6 Was Louis XVI chiefly to blame for the failure of constitutional monarchy?

constitutional monarch
A monarch whose powers are limited by a constitution

constitution
The fundamental principles according to which a state is governed which can be written as in the case of France or unwritten as in the case of Great Britain

A revolution had broken out but no one knew in 1789 what kind of revolution it would turn out to be. The majority of the deputies in the National Assembly expected a 'moderate revolution' – one in which the monarchy remained but with its powers reduced and shared with a wider range of the French people. This is what happened for two years because from the revolutionary events of October 1789 onwards France was effectively governed by a **constitutional monarch**. Louis was still king but was now subject to the law just like every other citizen of France. Laws were no longer made by the King but by the deputies sitting in the National Assembly. They were at work drafting a **constitution** intended to secure the future of the Revolution and the gains made. But could the deputies trust Louis to accept the constitution and become a constitutional monarch? The cartoonist who made this etching in 1791 thought not. He shows Louis XVI facing two ways. On one side Louis promises the National Assembly deputies that, 'I will support the Constitution.' And on the other hand he promises those clergy who have refused to swear an oath to the Constitution that, 'I will destroy the Constitution.'

The struggle to create an effective constitutional monarchy lasted for two years from autumn 1789 to autumn 1791. This struggle basically meant reaching agreement on how the country was to be governed. There were many questions that needed answering.

- Who would be allowed to vote?
- How would taxes be raised?
- Would Catholicism be the official religion of France?
- What powers would the King have? For example, would he be allowed to veto new laws?

Once the National Assembly had decided on the answers to these questions in September 1791 Louis accepted the new constitution. It appeared as if the problems had been solved but within two months Louis vetoed two new laws on key issues. At that point it was clear that the attempt to create a constitutional monarchy had failed. Was this all Louis' fault, as the cartoonist hinted, or should others share the blame?

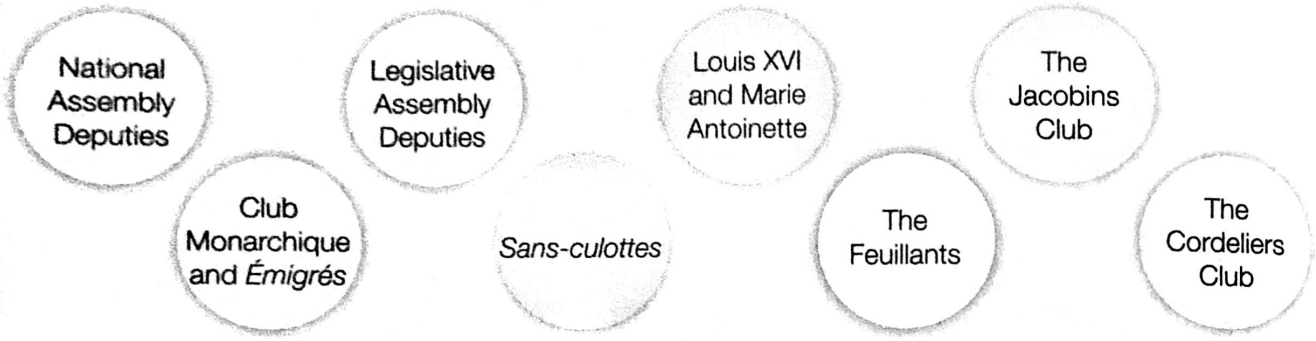
◁ *Le Roi Janus ou l'homme à deux visages.*

The chronology of constitutional monarchy 1789–91

October 1789	Early co-operation between Louis and the deputies of the National Assembly. Louis agreed to the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen and to the abolition of feudalism.
November 1789	The National Assembly nationalised all Church property but collaboration with the King was hampered by the decision to bar National Assembly Deputies from being royal ministers.
February to June 1790	The National Assembly passed a range of reforms: • France was reorganised into 83 departments, Paris into 48 sections. • Abolition of *lettres de cachet*, the *gabelle* and hereditary nobility.
April to June 1790	Counter-revolutionary uprisings in Nimes, Montauban, Toulouse and Vannes
July to August 1790	The National Assembly made more reforms – the Civil Constitution of the Clergy completely reorganised the Catholic Church in France, the legal system was also reorganised.
November 1790	As relations between the deputies and the King declined Louis began secret negotiations with other European countries. A National Assembly Decree ordered priests to take the oath to the Constitution.
February 1791	The political temperature was raised by the 'Chevaliers du poignard' conspiracy – the Tuileries were temporarily invaded by armed young nobles, counter-revolutionaries who may have been planning to abduct the King.
April 1791	Two events made a successful constitutional monarchy even less likely: • Mirabeau, whose influence with Louis many believed would make constitutional monarchy work, died • the people of Paris prevented the royal family from leaving for Saint-Cloud for Easter.
June 1791	The royal family failed in their attempt to flee to Varennes. All trust between the King and deputies had broken down.
July 1791	The emergence of the idea of Republicanism led to a split in the Jacobin Club. Pro-constitutional monarchists formed the Feuillant Club and took control in the aftermath of the Massacre of the Champ de Mars.
August 1791	In signs of deepening divisions a National Assembly Decree ordered all *émigrés* to return to France within one month whilst in the Pillnitz Declaration Leopold II of Austria and Frederick-William II of Prussia threatened a combined military intervention in French affairs on behalf of the French monarchy.
September 1791	Louis accepted the new Constitution and the National Assembly met for the last time.
October to November 1791	Brissot and his republican supporters in the new Legislative Assembly passed two laws directed against those clergy who refused to swear an oath of loyalty to the Constitution and against *émigrés* which led to Louis using his veto.

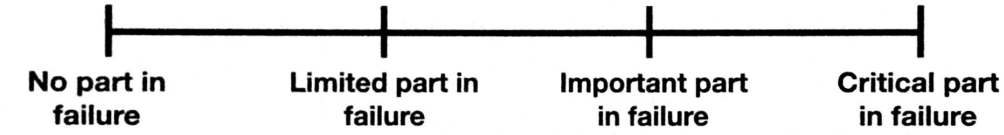
■ Enquiry Focus: Was Louis XVI chiefly to blame for the failure of constitutional monarchy?

A range of individuals and groups have shared the blame for the failure of the new system of constitutional monarchy. These are shown in the tinted circles.



As you read this chapter:

1. Use the questions at the end of each section to guide your note making on how each individual or group shown in the circles affected the development of the constitutional monarchy.
2. When you have completed your notes on each individual or group, place it on your own version of the continuum line below. You will have the chance to review this at the end of the chapter when you have looked at the impact of all the groups. This completed line should summarise who bears the greatest responsibility for the failure of the constitutional monarchy.



The decisions of the deputies of the National Assembly

When Louis agreed to the Rights of Man and Citizen and to the abolition of feudalism in October 1789 many believed the Revolution was over. However, the National Assembly still had to reform how France was governed. Some of these reforms, such as those to taxation, addressed problems that Louis and his ministers had tried to solve, others such as creating a written constitution were more far-reaching. Most had widespread support from within the National Assembly and the general population.

Local government and the voting system

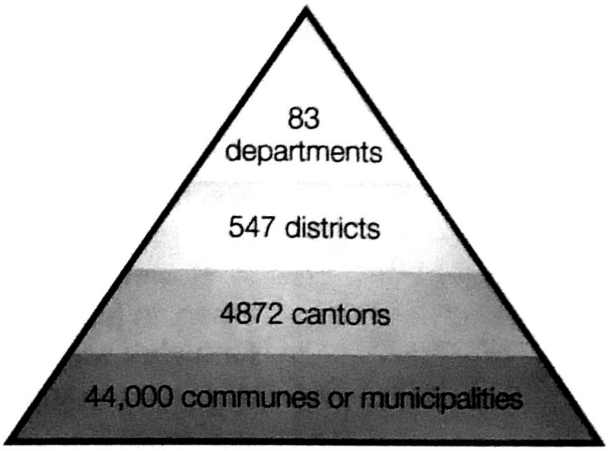
The deputies wanted to replace the administrative chaos of the Ancien Régime with a coherent structure. They also wanted to give more power to local areas and for the system to be democratic with all officials elected. This was because weakening the central government was one way to safeguard the Revolution as it made it more difficult for Louis to recover his power. Even at this early stage there were clearly deputies who did not trust Louis.

While more efficient administration was welcome to everyone, the degree of democracy planned for the new constitution was not enough for some while too much for others. Under the new system the right to vote in elections in communes (see the diagram) was open to all men over 25 who paid tax

equivalent to 3 days' wages. This gave over 4 million Frenchmen the right to vote (they were known as 'active citizens'). However, it excluded nearly 3 million men and all women. They had no vote (they were 'passive citizens'). The deputies were unwilling to give power to the lower orders of society.

In addition, voting in elections at canton, department and National Assembly level was only open to those men paying tax worth 10 days' wages. To stand for election to be a deputy required a tax payment that was out of the reach of most Frenchmen. So the system was heavily weighted in favour of the wealthy. Robespierre was one deputy who spoke out against these measures whilst Camille Desmoulins wrote in his newspaper:

> But what is this much repeated word active citizen supposed to mean? The active citizens are the ones who took the Bastille.



△ **By a decree of February 1790 France was divided into 83 departments for elections and local government. Departments were divided into districts (547), cantons (4872) and communes or municipalities (approx. 44,000) which would be run by elected councils.**

The new legal system

This also aimed to limit the power of the monarch. Ancien Régime features such as parlements, *seigneurial* courts and the hated *lettres de cachet* (see page 4) were abolished. They were replaced by a uniform system with a **Justice of the Peace** in each canton and a criminal court with trial by jury in each department. Torture and mutilation were abolished, anyone arrested had to brought before a court within 24 hours and a new and more humane method of execution, the guillotine, was approved. This replaced previous methods including decapitation (usually for nobles) and being broken on the wheel (for members of the Third Estate). Justice was made free and equal for all.

Justices of the Peace
JPs tried criminal cases up to the value of 50 livres. They were elected by active citizens and served for two years

Tax

Reforming the taxation system was more problematic. When royal government collapsed in 1789 the deputies tried to continue collecting taxes under the existing system until a new system was set up but people simply refused to pay and officials trying to collect taxes often faced physical threats. For example, in Picardy, income from indirect taxes fell by 80 per cent. Recognising the realities the deputies abolished the most unpopular indirect and direct taxes and the old system of tax farming.

The nationalisation of Church land provided an interim source of income. Bonds backed by the value of these lands, called ***assignats***, were issued as 1000-livre notes. They were soon being used as paper money, to pay the government's creditors and to buy more Church land. The deputies hoped this would safeguard the Revolution because those who bought land from the Church would have a vested interest in supporting the Revolution, as would the clergy who now received a salary from the state.

A new taxation system based upon citizens paying according to what they could afford, was introduced. There were just three taxes – the *contribution foncière*, a land tax which everyone had to pay; the *contribution mobilière*, a tax on moveable goods such as grain paid by 'active citizens'; and the *patente*, a tax on commercial profits. This was a fairer system.

assignats
Assignats were initially government bonds secured on the value of nationalised Church land. A buyer gave money to the government and in return received a bond which would pay interest. If the government needed to repay the bond holder then they could do so by selling some of the Church land. Over time *assignats* came to be used as a paper currency

Economy

The deputies believed in laissez-faire, that government should not interfere with trade and industry. So all internal customs barriers were abolished and price controls were removed. The old system of guilds (see page 23) which had restricted entry to crafts was also abolished. These reforms were previously attempted by Louis' ministers.

However, in one area of trade and industry, the deputies did intervene. When, in June 1791, thousands of workers in Paris were threatening to strike for higher wages the deputies passed the Le Chapelier Law which banned trade unions and employers' organisations. Strikes were made illegal.

The Church

It was when the deputies began reforming the Church that divisions within France, which threatened the successful working of constitutional monarchy, really began to appear.

- Abuses such as pluralism were abolished.
- Clergy were paid by the state instead of collecting the tithe.
- Monastic orders that did not provide either education or charitable work were suppressed.
- Civil rights were granted to Protestants in 1789 and Jews in 1791.

The clergy accepted all this. However, many were very unhappy when the deputies refused to make Catholicism the official religion of France. Matters came to a head in July. On 12 July 1790 the deputies approved the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. Dioceses were to coincide with the new departments, which reduced the number of bishops from 135 to 83. All other clerical posts apart from parish priests would disappear. The crucial clause was:

> From the publication of the present decree there will be only one way of appointing to bishops and curés, namely election.
>
> All elections will be conducted by ballot; the successful candidate will have an absolute majority of votes.

This brought the Church into conflict with the deputies. Elections were opposed by many of the clergy, although they wanted to find a way to accept the Civil Constitution. Their request for a national synod (council) of the French Church was rejected. The deputies refused to allow the Church a privileged position. Denied a synod, the clergy waited for the judgement of the Pope, Pius VI. He delayed and, growing tired of waiting, the deputies forced the issue by a decree on 27 November 1790 which required all clergy to take an oath to the Constitution. This split the Church. For many clergy the oath swearing 'fidelity to the nation, the law, the King and the Constitution' posed a potential conflict with their first loyalty to God. They saw it as a choice between their religion and the Revolution. The oath posed a crisis of conscience for Louis too. He delayed signing the legislation until 26 December 1790.

During January and February 1791 roughly 60 per cent of parish priests took the oath but only three bishops did so and when in March the Pope

denounced the Civil Constitution some priests retracted. Finally about 50 per cent of parish priests swore the oath. Those who refused were known as **refractory clergy** and were removed from their parishes, although a shortage of replacements meant that some were asked to stay on. The removal of priests was very unpopular with parishioners. For the first time, a significant number of people were now opposed to the Revolution.

refractory clergy
Those clergy who refused to swear an oath of loyalty to the Constitution

Louis XVI

Louis had accepted the changes of 1789 and whilst he was not entirely trusted by the deputies, they were prepared to work with him to establish a constitutional monarchy. However, opinion amongst historians is divided on whether Louis was prepared to accept a constitutional monarchy. The historian Munro Price studied Louis' secret correspondence with **Mirabeau** and suggests in an article in 2006 that:

> Instead of *whether*, the key word should be *when*. From July 17, 1789, to the middle of 1790, most of the evidence points to the king's decision to collaborate sincerely with the Constituent Assembly. During that summer, however, his confidence in the assembly's deliberations collapsed.

- This section has looked at five reforms made by the National Assembly, relating to the voting system, the economy, taxation, the legal system and the Church. For each reform note down whether it created support for, or opposition to, the new constitution and the reasons for its effects.
- Now place National Assembly Deputies on your continuum line, adding brief notes to justify this placement.

What undermined Louis' confidence was the Civil Constitution of the Clergy (see above) and the realisation that his negotiating position was weakened as long as he was in Paris. When, in April 1791, Louis and his family tried to leave Paris to spend Easter at Saint Cloud a huge crowd blocked them in. When Lafayette ordered his National Guard to clear a path through the crowds his men refused. It was at this point that historians such as William Doyle believe Louis realised he was a prisoner in his own capital and that he needed to escape.

Louis planned to escape from Paris to Montmédy in Lorraine where he could negotiate with the National Assembly deputies from a position of strength. In June, Mirabeau advised the King to leave Paris under military escort and warned, 'Remember … that a king must leave in broad daylight if he wants to continue as a king.' Louis ignored this advice. On the night of the 20 June 1791 the King and the royal family, disguised as servants of a Russian aristocrat, secretly left the Tuileries. They travelled east in a large coach but were recognised and then stopped at Varennes. From Varennes they were brought back to Paris where the crowds greeted them with an ominous silence. Meanwhile the King's younger brother, the Comte de Provence, and his family did successfully escape to the Austrian Netherlands.

Mirabeau was a leading revolutionary in the National Assembly who was secretly advising the royal family.

Before he left Paris, Louis had written a proclamation for the French people. In it he set out his true feelings and denounced the Revolution. He argued that it had gone against the wishes of the people set out in the *cahiers*, that the crown had insufficient power under the new constitution, that the power of the Jacobin Club was too great, that property had been attacked and that there was anarchy in parts of France.

The deputies of the National Assembly who had been working towards establishing a constitutional monarchy were appalled. Without the King their new constitution was worthless. To try and keep things on track, they declared

- Make notes which explain:
  Louis' attitude to constitutional monarchy; which issues most influenced his attitude; how his actions created mistrust and opposition; the impact of his proclamation to the people.
- Now place Louis XVI on your continuum line, adding brief notes to justify this placement.

that Louis had been kidnapped and was therefore blameless. No one believed this fiction. The key consequence of Louis' botched flight to Varennes was that people had to make a choice. Did they come out in support of constitutional monarchy or in favour of republicanism? The stream of *émigrés* increased with roughly 6000 army officers (all noble) and refractory clergy (see page 67) leaving France. Meanwhile, for many the monarchy was irretrievably damaged. In Paris, shop and inn signs which featured images of the King were destroyed by angry crowds. Most damaging of all was that many moderate politicians no longer believed that constitutional monarchy could work.

Marie Antoinette

The Queen's unpopularity increased further in this period. She became more active in politics, having secret discussions with Mirabeau and **Barnave** as they tried to make constitutional monarchy work, and she advised the King. She was never in favour of constitutional monarchy and described the Constitution of 1791 as 'monstrous'. She was blamed when Louis used his veto and was then nicknamed 'Madam Veto'. She also wrote many letters, some in code or lemon juice (which makes an invisible ink and turns brown when heated) and sent via trusted couriers, appealing to other European monarchs for military help. As the Comte de Mercy, Austrian ambassador to France since 1766, suggested in a letter to Mirabeau, changing the Queen's views was never easy.

> The queen has a proud and decided character; her lack of education and knowledge sometimes leads her into wrongheaded opinions, to which she holds with a constancy that resembles obstinacy, but since she has some intelligence and discernment, it is possible, although difficult, to talk her out of these by force of reasoning; once this has been achieved, her position is certain to stay fixed. It is important to observe that only half convincing her is insufficient and can allow a return to her old prejudices ...

Antoine **Barnave** was a barrister and one of the early leaders of the Revolution. After accompanying the royal family back from Varennes he worked for the continuation of constitutional monarchy and was a leading member of the Feuillants. When they failed, he returned to his home region but was arrested and guillotined on 29 November 1793.

▷ A contemporary cartoon showing the royal family being escorted back to Paris by the National Guard. Why has the cartoonist chosen to depict them as pigs?

Was she to blame for the downfall of the monarchy? One contemporary, the American Thomas Jefferson, was clear. 'I have ever believed that had there been no queen, there would have been no revolution.' A modern American, historian Thomas Kaiser (2000) differs, 'In recent years, feminist historiography has reconfigured the "Marie Antoinette question" in significant ways. The effect of this approach has been to place Marie Antoinette at the centre of systemic anxiety regarding the "unnatural" public power wielded by women in the late eighteenth century.'

He is suggestion that the Queen's own actions were less of a problem than people's expectations of what a queen should do – they were alarmed simply by her involvement in politics, something that was not expected of any woman.

- Make notes which explain: the Queen's attitudes to constitutional monarchy; how her reputation and attitude affected expectations that the system could work.
- Now place Marie Antoinette on your continuum line, adding brief notes to justify this placement.

The Jacobin Club

The Jacobin Club was one of hundreds of political clubs that had developed since 1789. It had emerged from the original meetings of a group of Breton deputies in 1789 and was given its name from the **Jacobin** convent in the Rue Saint-Honoré where they met. It charged high admission (12 livres) and membership fees (24 livres) which meant that its members were drawn from the wealthier sections of society. Crucially these men tended to be politically active, many were deputies, and in their debates they discussed the issues that arose in the National Assembly. Meeting four times a week it acted as a pressure group for first patriot and then radical (i.e. revolutionary) ideas. By June 1791 it had roughly 2400 members. Across France a network of Jacobin clubs developed in towns and cities (833 of them by June 1791) which communicated by letter with the central club in Paris. Together these became a powerful political force. Robespierre was to emerge as the leader of the Jacobins.

Jacobin was the name given to Dominican monks in Paris. When the Breton deputies began to hold their meetings in the Jacobins' former convent they were mockingly called Jacobins by their opponents in the National Assembly, suggesting they were some sort of monks.

Following the attempted royal flight to Varennes, the political pace was set by the radicals in the Jacobin Club. A petition was drawn up by Danton and Brissot and others. This stated that the King had, in effect, abdicated and that he should not be replaced unless the majority of the nation agreed to it. This was a republican manifesto, advocating the end of the experiment with constitutional monarchy.

Its immediate result was that the Jacobin Club split. The majority of its members, including most of the National Assembly deputies, were constitutional monarchists and were glad to split from the more radical republican members. They left to set up a new pro-monarchy club known as the **Feuillants** because they met at the former monastery of the Feuillants. One of the few deputies left in the Jacobin Club was Robespierre. He persuaded its remaining members to withdraw their support for the petition but was too late. Members of the new Feuillants would not return to the Jacobin Club and the idea of preparing a petition was taken up by the more radical Cordeliers Club.

Feuillants
Monks from Feuillant Abbey, a house of the Cistercian order of monks

- Make notes to explain: the attitude of the Jacobins and Cordeliers Club to constitutional monarchy.
- Place each of these groups on your continuum line, adding brief notes to justify its placement. You may want to revisit this when you find out what happened later.

The Cordeliers Club

The Cordeliers Club originated in the Cordeliers district of Paris in May 1790 and was more radical than the Jacobins at this time (though some people belonged to both clubs). It had a much lower admission charge and monthly subscription so its membership was large. Many Parisians could afford to belong and, unlike the Jacobins, women members were allowed. The leadership tended to be middle class and notably included Danton and Desmoulins, Marat and Hébert. The Cordeliers saw their role as politically educating the common people, keeping an eye on the actions of the deputies, acting as bodyguards to protect popular leaders and as leaders of the democratic movement. They took their support from the people of Paris, the very people who the National Assembly deputies were anxious to exclude from the political process. So the Cordeliers had an interest in constitutional monarchy failing.

Following Louis' failed flight to Varennes and the subsequent split in the Jacobin Club, the Cordeliers organised a signing ceremony for Danton and Brissot's petition for a republic on the Champs de Mars on 17 July 1791. By the afternoon roughly 50,000 people were gathered and thousands had signed. However, two men found hiding under the platform on which was a table with the petition for people to sign, were accused of being spies and lynched. This gave Bailly, the mayor of Paris, the excuse to declare martial law and call out the National Guard. Under Lafayette, and in response to stone throwing from the crowd, the National Guard opened fire. Between 12 and 50 were killed and the rest scattered in what is known as the Massacre of the Champs de Mars. In its aftermath its leaders fled abroad (Danton), were arrested (Desmoulins) or went into hiding (Marat). The Cordeliers Club was shut down.

- Make notes to explain: the views of the Club Monarchique and the *émigrés*; the extent of their influence; why they increased fear of counter-revolution.
- Place the Club Monarchique and the *émigrés* on your continuum line, adding brief notes to justify this placement.

The Club Monarchique and the *émigrés*

On the political far right there were clubs such as the Club Monarchique, a counter-revolutionary group which emerged in 1790. At its height it had some 200 members. Among them were deputies of the National Assembly and men from the clergy, the nobility and the upper bourgeoisie. It sponsored counter-revolutionary propaganda, fostered links with the *émigrés* and used charity to build popular support in Paris. It encouraged the formation of similar clubs across France such as Amis du Roi. These worked for a return to the monarchy of the Ancien Régime.

The *émigrés* were nobles who had emigrated from France since the Revolution began including Louis' youngest brother, the Comte Artois, who had left in July 1789. He set up his court in Turin and plotted to overthrow the Revolution despite Louis asking him not to do so. Louis viewed their actions as jeopardising his negotiating position and increasing popular fears of counter-revolution. Following the failed flight to Varennes in 1791, their numbers were swelled by thousands more, including Louis' younger brother the Comte de Provence. Their activities, such as calling on foreign rulers for military help, increased fears of counter-revolution. The **Pillnitz Declaration** in August 1791 added to those fears.

Pillnitz Declaration
A joint declaration by Leopold II of Austria and Frederick-William II of Prussia in which they threatened a combined military intervention in French affairs on behalf of the French monarchy.

The *sans-culottes*

The *sans-culottes* were the most radical political group. In the reorganisation of local government in 1790, Paris was divided into 48 sections and these became the power base of the *sans-culottes*. It was they who had stormed the Bastille and who forced the royal family to leave Versailles for Paris. But they did not seem to be benefiting from the Revolution. Many did not qualify to be voters ('active citizens') and their livelihoods were threatened by the high food prices resulting from the poor harvest of 1791. They responded with strikes and riots and pressed for the right to vote. Their radical demands for the Revolution to go further, put pressure on the process of trying to make constitutional monarchy work.

In 1791 the *sans-culottes* intervened directly in events again. Louis XVI was a devout man and his conscience was troubled by his acceptance of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. This led him to hear Mass said by a refractory priest. News of this caused outrage. People felt they could not trust Louis and there were rumours he would try to escape the city. So in April when he tried to go to Saint Cloud a huge crowd blocked his carriage, a moment that was to have future significance since it led to Louis' decision to leave Paris secretly.

- Make notes to explain: why the *sans-culottes* were dissatisfied with the constitutional monarchy; which of their actions played a part in its downfall.
- Place the *sans-culottes* on your continuum line, adding brief notes to justify its placement.

The Feuillants

The former Jacobins opposed to republicanism were known as the Feuillants. Some of its members had come from the Société de 1789, an elitist, constitutional monarchist pressure group founded in January 1790 as a direct response to the Jacobins. The Société de 1789 included Lafayette, Mirabeau and Sieyès amongst its membership and it tried to influence National Assembly deputies by persuasion at dinners.

By August 1791, following the Champs de Mars Massacre and the closure of the Cordeliers Club, the Jacobins were in disarray and newspapers were shut down. The Feuillants were the dominant group and they controlled the National Assembly because their arguments won over many non-Feuillant deputies. This enabled them to complete the new constitution spelling out how a constitutional monarchy would work.

The Constitution was formally signed by Louis on 13 September. The National Assembly met for the final time on 30 September to be replaced the next day by the new Legislative Assembly. But although it appeared that the Feuillants had secured the constitutional monarchy there was one significant problem. Back in May, at Robespierre's suggestion, the deputies had passed the self-denying decree. This meant that no National Assembly deputies could stand for the new Legislative Assembly. It meant that when the Legislative Assembly met, the men who had written the Constitution were not there to defend it.

- Make notes to explain: why the Feuillants were in control by August 1791; the main points of the new constitution; what the Feuillants failed to do to defend the new constitution.
- Place the Feuillants on your continuum line, adding brief notes to justify its placement. Reconsider the place of the Jacobins in the light of Robespierre's self-denying ordinance.

New constitution

The King:

- appoints ministers, conducts foreign policy and is head of the armed forces
- has a civil list or funding from the state of 25 million livres per annum
- cannot block legislation but can veto it. This veto suspends legislation for between two and four years.

Legislative Assembly:

- is one body with 745 deputies to be elected every two years
- has control of all legislation, government finances and the armed forces
- can impeach ministers.

- Make notes to explain: why the Jacobin deputies could take the lead in the Legislative Assembly; why Louis used his veto.
- Place the Legislative Assembly Deputies on your continuum line, adding brief notes to justify the placement.

Legislative Assembly Deputies

Elections took place at the end of August so that on the 1 October the 745 new deputies of the Legislative Assembly could start work. All these deputies were well off, as expected from an election system which favoured the wealthy (see page 64). The deputies were almost entirely drawn from the bourgeoisie. There were few nobles, most having either emigrated or retired to live quietly on their country estates; and there were a few clergy.

The political position of the deputies was made clear by which club they joined: 136 joined the Jacobins and 264 joined the Feuillants. This seemed to give the Feuillants most power but they needed the support of the 345 unaligned deputies and many of these distrusted the King and his commitment to the constitution he had signed.

Because so many deputies distrusted the King, this allowed the Jacobin republican Brissot and his radical supporters to control the assembly debates. They led on the two most important issues, how to deal with the refractory clergy and the *émigrés*, both seen as counter-revolutionary threats. On 29 November the deputies passed a law that any refractory clergy who continued to refuse to swear the oath would be regarded as conspiring against the nation. Louis, a devout Catholic, could not possibly agree with this and vetoed it. He also vetoed a second law passed on the same day which demanded the return of the King's brothers and threatened to confiscate the property of any *émigré* who did not return. The deputies, who wanted a republic, had deliberately backed Louis into the position where they knew he would use his veto. This made Louis even more unpopular because he seemed to be deliberately obstructing the work of the Legislative Assembly.

The Feuillants had failed to achieved their aims and all agreed so had constitutional monarchy. The British ambassador, Earl Gower, wrote, 'The present constitution has no friends and cannot last.'

■ Concluding your enquiry

Look at your completed continuum.

1 Re-assess the place of each one in the light of your understanding of this whole period.

2 Who do you now see as being most to blame for the failure of constitutional monarchy? You could think about the following questions.
   - Did the Feuillants such as Lafayette, do enough to ensure the success of constitutional monarchy?
   - Were the radical deputies determined to prevent constitutional monarchy from succeeding by pushing the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and the oath of loyalty?
   - Does the blame lie with Louis and Marie Antoinette for increasing distrust and fear of counter-revolution?
   - How significant was Robespierre's self-denying decree?

When was the turning point?

An alternative enquiry into this period would be to consider which of these two events was the key turning point in the failure of constitutional monarchy:

- 27 November 1790 when the National Assembly deputies demanded the oath of the clergy or 20 June 1791 Louis' flight to Varennes?

Whilst, as William Doyle writes, the oath did force the people of France to make a choice (were they for or against the Revolution?) I would argue that the key turning point was Louis' mistaken attempt to leave Paris, and in secrecy, because from then on his reign was doomed as both Furet and Tackett suggest below. What do you think?

Look back at your notes and the overview on page 63 and then read what the four historians below have to say. Then decide.

The French Revolution had many turning points; but the oath of the clergy was, if not the greatest, unquestionably one of them. It was certainly the Constituent Assembly's most serious mistake. For the first time revolutionaries forced fellow citizens to choose; to declare themselves publicly for or against the new order.

(William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, Second Edition (2002).)

Given the divisiveness engendered by the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and the Clerical Oath, some might point to November 1790 and the months that followed as a crucial turning point for revolutionary France. Certainly resentment over the legislation gave impetus to the counter-revolutionary movements that would plague France, particularly in the Vendée, for the rest of the decade. On the other hand, it seems likely that many devout Catholics would have come to oppose the Revolution as it grew more radical even had their priests not been required to swear an oath of loyalty.

(Paul Hanson, *Contesting the French Revolution* (2009).)

But a full explanation of the origins of the Terror must also reflect on the impact of the attempted flight of the king. The dramatic effort of Louis XVI and his family to escape the capital and abandon the new government … set in motion an extraordinary chain of actions and reactions with profound effects on all elements of society and virtually every corner of the nation.

(Timothy Tackett *When the King Took Flight* (2003).)

Louis XVI started to die on 21 June 1791. He was not yet a hostage, but he was already little more than a stake in the game. For his flight tore away the veil of that false constitutional monarchy and once more confronted the patriot party with the whole problem of the revolution's future.

(François Furet, *The French Revolution* (1988).)

Insight

Revolutionary leaders

Two of the leading revolutionaries were Georges Danton and Maximilien Robespierre but they were very different people.

Georges Jacques Danton (1759–94)

△ Danton, graphite sketch *c.* 1793 by Jacques-Louis David.

Danton was born on 26 October 1759, the fifth child of a petty bourgeois family. As a child he sustained facial injuries in an attack by a bull and he was also left scarred by smallpox. These, together with his great size, made him an intimidating figure. Added to this were his skills as an orator, honed in his legal practice before he entered politics.

Danton came to political prominence in the Cordeliers district and club in 1789, and later in the Jacobin Club where his speeches were legendary. He was one of the organisers of the event that led to the Massacre of the Champs de Mars in July 1791 (see page 71). Danton then went to England to avoid possible arrest but returned in September and in November was elected deputy *procureur* of Paris. From this important post he increased his power base in the city.

He was seen as the revolutionary who spoke for the *sans-culottes*. Therefore, he was a key figure, possibly the leader, in the final overthrow of the monarchy in August 1792. Immediately afterwards Danton was appointed Minister of Justice in the provisional government that controlled France until October. In that time he did not prevent the September Massacres but did crucially rally support for the war effort.

He was elected to the National Convention in 1792 where he sat in **'the Mountain'**. He came under attack from the Girondins who hated him for his complicity in the September Massacres (see page 86), for his corruption and for his links with General Dumouriez, who eventually defected to the Austrians. On the charges of corruption there is no doubt that Danton made money during the Revolution which he used to buy land. He voted for the death of Louis XVI and was instrumental in the setting up of the apparatus of the Terror, that is the Revolutionary Tribunal and the Committee of Public Safety of which he was one of the original nine members. He said, '... let us be terrible, to dispense the people from the need to be terrible themselves'. He was frequently sent on missions to the front of the Revolutionary Wars (see page 80) to bolster and support the morale of the generals and their troops.

the Mountain (*montagne* in French) This was the nickname for the benches high up on the left in the National Convention where the Jacobin deputies sat, hence their other name, the Montagnards

Following illness and a spell at home, he returned to Paris and campaigned to end the Terror. He lost the resulting power struggle with Robespierre and was arrested, tried and executed. His last words to the executioner were: 'Don't forget to show my head to the people. It's well worth seeing.'

Verdicts on Danton

- Carlyle called Danton the 'Titan of the Revolution'.
- Another famous revolutionary, Lenin, admiringly described Danton as 'the greatest master of revolutionary tactics yet known'. He was referring to how Danton led the planning of the Insurrectionist Committee which successfully overthrew the monarchy by the attack on the Tuileries, 10 August 1792.
- David Lawday titled his 2009 biography *Danton: Gentle Giant of Terror*.

Maximilien Robespierre (1758–94)

△ *Robespierre*, sketch by Jacques-Louis David. David also made some notes on the sketch. 'Eyes green, complexion pale, green striped nankeen jacket, blue waistcoat with blue stripes, white cravat striped with red.'

Maximilien Robespierre was born in Arras, the son of a lawyer. Following the early death of his mother and the absence of his father he was brought up by his grandfather and aunts. He was educated as a scholarship boy at the College Louis-le-Grand in Paris where he first met and became friends with Camille Desmoulins. Here Robespierre was influenced by the ideals of the Ancient Roman Republic and most importantly by the ideas of Rousseau, especially those written in his *Social Contract* (see page 26). Following his education and subsequent legal training he returned to Arras to practise as a lawyer.

Robespierre first came to national attention in 1789 when he was elected as a deputy to the Estates-General. There he became well known for his Jacobin views, his belief in democracy and his opposition to both capital punishment and slavery. Of him Mirabeau said: 'That young man will go far because he believes everything he says.' Robespierre did indeed rise to prominence in the Jacobin Club and in August 1792 was elected to the National Convention. Here, he became a leader of the Montagnard faction opposed to the Girondins (see page 61). Unlike Danton, he gained a reputation as an incorruptible politician. He sought neither political office nor wealth. In 1792 he was living simply, lodging with the cabinet maker Maurice Duplay and his family in Rue Saint Honoré, conveniently close to the Jacobin Club and the meeting place of the National Convention.

When the Committee of Public Safety was first elected he declined to be a member but in July 1793 he joined the Committee and became its key member. To many people he then became the driving force behind the Terror which lasted from the middle of 1793 to July 1794 when Robespierre was arrested and executed. He justified the thousands of deaths in the Terror as being necessary to defend the Revolution against counter-revolutionary forces but his reputation has been much debated.

Verdicts on Robespierre

- Lord Acton (1910) described Robespierre as 'the most hateful character in the forefront of human history since Machiavelli reduced to a code the wickedness of public men.'
- James M Thompson (1939) wrote: 'so long as its [the French Revolution] leaders are sanely judged, with due allowance for the terrible difficulties of their task; so long will Robespierre, who lived and died for the Revolution, remain one of the great figures of history.'
- Ruth Scurr titled her 2006 biography *Fatal Purity: Robespierre and the French Revolution*.

For Marisa Linton's verdict on Robespierre, go to page 112.

Insight

7 Why did violence explode in August and September 1792?

... I saw a woman appear, pale as her underclothing, held up by a counter clerk. They said to her in a harsh voice: 'Cry out "Long live the nation!"' 'No! no!' she said. They made her climb onto a heap of corpses. One of the murderers seized the counter clerk and took him away. 'Ah!' cried the unfortunate woman, 'don't hurt him!' They told her again to cry out 'Long live the nation!' she refused disdainfully. Then a killer seized her, tore off her dress and opened her belly. She fell and was finished off by the others. Never had such horror offered itself to my imagination. I tried to flee, my legs failed. I fainted. When I came to my senses I saw the bloody head. I was told that it had been washed, its hair curled, and that it had been put on the end of a pike and carried under the windows of ***the Temple***. Pointless cruelty! ...

the Temple
This was where the Princess de Lamballe's great friend, Marie Antoinette, was imprisoned

These words, written by an eye-witness, the novelist Restif de la Bretonne, describe the death of the Princess de Lamballe, close friend of Marie Antoinette. This was one moment, one death in the explosion of violence that shook Paris in August and September 1792, culminating in the September Massacres in which many hundreds of people suspected of counter-revolutionary activities were executed.

Tension had been building for more than a year, ever since Louis' failed flight to Varennes (June 1791) had destroyed his credibility as King in the eyes of many of his subjects. From that moment, some at least had begun to think of a future for France without a king, of France as a republic. However, there was no instant change. Louis remained King in name during the rest of 1791 and as 1792 unfolded, but nobody, of course, knew what lay ahead for him and the people of France.

Much of the growing tension was linked to wars with Austria and Prussia. These wars were a threat to the revolutionaries because French defeat might well see Austria and Prussia restore Louis as King with full powers and consequently the destruction of the Revolution. Mixed inextricably with these anxieties over how the wars might develop, was fear of counter-revolutionaries plotting within France, especially amongst and surrounding the royal family. Thus the revolutionaries felt under threat both from within and from outside France but were determined to defeat their enemies and safeguard the revolution.

The atmosphere of summer 1792 is wonderfully captured in the words of *La Marseillaise*, one of the most stirring national anthems. Nowadays we hear it most often at sports fixtures but it was composed by Rouget de l'Isle in 1792, at a moment of deep crisis for the Revolution, as the war song of the French army of the Rhine. The *fédérés* (the regional National Guard) of Marseilles sang it as they marched into Paris, summoned to protect the city from the Prussian army whose commander had threatened to destroy Paris if Louis was harmed. So popular was *La Marseillaise* that it was adopted as the anthem of the Republic on 14 July 1795.

Examine the words of *La Marseillaise* closely and you can feel the fear and resistance to the twin threats from counter-revolutionaries ('traitors and conjured kings') and foreign armies ('ferocious soldiers'). But above all, *La Marseillaise* is a call to arms, appealing to the 'citizens' of France to defend the Revolution.

That word 'citizens' tells us a great deal about how ideas had changed. With the experiment of constitutional monarchy dead or dying, the revolutionaries no longer saw themselves as 'subjects' of the king ('the old slavery' in *La Marseillaise*) but as 'citizens'. Now everyone should be free and equal. Hence the soldiers of the foreign armies, subjects of kings, are viewed as 'slaves' and the threat facing the citizens of France is that if absolute monarchy is restored then the French people will become slaves again. Given this fear, the explosion of violence in Paris in the summer of 1792 is far from surprising.

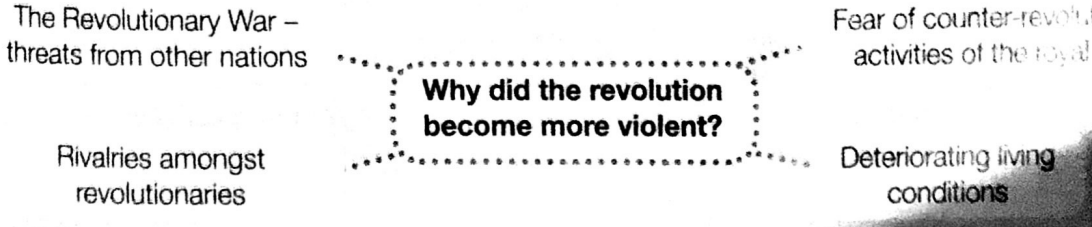
La Marseillaise

Arise, children of the Fatherland,
The day of glory has arrived!
Against us of tyranny
The bloody banner is raised, (repeat)
Do you hear, in the countryside,
The roar of those ferocious soldiers?
They're coming right into our arms
To cut the throats of our sons and women!
To arms, citizens,
Form your battalions,
Let's march, let's march!
That an impure blood
Waters our furrows!
What does this horde of slaves,
Of traitors and conjured kings want?
For whom are these vile chains,
These long-prepared irons? (repeat)
Frenchmen, for us, ah! What outrage
What fury it must arouse!
It is us they dare plan
To return to the old slavery!

■ **Enquiry Focus:** Why did violence explode in August and September 1792?

The mind map below shows the main factors behind this explosion of violence. Your task is to collect evidence showing the impact of these factors, to consider how they may be connected and to decide which of them were most significant. This is a good activity to do in collaboration with another person.

1 After each section of text, answer the questions in the blue boxes.
2 Annotate your own version of this mind map with brief examples of how each factor helped increase the possibility of violence or provoked actual violence. The developing map will therefore give you an overview of the impact of the factors.



The slow path to violence – an outline of events in 1792

March	War with Austria. Military defeats led to fear of the defeat of the Revolution.
June	Prussia declared war on France.
	Sans-culottes occupied the Tuileries Palace, making Louis wear a red cap of liberty.
	Fédérés arrived in Paris singing *La Marseillaise*.
August	Prussia issued the Brunswick manifesto, threatening the destruction of Paris if Louis was harmed. News reached Paris that the Prussian army was approaching.
	The monarchy was overthrown when *sans-culottes* attacked the Tuileries Palace, leading to many deaths. Louis was imprisoned.
September	The September Massacres in Paris of many hundreds of people believed to be counter-revolutionaries.
	Victories by French forces ended fears of defeat by foreign armies.
	France was declared a republic.
December	Louis was put on trial for crimes against the French people.

War and the build-up of tension August 1791 to May 1792

As the Revolution progressed, Austria, Britain, Prussia and Russia watched carefully. A weakened, distracted France was less of a threat to them but, on the other hand, they feared that any assault on a monarch was threatening to all other monarchies.

In August 1791 Austria and Prussia issued the Pillnitz Declaration which threatened military intervention in support of Louis. Although they did nothing, the threat and the presence of *émigré* troops under the Comte d'Artois, Louis' brother, in Coblenz (on France's north eastern frontier), made the revolutionaries even more suspicious of the royal family's attitudes and increased their fear of counter-revolution and invasion. They were right to be suspicious. In December, at the urging of the National Assembly deputies, Louis publicly demanded that the Elector of **Trier** disperse the *émigré* troops at Coblenz, yet at the same time Louis secretly asked the Elector not to do this.

Trier and Mainz were small states on the Rhine where the *émigrés* were based. Their hereditary rulers had been known as Electors since the Middle Ages when the Holy Roman Emperor was elected by the rulers of German states. (See the map on page 81.)

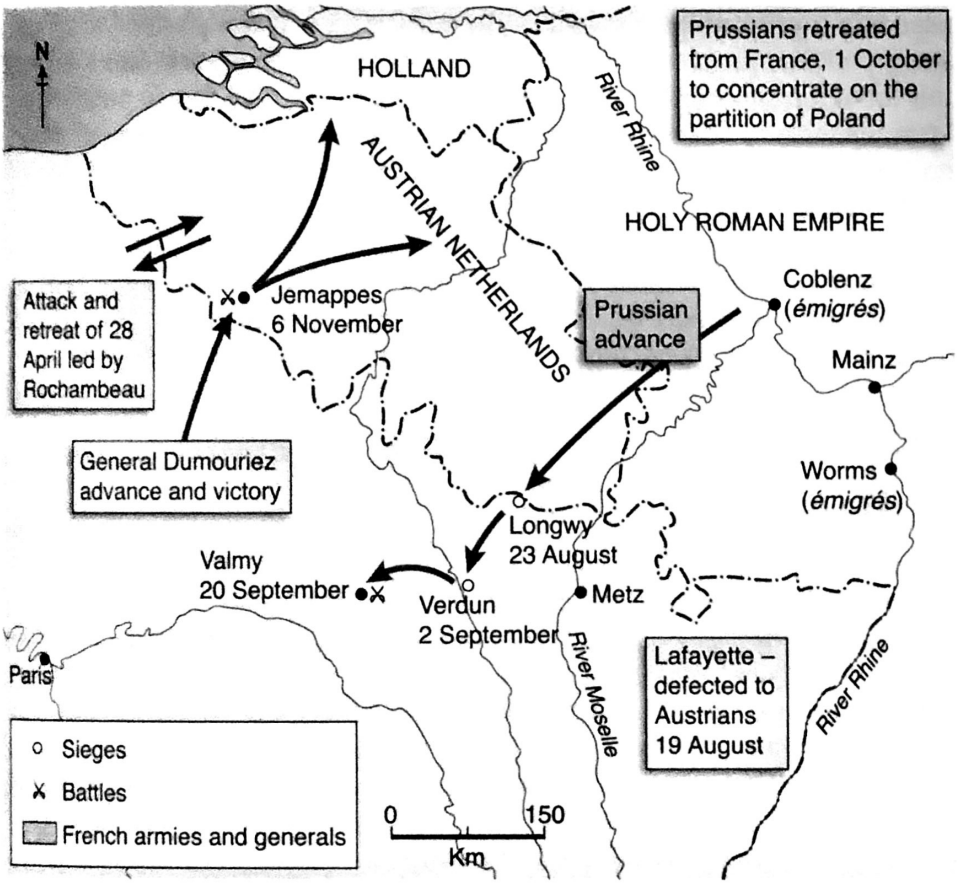
Within France there were different views on the desirability of war against Austria. Louis was in favour, believing he would benefit, whatever the result. If a war went well he, as commander-in-chief, might recover his powers and if it went badly the Austrian victors would restore his old powers. Marie Antoinette also believed that Louis would benefit from France being defeated. In a letter in December 1791 she wrote, 'I do believe we are about to declare war ... The imbeciles! They cannot see that this will serve us well, for ... if we begin it, all the Powers will become involved.' She was expecting, looking forward to, defeat. The generals, Lafayette and Dumouriez, also believed a short, successful war would strengthen the authority of the King and increase their own prestige and influence.

On the other side of the political divide the republican Brissot and other Girondins also argued for war but for a very different reason. They believed war would force Louis to reveal his true position, for or against the Revolution, and would bring other traitors out into the open. They claimed that counter-revolutionaries, a shadowy **Austrian Committee**, were plotting around Marie Antoinette. Brissot also wanted to spread the Revolution beyond France, believing the people of other nations would fight alongside the invading French armies to overthrow their own rulers.

In contrast, Robespierre opposed the war believing generals like Lafayette threatened the Revolution and had ambitions of their own. Robespierre also argued that people of other countries would not rise up and fight alongside the French invaders. He famously commented: 'No one loves armed missionaries.'

The Feuillants, such as Barnave, were also against war believing peace gave a better chance of preserving the gains of the Revolution, which for them had gone far enough. But their influence was destroyed when Louis replaced them as ministers with Brissot and his Girondins. The pro-war groups had won the argument. On 20 April 1792 Louis announced that France was at war with Austria. Only 7 out of 745 deputies voted against war.

Rumours of an **Austrian Committee** were developed in the popular press by writers like Desmoulins from 1790 onwards. It was supposed to meet in the Tuileries under the direction of Marie Antoinette with the intention of plotting with foreign countries, especially Austria, against the Revolution.



◁ The Revolutionary War in 1792.

- Make notes using the following questions as a guide.
  - Why did war against Austria seem to threaten the Revolution?
  - How did the actions of Louis, Marie Antoinette and Lafayette contribute to fears of counter-revolution?
  - How did pressures on political groups help to increase the threat of violence?
- Add summary examples to your mind map of how some factors increased the possiblity of violence.

The hoped-for successful war against Austria never materialised. Half the officers of the French army had become *émigrés* and the soldiers were a mixture of demoralised regulars and untried volunteers. Advancing into the Austrian Netherlands they were not welcomed by the population but instead (as Robespierre had predicted) met serious opposition. Soon they were in full retreat, murdering one of their generals on the way. Desertion rates in the cavalry doubled and the French generals called for peace talks.

Back in Paris the Girondins, anxious to turn blame away from themselves, accused the generals, the King and the Austrian Committee of betraying France. There was some truth to this last point, although they did not know it, as Marie Antoinette had secretly passed on the French military plans to her Austrian contacts. The language the Girondins used was inflammatory. One Girondin deputy, Elie Guadet, said: 'Let us mark out a place for traitors and let that place be a scaffold.' Defeat had heightened the likelihood of violence.

In an atmosphere of near panic, a number of measures were passed by the Legislative Assembly in May and June which show the extent of fear of counter-revolution. All foreigners in Paris were placed under surveillance. Refractory priests were to be deported. Louis vetoed this but he did agree to his personal bodyguard of 1800 men being disbanded. All regular troops stationed in and around Paris were sent to the front so they could not be used in a royalist military take-over. To replace them it was planned to set up a camp of *fédérés*, provincial National Guards, just outside Paris. Louis vetoed this too but *fédérés* arrived in Paris anyway for the annual 14 July parade. Meanwhile Louis changed ministers again, dismissing the Girondins who had criticised him and replacing them with Feuillants.

In addition Lafayette denounced the Girondins and visited Paris to try to persuade the National Guard to support the King and close the Jacobin Club. He was shunned by all sides as Marie Antoinette hated him and the deputies of the Legislative Assembly feared he planned a military dictatorship. He returned, disappointed, having only fuelled fears of counter-revolution.

Sans-culotte power – the invasion of the Tuileries, June 1792

The ***journées* of 1789** were the storming of the Bastille in July and the march to Versailles in October (see page 48).

The *sans-culottes* had first made their presence felt in the Revolution in the ***journées* of 1789**. By 1792 the 48 Sections of Paris were becoming centres of militancy dominated by the *sans-culottes*. Each section was run by its own officials and committees. From 1793 this included the powerful **Surveillance or Watch Committees**. Each section sent two representatives to sit on the Paris Commune, the Municipal (or City) Government of Paris.

The *sans-culottes* wanted more extreme measures than the deputies in the Legislative Assembly, such as price controls on food and the right to vote to benefit the lower classes. The value of the livre and *assignats* had fallen significantly, pushing up the price of food and there were shortages of sugar (which tripled in price) after the slave rebellion and subsequent civil war in Saint Domingue (see pages 74–75). These developments triggered riots in Paris in January and February 1792 and all served to make the *sans-culottes* more militant. Other events of 1792 (particularly the war propaganda of the Girondins, the military defeats, Louis' use of his veto and dismissal of his Girondin ministers, and Lafayette's call for the

Surveillance or Watch Committees
These were officially created by a decree of 21 March 1793 and were entrusted with carrying out revolutionary legislation during the Terror

Jacobin Club to be shut down) all served to increase the militancy of the *sans-culottes* still further.

On 20 June all these frustrations came to a head. Thousands of *sans-culottes* occupied the Tuileries and forced Louis to wear a red cap of liberty. He behaved with great courage on the day, resisted their demands to reinstate the Girondin ministers and withdraw his veto, and eventually the demonstrators were peacefully persuaded to disperse. There had been no violence as yet but tension was growing ever higher.

Sans-culottes – a criminal rabble or respectable workers?

Not all historians attach the same importance or give the same attention to the *sans-culottes*. One who did was the British Marxist historian George Rudé, an advocate of 'history from below' (see page 53). In *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (1959), he analysed the records of 120 of the 300 Parisians killed in the attack on the Tuileries whose occupations are known.

'Of this number as many as 95 are drawn from 50 of the petty trades and crafts of the capital either as shopkeepers, small traders and manufacturers, master craftsmen, artisans, or journeymen. There are only two bourgeois and three that may be termed professional men among them: an architect, a surgeon, and a drawing master. The rest are clerks (20), musicians (2), domestic servants (9), port workers, labourers, and carters (7), and glass workers (2) ... there are surprisingly many wage-earners among them: 33 journeymen and 18 other workers. Yet, even so, they form considerably less than half the total. In all then, they are typical *sans-culottes*, with a sprinkling of more or less prosperous citizens ...'

Rudé, as a Marxist historian, was in part responding to historians on the political right who characterised the *sans-culottes* as a mob or rabble (*la canaille*), vagrants, beggars and common criminals. Rudé argued they were respectable workers and artisans of modest means but he also believed they were a definable social group. More recently revisionist historians such as Richard Andrews see the *sans-culottes* not as a social class but as a political grouping, a subtle but important difference.

△ A section from *A Sans-culotte with His Pike, a Carter, a Market Porter, a Cobbler and a Carpenter*, a Giclee print by the Le Sueur Brothers.

The onrush of violence, August 1792

In July the deputies declared a state of national emergency after Prussia had joined the war against France. In a climate of increasing fear, Robespierre called for the abolition of the monarchy. Provincial National Guards (*fédérés*) began to arrive in Paris, joining increased calls for the end of the monarchy, and a law of 30 July allowed '**passive citizens**' to join the National Guard, a clear boost to *sans-culotte* power. An **Insurrectionist Committee** began to meet secretly in Paris. Its very secrecy means it is difficult to know exactly what was said or who attended but it certainly involved Danton and many *sans-culottes*. Also possibly involved were Marat, whose journal *L'Ami du peuple* continually called for democracy and violence, and Robespierre, who led the Jacobins and was very influential with the *fédérés*. But whatever was said and whoever was involved it was instrumental in the *journée* of 10 August which overthrew the monarchy.

passive citizens
Those men over 25 who, under the 1791 constitution, had full civic rights but did not have the right to vote because they did not pay tax equivalent to 3 days' wages

The **Insurrectionist Committee** was a secret conspiratorial group made up of representatives of the Paris section. Before 10 August 1792 it was a committee plotting to overthrow the monarchy. Afterwards, known as the Insurrectionist Commune, it controlled the revolutionary forces.

Central to the outbreak of violence was the issue of the Brunswick Manifesto by the Duke of Brunswick in August 1792. Written by an *émigré*, the manifesto set out Prussia's purpose which was to enter (though not conquer) France, restore the freedom of Louis XVI, make the city of Paris responsible for Louis' safety and threatened to inflict 'an exemplary vengeance' on the city and its citizens if the Tuileries were attacked and the royal family harmed.

News of the manifesto's contents inflamed public opinion against Louis even more. For those who were plotting an attack on the Tuileries it showed that they could not afford to fail and the final, decisive *journée* of 10 August 1792 overthrew the monarchy. On the previous night of the 9 August there was an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty in the Tuileries Palace. No one slept. There had been rumours in Paris of an organised attack on the Tuileries to overthrow the monarchy and during the night alarm bells rang all over the city. Paris itself was like an armed camp, filled with the *fédérés* from the provinces who had stopped on their way to the war front, including those recently arrived from Marseilles. The palace itself was defended by a garrison of 2000 National Guards, 800 Swiss Guards and between 100 and 200 courtiers and former officers who had come to protect the King, the 'knights of the dagger' (*chevaliers du poignard*) as they were described. At 6.00a.m. the garrison commander, the Marquis de Mandat, was summoned to the Hotel de Ville where he found Danton in control. Mandat was arrested and then murdered, the first of many to die that day.

Thousands of men, (*sans-culottes*, *fédérés* and National Guards) were massed to attack. This is how Madame de Tourzel, governess of the royal children who was in the Tuileries that day, describes what happened next in her memoires:

> About 7a.m. it was announced that the inhabitants of the faubourgs and the Marseillais were advancing against the chateau ...

She goes on to describe the scene in the King's bedchamber when Roederer, who was in charge of the National Guard spoke to Louis. It was already apparent from events earlier that morning that the members of the National Guard who were supposed to be defending the palace, would go over to the side of the attackers.

> 'Sire the danger is imminent; the authorities have no force at their disposal and defence is impossible. Your Majesty and your family, as well as everybody in the chateau are in greatest danger; to prevent bloodshed there is no other resource than to repair to the assembly'. The Queen, who was standing by the King, remarked that it was impossible to abandon all the brave men who had come to the chateau solely to defend the King. 'If you oppose this step,' said Roederer to her in a severe voice, 'you will be responsible, Madame for the lives of the King and your children.' The poor unhappy Queen was silent and experienced such a revulsion of feeling that her face and neck became suffused with colour. She was distressed beyond measure to see the King listen to the advice of a man as justifiably suspect ...

But listen Louis did and at about 8.00a.m. he agreed to take his family, including Madame de Tourzel, to seek refuge with the Legislative Assembly.

The story is next taken up by a National Guardsman writing a letter to a friend in Rennes the next day.

Hardly was the King safe than the noise of cannon fire increased. The Breton *fédérés* beat a tattoo. Some officers suggested retreat to the commander of the Swiss guards. But he seemed prepared and soon, by a clever tactic, captured the artillery which the national guard held in the courtyard. These guns, now turned on the people, fire and strike them down. But soon the conflict is intensified everywhere. The Swiss, surrounded, overpowered, stricken, then run out of ammunition. They plead for mercy, but it is impossible to calm the people, furious at Helvetian treachery.

The Swiss are cut to pieces. Some were killed in the state-rooms, others in the garden. Many died on the Champs-Elysées. Heavens! That liberty should cost Frenchmen blood and tears! How many victims there were among both the people and the national guard! The total number of dead could run to 2000. All the Swiss who had been taken prisoner were escorted to the Place de Grève. There they had their brains blown out. They were traitors sacrificed to vengeance. What vengeance! I shivered to the roots of my being. At least 47 heads were cut off. The Grève was littered with corpses, and heads were paraded on the ends of several pikes. The first heads to be severed were those of seven *chevaliers du poignard*, slain at 8 o'clock in the morning on the Place Vendôme. Many Marseillais perished in the *journée* of 10 August.

▽ ***The Taking of the Tuileries Palace (Prise du palais des Tuileries)***, painted in 1793 by Jean Duplessis-Bertaux.

- Make notes using this question as a guide: what part did each of the following play in the outbreak of violence in August:
  - changing living standards
  - the impact of war
  - the actions of Louis and Lafayette?
- What examples of greater violence are there in this period? How great was the increase in violence?
- Add summary examples to your mind map of how some factors increased the possibility of violence.

By mid-day it was all over, the bloodiest day of the Revolution so far. The Insurrectionist Commune was now in control of Paris. The deputies of the Legislative Assembly were forced to hand over Louis and he was imprisoned. The deputies were also forced to agree to a new election, by universal male suffrage, of a National Convention that was to draw up a new democratic constitution for the Republic. The monarchy was over.

The First Terror and the September Massacres

In the aftermath of the taking of the Tuileries, Louis and his family were imprisoned by the Insurrectionist Commune. Power was now shared between the deputies of the Legislative Assembly, the Insurrectionist Commune who controlled Paris and a new body created by them both, the Provisional Executive Council which was dominated by Danton. These three groups held power until September 1792 when the new National Convention was put in place. In another sign of changing times, an Extraordinary Tribunal was set up on the 17 August to try those who had 'committed counter-revolutionary offences'. In this **First Terror**, a few people were found guilty and guillotined for the crime of being a royalist.

Meanwhile the revolutionary war continued. On 19 August the Prussian army invaded France and on the same day, when his own army refused to march on Paris to help him overthrow Brissot and his supporters (see page 83), Lafayette defected to the Austrians. When the frontier fortress of Longwy was easily captured it seemed that the Prussians would capture Paris within weeks. In response the Insurrectionist Commune ordered the arrest of all suspected counter-revolutionaries. Hundreds were imprisoned but rumours spread that these counter-revolutionaries would break out of the prisons, massacre the people and surrender the city to the advancing Prussians. Marat and other extremists called for them to be killed.

Some historians call the period between the 17 August and the 6 September 1792 the **First Terror**.

The killing known as the September Massacres started after the fortress of Verdun fell on 1 September, leaving Paris unprotected from the Prussian army. Next day crowds surrounded a tumbrel (wagon) of prisoners on its way to the Abbaye prison and murdered them on the spot. Groups of *sans-culottes* then invaded other prisons and set up impromptu courts. Prisoners were dragged from their cells, tried, then hacked or beaten to death in the prison courtyards. Over five days between 1100 and 1300 prisoners out of the 2600 held in Paris prisons were murdered. Amongst them were 200 refractory priests, what was left of the Swiss guards and many known royalists; but the rest were ordinary criminals who were simply suspected of being in the pay of the counter-revolutionaries. Whilst the massacres were taking place, the Paris Commune did nothing to stop them and afterwards even voted to pay the murderers for their work. The killings shocked Paris, France and the rest of Europe. None of the revolutionary leaders came out to openly condemn the killings but they did accuse each other of responsibility or complicity. Danton, for example, as Minister of Justice was blamed for doing nothing, as was Roland who was Minister of the Interior.

■ Concluding your enquiry

1 Make notes using these questions as a guide:
   - How did Lafayette and events in the war contribute to increased fear of counter-revolution?
   - What examples are there in this period of greater violence?
   - How great was the increase in violence?

2 Add summary examples to your mind map of how some factors increased the possibility of violence.

3 Read pages 88–89. How do the views presented there challenge the enquiry question in this chapter in their analysis of the role of violence in the Revolution?

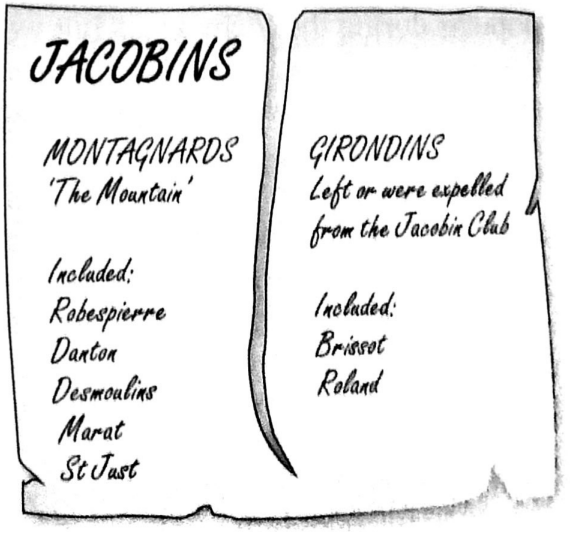
4 Review your completed mind map. Which factors seem most significant in the explosion of violence in August and September? What connections can you see between the various factors?

5 Write a short summary explaining why the Revolution became so violent. Use your mind map to provide structure.

Postscript – the execution of the King

Two weeks after the September Massacres, on 20 September 1792, the 749 new deputies of the National Convention met for the first time. They were mostly lawyers, professional men and property owners and for the first time there were a few artisans. Amongst the deputies there was a clear division. Seated on the high benches on the left of the chair were those who came to be known as Montagnards, from 'the Mountain' where they sat. Opposing them were those on the right who came to be known as Girondins. Both groups had been members of the Jacobin Club. In between sat the main group of uncommitted deputies. Both Girondins and Montagnards were committed revolutionaries and republicans who wanted a fairer and more humane France. So how might they be distinguished from one another?

- The Girondins were marginally more moderate. They were pro war and hostile towards the *sans-culottes*.
- The Montagnards wanted the King punished and were prepared to accept *sans-culotte* support.
- The Girondins also accused the Montagnards of wanting to impose a political dictatorship and of being responsible for the September Massacres.



◁ The opposing revolutionary factions who once made up the Jacobin Club.

The question of the now deposed King had to be addressed. The deputies disagreed on what to do with Louis. The Girondins wanted a trial and to hold Louis as a hostage for possible future use. The Montagnards viewed him as already guilty and wanted him punished without trial. The Girondins won the argument and persuaded the deputies to agree to put Louis on trial for over 30 crimes against the French people.

The verdict was never in any doubt, especially after the discovery of the *armoire de fer*, an iron wall safe in the Tuileries which contained correspondence between Louis and the Austrians. Even so the sentence remained in doubt. Robespierre and the Montagnards argued for the death penalty whilst the Girondins wanted the sentence to be subject to a referendum of the people. They believed the people of the provinces, unlike the people of Paris, would not want Louis' death. But their efforts failed. Louis was found guilty and was then sentenced to death. On 21 January 1793 the sentence was carried out.

After the storming of the Tuileries and being deposed as King, Louis was known as Louis ***Capet***.

The fate of Marie Antoinette

After the King's execution the Queen acquired her last nickname, 'Widow ***Capet***'. Finally, in 1793 she was separated from her children, transferred to the Conciergerie prison and then subjected to a show trial. She was accused of making secret agreements with foreign powers and sending them money, of conspiring against the French state and even of sexually abusing her own son. A guilty verdict was never in doubt. On Wednesday 16 October 1793 she was guillotined, ironically by the son of Louis' executioner.

Was violence always central to the Revolution?

Not all historians would see the violence of September 1792 as a sudden explosion. Some on the political right have argued that violence was inherent in the Revolution from the very beginning. This viewpoint was popular during the Vichy years but was then discredited, along with that government. It was revived in the 1980s by French historian François Furet and it is the view advanced by Simon Schama in *Citizens* (1989).

> ... the carnage of the tenth of August was not an incidental moment in the history of the Revolution. It was, in fact, its logical consummation. From 1789 onwards, perhaps even before that, it had been the willingness of politicians to exploit either the threat or fact of violence that had given them the power to challenge constituted authority. Bloodshed was not the unfortunate by-product of revolution, it was the source of its energy. The verses of the Marseillaise and the great speeches of the Girondins had spoken of *patrie* in the absolute poetry of life and death.

Later in *Citizens*, Schama restates his claim:

> However much the historian, in a year of celebration, may be tempted to see that violence as an unpleasant 'aspect' of the revolution which ought not to distract from its accomplishments, it would be jejune to do so. From the very beginning – from the summer of 1789 – violence was the motor of the Revolution.

However there are many historians who take a different view seeing the Revolution as being blown off course by the violence. Their argument is that the Revolution came under attack from enemies both within and outside France and that violence was an unfortunate but necessary response. That places the blame not just on the revolutionaries but also on the counter-revolutionaries. I agree with those historians who view the revolutionary violence as a response to the threat or actual violence of the counter-revolutionaries. Before the attack on the Bastille the crowds were attacked by Louis' cavalry in the Tuileries gardens, and that attack itself only turned violent when the garrison fired on the crowd. And the same was true on 10 August.

From his research into the crowd in the 1789 protests the historian Micah Alpaugh (2009) claims that:

> ... Revolutionary protesters did not necessarily set out to commit physical violence in the **Réveillon** riots, the taking of the Bastille or the October Days, and that their actions during the early phases of these events most closely corresponded to already developing, predominantly non-violent practices. The escalation of the *journées* into bloody insurrections was compelled to a substantial degree by attempted state repression, causing protesters to turn to more extreme tactics.

Réveillon was a wealthy, wallpaper manufacturer whose Paris factory employed 300 workers. In April 1789 he was reported to have made comments about cutting wages which sparked off riots. During these riots his house and factory were destroyed but there was no loss of life until the troops brought in to restore order opened fire leaving 25 dead and others wounded.