

## Triumvirate Background Guide

Delegates,

My name is Ostin Zarse, and I will be the crisis director for the 2015 MITMUNC Triumvirate committees. I'm currently a sophomore at MIT and am majoring in Aeronautics/Astronautics (or what we would call Course 16). During the school year, I participate in Design, Build, Fly, conduct research in labs, and do an insane amount of homework. Outside of the classroom though, I like to build and fly quadcopters when it's not too cold out, as well as be a part of many crazy shenanigans with friends.

In high school, I participated in Model UN for one year and attended a single regional conference. However, that was enough to draw me back once I enrolled in college. Last year, I was the head chair of the UNESCO committee and had a lot of fun moderating the debate. New York University MUN gave me the opportunity last April to participate in my first crisis committee, and I had a blast doing so.

As crisis director, I hope to be able to bring you all interesting situations, challenges, and twists that will be demanding and engaging. I look forward to working with all of you this coming year in being a part of the French Revolution!

Ostin Zarse

## Buildup to the French Revolution

### The Estates

The *Ancien Régime* was the social and political system that governed pre-Revolutionary France. Under the *Ancien Régime*, the society of approximately 26 million was divided into three classes, named estates.

The clergy (Catholic leaders) comprised the First Estate with a population of approximately 150 000 or half a percent of the population (Oliver 2). The First Estate was also further divided into 'higher' and 'lower' clergy. The former consisted of those from noble families and only accounted for a relatively small percentage of the clergy (Aston 121).

The Nobility of France comprised the Second Estate with a population of approximately 350 000 or one-and-a-half percent of the population. This included all royalty but the King, who was considered to lie outside the Estate system (Oliver 2). The Second Estate was further divided into those who administered the justice system and civil government and those who owed military service to the monarch.

The Third Estate consisted of everyone else: approximately 500 000 bourgeoisie (middle class), approximately 2 500 000 city workers and about 22 500 000 peasants or farmers (Oliver 2).

The First and Second Estates had special powers and rights. One key example of this is that they were exempt from taxes and had the ability to collect them: the First Estate could impose a ten percent tax known as the *tithe* and the Second Estate could collect other taxes or dues and were awarded other special privileges (UCL). The First and Second Estates also owned the majority of the land and those working the land were obliged, in addition to paying feudal dues, to pay to use the local lord's mill, oven and press rather than having their own and to allow the lord to hunt on their land (Socialist Standard). The Second Estate's control of the justice system also gave them further influence.

In the years preceding the French revolution, the bourgeoisie who had gained significant wealth and power were particularly displeased with the tax exemptions granted to those in other estates. They included merchants, manufacturers, lawyers and other professionals (Socialist Standard). Below them were the *sans-culottes* (literally, those without breeches) who were lower-class urban labourers (Socialist Standard) who began to have significant political influence grouped together. They typically believed in social and political equality, democracy and rejected free markets.

In August 1788, a meeting of the Estates General was called for 1789 (Socialist Standard). The Estates General was an assembly in which each estate formed its own separate assembly. It had no official power and functioned as an advisory body to the monarch, unlike, for example, the English parliament of the time. This body was established in 1302 and met irregularly until 1614, which was the last time it had met before 1789 (Encyclopædia Britannica).

In the lead up to this Estates General, the rich among the Third Estate began to demand a fairer sharing of the tax burden and some also demanded a constitution that would allow the Third Estate to dominate the Estates General, better reflecting the entire nation (Socialist Standard).

One influential document reflecting this belief was the pamphlet *Qu'est-ce que le tiers-état?* (What is the Third Estate?), written by French philosopher Abbé Sieyès. In it, he asks and answers three key questions: (Cal Poly)

*What is the Third Estate? Everything.*

*What has it been until now in politics? Nothing.*

*What does it ask? To become something.*

He elaborates on these principles and in particular demands that the Third Estate be given double the representatives, that is equal to the other estates together (Cal Poly). He also demands that votes be counted by head and not by order (Cal Poly). This means that a majority of votes is required rather than a majority of estates – i.e. two – being required.

The Estates General of 1789 forms the beginning of the crisis we will explore during MITMUNC.

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## **Financial Complications**

Preceding the revolution, financial complications had already been building tensions between the three social classes. The most problematic aspect of the French economy was the mounting disparity between the rich and poor. Due to overpopulation and depression, working party members were falling to unemployment, while the high prices and low food supplies meant that resources were even harder to obtain. The situation was further strained by the aristocracy's refusal to pay taxes, forcing the burden on people who could truly not afford them. Ultimately, the sources of the economic difficulties stemmed from French participation in the Seven Years' War and subsequent involvement in the American Revolution, in addition to the heavily flawed taxation system.

During the early to mid eighteenth century, tensions between France and Britain over territory, especially in North America, ultimately culminated in the Seven Years' War (also called the French and Indian War). The war in America was borne primarily out of colonial disputes. Seeking the best materials, American fur traders sought to trade with natives in the Ohio River Valley. In an effort to prevent Americans from accessing this area and thus secure the furs for themselves, the French built a chain of forts along the Allegheny River in Pennsylvania. Inconvenienced and angered by France's hostility, British royals ordered colonial governors to repel the French from this area, using whatever force would be necessary. As this conflict dragged on and both sides refused to yield, the budding tensions eventually resulted in a battle at Fort Necessity, which France won: the official first battle of the war. Though this war was also occurring across the Atlantic in Europe, British chief minister William Pitt chose to prioritize the war in America, in order to effectively attack the French. Ultimately, Pitt's strategy worked and a 3-month siege on Quebec allowed for the British defeat of France in September 1758 (Source 1). France was only able to retain the Caribbean slave colonies Guadeloupe and Martinique; the subsequent Treaty of Paris in 1763 deprived France of all their land in Canada and American territories east of the Mississippi River (Source 2). Britain's extreme victory over France in this war led to bad blood between the two countries.

Deeply embroiled by resentment from their loss in the Seven Years' War, France saw the American Revolution as a way to shame Britain and cause her to lose colonies. Officially, French support of the colonists was facilitated by their foreign minister Vergennes. His diplomacy employed the motto "Don't give peace a chance"; he established two Franco-American treaties in order to ensure that the conflict would not be settled between Britain and her colonies. The first of these two was a treaty of amity and commerce, and the second was a conditional and defensive alliance, promising that France would fight alongside America in any war (Source 4). After signing the latter of these in 1778, France proceeded to provide supplies, arms and ammunition, uniforms, troops, and naval support for the next four years. The most beneficial of these resources was the French navy, which served to transport reinforcements, fight off British fleets, and protect Washington's forces in Virginia (Source 1). While France's mission was ultimately fulfilled in that Britain lost control of the American colonists, it is questionable whether the embarrassment of the British Empire was worth the enormous costs.

Throughout these two wars, France had quieted the issue of how their debts would be repaid. After the fact, the French government recognized the pertinence of reforming the taxation system. Their first attempted policy, proposed by Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, was to tax the noble, but this failed due to their refusal to abide by these laws. After that, taxing continued but nobles and clergymen were excused. From province to province, varying levels of trade taxes were imposed on peasants. This was extremely burdensome considering the conditions that harvest was low and prices were soaring. The demand for manufactured goods was also down, which employed the third estate for the most part (Source 3). As a result, nobles acquired monopolies on manufactured goods. This system only worked to widen the gap between the top and bottom of society; the rich got richer, while the poor fell more deeply into poverty. Eventually, this bitterness culminated in an uprising which sparked the revolution.

#### Works Cited:

Source 1: <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1776-1783/french-alliance>

Source 2: [http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp\\_textbook.cfm?smtID=2&psid=3592](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=2&psid=3592)

Source 3: <http://www.indiana.edu/~b356/exams+assignments/extra%20credit%20assignment.pdf>

Source 4: <http://www.ushistory.org/us/11h.asp>

#### Suggested Readings:

<http://www.econ.tcu.edu/quinn/finhist/readings/white%20french%20revolution.pdf>

<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1776-1783/french-alliance>

### **Economic Situation**

The economic situation in the years leading up to the onset of the French Revolution was anything but ideal. Not only plagued by massive debt incurred by several war, the French government was continually undermined by opposition of the common people due to taxes, high food prices, and a failure to supply enough food. 18<sup>th</sup> century France before the revolution had already been filled with shortages of food, revolts by the people, and debt, but a series of bad harvests and a failure on the part of the government to correctly regulate the food market quickly forced the commoners to take action in the late 1780's [1].

Traditionally, the food market in France had been regulated directly by the police and the established guild system, who maintained the food prices necessarily and controlled the supply of goods. However, in the latter part of the century, the Physiocrats, a group who favored free market policies and who believed the agricultural system could yield more profit without the police and guild restrictions, rose in popularity and control [2]. In 1774, King Louis XVI appointed Anne Robert Jacques Turgot to the Minister of Finances in an attempt to expand the

markets. Based on the Physiocratic philosophy, Turgot attempted to deregulate the system by eliminating police control of the food market and by reforming the guild system to allow for free trade of agricultural products and supplies [3].

Ultimately, this tactic backfired. The police, who tried to maintain power, implemented stricter measures and prevented businesses from opening, based on their own standards. The new, young, and inexperienced king failed to support and uphold Turgot's changes, and the free market lapsed back into police control. Turgot had further plans to adjust the taxation system to relieve pressure on the poor, utilize revenue for much needed infrastructure, and prevent the military from seizing supplies from trade caravans. However, in 1776, Turgot was forced to resign from office due to the failing changes he tried to impose. Had Turgot succeeded due to a more competent king and more support, some speculate that the French Revolution may have been prevented altogether, as the economy would have been better suited to deal with the bad harvests just 13 years later [3].

In the year of 1788, France was struck with a severe drought that first caused low yield of the crops. On top of this terrible situation, the most fertile regions of the country suffered a severe hailstorm, just before the harvest was ready, destroying hundreds of millions of dollars in crops. As a final blow to the French population, the winter following the poor harvest had been the worst in almost seven decades. The combined effect of these three major events was extremely high food prices, lack of wheat, a heavy reliance on barley to feed the populace, long lines to obtain bread, and increased robbery. Given that bread was the main source of food and nutrition of a majority of the people, the government's hold on the people began to weaken [4].

Despite the many who believed in the Famine Pact, a conspiracy that the nobility and people with high ranking positions purposefully created a short supply of wheat to profit themselves, the aristocracy and many of the rich attempted many efforts to feed the population as best as they could [5]. Food had been imported from external sources and food was given out to people who could not afford it, but the damage dealt by nature had been too much for any charity to cover. Even though these efforts were made, too many people, including Turgot, believed in the Famine Pact and this gave a huge portion of the people a cause to join the revolution that was soon to come.

Sources:

[1] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Causes\\_of\\_the\\_French\\_Revolution#cite\\_note-23](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Causes_of_the_French_Revolution#cite_note-23)

[2] <http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Physiocrats.html>

[3] <http://www.econlib.org/library/Essays/TurgotBio.html>

[4] <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook/lookup?num=2578>

[5] *An Oxford History of the French Revolution* by William Doyle

## **The Role of Philosophy in the Revolution**

The 18<sup>th</sup> century was an exciting and volatile time for philosophical development. Renaissance scientists and mathematicians had discovered laws that govern the natural world, and the age of Enlightenment brought about greater confidence in the idea that these natural laws could also be applied to human beings and our social structure. There was an increasing faith in human reason, and decreasing faith in the old authority. These ideas would prove to be incredibly powerful in the context of the French Revolution.

The intellectuals leading this movement in France were known as *philosophes*. In addition to promoting the values of logic and reason over faith and superstition, the *philosophes* made great strides in reevaluating traditional ideas of morality, politics, economics, and religion. These secular thinkers were particularly interested in analyzing how human institutions such as governments were formed; they criticized the old hereditary aristocracy and dogmatic Church and questioned the divine right of kings.

The public environment was conducive for this kind of conversation. Cafes serving the fashionable new imports of coffee and tea became intellectual meeting places, and the development of a more commercial culture saw the proliferation of periodicals and critical subtexts to paintings and plays. Religious controversies over Jansenism (a Christian theological movement that emphasized original sin, human depravity, the necessity of divine grace, and predestination) also led to a more politically aware bourgeoisie, and high-profile trials allowed for more discussions about government and social injustice. The combination of these cultural changes alongside redefined notions of patriotism and citizenship prepared the French to make new choices when the opportunity for revolution arose.

## **Committees**

### **Aristocracy/Clergy**

On May 10<sup>th</sup> of 1774, the nineteen year old Louis XVI took the throne as the King of France and Navarre. At this period, the French government was in deep debt due to France's involvement in the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) and France providing assistance to America during the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783).

Before 1789, the aristocracy of France possessed privileges that the rest of French citizens did not. The regressive tax systems forced most of the tax burden on the lower class while providing large tax exemptions to the nobility and the clergy. These tax exemptions on the aristocracy and clergy allowed the wealthy to maintain their high quality of living. A majority of the aristocratic wealth came from the citizens residing on their land or in their territory, as those on the land were required to pay rent to the nobility.

The aristocracy held the wealth and the power in France. French Parliament was broken in thirteen corporate bodies and composed of approximately 2300 magistrates who were all noble. Those born into nobility believed that their noble birth set them apart from the rest of society, thus it made sense for them to rule the lands.

While the life of French nobility was easier than the lives of the common people, there still remained responsibilities. Nobles were required to serve and counsel their king whenever requested. During times of war, nobles would be required to be leaders of the military. This system helped shape great military figures such as Louis Charles Cesar Le Tellier.

Those in the upper clergy (Bishops) owned ten percent of the land in France. They received their wealth from the lands they owned and by imposing a one tenth tax on earnings on those who resided on their land. The lower clergy (Priests) did not receive these same privileges. The clergy spread the word of Catholicism throughout the country since freedom of religion did not exist in France until the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen of 1789. After this point, non-Catholics such as Lutherans and Calvinists Huguenots were allowed to openly practice their faiths.

## **Girondins**

The Second Estate was composed of the French nobility and royalty, with the exception of the king himself. Perhaps most expository of the Girondin ideology is that the political term “right” was derived from their sitting on the right wing in the French legislative assembly. Traditionally, they rested at the top of the French hierarchy and had authority and immunity over all aspects of society. Despite only comprising about 2% of the national population, the Second Estate possessed unchallenged control of the legislature (Source 1). Because of this, they were generally able to evade most of the taxes and thus push those financial burdens onto the poorer third estate. As the most privileged social class, the Girondins generally resisted any inclination toward reformation or change.

Due to their position as nobles, the Girondins were born into social superiority and lacked sympathy for the lower classes. They were famously known to be ignorant or oblivious of the severe economic depression tormenting the majority of the country. This was evident in their refusal to adhere to tax reform legislation, despite having far more assets than the bourgeoisie upon whom these burdens were reallocated.

Though the Girondins are traditionally regarded as a political faction, their ideologies were arguably quite disparate. While they maintained fabricated social relations, the nobles were more friends of proximity than shared opinions. In examining the history of how this group came to ties, it is evident that several of the groups held roots in Enlightenment ideals—in particular, one Paris-based group of intellectuals, lawyers, journalists, and local political activists (Source 2). More broadly, Girondin ideology can be classified as the mean between two extremes: on the one hand, liberal Patriots, and on the other, extreme radicals.

Furthermore, Girondins were fiercely active in politics and constantly sought positions in office; despite their reputation as elitist, they were heavily supportive of the representative democratic system—when it played to their advantage. They aspired to initialize and foster a liberal-democratic regime in France (Source 3). In order to pursue this vision, the nobles supported foreign war and conflict as a way to unify the majorities behind a common cause (Source 4). This way, the people would be inclined to bond over having a mutual enemy.

Already at the top of the societal pyramid, Girondins favored a policy of economic liberalism. They believed that the economy and the social hierarchy should remain mostly unregulated by the government. As such, they primarily drew support from provincial cities and local government officials (Source 4). Despite the alarming prevalence of financial instability



and recession, the Girondins failed to address these issues, instead promoting their preference toward laissez-faire.

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- Source 2: Kates, Gary. "The Girondins: Champions of Representative Democracy." *JSTOR*. Berghahn Books, 3 Mar. 2010. Web. 28 Nov. 2014.
- Source 3: <http://www.liberal.org.il/index.php/english-articles/3-psycho-philosophical-differences-between-left-and-right>
- Source 4: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/234283/Girondin>

### Jacobins

The Jacobin Club was first formed during the 1789 Estates-General, where deputies attending the assembly met to discuss actions that should be taken. Shortly after the Estates-General occurred, the club shifted its center from Versailles to Paris, following the heart of the revolution. The relocation and changes to the requirements for joining the club that allowed practically anyone to join led to a rapid expansion of the Jacobins and the club. In just one year, 152 related clubs had formed in Paris [1].

The Jacobins were a group of citizens from the third estate mainly composed of artisans, tradesmen, and bourgeoisie who belonged to the many Jacobin Clubs. The clubs and meetings served as centers of debate surrounding the revolution and the actions that should be taken to make further progress. Among the many topics discussed at the clubs, official objectives were formed that gave direction to the members. These included [2]:

1. To discuss in advance questions to be decided by the National Assembly
2. To work for the establishment and strengthening of the constitution in accordance with the spirit of the preamble (that is, of respect for legally constituted authority and the Rights of Man)
3. To correspond with other societies of the same kind which should be formed in the realm

As with the many other political parties, the Jacobins' support for the revolution aligned with the other parties. The beginning of the revolution was supported by the combined third estate, but as time progressed and the revolution began to change the nation of France, opinions diverged over what the next step should be. Before the king was executed, the debate over

whether to officially remove him as king divided many people, even within the Jacobin Club itself. During this time, many of the Jacobins were not in favor of removing or replacing King Louis XVI, as the Jacobin petition in 1791 had called for. These more conservative Jacobins left to form their own, more moderate club. Once the king was executed, the Jacobins' general interest became severely different from that of the Girondins. The Jacobins were not in favor of a war with Austria, and wanted the domestic aspect of the revolution to be the focus of the country [3].

During this divide, the Jacobins gained the support of the people, due to their similar interests and goals. With their newfound power, the Jacobins began to institute new policies and carry out investigations of treason among the people, aristocracy, and the revolutionaries themselves. This progression of events culminated in the Reign of Terror, with Maximillian Robespierre as its leader.

[1] <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/299007/Jacobin-Club>

[2] <https://napoleonstark.wordpress.com/political-parties-of-the-french-revolution/>

[3] Shusterman, Noah. *The French Revolution: Faith, Desire, and Politics*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. Print.