

LESSON 2

# Radical Revolution and Reaction

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What causes revolution?
- How does revolution change society?

READING HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

- domestic
- percent

Content Vocabulary

- electors
- coup d'état

TAKING NOTES

Key Ideas and Details

**Differentiating** Use a graphic organizer like the one below to list actions taken by the National Convention.

Actions Taken by the National Convention
1.
2.
3.
4.

IT MATTERS BECAUSE

*The French Revolution could be chaotic. The government repeatedly changed hands, foreign powers threatened to intervene, and economic conditions in France showed little improvement. This instability led to calls for new measures to be taken to secure the future of the revolution and to improve the living conditions of the people in France.*

The Move to Radicalism

**GUIDING QUESTION** *Why did the French Revolution become more radical?*

In September 1792, the newly elected National Convention began meeting. The Convention had been called to draft a new constitution, but it also served as the ruling body of France. It was dominated by lawyers, professionals, and property owners. Two-thirds of its deputies were under the age of 45, but most had some political experience as a result of the revolution. Almost all distrusted the king. It was therefore no surprise that the National Convention's first major step on September 21 was to abolish the monarchy and to establish a republic.

After 1789, citizens had formed political clubs of varying social and political views. Many deputies belonged to these clubs. The Girondins (juh • RAHN • duhns) tended to represent areas outside Paris. They feared the radical mobs of Paris. The Mountain represented the interests of radicals in Paris, and many belonged to the Jacobin (JA • kuh • buhn) club. Increasingly they felt the king needed to be executed to ensure he was not a rallying point for opponents of the republic.

In early 1793, the Mountain convinced the Convention to pass a decree condemning Louis XVI to death. On January 21, the king was beheaded on the guillotine. Revolutionaries had adopted this machine because it killed quickly and, they thought, humanely. The king's execution created new enemies for the revolution, both at home and abroad. A new crisis was at hand.

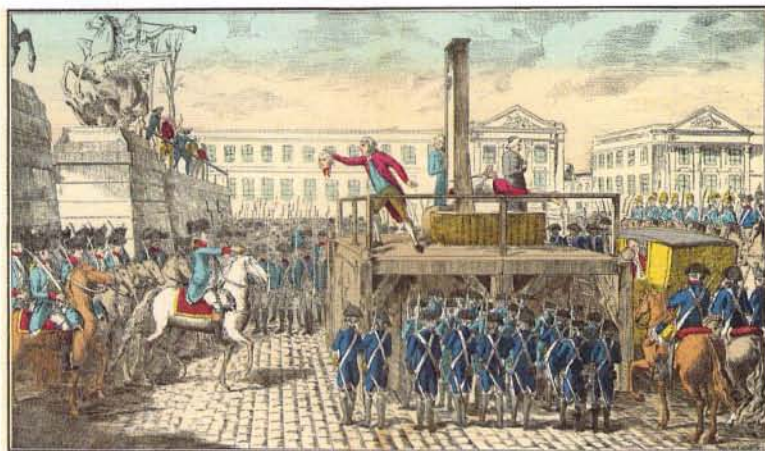


The execution of King Louis XVI reinforced the trend toward a new radical phase. The local government in Paris—the Commune—had a number of working-class leaders who wanted radical change. Led by Georges Danton, it put constant pressure on the National Convention to adopt more radical measures. Moreover, the National Convention itself still did not rule all France. Peasants in western France, as well as many people in France’s major cities, refused to accept the authority of the Convention.

A foreign crisis also loomed large. After Louis XVI was executed, a coalition of Austria, Prussia, Spain, Portugal, Britain, and the Dutch Republic took up arms against France. The French armies began to fall back. By late spring 1793, the coalition was poised to invade. It seemed possible that the revolution would be destroyed and the old regime reestablished.

### READING PROGRESS CHECK

**Identifying** What radical steps did the National Convention take?



▲ This print by Faucher-Gudin depicts Louis XVI’s execution on January 21, 1793.

## The Reign of Terror

**GUIDING QUESTION** How did the new French government deal with crises?

To meet these crises, the National Convention gave broad powers to a special committee of 12 known as the Committee of Public Safety. It came to be dominated by the radical Jacobin Maximilien Robespierre. For approximately a year during 1793 and 1794, the Committee of Public Safety took control of the government. To defend France from **domestic** threats, the Committee adopted policies that became known as the Reign of Terror.

As a temporary measure, revolutionary courts were set up to prosecute counterrevolutionaries and traitors. Almost 40,000 people were killed during the French Reign of Terror. Of those, 16,000 people, including Marie Antoinette and Olympe de Gouges, died by the guillotine. Most executions occurred in towns that had openly rebelled against the Convention.

Revolutionary armies were set up to bring rebellious cities under the control of the Convention. The Committee of Public Safety decided to make an example of Lyon, a city that rebelled during a time when the Republic was in peril, and 1,880 citizens of Lyon were executed. When guillotining proved too slow, the condemned were shot with grapeshot (a cluster of small iron balls) into open graves. A foreign witness wrote:

### PRIMARY SOURCE

“Whole ranges of houses, always the most handsome, burnt. The churches, convents, and all the dwellings of the former patricians were in ruins. When I came to the guillotine, the blood of those who had been executed a few hours beforehand was still running in the street . . . I said to a group of sans-culottes. . . that it would be decent to clear away all this human blood.— Why should it be cleared? one of them said to me. It’s the blood of aristocrats and rebels. The dogs should lick it up.”

—quoted in *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*

In western France, too, revolutionary armies were brutal and merciless in defeating rebels. Perhaps the most notorious violence occurred in the city

### CRITICAL THINKING

**Drawing Inferences** Why might the method of the king’s execution be significant?

**domestic** relating to or originating within one’s country



**percent** a part of a whole divided into 100 parts

of Nantes, where victims were executed by being loaded onto and then sunk in barges in the Loire River.

People from all classes were killed during the Terror. Clergy and nobles made up about 15 **percent** of the victims, while the rest were from the Third Estate. The Committee of Public Safety held that all this bloodletting was only temporary. When the war and domestic crisis were over, the true “Republic of Virtue” would follow, and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen would be realized.

In addition to the Terror, the Committee of Public Safety took other steps to control and shape a French society. Robespierre called this new order the Republic of Virtue—a democratic republic composed of good citizens. As outward signs of support for the republic, the titles “citizen” and “citizeness” were to replace “mister” and “madame.” Women wore long dresses inspired by the clothing worn in the ancient Roman Republic.

Good citizens would be formed by good education. A law aimed at primary education for all was passed but not widely implemented. Another law abolished slavery in French colonies.

Because people were alarmed about high inflation, the Committee tried to control the prices of essential goods such as food, fuel, and clothing. The controls did not work well because the government had no way to enforce them.

From the beginning, women had been active participants in the revolution, although they had no official power. During the radical stage of the revolution, women observed sessions of the National Convention and were not shy about making their demands.

In 1793, two women founded the Society for Revolutionary Republican Women in Paris. Most members were working-class women who asserted that they were ready to defend the republic. Most men, however, believed that women should not participate in either politics or the military.

The Convention also pursued a policy of de-Christianization. Its members believed that the religion encouraged superstition, rather than the use of reason. The word *saint* was removed from street names, churches were looted and closed by revolutionary armies, and priests were encouraged to marry. In Paris, the cathedral of Notre Dame, the center of the Catholic religion in France, was designated a “temple of reason.” In November 1793, a public ceremony dedicated to the worship of reason was held in the former cathedral. Patriotic young girls dressed in white dresses paraded before a temple of reason where the high altar had once stood.

#### ► CRITICAL THINKING

**Interpreting Significance** Why, by 1793, would some Parisians hold a parade mocking the Church?

▼ Parade in Paris ridiculing Christianity and the Church, 1793





Another example of de-Christianization was the adoption of a new calendar. Years would no longer be numbered from the birth of Jesus but from September 22, 1792—the first day of the French Republic. The calendar contained 12 months. Each month consisted of three 10-day weeks, with the tenth day of each week a day of rest.

These changes in the calendar had a significant effect on religion in France, eliminating Sundays, Sunday worship services, and church holidays. Robespierre came to realize, however, that most French people would not accept these efforts at de-Christianization. France was still overwhelmingly Catholic.

#### ✓ READING PROGRESS CHECK

**Questioning** Why did the French government use force against its own people?



## A Nation in Arms

**GUIDING QUESTION** How did the new French government deal with crises?

As foreign troops gathered on its borders, the revolution seemed to be in danger. To save the republic, the Committee of Public Safety issued a decree to raise an army:

#### PRIMARY SOURCE

“Young men will fight, young men are called to conquer. Married men will forge arms, transport military baggage and guns and will prepare food supplies. Women, who at long last are to take their rightful place in the revolution and follow their true destiny, will forget their futile tasks: their delicate hands will work at making clothes for soldiers; they will make tents and they will extend their tender care to shelters where the defenders of the *Patrie* [homeland] will receive the help that their wounds require. Children will make lint of old cloth. It is for them that we are fighting: children, those beings destined to gather all the fruits of the revolution, will raise their pure hands toward the skies. And old men, performing their missions again, as of yore, will be guided to the public squares of the cities where they will kindle the courage of young warriors and preach the doctrines of hate for kings and the unity of the Republic.”

—from the mobilization decree, August 23, 1793

In less than a year, the new French government had raised a huge army—by September 1794, it had more than a million soldiers. It was the largest army ever seen in Europe, and it pushed the invaders back across the Rhine. It even conquered the Austrian Netherlands. In earlier times, wars were the business of rulers who fought rivals with professional soldiers. The new French army was created by a people’s government. Its wars were now people’s wars.

By the summer of 1794, the French had largely defeated their foreign foes. There was less need for the Reign of Terror, but it continued nonetheless. Robespierre was obsessed with ridding France of all the corrupt elements. Many in the National Convention who feared Robespierre decided to act, lest they be the next victims. They gathered enough votes to condemn him, and Robespierre was guillotined on July 28, 1794.

#### ✓ READING PROGRESS CHECK

**Summarizing** How did the French army become the people’s army?

▲ The Battle of Valmy was a victory for the French over the Austrians.

#### ► CRITICAL THINKING

**Identifying Central Ideas** What was the cause of the foreign crisis in the spring of 1793?





▲ Execution of Robespierre on July 28, 1794

## The Directory

**GUIDING QUESTION** How did the constant transition within the French government influence its effectiveness?

After the death of Robespierre, a reaction set in as more moderate middle class leaders took control. The Reign of Terror came to a halt. The National Convention reduced the power of the Committee of Public Safety. Churches were allowed to reopen. Finally, the Constitution of 1791 was scrapped and a new constitution was created.

The Constitution of 1795 set up two legislative houses. A lower house, the Council of 500, drafted laws. An upper house of 250, the Council of Elders, accepted or rejected proposed laws. Members of both houses were chosen by **electors**, or qualified voters. Only those who owned or rented property worth a certain amount could be electors— only 30,000 people in the whole nation qualified. This was a significant change from the universal male suffrage the Paris Commune had demanded.

Under the new constitution, the executive was a committee of five called the Directory, chosen by the Council of Elders. The Directory, which lasted from 1795 to 1799, became known mainly for corruption. People reacted against the sufferings and sacrifices that had been demanded in the Reign of Terror. Some people made fortunes from government contracts or by loaning the government money at very high interest rates. They took advantage of the government's severe money problems during these difficult times.

At the same time, the government of the Directory faced political enemies from both conservatives and radicals. Some people wanted to bring back the monarchy, while others plotted to create a more radical regime like Robespierre's. Likewise, economic problems continued with no solution in sight. Finally, France was still conducting expensive wars against foreign enemies.

To stay in power, the Directory began to rely on the military, but one military leader turned on the government. In 1799 the successful and popular general Napoleon Bonaparte toppled the Directory in a **coup d'état** (KOO day • TAH), a sudden overthrow of the government. Napoleon then seized power.

### **READING PROGRESS CHECK**

**Evaluating** Did the transition from the Committee of Public Safety to the Directory help respond to the French people's needs?

**elector** an individual qualified to vote in an election

**coup d'état** a sudden overthrow of the government

## LESSON 2 REVIEW

### Reviewing Vocabulary

1. **Examining** Explain how the coup d'état in which Napoleon took part differed from other transitions in the revolutionary French government.

### Using Your Notes

2. **Applying** Use your notes to write a paragraph describing the actions taken by the National Convention and some of the consequences of these actions.

### Answering the Guiding Questions

3. **Theorizing** Why did the French Revolution become more radical?

4. **Identifying** How did the new French government deal with crises?

5. **Analyzing** How did the constant transition within the French government influence its effectiveness?

### Writing Activity

6. **Informative/Explanatory** Write an essay tracing the changes in the French government between the Constitution of 1791 and the Constitution of 1795. Include defining characteristics of each new form of government and how it led to the next change in leadership.