

Louis xvi failure to prevent the french revolution



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Through a close analysis, to a certain extent Louis XVI plays a major role in the advance of the French revolution. He was responsible for aspects of the revolution, but it was an event which was ready for creation, and nothing was going to terminate its destiny. The times prior were becoming extremely difficult, and France was becoming a worn-out, desperate country suffocating from finances and other communal issues. There were numerous causes for why the revolution took place such as the great division in society and specific events, and Louis XVI plays a minor role as the authority figure through the hardship and change. Thus, Louis XVI becomes a vulnerable king who receives a substantial amount of blame for the revolution.

Louis-Auguste ascended the throne at the age of 20 after the death of his father and was married to Marie-Antoinette, a queen which was disliked by the public of France. Their characters were seen as contrasting, yet both were disfavoured by the people. Louis was the King in name and in power, but did not support this authority with his character. He was mildly interested in reform, more interested in his kingship, but most interested in hunting. Queen Marie-Antoinette was at fault for the revolution to a small extent also, and was extremely unpopular among the common folk of France as the representative of the hated Austrian alliance. The king was overpowered by the fatal influence of Marie-Antoinette, and was "too weak-minded to be stable, and the Queen was too strong-minded to be sensible". The image that was portrayed of the King and Queen to the public eye was not of positive attitude, which causes the people of France to accuse the monarchy

The first signs which revealed a crisis to be uprising were the financial situations France was confronted with during the 1780s. There were three main reasons for bankruptcy to take place in France, one which directly involved Louis XVI and caused repugnance to be felt by the public. The constant wars and ruinous loss of most of the French Empire made continuous borrowing a necessity, and along with it came an enormous amount of debt. France was known to have an inefficient taxation system, by which the third estate paid all the taxes and the nobles and clergy escaped on light terms. The main situation which directs at Louis XVI's flaws was that the French court alone was accounting for one twelfth of the whole revenue of the government, which allowed them to live in luxury while the government continued to slip into financial debts, and all the common folk of France. Louis XVI is a major part to why the government was continuing to subside into bankruptcy, and he is seen as a poor role model of high status.

Specific events from 1788-1799 caused a pressure on France, and created a numerous amount of problems to occur. Louis XVI was not of fault for the reasons, which shows that he was not the only source of the revolution.

France's population growth had risen from knowledge of medical technology upgrading, causing strains on the economy and the agricultural resources of the country. With an increase in population came a decrease in job vacancies, causing a rapid increase of unemployment of the Parisiennes.

Another specific problem to occur during the time period of a year was a harsh winter, which forced people into Paris in search of food and shelter.

Food started to become increasingly short and prices began to fluctuate. The typical worker was now spending three quarters of their wages on food. The

tension that grew from these important events during the year of 1788 and 1799 caused a sudden outbreak of a ' Paris Mob' to form. They were a desperate mob of exceptional size that were idle and ready to cheer on the most extreme measures to create a change of misfortune. Therefore, this is evidence of one cause of the revolution, which Louis XVI was not of fault.

Additional evidence supporting the fact that Louis XVI was not the main factor for the revolution to take place was the growth of ideas, which had been brought to the attention of the French people. Ideas were brought to the public by members of society who began to question the hierarchal society and its oppressive structure. Philosophers and thinkers were the main bodies of the ideas and believed in rights of the individual in society and the division of power and the basic freedoms of man. Many famous writers such as Voltaire, Jean Jaques Rousseau and many other familiar names endorsed the general feeling of uprising. It was an age of enlightenment and it was designed to liberate men and set them free from fear. They were against the beliefs churches were imposing on educating and religion. They wanted to create a change, and not allow the church to be in such dominant power anymore. Thus, this proves to the point that Louis was not the main vehicle behind the revolution that other dominant forces such as the church were oppressing towards the French society creating this distinct tension to the up rise.

The last influence to the revolution was how the society of France was divided distinctively into three sections, and this was a subject that was in the power of the king, Louis XVI to govern. An extreme amount of tension and hatred had grown from the three separate classes; they were known as

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the first estate consisting of the clergy, the second estate which were the nobles, and the third estate holding a large percentage of 90 percent of the population, were the middle class, otherwise known as the bourgeoisie and peasants. The major resentment was held by the middle class who did not want to be categorized in the same title as the underprivileged. The nobles were exempt from almost all taxes, leaving the peasants and middle class to pay for them, which they could not afford to do. The ' Sans-culottes' which was the term given to the radicals of Paris who wore long trousers instead of the aristocratic knee-breeches were from the class of artisans and small shopkeepers. There were no major industrial enterprises, since they tended to be state monopolized or strictly regulated by the state. There were not many job opportunities for the peasantry and middle-class. The third estate was never given a fair chance of speech and was cast aside and ignored in any of its ideas or needs. No matter if they were of the middle class with academic background or just the common peasant they were treated as the outcasts of society. Louis XVI had the power to change the classes, since he was in absolute monarchy, but he was content with the way France was divided and felt there was no need to make the third estate pleased. Instead he decided to ignore their requests for change and left the tension of the estates to escalate. This is an indication that Louis XVI can not be completely excluded from the bringing about of the French Revolution.

Thus, through the identification of the reasons of the initial events occurring to the uprising of the revolution, and through the cross analysis of Louis XVI being entwined to the causes, it can be seen that he was only a small component of the reasons. Louis XVI was in absolute monarchy and had

power over many subjects, although there were reasons that no amount of power could have discontinued. As many historians have concluded about the French Revolution, France had become a very desperate country with a weak king and had a strong body of reformists, and needed only the smallest of events to occur to set it into fire.

Louis XVI (23 August 1754-21 January 1793) was King of France and Navarre from 1774 until 1791, and then King of the French from 1791 to 1792. Suspended and arrested during the Insurrection of the 10th of August 1792, he was tried by the National Convention, found guilty of treason, and executed on 21 January 1793. His execution signaled the end of the absolutist monarchy in France and would eventually bring about the rise of Napoleon.

There are conflicting views about his conviction. Not only is it believed that he was guilty and deserved to be guillotined in front of a cheering crowd on 21 January 1793, but a divergent view is held, outlining how his intentions were good but the circumstances were. But to what extent was Louis XVI really to blame?

Though it is certain that Louis XVI failed to maintain the centralization of power; people were under the false impression that he was a vain, obtuse, and inadequate monarch, so clueless that on the day the Bastille was seized by revolutionaries, he wrote in his diary, " Rien," " Nothing happened.". This led to all the large forces in France conspiring to fragment power away from the monarchy. This meant that Louis could have been a scape goat and someone easy to blame for the revolution. He inherited the debt problem left

by his grandfather, Louis XV, and contributed to the predicament himself through heavy spending during France's involvement in the American Revolution (1775-1783).

Because this massive debt overwhelmed all of his financial consultants, Louis XVI was forced to give in to the demands of the Parlement of Paris and convene the Estates, General. Also Marie Antoinette, who was brought up in indulgence as an Austrian princess, after their marriage became, in the French commoners' eyes, the primary symbol of the French royalty's extravagance and excess. She was hindering their payment of loans both Louis XVI and his predecessors had. Thought she didn't have power of anything more than any other French queen until the reforms were rejected, she still had power over his purse, and carried on her indulgent life even when the country was declaring bankruptcy.

This was another target that France used in their feud against their youthful king. He had an Austrian queen, in an attempt to reconcile differences between the two countries, but with many French people against his wife, Louis was led to ignore those citizen's opinions and carry on, not worrying about how he could be wrong in having a queen like Mary Antoinette. This in turn may explain why the French started to despise Louis xvi, and in the end turn to executing him.

Complaints about the king, taxing, and voting in the Estates General were on the increase. The bourgeoisie were well informed of their legal weakness and conscious of the rights that other people in other nations, such as the new United States of America, were receiving as a right of a drastic change in

judgment. The most important causes of the French Revolution, therefore, were these: the constant unprofessional conduct of the French government and the subsequent unfairness in the distribution of wealth, the incredible hardship that the populations of the Third Estate were subject to, and, finally, the Enlightenment principles finally reaching the thinkers of the day.

The ruling parties in France had long since overstepped their boundaries in terms of levying taxes. The Old Regime had become antiquated and impractical, unfit for the growing size of the country and for the well-being of the people. Feudalism had existed for centuries, but it was time for a change. King Louis XVI and his teams of advisors were forced to develop elaborate taxation schemes to pay the inflation on the national debt, which was partly the fault of his predecessors, who had spent colossal amounts of money on Versailles, amongst other things. More than fifty percent of the total budget was directed toward this remuneration.

Tax collection, however, was a debacle. Taxes varied from region to region, and most of the taxes were collected by private businessmen. They would lend the taxes to the government and then accumulate the taxes directly; they then paid themselves both the principal and the interest on the loan and sent the rest to the government. They were liberated to hold back as much as they wanted, so the Third Estate was paying far more in taxes than truly went to the government. What's worse is that the assets of the country were not centralized; there were hundreds of offices paying out money. By the 1780's, no one had any idea as to what the total asset and liability profile of the nation looked like.

The financial crisis precipitated a steep inflationary rise in prices. This inflation was good news for French manufacturing and mercantilism because it resulted in a significant shot of capital into emerging industrial and mercantile businesses. It played hell, however, with the peasantry. Not only did the peasants have to pay higher prices for the basics of life, but landlords began raising fees on the peasantry when they saw their purchasing power decrease. By 1789, over 80 percent of an average peasant's household income went to purchasing bread alone, just bread. In that same year, unemployment in many parts of France was over 50%. This, of course, meant practically bleeding the poorest, most disadvantaged people in the country dry of what little capital they had. As time went on, the Churches and the nobles, making up only three percent of the territory, gathered to them upwards of half of the land in the country; they then turned their sights on the largest portion of the French people, and began to take whatever they could from them.

Louis was blamed for this as he was that kept the taxes and even added some on to pay off his debts. On top of the taille, the corvée, the tithe and capitation, the vingtieme was called on even when France wasn't at war.

In 1787, Louis's financial ministers, Charles de Calonne and Loménie de Brienne, tried to initiate a series of reforms to stop the complete financial ruin of the French government. They wanted new taxes. The Parlements, which had the authority to raise taxes, want something in return: more regional independence. The aristocracy wouldn't budge on the matter; when Louis calls a select group of nobles together to sell him on the reforms, they flat out declined to consider the matter. They insist, rather, that the only

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governmental body that can support the new taxes is the Estates General, which hadn't been called since 1614. So Louis XVI decided in 1789 to convene the Estates, General, and an ancient assembly consisting of three different estates that each represented a portion of the French population. If the Estates, General could agree on a tax solution, it would be implemented. However, since two of the three estates; the clergy and the nobility, were tax, exempt, the achievement of any such result was unlikely.

Furthermore, the out of date rules of order for the Estates, General gave each estate a single vote, despite the fact that the Third Estate, consisting of the general French public, was many times larger than either of the first two. Feuds quickly broke out over this discrepancy and would prove to be contradictory. Realizing that its numbers gave it an automatic advantage, the Third Estate declared itself the sovereign National Assembly. Within days of the announcement, many members of the other two estates had switched allegiances over to this revolutionary new assembly.

On May 5, 1789, Louis XVI convened the Estates General. Almost immediately, it became apparent that the 1614 arrangement would not sit well with its present members. Although Louis XVI granted the Third Estate greater numerical representation, the Parlement of Paris stepped in and invoked an old rule mandating that each estate receive one vote, regardless of size. As a result, though the Third Estate was vastly larger than the clergy and nobility, each estate had the same representation, one vote. Inevitably, the Third Estate's vote was doubled to accommodate the difference in population. Louis XVI could be commentated on his good intentions in light of this event. Knowing very well that a revolution was imminent, he let there be

an equal ration of representatives, thus editing a tradition to make it democratic.

The fact that the Estates General hadn't been summoned in nearly 200 years probably says a thing or two about the extent of the situation. The First and Second Estates, clergy and nobility, respectively, were too closely related in many matters. Both were linked to the royalty and shared many similar privileges. As a result, their votes often went the same way, automatically neutralizing any effort by the Third Estate. Additionally, in a country as secularized as France at the time, giving the church a full third of the vote was ill-advised: although France's citizens would ultimately have their revenge, at the time the church's voting power just fostered more animosity. There were numerous philosophers in France speaking out against religion and the mindless following that it supposedly demanded, and many resented being forced to follow the decisions of the church on a national scale.

In a way if it weren't for Louis making his decision to give more votes to the 3rd estate, there would be no upheaval from the 1st and 2nd estates. On the other hand the revolt of the 3rd estate would affect him. He was stuck in the middle with no way of compromise. Things got worse when the third estate segregated. The Third Estate itself varied greatly in socioeconomic status: some members were peasants and labourers, whereas others had the occupations, wealth, and lifestyles of nobility. These disparities between members of the Third Estate made it difficult for the wealthy members to relate to the peasants with whom they were grouped. Because of these rifts, the Estates, General, though organized to reach a peaceful solution, remained in a long-lasting inside feud. It was only through the efforts of men

such as Sieyès that the members of the Third Estate finally realized that fighting among them was fruitless and that if they took advantage of the estate's massive size, they would be a force that could not be ignored.

In conclusion, I believe the French Revolution was an astonishingly convoluted affair; it was principally lit by the antagonisms between the first two and the Third Estate, antagonisms rooted in decades of abuse and frustration and not a "despot" who was trying to fix his families mistakes along with his own. Louis xvi may have made some decisions that would make any other monarch twitch with distaste but his intentions were good , and considering his age and his power , he was an adequate king for a place that certainly had a revolution in its midst.