

The lecture centered on the fall of the Bastille, given by Lynne Taylor outlined the events and causes of the fighting that led to the fall of the Bastille in 1789. The fall of the Bastille was preceded by rioting in the streets building to a large mob backed by the city government forcing the commander of the Bastille to surrender. The actual cause of the revolution started with the noble class rebelling against the king in response to a tax hike and inciting enlightenment ideals. These ideas transferred to the populace and led them to rebel against the nobility.

The readings associated with the lecture include the Proclamation of the National Assembly. This outlines that the Assembly represents a large portion of the population and is composed of the only representatives lawfully chosen by the people of France. It essentially claims that the National Assembly is the true representative of France. The second reading is a pamphlet titled “What is the Third Estate”. In it is a complaint that the Third Estate bears “all the burdens” but is given no power.

The French revolution was started and fueled by the nobility in an act that can only be described as shooting oneself in the foot. In response to a tax reform the nobility convince the king to call the Estates General. The reasoning the nobility used for calling the Estates General is that a citizen is anyone who pays taxes and they do so voluntarily which is why they should have a say in the government. This is the exact same logic used by the National Assembly when they declare sovereignty as seen in the pamphlet which says that despite the fact that the third estate “attends to nineteen-twentieths” of the burdens they are excluded from the government and that is a “social crime against the Third Estate”. It not possible to say that this kind of rhetoric would not have come from the third estate had the nobility not used it first, but it is clear that the nobility first brought up the enlightenment ideals that would become the central argument of the revolution.

After bringing forth the notion of underrepresentation the nobility further fueled the revolution by halting governmental progress. When the Estates General was called the people were invited to write out a list of grievances that they expect the government to solve. This let the people feel like their voices are being heard. The peasants had been abused by the nobility for so long they expected the

nobility to halt the electoral progress, so when the First and Second Estates deadlock the General Estate by insisting on vote by order it shows the people that the nobility do not want to give them the power they are due and that they do not care about the common people's problems. These feelings can be felt in the Proclamation of the National Assembly which shows the people's impatience when it states "such a mass of deputies cannot remain inactive". Most importantly is that the National Assembly claims that its representatives "are directly sent by almost the whole nation". It is very clear that the people felt that nobility did not have their best interests at heart, going so far as to say that "privileged persons, far from being useful to the nation, cannot but enfeeble and injure it" so the actions of the nobility to postpone the Estate General only went to further prove this. At this point the nobility had already achieved their goal of killing the king's tax return, letting the Third Estate have their vote by head would not have given them a strict advantage as their numbers would have been equal to the First and Second Estates, but it would have not stoked the already growing fire of revolution.

It is easy to say things with hindsight, but it is very clear that the nobility's own actions are what lead to their down fall. Had they acted more prudently and paid a bit more in taxes they would not have sparked a full blown revolution that lead to many of their deaths. The revolution would probably have happened anyway but it might not have been so bloody and it might have taken much longer to start. One can only describe the fall of the French nobility as a death by irony.x