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The French Revolution lasted for a period of about one decade ranging from 1789 to 1799. The period was characterised by radical socio-economic and political transformations and it also marked the collapse of absolute monarchy (Kates 56). There were three major social groups in France prior to the French revolution. These were the first, second and third estates. The First Estate consisted of the clergy; the second one was nobility while the third estate was known as the commoners. The major goal of the commoners was to attain more power and independence from the nobility and the clergy.

On the other hand, both the nobility and the clergy groups had the aim of attaining political power. The First Estate lost power due to the changes that were implemented by the National Assembly. Firstly, The French Jews and Protestants were given religious autonomy. Therefore, they were not under direct control of the religious monarchs. Secondly, property of the church was nationalised and there was abolition of the monasteries.

This weakened the economic power of the church (Kates 57). The nationalised land acted as the collateral for the government loans which was later sold to the commoners. Another blow to the clergy was the establishment of the National Church which had priests elected and had to take oath of loyalty to the government. The nobility which composed of the Second Estate also had the same interest as that of the clergy. The nobility of the sword was evidently the most privileged among the three types. This was followed by the nobility of the court. Some of the privileges which they had such as tax exemption and manorial rights was short lived since the poor nobility could not afford most of their basic needs and therefore

decided to be like commoners due to rising inflation. They later joined the commoners in trying to voice their public opinion.

However, nobles quite often exercised their rights in order to earn a living as it was the case with the poor nobles since they had never imagined being equal to the commoners. Furthermore, there was intense complain by the bourgeoisie who were at the top of the third Estate, on why the nobility enjoyed tax exemptions and unnecessary privileges with regards to juridical matters. The demand was that bourgeoisie was to be accepted as close friends of the nobility and that they qualified to serve the state in all positions. They pushed for the scraping of the armorial rights and demanded an end to the education of poor nobles' children. They wanted equality in the civil and penal laws to be applied to both the nobles and commoners. This led to the establishment of Estates General in May 1789 which was composed of three groups namely, the clergy, the nobility and the commoners. As the press censorship was lifted; the more open minded nobles and clergy saw the need to give more attention to the commoners.

By mid of 1789, the commoners organized a meeting dubbed the National Assembly. They discussed national matters without the other two estates. The National Assembly was making inroads on national matters and this forced the king to order their meeting hall to be closed. This act led to the tennis Court oath where some members of the Third estate vowed to remain united (Kates 58).

The Third estate then reorganized itself and came up with the national assembly whose members were mostly drawn from among the bourgeoisies

and had the duty of writing the constitution. This was achieved in the declaration of Human Rights and finally the French Republic was declared in September 1792. The new constitution granted equal rights to women and the rest of the population.

## **Works Cited**

Kates, Gary.

The French Revolution: recent debates and new controversies. London: Routledge, 1998. Print.