

## The Three Estates

### The Monarchy

- Head of the social and government it was his duty to ensure that his people were provided with law and order.
- Appointed ministers and he also chose 36 intendants, who acted as his local officials and were responsible for the different parts of France known as generalities.
- Louis ruled as an absolute monarch and later faced charges of despotism (tyrannical power/dictatorship). Louis' belief was that he ruled by divine right.
- The king was expected to rule over a fair and just regime, he was expected to pass only such laws as were necessary for the well-being of the whole kingdom and to preserve his subjects' freedom within the law.

**The process of law making-** an edict was drawn up by the king and advisers, this was then sent to the parlements for approval. These were the 13 supreme courts of appeal in France; who also had political powers. They had the right to challenge all edicts before they became law.

### First Estate

- The clergy, both high and low. The clergy occupied the highest position in society and was known as the First Estate.
- Its members varied tremendously in type- there was a huge difference, in terms of wealth and power, between humble parish priests, monks and nuns and the bishops and archbishops and cardinals (who came from the ranks of the nobility).
- Not all members of the first estate were rich. Clerics were very influential in France, the Catholic Church governed the daily lives of most people, and it controlled education and provided care for the sick.

**Privileges:** They could only be prosecuted in their own church courts, they could not be asked to perform military service or house troops or provide money for royal troops, and they also had various financial privileges and were not required to pay the taille (the main direct tax).

### Second Estate

- The nobility, including the royal family, which owned around a fifth of the land in France.
- The nobility was divided, and not all were exceptionally wealthy. The first group was the ancient nobility, whose status came from their birth. They were known as the nobility of the sword as they were originally the only men allowed to carry a sword.
- The other group was made up of those whose noble status derived from the work they did and was known as the nobility of the robe. Nobility might be acquired through performance of a particular job, such as judge, given in return for money, as a reward for outstanding military service, or, more often, as a 'perk' accompanying a particular governmental office.
- Venal offices were those that could be purchased and they provided a useful source of income for the crown during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. The numbers of the second estate had grown considerably during this century.

**Privileges:** the right to wear a sword, display their coat of arms and take precedence at public ceremonies helped reinforce their belief in a natural superiority. They had a right to be heard in a high court and be beheaded rather than hung; they were exempt from the corvée (forced labour on the roads) and the taille (direct tax) and gabelle (salt tax) and had a lower rate of assessment in other direct taxes.

### Third Estate

- A mixed group of those who were neither clerics nor nobility.

- The largest proportion, comprising 80-90% of the population, was peasantry. Peasants worked the land of others but there were some peasants with small holdings of their own.
- At the top there were the richer, land-owning peasantry and the tenant farmers of large estates and the bourgeoisie, who relied on their skill as professionals (doctors, lawyers, teachers etc).
- At the very top of the bourgeoisie, they identified more with the second estate and many tried to join through the purchase of office. The lower bourgeoisie had fewer opportunities for advancement.

**Privileges:** Few, they were required to pay direct taxes, such as the taille and the vingtieme, and capitation and indirect taxes, such as the gabelle, the aides on drink and tobacco as well as their tithe to the church. The third estate was also required to do unpaid labour service to maintain the roads, although wealthier citizens could buy their way out.

### **The Ancien Regime**

- The organisation of government and society in France before the revolution.
- The system had evolved over many years and was based on the medieval idea of a hierarchical society with the king at the top and his subjects in their place according to their duties and birth.

### **Taxes and Feudal Dues**

#### **Direct taxes-**

**Taille:** a tax on either land or income

- All citizens were meant to pay (except men on army service).
- Nobles and the clergy were exempt.

**Capitation:** a poll tax- fixed sum paid each year to the government.

- All citizens were meant to pay
- Nobody was exempt, but, in practise, many nobles and clergy evaded it or paid little.

**Vingtieme:** an income tax of one twentieth of a year's earnings

- All citizens were meant to pay
- In practise many clergy evaded it or paid little

**Corvee:** a labour tax requiring unpaid work mending roads

- All able-bodied men were meant to pay
- Nobles, clergy, townspeople, post masters, country school teachers and shepherds were exempt.

#### **Indirect taxes-**

**Gabelle:** a tax on salt

- Anyone buying salt had to pay
- There were 4 exempt provinces

**Octroi:** a tax, paid at the own gates, on goods being taken to market

- The merchant transporting goods had to pay
- Nobody was exempt

**Aides:** a tax on drinks, especially wine

- Some provinces were exempt

**Traites:** a tax on goods being transported form one province to another

- The merchant transporting the goods had to pay
- Nobody was exempt

#### **Feudal Rights-**

**The right of the oven:** peasants had to bake their bread in an oven owned by the landlord, paying a fee for its use.

**The rights of the mill:** peasants had to grind their corn in the landlord's windmill or watermill, paying a fee to use it.

**The right of the press:** peasants had to press their grapes in the landlord's press, paying a fee for its use.

**The right of the hunt:** the landlord could ride over his tenants' fields whilst hunting, even if they are planted.

**The right of the warren:** the landlord could keep rabbits in a warren; tenants could not kill them, even when they damaged crops.

**The right of the dovecote:** the landlord could keep pigeons in a dovecote; tenants could not kill them, even when they damaged crops.

#### **Dues-**

**The corvee:** peasants had to do several days' unpaid work for the landlord each year (e.g. harvest)

**The cens:** peasants had to pay a tax to the landlord each year

**The champart:** peasants had to give the landlord a portion of their crops each year.

#### **Land Ownership-**

- Nobles (3-400,000): 20%
- Clergy (170,000): 15%
- Bourgeoisie (2.5 million): 30%
- Peasantry (24 million): 35%

The standard of living of the poor declines by 25% because food prices rose by 65% and wages rose by 22% only.

#### **Taxation of Earnings (%)**

Percentage surrendered by peasants in the form of taxes, tithes and feudal dues- 45% in total:

- Taxes to the king: 27%
- Feudal dues: 10%
- Tithes: 8%

### **The Enlightenment**

#### **What was the enlightenment?**

The Enlightenment was a "movement of criticism" which emphasised the importance of human reason guiding society.

#### **What did it advocate? What did its writers believe?**

- That men could control their own destiny
- That change was necessary to destroy the inequalities of the ancient regime
- Questioned the power of the church
- Believed that more could be done to improve the daily lives of ordinary people
- Challenged the King's role as God's representative
- Believed that rulers should use their power more effectively to benefit their subjects
- Promoted the importance of using reason and common sense to promote human progress, wealth and happiness on earth
- Developed the idea that government was based on a 'contract' between the king and his subjects, with obligations on both sides

- Believed that anything that wasn't shown to be useful to humanity or promote human happiness wasn't justifiable
- Believed in the improvement of social conditions for fellow men

#### How did Enlightenment ideas spread?

- French architecture, furniture and fashion dominated continental taste and all educated Europe adopted the French language as its primary tongue. It was the language spoken in courts Europe wide with the exception of England and Spain. New developments in France were, therefore, rapidly discussed and absorbed elsewhere.
- The proliferation of journals, newspapers and books generated a circulation Europe wide. In 1787, 70,000 copies of newspapers were being regularly sold with a subscription of over half a million. Over 1/3 of Louis' subjects were literate (high rate) although not all could afford newspapers. However, this was eased by the development of subscription libraries, reading rooms and literary societies which encouraged reading of Enlightenment ideas and discussions.
- Due to the dissolution of the Jesuits, who had dominated the higher education of the Catholic elite since the late 16<sup>th</sup> Century, rational thought, in the form of the natural sciences in a course called 'Philosophy' was being taught.
- The 7 years war, 1756-63, greatly fuelled public discussion and the impact of the enlightenment. The American War of Independence led to journals and books regarding the revolt as well as translations documents, such as the Declaration of Independence, being read by Frenchmen as French soldiers returned from the war in 1783 and informed others. America reflected critically on French society and politics.
- By the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, there were some signs that the ideas of the Enlightenment were beginning to take effect in France. The numbers taking up careers in the church and the number of religious books and pamphlets published declined.

#### Writers of the Enlightenment

##### Voltaire-

- Born November 21<sup>st</sup> 1694 to a wealthy Parisian family
- Great wit and crusader against injustice and intolerance
- Jesuit educated at the college of Louis-le-grand
- Pursued legal training before becoming a writer.
- Was a realist- he saw that equality was just an ideal
- One of the great works of the Enlightenment was his 'Understanding of Inequality'
- Voltaire claims equality is unachievable because the poor will always lose as they do not have the money or resources to win against the rich and powerful

##### Montesquieu-

- Born 1689
- Became a baron when his uncle died in 1716
- Member of the Bordeaux and French academies of science
- The 'Persian Letters' criticised the lifestyle and liberties of the wealthy French and the church. He attacks the nobility. He uses irony and satire. Montesquieu describes the noble in a disgusting manner to show his ridiculous pomposity.
- Montesquieu's 'The Spirit of the Laws' outlines his ideas on governance of republics/monarchical states and empires. He points out the difficulties in governing territories of these sizes. He therefore criticises the governance of France, in many ways suggesting it should be firmer.

##### Rousseau-

- Born in Geneva, Switzerland