

The French Revolution (1789-1799) broke out in late 18th-century Europe

Definition

It put the ideas of the Enlightenment into practice and led to the rise of nationalism

Background to the French Revolution

From 16th century onwards, the Bourbon Dynasty continued to strengthen its absolute rule in France.

During the rule of Louis XVI (reigned 1774-1792), political corruption and other long-standing financial and social crises surfaced

French Revolution against absolute rule finally broke out

Causes of the Revolution

Political corruption

Louis XVI was a incapable leader.

He failed to solve the worsening financial and social problems

He lived an extravagant (luxurious) life.

This made him unpopular among French people

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Social inequalities

Strict class divisions

In the 18th century, there were still strict class divisions in France

The French people were divided into three estates: the First Estate (clergy), the Second Estate (nobility) and the Third Estate (commoners)

Unfair treatment of the Third Estate

The First Estate and Second Estate were the minorities in the population

They held most of the government posts

They had a lot of land and lived luxuriously

They enjoyed many special rights and did not have to pay taxes

The majority of the French population belonged to the Third Estate

Farmers, rich and educated merchants, doctors and lawyers were belonged to the Third Estate

The Third Estate did not have any say in the government

They had to shoulder heavy tax burdens, serve in the army and laboring works.

The Unfair treatment led to discontent among the Third Estate. A social crisis was about to break out in France

Financial crisis

The French government faced serious financial problems during the reign of Louis XVI

Reasons

Tax income greatly reduced

Tax was greatly reduced because of natural disasters

The natural disasters cause a bad harvest

The bad harvest led to food shortage and affect the manufacture

Less labor was use in manufacture and cause unemployment

Thus, the tax income was greatly reduced

Spent a lot of money on Foreign wars

Two previous Kings, Louis XIV and Louis XV fought many wars

Louis XVI also sent troops to join the American Revolution (1775-1783)

Spent a lot of money

Spent a lot of money on count expense

Solutions

Financial reforms

Louis XVI's government tried to carry out financial reforms to solve the financial crisis.

It tried to impose taxes on the First Estate and Second Estate, but failed.

Estates-General (immediate cause)

Louis XVI was forced to call a meeting of the Estates-General.

This became the immediate cause of the French Revolution

Inspiration of the Enlightenment and encouragement of the American Revolution

Inspiration of the Enlightenment

In the late 18th century, the ideas of liberty, equality and civil rights, promoted by Enlightenment thinkers (Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau) became popular in France

This deepened the discontent of the French people against social inequalities.

French people determined to challenge absolutism

Encouragement of the success of American Revolution

Between 1775 and 1783, French soldiers took part in the American Revolution.

After the war, the soldiers shared their experiences and brought back the ideas of equality and liberty

The success of the American Revolution encouraged the French people to fight for their rights and end absolutism and social inequalities

The French Revolution (late 18th century)

Course of the Revolution

1788-1789: Social instability

The food shortage caused serious inflation

A lot of people fled to Paris

This greatly increased the competition for food and jobs

Social instability resulted, paving the way for the outbreak of revolution

May 1789: Calling of the Estates-General

Definition: Estates-General

The Estates-General was formed by the representatives of the three estates. It was called by the king when country faced financial difficulties. It aimed to consult the three estates and pass important resolutions

To save the government from bankruptcy, Louis XVI called the Estates-General to discuss tax reform in May 1789

The First Estate and Second Estate used 'One Estate, One Vote' to veto reform proposals.

The Third Estate proposed changing the existing voting system to 'One Head, One Vote'. However, this proposal was also opposed by the First Estate and Second Estate

The Third Estate withdrew from the Estates-General to protest against unequal treatment and set up the National Assembly

Start of Liberal Revolution by the Third Estate

Immediate cause of the Revolution

June 1789: Tennis Court Oath

On June 20, 1789, Louis XVI ordered to close the meeting hall of the National Assembly.

Members of the assembly met at a tennis court nearby.

They took the Tennis Court Oath, stating that they would not disband until Louis XVI introduced a constitution

They also stated that political power belonged to the people and their representatives

July 14, 1789: Start of the Revolution: Fall of the Bastille

On July 14, 1789, the people of Paris heard that the government intended to suppress them.

They therefore attacked the Bastille to seize weapons and release all the people who were caught

The French Revolution began.

Outbreak of the Revolution

August 1789: Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen

In the August 1789, the National Constituent Assembly (formerly the National Assembly) proclaimed the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen

It reflected the French people's desire for liberty and equality

Equality for all men and people enjoy freedom of speech, press and religion

People had rights to work in government

Power of the government comes from the people

The government was responsible to protect the rights of people

Privileges in the payment of taxes are abolished

Promoted separation of powers

October 1789: France became a constitutional monarchy

In June 1791, Louis XVI was forced to accept the constitution passed by National Constituent Assembly

In October 1791, France became a constitutional monarchy

The power of king was limit by the constitution

April 1792: Beginning of the French Revolutionary Wars

Many European rulers were worried that the French Revolution would spread to their countries.

In February 1792, Prussia and Austria formed a coalition to stop France to spread the French Revolution

The Liberal Revolution turned into Radical Revolution

With the defeat of the coalition, Spain, Portugal, Netherlands and Russia joined in the team

The French Revolutionary Wars started from 1792-1802

September 1792: Establishment of First French Republic

In September 1792, the elected National Convention ended the monarchy and set up First French Republic

January 1793: Louis XVI dead

Louis XVI was convicted of treason and guillotined in January 1793

1793-1794: Reign of Terror

In 1793-1794, Robespierre from the Jacobin party gained power

They suppressed people who opposed their rule

He carried out de-Christianization

There will be no Sundays and Christmas

Continue his purification, he killed 40,000 people

France entered a period called the 'Reign of Terror'

In July 1794, Robespierre was arrested and guillotined by his enemies. Mark the end of 'Reign of Terror'

1795-1799: Rule of the Directory

In 1795-1799, France was ruled by Directory

France was also attacked by the anti-French coalitions

November 1799: End of the French Revolution

The Directory failed to stabilize the situation.

In November 1799, Napoleon overthrew the Directory and monopolized political and military power.

The French Revolution ended

End of the French Revolution

Development of the French Revolution