

## **Lecture Outline, The French Revolution, 1789-1799**

### **A) Causes**

- **growth of "liberal" public opinion—the spread of Enlightenment ideas re. rights, liberty, limited state power, need for rational administrative reforms, laissez-faire economic policies, etc., in contrast with existing state/legal system**
- **"rigid" system of legal privileges based upon system of 3 "estates" (clergy, nobles, commoners), and King Louis XVI's claims to absolutist power, both in conflict with demands of social groups that were demanding political representation**
- **fundamental social and economic tensions (noble fear of losing privilege, middle class lack of political power, artisans pressed by growth of merchant-driven market economy, peasant resentments re. taxes, tithes, and land).**
- **France as a "kingdom" lacked strong sense of "national" unity or identity (e.g., fragmented by language, culture, etc.)**
- **state financial crisis—product of war, weak tax base, etc--need to increase revenues leads to discussion of taxing nobles (etc)**

### **B) First Phase ("moderate revolution"), 1789-1792**

**1) Revolt of the nobility --nobles refused to accept Louis XVI's proposed fiscal and tax reforms**

#### **2) The Estates General**

- **Louis XVI tried to do an "end run" around the nobility by gathering the E-G to approve his reforms.**
- **Majority of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Estates intended to use the E-G to protect their privileges**
- **Majority of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Estate intended to use the E-G to force fundamental political change. The Seiyes document, "What is the Third Estate," laid out this aim.**

**3) 20 June 1789 Tennis Court Oath—the E-G (esp. 3<sup>rd</sup> estate) declared itself a "NATIONAL" assembly and said it would keep meeting until it drafted a constitution.**

#### **4) the July 1789 Paris uprising**

- **Rumors that Louis XVI would use troops to crush the "Nat. Assembly" sparked a rebellion.**
- **Leadership came from the "middle class," but the crowds were made up mostly of the "lower-classes"**

- **Demonstrations turned into street fighting, and "the people" took control of Paris (defeated the army and police)**
- **The "rebel" leaders declared a "provisional" city government (again, under middle-class leadership), and recognized the authority of the National Assembly.**
- **Similar rebellions then broke out all across France**

#### **5) The immediate social context for the July 1789 uprising**

- **2 years of bad harvests had forced up food prices, which led to a general economic depression**
- **About 1/3 of workers in Paris were unemployed in summer 1789, and food (etc) prices has skyrocketed.**
- **The lower classes saw the King as failing to help "the people," and viewed the National Assembly as the voice of the People**
- **There was a wide-spread sense that the "tyrant" King was trying to silence the People and destroy their Liberty**

#### **5) Reverberations of the revolution in the provinces**

- **provincial urban uprisings**
- **the Great Fear**
- **peasant attacks on noble and church property, effort to seize land and drive out the nobility**

#### **6) 26 August 1789 Declaration of Rights of Man**

- **National Assembly, in response to events (especially unrest in the countryside), drafted this "outline" of constitutional principles**
- **Declaration ends the "estate" system—all men born equal in rights**
- **the purpose of government is to protect rights**
- **the nation is source of sovereign power**
- **state power must be limited—the state can not deprive men of liberty except under certain conditions**
- **property rights among the fundamental rights of man**

#### **7) The "moderate" political settlement of 1789-1791**

- **constitutional monarchy—decision to keep the King in place as the executive power in a "constitutional" monarchy, with legislative power exercised by the Assembly**
- **the National Assembly created a body of laws that implemented its vision of a reformed**

**social and political order. For example, it**

- **outlawed guilds, sold off lands that belonged to the Church and to the Crown, and required that the clergy swear an oath to recognize the secular authority of the new regime ("Civil Constitution of the Clergy")**

#### **8) Who exercises what rights?**

- **restrictions of vote to property owners (passive vs active citizens)**
- **lower classes clearly saw the revolution as "their" revolution, too, and expected that it would give them equal political rights**
- **the best politically organized artisans and shopkeepers began to see a connection between political rights and social rights (eg, in reaction to food shortages, unemployment, etc).**

### **C) Second Phase (Radical or Jacobin Revolution), 1792-1794**

#### **1) Internal domestic opposition to the Revolution in France**

- **split in clergy as a result of the 1789-91 laws on the division of church lands and the "civil constitution of the clergy"**
- **noble opposition to their loss of privilege (etc)**
- **King's desire to restore powers and his "secret" efforts to rally troops vs the revolution**
- **regional opposition to policies made in Paris and especially to policies on taxes and on the church.**

#### **2) External (foreign) opposition to the Revolution, from monarchies (esp. Austria and Prussia) that saw the Revolution as a threat to order.**

#### **3) Radicalization of lower class politics in Spring 1792**

- **lower classes radicalized by continuing economic crisis**
- **by sense of exclusion from full citizens' rights**
- **by implications of some of the new "laissez-faire" policies (like the laws banning guilds)**
- **by fear that there were secret "counter-revolutionaries" among the middle classes who would "hijack" the revolution**
- **by deep belief in the cause of spreading the revolution to all mankind**
- **and by conclusion that the King, the nobles, and the church all seek to crush "their" revolution. This last fear is even greater after the King's failed attempt to "escape" in June 1791.**

**All this = growing demand from below for a Republic and for universal manhood suffrage.**

**4) War with Austria and Prussia.** The dominant factions in the legislature—the Girondins and the Jacobins--both pushed for war in Spring 1792 (to spread of the Revolution, promote national unity, and push reforms). The Girondins leaders of the Assembly declared war on Austria and Prussia in April 1792. The war quickly turned sour for France, which loses battles and territories through spring and summer 1792. This further accelerated the radicalization of politics and lower classes.

**5) Lower-Class Radicalism and the Declaration of a Republic**

- In August 1792, crowds of radical workers and soldiers attacked the royal palace and demanded that the Assembly declare a Republic and hold elections based upon universal manhood suffrage. With support from the crowds, the Jacobins expelled the Girondins from power took control of the government.
- Continued lower class demonstrations and popular violence in September 1792, in the weeks leading to popular elections for a new legislature—the Convention—based upon universal manhood suffrage
- The Convention proved much more radical than had been the National Assembly (strong influence of ideas of Rousseau).
- The Convention declared France a Republic.

**6) The Jacobins in Power, phase I (Fall 1792-Spring 1793)**

**a) Jacobins introduced a series of "radical" reforms, including emergency measures to mobilize the economy and society for war. These included:**

- mass conscription of soldiers for the army
- the "law of the maximum" which fixed prices for food and other necessities
- measures to require delivery of goods and services for the war effort
- the persecution of any dissent on the grounds that dissenters were (supposedly) enemies of the Revolution

The Jacobins argued that such steps were necessary to do these things to save the Revolution from its enemies--the homeland of the Revolution was in danger, and so (they claimed) liberties had to be sacrificed in the cause of security.

**b) Under Jacobin rule, the armies of French won major victories in the war, which now spread into a war against Austria, England, Holland, and Spain. But it also faced major internal rebellions.**

**c) the Jacobin government tried King Louis XVI for treason, and executed him in January 1793**

**d) among the Jacobin leaders, the most radical elements (the Mountain) took power in the Convention, based upon grass-roots support from the local "committees," made up largely of artisans and small shopkeepers.**

#### **7) The Jacobins in Power, phase II (July 1793-July 1794)**

**a) Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety: The Convention appointed the CPS to act as "emergency authority" (a dictatorship of twelve men) in the name of the Convention**

**b) the CPS continued emergency economic measures that violated laissez-faire principles in the name to saving the revolution; but it also further steps towards democratization, including the abolition of slavery in French colonies**

**c) under the CPS, radical revolutionary cultural trends reached an apex. These included**

- **rejection of organized religion**
- **creation of "civic cult of virtue," in which great philosophers were treated as quasi-religious figures**
- **public celebration of "virtues" of the Republic: democracy, honesty, devotion to the nation, and subsuming ones' self to the "general will" (remember Rousseau).**
- **symbolic "rational" reforms and changes come with this—such as reform of the calendar to "reflect nature" and to recognize the founding of the Republic as "Year One" of a new age in history**

**d) also under the CPS, political repression reached its apex:**

- **There was a mass campaign against dissidents, who were defined as "enemies of the people" because their actions—or even just their ideas and attitudes—were judged to be in violation of the "general will."**
- **Not only were real counter-revolutionaries arrested and imprisoned or executed, but thousands of people who months before had been considered loyal citizens were now subject to accusations and condemnations as enemies and were tried and convicted by "popular tribunals."**
- **In all, some 30,000 people were killed in the "Terror," which the Jacobins and their supporters felt would "cleanse" the country and save the Revolution from its enemies.**
- **Again, all of this could be justified on the grounds of "national security"—the Jacobins claimed that the rights of individuals had to be sacrificed in order to protect the Revolution...**

**e) The end of the radical phase: in July 1794 the Convention turned on the Committee of Public Safety and executed its members as enemies of the revolution.**

## **D) The Third Phase (Conservative Reaction or Thermidorian revolution), 1794-1799**

- 1) New leaders ended the Jacobin emergency measures (i.e., law of the maximum), but not to the economic crisis.**
- 2) The new constitution of 1795 placed limits on voting rights: voters must be able to read and write; they vote for "electors" (who must have "x" amount of income), who then chose legislators.**
- 3) The new (1795) constitution reaffirmed "rights," but put great stress upon duties that citizens owed to the state.**
- 4) The new constitution was intended to put government in hands of propertied classes to provide "stability" and prevent lower class "unrest." The government's executive body now was the "Directory," 5 men chosen by the legislature.**
- 5) The State now repeatedly demonstrated its willingness to use violence vs the rebellious crowd (eg. Napoleon's "whiff of grapeshot" in October 1795). The Directory repeatedly used force to crush remnants of popular lower-class radical movements.**
- 6) The war continued, and under the military leadership of General Napoleon Bonaparte, France dominated the land war and won control of territory across central and southern Europe.**
- 7) But the new State was weak**
  - a) The Directory proved unable to provide stable leadership, and was faced by constant threat of being overthrown from the Right (from monarchists), even once it has destroyed the opposition on the Left.**
  - b) The Directory had to annul elections in 1797, because of large pro-monarchist vote.**
  - c) By Fall 1799, key members of the Directory were willing to support a "coup" to put Napoleon in power.**
  - d) In November 1799, Napoleon and his co-conspirators seized power. There was no "middle class" opposition to the coup, even though this effectively meant an end to the Revolution and a reduction of political liberty. However, there were scattered revolts by radical workers' groups and by ultra-monarchists. Napoleon crushed these with force.**

## **II. The Napoleonic Era, 1799-1815**

**A) Napoleon as "man of the Revolution"****B) Napoleon's consolidation of power: First Counsel (1799-1804); Emperor 1804-1814/15.****C) Napoleon and the settlement of domestic conflict**

- settlement with the nobility
- settlement with the clergy
- promises to the middle classes
- promises to urban workers
- promises to peasants
- use of nationalism and war to build consensus

**B) Napoleon as "liberal reformer"**

- uniform codes of civil law and criminal law (1804) based upon "laissez-faire liberal" principles
- re-organization of the state administration based upon a rational hierarchy, advancement on basis of talent and ability
- centralization of administration
- reform of tax codes
- reform and centralization of education system.
- use of military victories to spread reforms across Europe.

**C) Napoleon as Authoritarian.**

- Creation of police state, surveillance system, network of government spies
- Censorship of press, restrictions upon freedom of speech and assembly
- Personalization of power: e.g., from 1804, all civil servants take an oath to the Emperor.
- Pretense of constitutional rule, but legislative powers are minimal and real power lay with the Emperor.

**D) Over-extension of the Empire and defeat (1808-1814).**