cockades*** (ornamental ribbons), combining the red and blue of Paris with the white of the monarchy. On 17 July the King, escorted by the new commander of the National Guard, came into Paris to reaffirm to the people his promises of 15 July to the National Assembly. These had been to confirm the withdrawal from the city of the remaining royal troops to the Champ de Mars and to reassure the deputies of the National Assembly of their personal safety. He was greeted on the steps of the Hôtel de Ville by Bailly and accepted the revolutionary cockade offered to him. After formally endorsing the appointments of Lafayette and Bailly, he was persuaded to appear on the balcony, wearing for the first time the new revolutionary cockade of red, white and blue. The crowd cheered: *'Vive le roi! Vive la nation!'* It was at this moment that the constitutional monarchy of France was born.

38 Schama, *Citizens*, 420.
39 Schama, *Citizens*.

The murders of Bertier de Sauvigny and Foulon 23 July 1789

The day after the Storming of the Bastille, contracts were let for its demolition. A thousand workmen began the task. Satisfying as it was for people to see it wrecked and empty, perhaps to take away a stone, a door stop or some other souvenir, the violence did not end with this popular triumph. Nine days after the Bastille, on 23 July 1789, the heads and hearts of Ferdinand de Bertier de Sauvigny, the Intendant of Paris and the King's minister, Joseph François Foulon, became victims of popular outrage. Foulon was, rumour suggested, responsible for the famine plot and was reputed to be hoarding food. Bertier de Sauvigny was stopped as he was trying to emigrate. When their heads were mounted on pikes, Foulon's mouth was stuffed with grass, a reference to his supposed comment that, failing bread, the people could eat hay. These murders provoked strong protest, but by now some of the bourgeoisie, roused by the obvious danger, joined the people in their fury. Most deputies of the National Assembly were horrified at such violence. Robespierre, however, regarded the selective killings as the punishment of the people, which would continue if there were not political, legal and social reforms.[40] Lafayette offered to resign his command of the National Guard, feeling that he had failed his commission to prevent violence. The young politician from Grenoble, Antoine Barnave, however, was not so squeamish. When he was asked whether the deaths were necessary in the pursuit of freedom he is said to have replied, 'What, then, is their blood so pure?'[41]



The Patriotic Calculator, engraving, 1789.

This engraving, appearing after the deaths of Bertier de Sauvigny and Foulon on 23 July 1789 (the head of Foulon is clearly identifiable by the grass stuffed in its mouth), is a satire upon the 'terrorist-executioner,' the 'drinker of blood,' as he was called during the Terror. Six heads lie on his desk and on the wall is a gun with a shot bag. The subject calculates that he has fourteen more decapitated heads to shave. His patriotism is measured by the number of decapitations. This engraving is of interest in that it appeared so early in the Revolution – representations of revolutionary violence of this nature were far more common by 1793–94.

See Emmet Kennedy, *A Cultural History of the French Revolution* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 268.

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ACTIVITY 7

Focus Questions

1 To what extent was the direct action taken on the streets by the Paris crowds responsible for the continued existence of the National Assembly?

2 Was the Paris crowd an ally of the Estates-General or a potential threat to its existence?

3 Was the violence of the crowd a spontaneous reaction to events and injustices? To what extent is violence intrinsic to a revolution?

The Municipal Revolt

Popular unrest was not confined to Paris. People living in the provinces watched events in Paris with close interest, read the broadsheets and newspapers, met and discussed the issues, followed the actions of their deputies and sent protests to royal authorities about such things as the movement of troops to the capital and the attempts to dismiss the Estates-General. As in Paris, food scarcity had led to inflation in prices and there was general discontent with the actions of royal authorities. As tensions grew in

40 Georges Lefebvre, *The French Revolution from its Origins to 1793* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 125.
41 Schama, *Citizens*, 406.

Paris, they were matched by unrest in the provinces. In some towns, such as Nantes and Lyons, crowds invaded the tax offices. At Rennes, the armoury was invaded and weapons stolen, forcing royal troops to surrender. At Bordeaux, Le Havre, Marseilles, Nantes and Dijon, royal citadels were seized. Local committees were set up and National Guard units were established to support the Revolution against the monarch. Aristocrats were forced to give up their posts or risk attack. As in Paris, there were attacks on grain stores and grain transports and those who dealt in grain were under threat. Everywhere, people refused to pay taxes, tithes and feudal dues and the King's officers were unable to restore order because their own troops were sympathetic to the rebels. As a result, there was no means of enforcing the law or of punishing those responsible.

The Rural Revolt and the Great Fear: final crises of the old regime

In March and April of 1789, the peasants began to revolt against the age-old rules of honorific privilege. From late 1788 and the writing of the *cahiers*, many peasants had simply refused to pay tax. The bad harvests of 1788, the threat of starvation and the increased burden of feudal dues set off peasant unrest and the breakdown of old rules. As food became more scarce, there were more local uprisings and more disregard for the honorific privileges of the nobility. Starving peasants grazed their stock on common land, broke down enclosures and refused to pay their tithes and feudal dues.

During the weeks after the fall of the Bastille, there arose a new phenomenon in the revolutionary mix. People in the countryside became possessed by what the French Marxist historian Georges Lefebvre identified as 'The Great Fear,' the belief that the nobility were plotting to destroy the Revolution. This was partly engendered by the fear of retaliation for their own actions, partly by the rapidly increasing numbers of beggars and the arrival in country districts of soldiers redeployed from the capital. According to rumours, the nobility were going to hire bands of 'brigands' who would seek out rebellious peasants and kill anyone who had supported the Revolution. The flight of the *émigré* nobles to neighbouring countries added to the fear, because this was seen as the first action before their return with foreign troops. In towns and villages, people began to form into groups and to arm themselves.

Georges Lefebvre has done extensive and ground-breaking work on the Great Fear. He has commented that

> The Great Fear arose from the fear of the brigand ... There had always been great anxiety at harvest time, [but in the climate of the] conflict between the Third Estate and the aristocracy (supported by royal authority) [these fears escalated] ... Every beggar, every vagrant and rioter seemed to be a 'brigand' ... No-one doubted that the aristocracy had taken the brigands into their pay ... and this allowed alarms which began by being purely local to spread swiftly through the country. The fear of brigands was a universal phenomenon, but the Great Fear was not, and it is wrong to confuse the one with the other.[42]

Other rumours of invasion by the foreign armies abounded. People claimed to have seen battalions of Austrians within the French borders.[43] These rumours were just as unfounded as those of the aristocratic-brigand plot. Interestingly, work done on the specific path of the Great Fear shows it manifested itself in pockets, with news travelling from village to village

42 Georges Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789* (New Left Books, 1973), 210.

43 Schama, *Citizens*, 429.

at several kilometres an hour – i.e. at walking pace.[44] When the promised brigands and foreign troops did not arrive, armed peasants turned and struck at their local nobility.

Their goal was to seize the manorial rolls or *terriers*, on which were recorded the feudal dues owed by each peasant. In the 1780s a French lord could collect a variety of monetary and material payments from his peasants, could insist that nearby villages grind their grain in the seigneurial mill, bake their bread in the seigneurial oven and press their grapes in the seigneurial wine press. He could set the date of the grape harvest, could have local cases tried in his own court, could claim favoured benches in church for his family and proudly point to the family tombs below the church floor. He could also take pleasures forbidden to the peasants, such as raising rabbits or pigeons, or hunting, in the pursuit of which the peasants' fields were sometimes devastated.

Honorific privileges had become deeply resented by peasants who were struggling to survive. They looked with anger on the pigeons and rabbits which devoured their crops, while they were forbidden to either stop them or use them for food. Feudal dues and manorial rights kept peasant families in poverty. The *corvée* took men away from their farms and their crops. When the revolt came, according to Simon Schama, 'The first heavy casualties of the French Revolution were rabbits.'[45] He has written that

> hobnailed boots trampled through forbidden forests or climbed over fences and stone walls. Grass was mown in grain fields to reveal the nests of partridge and pheasant, snipe and pheasant, snipe and woodcock; eggs were smashed ... Pit traps were even set for the most prized game, which was also the most voracious consumer of green shoots: roe deer.[46]

As well as the game, dovecots, wine presses and ovens were destroyed, symbols of an exploitation that would no longer be tolerated. Such actions might be considered minor crimes but it should be noted that in the late eighteenth century the punishments for these activities were sentences of flogging, branding and banishment, which would separate the peasant from his family, his farm and his neighbourhood and, in all probability, condemn his family to starvation. The game riots are evidence of the deep anger and perhaps desperation of the peasants in 1789.

Groups of peasants also attacked the châteaux and manor-houses of the wealthy. Their goal was to destroy the manorial rolls on which were recorded the dues they owed to feudal lords. By destroying the records, they hoped to avoid payments in future. In some cases, the houses were burnt down. Resistance was sometimes met with violence, but there were remarkably few fatalities recorded as a result of the Great Fear. It was the system, rather than the master, which was the cause of anger.

The significance of the Great Fear was that it armed the people of the countryside and created pressure on the nobility for reform. In Lefebvre's words,

> There is no trace of plot or conspiracy at the start of the Great Fear. The aristocrat-brigand was a phantom figure [the image of which] the revolutionaries had helped spread ... It provided an excellent excuse to arm the people against royal power ... and this reaction in the countryside gathered the peasants together to turn against the aristocracy ... It allowed the peasantry to achieve a full realization of its strength and ... played its part in the preparations for the night of 4 August. On these grounds alone, it must count as one of the most important episodes in the history of the French nation.[47]

44 Peter McPhee, *The French Revolution 1789–1799* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2002), 57.

45 Schama, *Citizens*, 322.

46 Schama, *Citizens*, 323.

47 Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789*, 211.

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ACTIVITY 8

Focus Question

After the Municipal Revolt and Rural Revolt, the Revolution was secure. What options were then open to Louis XVI and his ministers?

The Night of 4 August 1789

When news reached Paris of the attacks on the châteaux, the first response of the National Assembly was to appoint a committee to investigate its causes and offer a solution. The Committee's spokesman reported back to the deputies that

> By letters from every province it appears that properties of whatever sort are falling prey to the most disgraceful brigandage; on all sides, castles are being burned, monasteries destroyed, farms given up to pillage. Taxes, payments to lords, all are destroyed: the law is powerless, the magistrates without authority, and justice a mere phantom sought from the courts in vain.[48]

Most Committee members were in favour of quelling the riots by force if necessary, and demanding that taxes, feudal dues and tithes should continue to be paid until the Assembly could consider the necessary reforms. But it was all too late, as the more radical members of the Assembly had deduced. The more progressive members of the nobility had determined that, to save anything, they needed to concede their privileged status voluntarily. A similar conclusion had been formed by the Third Estate deputies from Brittany, who had formed the ***'Breton Club'*** in order to present a united front in National Assembly debates. The young Duc d'Aiguillon, one of the original 'Society of Thirty,' was encouraged to move for the total abolition of the system of privilege. The group chose the evening of 4 August, when attendance at the Assembly would be thin. However, before d'Aiguillon could move the motion, the Viscount de Noailles, cousin to Lafayette and one of the veterans of the American War, spoke ahead of him. D'Aiguillon could only support de Noailles' motion.

The Night of 4 August became, at that stage, something like an auction. Nobleman after nobleman rose to forfeit rights which had been sacred for hundreds of years. A bishop proposed an end to hunting rights; a nobleman responded by calling for the abolition of tithes. Country nobles were deprived of manorial rights; courtiers were stripped of their pensions. Parish priests lost their fees for church services; bishops were told they could no longer have multiple parishes. Towns gave up municipal privileges and magistrates declared that justice should be free. Venal offices were swept aside and in their place came jobs and public offices open to men of talent. The principle of equal taxation was introduced and accepted. The Marquis de Ferrières, lost in admiration of this orgy of self-dispossession called it 'a moment of patriotic drunkenness.'[49] It seemed that the old regime was to be swept away overnight, and as news of the night's events became known in the countryside, many peasants certainly believed this. The realities were a little different, however – another three years passed before the National Convention abolished the last vestiges of the feudal regime.

48 Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 115.

49 Schama, *Citizens*, 439.

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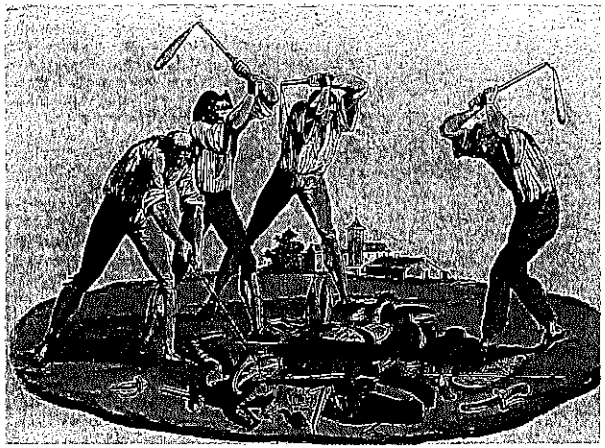
ACTIVITY 9

Visual Analysis

Look carefully at the representation, and its caption, and complete the tasks below.

1 Which groups in the old French society are represented by the three figures on the left?
2 What is the significance of the objects being destroyed?
3 Using your own knowledge and the representation, explain the importance of the events of 4 August 1789.
4 What does the figure of the 'common man' add to our understanding of the forces for revolutionary change that emerged in France from January 1789?



Destroying the Vestiges of Feudalism.

A symbolic representation of the events of 4 Aught 1789: The three estates on the left and the new common man on the right destroy the emblems of feudalism.