

# Chronology

HANDOUT 9.

## Events and ideas building to revolution

1748

*The Spirit of the Laws* by the Baron de Montesquieu, published, presenting case for separation of powers.

1751

*Encyclopédie* first published. This was a project to compile all useful knowledge. Experts from every field contributed. The *Encyclopédie* ran to twenty-seven volumes of text and eleven volumes of engravings. It was edited by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert. The project was shut down by authorities on a number of occasions and took twenty-nine years to complete.

1763

*The Social Contract* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau published. Rousseau supported equality of man in nature and popular sovereignty through the expression of the General Will.

1763

The Calas case - Protestant victimisation by Catholic ecclesiastical courts.

1774

*Traité sur l'éducation, and Ecclesiastical Organisation* published by Voltaire. The ideas expressed here were to form the basis of the revolutionary reorganisation of the Church laid out in the Civil Constitution of the Clergy 1790.

1778-83

Accession of Louis XVI.

1780

France supported America in War of Independence against Britain.

1781

*Encyclopédie* project finished.

1785

Appointed Director-General of the Royal Finances in 1776, Jacques Necker presented his *Compte Rendu au Roi*, the first public account of the state of the kingdom's finances in 1781. While the *Compte Rendu* was intended to bolster confidence in France's finances to reassure creditors and to make it possible to raise further loans, its publication was a marker on the road to revolution because, for the first time, there was a notion that the King was publicly accountable for the state of the Treasury. The general discussion of this public document was the first step to creating a court of public opinion. Through creative accounting, Necker was able to suggest that France was annually in surplus by ten million livres when, in reality, Necker wished also to introduce reforms and to curtail public spending of other royal ministers, but he could not sit on the Royal Council because he was Swiss, a Protestant, non-noble and not a French subject. The King was too weak to support Necker against the other royal ministers and so dismissed him. His successor, Joly de Fleury, was a noble Frenchman and Catholic, appointed in 1781.

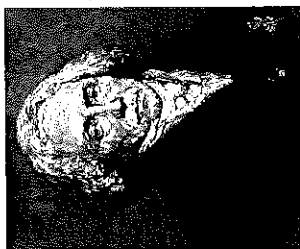
1786

Calonne took office as Comptroller-General of Finances.  
Calonne informed King of disastrous finances, presented his reform agenda, and suggested calling of Assembly of Notables to endorse the reforms before sending them to the Parlement of Paris for registration. The King agreed.

he met among the prisoners Thérèse Cabarrus, with whom he fell in love. He released her and, once Robespierre had fallen, married her in December 1794. Thérèse's influence turned Tallien away from the Terror. Because of her influence many lives were saved, although his commitment to the Revolution itself remained strong. Tallien led the attack on Robespierre within the National Convention. He then became a leading member of the new Thermidorian government. Eventually, however, Thérèse left him and his career drifted downwards. He died in Paris in 1820.

### Talleyrand-Périgord, Charles-Maurice (1754-1838)

Talleyrand was born into the nobility. He studied at the seminary of Saint-Sulpice and the Sorbonne and, in 1788, before he had actually been made a priest, was appointed Bishop of Autun. He was elected as a noble deputy to the Estates-General. He accepted the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, but gave up the Church to become Ambassador to London for the revolutionary government of the Terror. By 1794 he was in America looking for land to sell to French émigrés. In 1796 he was able to return to France, exonerated from the charge of being an émigré himself. He had, as Boissy d'Anglas argued, been unjustly proscribed as he had been sent abroad on an official mission. Talleyrand was to play a major role in bringing Napoleon to power and later served the government of Louis XVIII.



Bishop Talleyrand.

### Vadier, Marc Guillaume Alexis (1736-1828)

Vadier was a deputy in the National Convention and a member of the Committee of General Security from September 1793. He was a remorseless terrorist. Although one of the leaders of the coup against Robespierre (9 Thermidor Year II), he managed to survive the ensuing reaction against the Terror and lived quietly under Napoleon's rule.

### Vergniaud, Pierre (1753-1793)

Vergniaud was one of the leading Girondins. He was a supporter of the war against Austria and Prussia, opposed extending the franchise to the *sans-culottes* and the execution of Louis XVI. He fell from power with his leader Brissot and the other Girondins, was arrested and imprisoned on 2 June 1793 and executed with his colleagues on 31 October 1793. One of the leading orators of the Girondin faction, it was Vergniaud who delivered on 13 March 1793 in the National Convention the famous and terrible prophecy that 'It must be feared that the Revolution, like Saturn, successfully devouring its children, will engender, finally, only despotism and the calamities which accompany it.'<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Schama, *Citizens*, 714.



22 February

The Assembly of Notables convened and was stunned to hear of the state of France's finances when Necker had shown them to be so healthy only five years before. Distrust of Calonne – how had he mismanaged the money?

The Notables were asked to support Calonne's reforms:

Single Land Tax to be imposed on all land without exception and graded according to the proprietor's income – tax to be paid in produce (but not necessarily grain);

Free trade of grain and abolition of internal tariffs to increase national production;

Hierarchy of consultative assemblies to be elected by all property-owners (therefore no bias in favour of upper classes), so that King's subjects could pay their part in the administration of the realm. (Furet and Richey, *The French Revolution*, 49).

Notables refused to support reforms. Were they conservative, blocking reform to defend their own privileges, as George Rudé maintained? Or were they the first revolutionaries, as Simon Schama has argued?

8 April

Once again, although the King recognised the need for reform, he was too weak to support Calonne against the Notables. Calonne dismissed.

1 May

Brienne replaced Calonne. The Notables now called to view the nation's accounts and still refused to support the tax reforms. They argued that legally the only body which could raise new taxes was an Estates-General. Did the Notables wish to force the calling of an Estates-General in order to gain more power for themselves?

25 May

Assembly of Notables dissolved. Brienne reworked Calonne's reforms.

15 August

Parlement of Paris exiled by King for refusing to register Brienne's reform package. It also used the argument of the Notables, that only an Estates-General had the authority to allow new taxes. Each time an institution used this argument, the revolutionary idea that the nation should be consulted grew stronger.

September

King recalled Parlement – Brienne announced Estates-General for 1792.

19 November

Royal Session. The King attempted to assert his royal prerogative as if this were a *lit de justice*. When the Duc d'Orléans questioned the legality of registering the loans first, and discussing them afterwards, the King replied, 'it is legal because I will it.'

3 May

Parlement of Paris proclaimed Fundamental Laws of Kingdom.

The Paris Parlement appeared as defender of the rights of the nation in promulgating laws which it claimed were 'ancient practice and outside the jurisdiction of the King'.

8 May

- The right to approve new taxes belonged solely to the Estates-General;
- Frenchmen could not be imprisoned without trial (i.e. arbitrary arrest through the *lettres de cachet* was 'unconstitutional');
- The King could not change the privileges and customs of the provinces (*provis d'état*).

New Plenary Courts set up, *parlements* deprived of rights to register new laws – in exile again.

Aristocratic Revolt: Riots in provincial capitals, nobles met in unauthorised assemblies.

7 June

Day of Tiles in Grenoble. The people of Grenoble turned out to prevent the exile by force of their *parlementaires* – they pelted the soldiers with roof tiles, took over the governor's residence and marched the *parlementaires* in triumph to the Palais de Justice. Simon Schama has designated the Day of Tiles as a 'threefold revolution'. It (1) signified the breakdown of royal authority and the helplessness of military force against sustained urban disorder; (2) warned the elite beneficiaries of that disorder that the price to be paid could be unpredictable and could easily be turned against them; and (3) delivered the initiative of further political action into the hands of a younger, more radical group consisting of people such as Joseph Mounier and Antoine Barnave. (*Citizens*, 277).

Assembly of Clergy supported nobles, voted very small *don gratuit* for 1788.

Pamphlet war began: more radical – referred to ideas like natural law, inalienable rights, general will and sovereignty of the people. (Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 1762).

8–16 August

Government bankrupt; meeting of Estates-General brought forward to 1 May 1789. Brienne resigned.

25 August

Necker reinstated.

Parlement recalled, Plenary Court disbanded.

25 September

Parlement of Paris declared that Estates-General must be constituted as it was in 1614. Overnight the Parlement lost the support of bourgeoisie who feared this meant voting by estate, not by head.

Controversy erupted over method of voting in Estates-General; Assembly of Notables recalled briefly but did not resolve issue.

November

Formation of Society of Thirty. 'The conspiracy of well intentioned men' (Schama, *Citizens*, 299). A revolutionary group, later called The Constitutional Club. Met twice weekly at house of *parlementaire* Adrien Dupont to debate manner of representation at Estates-General. Consisted of thirty, but later increased to sixty liberal nobles (only five commoners).

Members included Marquis de Lafayette, Duc de Noailles and Duc de La Rochefoucauld. Many had brought home ideas from America.



Other members: Marquis de Condorcet (last of *philosophes* living), Bishop Talleyrand, Count Mirabeau, Abbé Sieyès, Pastor Rabaut Saint-Etienne, Louis-Sebastien Mercier.

Three basic principles:

- Rejected outright that there had been some 'fundamental constitution' which the *parlements* had been concerned to conserve;
- Only fundamental law 'the welfare of the people';
- France had no constitution; necessary to create one from scratch.

Majority of membership adamant that Third Estate should have double the representation of the other two Estates, believed that the state and the people were one and the same: 'The Third Estate is not an order, it is the nation itself' (Comte D'Antraigues, friend of Rousseau, cited in Schama, *Citizens*, 301).

Very harsh and cold; wolves entered streets of Paris.

King publicly ruled that the **Third Estate be given double the number of deputies**. The Third Estate now had 600 deputies, while the nobility and clergy each had 300. As voting was by order, however, the two privileged orders would still be able to overrule the Commons.

Elections of deputies began, although indirect for Third Estate, these were the most democratic elections of the whole revolution!

Abbé Sieyès published *What is the Third Estate?* Thousands of copies sold.

*Cahiers* drawn up during this period.

Price of bread rose to 75-89 per cent of working man's wage!

Réveillon riots: house and factory of prosperous businessman set on fire, rumoured that he intended to reduce wages.

## The Estates-General (1 May-27 June 1789)

Formal opening of Estates-General at Versailles. Deputies still did not know whether they would be voting by estate or by head.

Opening plenary session.

The Estates sent off to verify credentials separately.

Death of seven-year-old Dauphin after two-year illness (tuberculosis). King and Queen suffered deep grief throughout this period.

Third Estate invited privileged orders to join it.

Deputies began verification of their credentials - not as Third Estate, but as representatives of the nation. Soon several parish priests joined them.

17 June

19 June

20 June

22 June

23 June

24 June

25 June

27 June

This group of commoners and a few lower clergy took a momentous and revolutionary step and declared itself the **National Assembly**.

Clergy voted to join commoners, endorsing the declaration of 17 June.

**Tennis Court Oath:** '[We] take a solemn oath not to separate ... until the constitution of the Kingdom is established.'

150 clerical deputies, headed by two archbishops and a few nobles, joined new National Assembly.

**Royal Session.** King ordered Estates to meet separately. New National Assembly exhorted by Mirabeau to uphold Tennis Court Oath; refused to disband.

Soldiers sent to deny deputies entry to meeting hall crossed to support National Assembly: 'We, too, are citizens.'

Forty-seven liberal nobles (including royal prince, Duc d'Orleans) arrived - the highest of the peerage - but Lafayette not among them.

**King capitulated; ordered Estates to meet in common, to vote by head.**

## The National Assembly (27 June 1789-30 September 1791)

7 July

National Assembly took name of National Constituent Assembly, reflecting its avowed purpose, which was to write a constitution for France.

Royal troops around Paris now at 18 000. The National Constituent Assembly and the people of Paris feared the King meant to close the Assembly by force.

The King dismissed Necker, blaming him for the failure of the Estates-General. Royal troops now numbered 30 000. To the crowd in Paris this seemed like a declaration of war.

Parisians attacked hated customs barriers around Paris, which imposed taxes on food entering Paris. The crowd began to arm itself.

Electors of Paris (bourgeois) decided to form a new municipal government, the **Paris Commune**, at the Town Hall, in attempt to restore order in the city.

**Fall of the Bastille**, the first revolutionary *journée*. The crowd seized 'agency' - it now saw itself as having 'saved' the Revolution. Initially it was content to have saved the work of the National Assembly from destruction by the King, but would come to expect benefits from the Revolution. From 14 July it understood that it had power if it organised itself to act together.

11 July

12 July

13 July

14 July

Winter

27 December

January

Spring

28 April

1 May

5 May

4 June

10 June

12 June



15 July

Lafayette appointed commander of the newly-formed National Guard, answerable to the new Paris Commune.

16 July

The Comte d'Artois, the King's brother, fled Paris. 20 000 *émigrés* were to follow him in the next two months.

17 July

Lafayette escorted the King into Paris where Louis acknowledged the crowd from the balcony of the Town Hall, wearing the revolutionary red, white and blue cockade. The cockade signified to the crowd the King's acceptance of the Revolution. The crowd called, *Vive le roi, vive la nation!* This was the symbolic birth of constitutional monarchy in France.

July-August

**Municipal Revolt** - the term used to describe the seizure of power from royal authorities throughout the towns of France, the establishment of communes and national guards in regional cities, modelled on those of Paris.

The Rural Revolt, which had already begun in the spring, intensified after the news of the fall of the Bastille reached the countryside. Châteaux and tithed barns were attacked for the grain stores which were rumoured to be hoarded there and in the case of the châteaux, fires were sometimes set in order to destroy the *terriers*, or manorial rolls of feudal records.

20 July-6 August

'The Great Fear' was a separate phenomenon which became entwined with the Rural Revolt. This was a ser of rumours which swept through pockets of France, claiming that armed bands of 'brigands' who were in the pay of the aristocracy would destroy the harvest. The aristocracy was plotting to starve the peasants and was in league with foreign armies, which, it was claimed, had been sent at the borders and were invading France to destroy the National Assembly and restore the King's full powers. There was no substance at all to any of these rumours, but frightened and armed peasants turned with increasing violence upon the landlords. The Great Fear was the last major crisis of the old regime and had a direct influence upon the reforms of 4 August.

4 August

**Abolition of feudal privileges:** The Night of Self-dispossession. The National Assembly met throughout the night and, in great excitement, abolished feudalism and many of the other hereditary privileges the First and Second Estates had held. This was the moment which could be regarded as the final demise of the old regime.

## The Liberal Bourgeois Consensus (1789-91)

1781

5-11 August

**August Decrees.** These decrees watered down the absolute renunciations made on the Night of 4 August. Many peasants believed that feudalism had been abolished absolutely, but in fact many of the former seigneurial dues had to be redeemed or paid out. Other feudal taxes were to remain in place until the taxation system could be reformed. Many peasants simply stopped paying taxes from this time.

20-27 August

Discussion of The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. This document could be called the 'blue print' of the Revolution.

5-6 October

The second revolutionary *journée*. March of Women to Versailles; King and family brought back to Paris.

King forced to pass the August Decrees and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, thus the women had 'saved' the Revolution once more. But the King argued that from this time on, all his actions were taken under duress and that he was not therefore bound by any of his oaths of allegiance to the Constitution of France. The National Assembly also followed the King to Paris. It felt itself to be answerable to the people of Paris and, indeed, no government could now hold power without the support of Paris.

## Reforms introduced by the National Constituent Assembly: the reorganisation of France 1789-91

2 November

Nationalisation and sale of Church property to float new paper currency - assignats.

14-19 December

Reorganisation of local government. Power decentralised to eighty-three departments; division of 'active' and 'passive' citizens.

19 December

**First issue of assignats.** Theoretically, 100 livres assignats = 100 livres coins. Many merchants and others very dubious about wisdom of issuing paper money. Throughout Revolution the assignat steadily lost value - by September 1795, it had fallen to 100 livres assignats = 1.4 livres in coins!

**Remodelling of France:** over period 1789-91 new tax system implemented (1791), free trade measures introduced such as removal of price controls, abolition of tariffs, guilds (1791), single system of weights and measures, state assumed duty of poor relief, new uniform justice system with jury of twelve, more humane penal code.

1790

May

Decree abolishing King's right to declare war.

19 June

Abolition of nobility.

12 July

**Civil Constitution of the Clergy,** the first major mistake of the Revolution. It divided the nation into two groups: those who supported the state and the Constitutional Church and those who supported refractory or non-juring clergy, whose loyalty to the Revolution was therefore suspect. Many French women, especially, felt they had to choose between the Revolution and their religious faith. It was a direct cause of the King's Flight to Varennes.

27 November

**Clerical Oath of loyalty** to the nation imposed, the next major mistake of the Revolution.

