

# The French Revolution



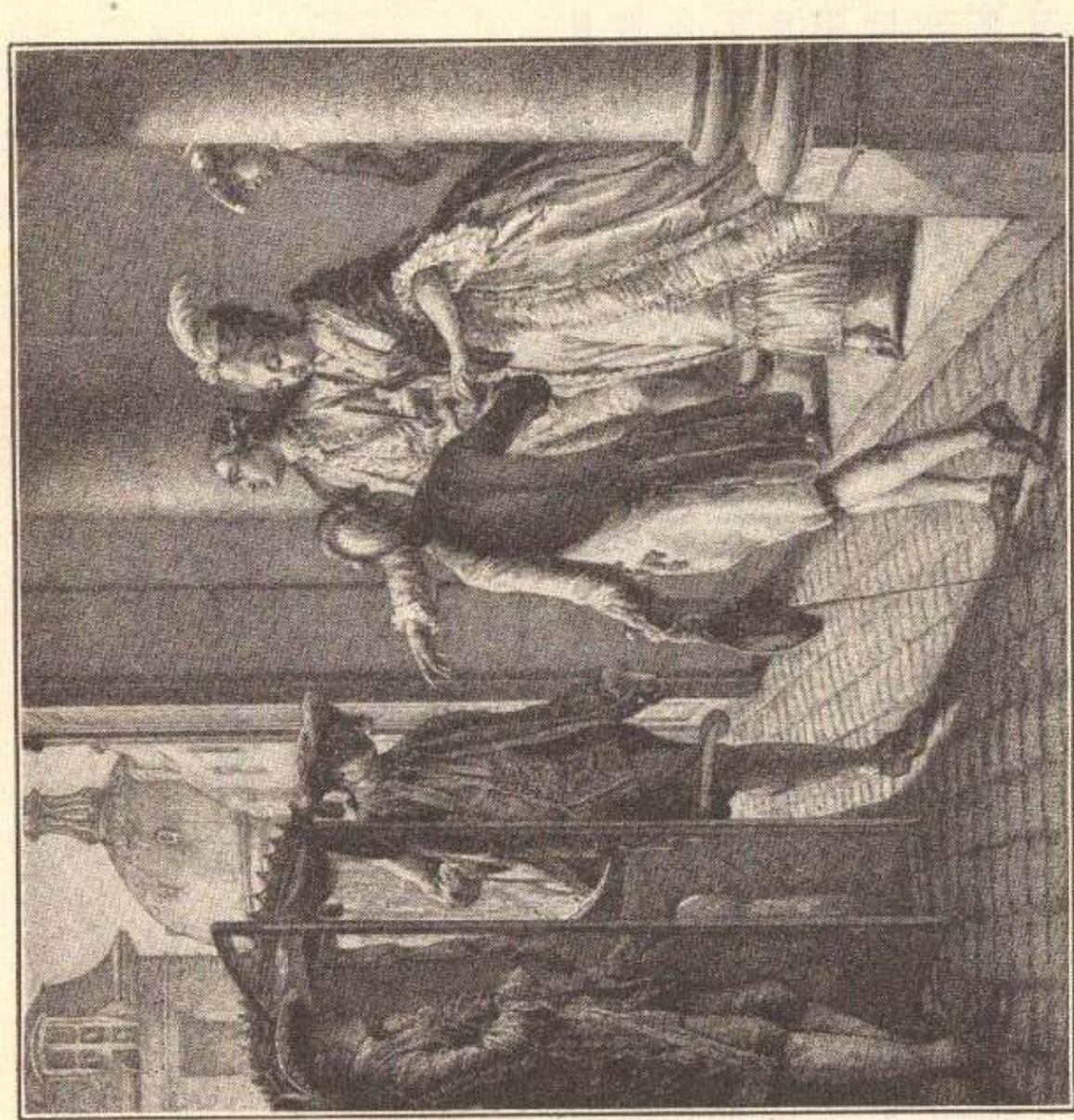
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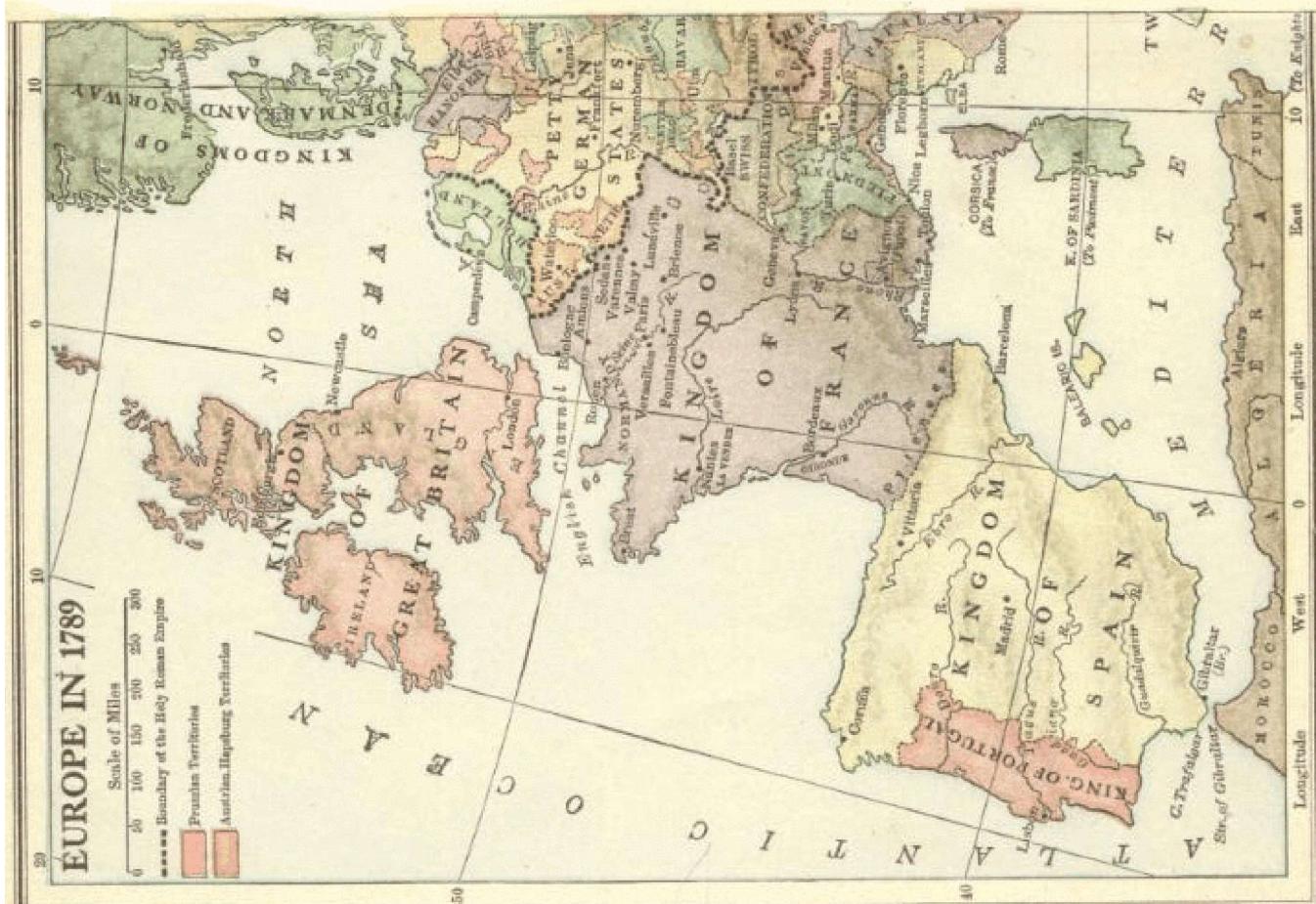
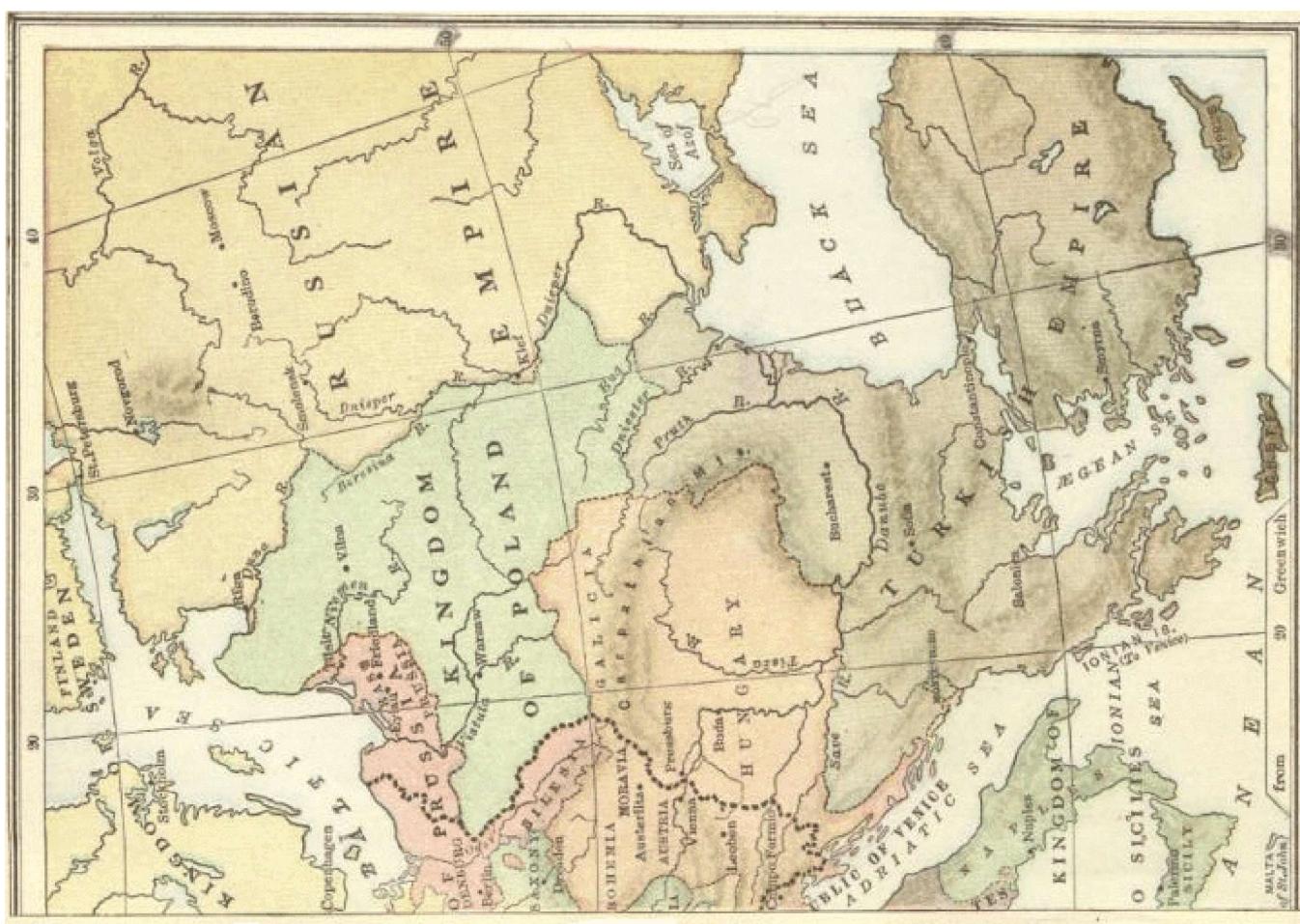
# The Old Regime (*Ancien Régime*)

- **Old Regime** – socio-political system which existed in most of Europe during the 18<sup>th</sup> century
- Countries were ruled by **absolutism** – the monarch had absolute control over the government
- Classes of people – privileged and unprivileged
  - **Unprivileged people** – paid taxes and treated badly
  - **Privileged people** – did not pay taxes and treated well

FRENCH LADY ENTERING A SEDAN CHAIR

The sedan chair, used by the upper classes during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was carried by two "chairmen." It had side windows, a hinged door at the front, and a roof that opened to allow the occupant to stand. It took its name from the town of Sedan, France. This engraving, made in Paris in 1777, shows the elegant costumes worn by the nobility and their servants.





# Society under the Old Regime

- In France, people were divided into three estates
  - **First Estate**
    - High-ranking members of the Church
    - Privileged class
  - **Second Estate**
    - Nobility
    - Privileged class
  - **Third Estate**
    - Everyone else – from peasants in the countryside to wealthy bourgeoisie merchants in the cities
    - Unprivileged class

# The Three Estates

Estate	Population	Privileges	Exemptions	Burdens
First	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Circa 130,000</li> <li>•High-ranking clergy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Collected the tithe</li> <li>•Censorship of the press</li> <li>•Control of education</li> <li>•Kept records of births, deaths, marriages, etc.</li> <li>•Catholic faith held honored position of being the state religion (practiced by monarch and nobility)</li> <li>•Owned 20% of the land</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Paid no taxes</li> <li>•Subject to Church law rather than civil law</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Moral obligation (rather than legal obligation) to assist the poor and needy</li> <li>•Support the monarchy and Old Regime</li> </ul>
Second	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Circa 110,000</li> <li>•Nobles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Collected taxes in the form of feudal dues</li> <li>•Monopolized military and state appointments</li> <li>•Owned 20% of the land</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Paid no taxes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Support the monarchy and Old Regime</li> </ul>
Third	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Circa 25,000,000</li> <li>•Everyone else: artisans, bourgeoisie, city workers, merchants, peasants, etc., along with many parish priests</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•None</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Paid all taxes</li> <li>•Tithe (Church tax)</li> <li>•Octrot (tax on goods brought into cities)</li> <li>•Corvée (forced road work)</li> <li>•Capitation (poll tax)</li> <li>•Vingtième (income tax)</li> <li>•Gabelle (salt tax)</li> <li>•Taille (land tax)</li> <li>•Feudal dues for use of local manor's winepress, oven, etc.</li> </ul>

**What does this contemporary political cartoon say about conditions in France under the Old Regime?**



# Government under the Old Regime: The Divine Right of Kings

- Monarch ruled by **divine right**
  - God put the world in motion
  - God put **some** people in positions of power
  - Power is given by God
  - No one can question God
  - No one can question **someone** put in power by God
  - Questioning the monarchy was blasphemy because it meant questioning God

# What the King Did

Appointed the *Intendants*, the “petty tyrants” who governed France’s 30 districts

Appointed the people who would collect his taxes and carry out his laws

Controlled justice by appointing judges

Controlled the military

Could imprison anyone at any time for any reason (blank warrants of arrest were called *lettres de cachet*)

Levied all taxes and decided how to spend the money

Made all laws

Made decisions regarding war and peace

# Economic Conditions under the Old Regime

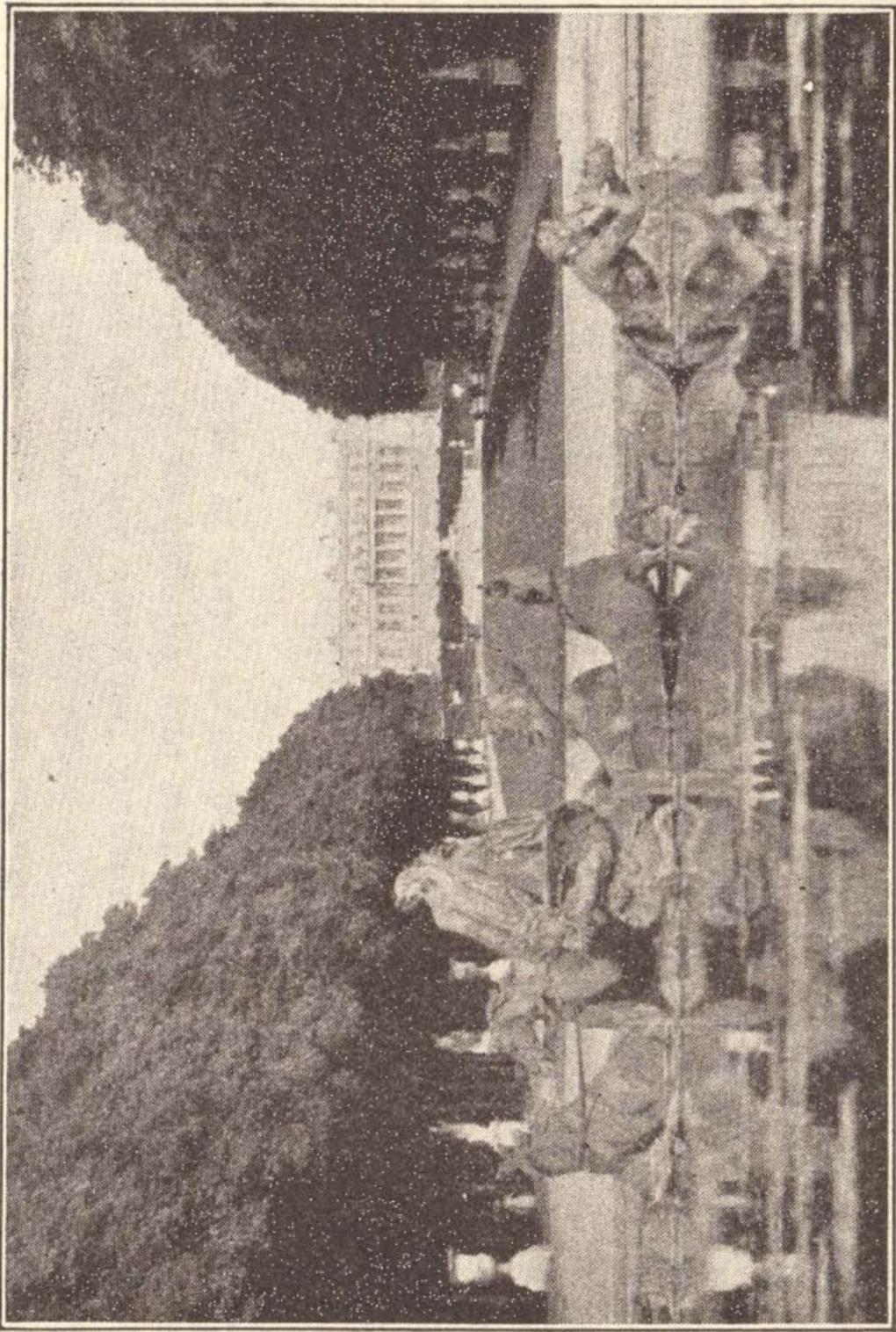
- France's economy was based primarily on agriculture
- Peasant farmers of France bore the burden of taxation
- Poor harvests meant that peasants had trouble paying their regular taxes
  - Certainly could not afford to have their taxes raised
- Bourgeoisie often managed to gather wealth
  - But were upset that they paid taxes while nobles did not

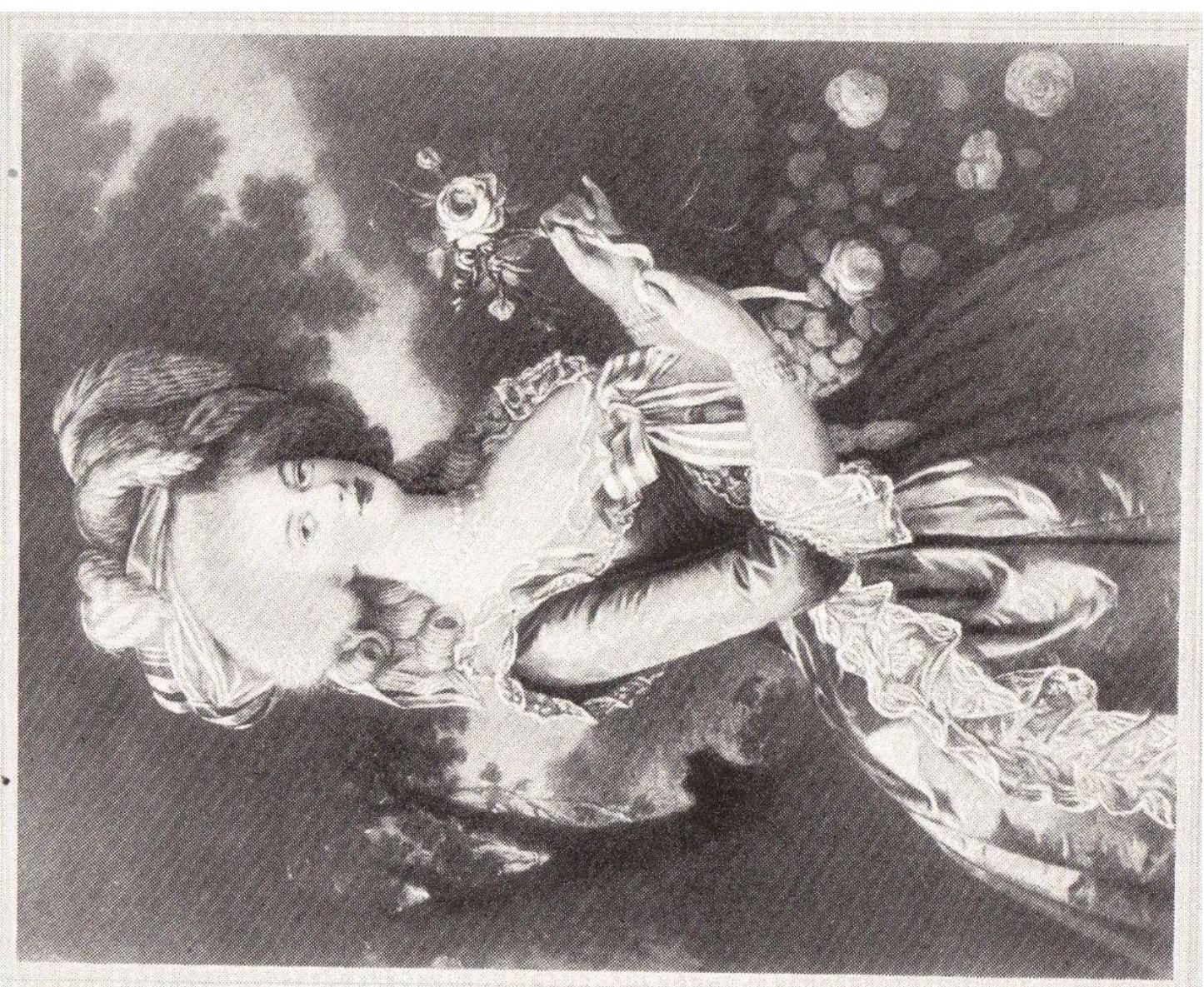
# France Is Bankrupt

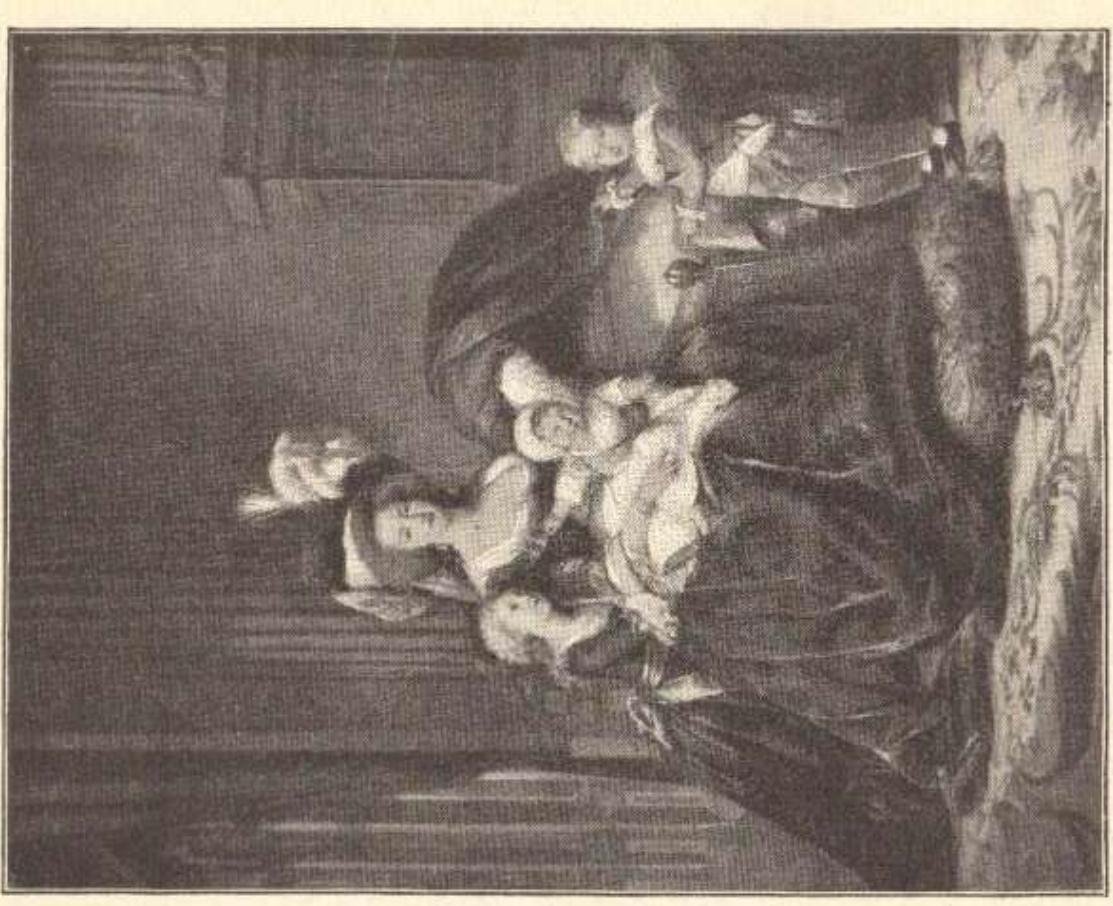
- The king (Louis XVI) lavished money on himself and residences like Versailles
- Queen Marie Antoinette was seen as a wasteful spender
- Government found its funds depleted as a result of wars
  - Including the funding of the American Revolution
- **Deficit spending** – a government spending more money than it takes in from tax revenues
  - Privileged classes would not submit to being taxed

PALACE OF VERSAILLES AS SEEN FROM THE GARDENS

This side of the palace is almost 2000 feet long. The portion seen in this picture contains the Gallery of Mirrors, so named from the seventeen large mirrors which occupy the side of the room opposite the round arched windows on the second floor. It was in this great hall that the Treaty of 1919 with Germany, ending the World War, was signed by delegates representing nearly nine tenths of the population of the globe.







MARIE ANTOINETTE AND HER CHILDREN

From a painting by Madame Lebrun, in the Versailles Palace. Marie Antoinette was unpopular both at the French court and with the people almost from the time of her marriage. The ladies of the court disliked her because she made fun of their grand manners. The people considered her frivolous and extravagant. They declared that she was nothing but a "foreigner," and generally called her "the Austrian." She had four children — two daughters and two sons. The younger daughter died in infancy, in 1787; and the older son died at the age of seven, in 1789. The younger son, who survived his parents, is shown in the picture as the baby on the queen's lap.

# Philosophy of the French Revolution: The Enlightenment (Age of Reason)

- Scientists during the Renaissance had discovered laws that govern the natural world
- Intellectuals – **philosophes** – began to ask if natural laws might also apply to human beings
  - Particularly to human institutions such as governments
  - Philosophes were **secular** in thinking – they used reason and logic, rather than faith, religion, and superstition, to answer important questions
  - Used reason and logic to determine how governments are formed
    - Tried to figure out what logical, rational principles work to tie people to their governments
  - Questioned the divine right of kings

# Long- and Short-term Causes

- Long-term causes
  - Also known as *underlying causes*
  - Causes which can stem back many years
- Short-term causes
  - Also known as *immediate causes*
  - Causes which happen close to the moment the change or action happens
- Example: A person is fired from his or her job.
  - Long-term cause(s): The person is often late to work and is generally unproductive on the job.
  - Short-term cause(s): The person fails to show up for work and does not call the employer.
- Key: One typically does not happen without the other.  
Events which bring important change (or action) need both long-term and short-term causes.

# Long-term Causes of the French Revolution

## Everything previously discussed

- Absolutism
- Unjust socio-political system (Old Regime)
- Poor harvests which left peasant farmers with little money for taxes
- Influence of Enlightenment philosophes

## Also

- System of mercantilism which restricted trade
- Influence of other successful revolutions
  - England's Glorious Revolution (1688-1689)
  - American Revolution (1775-1783)

# Short-term Causes of the French Revolution

- Caused by deficit spending
- Financial ministers (Turgot, Necker, Calonne) proposed changes
- But these were rejected
- Assembly of Notables voted down taxation for the nobility in 1787

## Bankruptcy

- Worst famine in memory
- Hungry, impoverished peasants feared that nobles at Estates-General were seeking greater privileges
- Attacks on nobles occurred throughout the country in 1789

## Great Fear

- Louis XVI had no choice but to call for a meeting of the **Estates-General** to find a solution to the bankruptcy problem
  - All three estates
  - Had not met since 1614
- Set in motion a series of events which resulted in the abolition of the monarchy and a completely new socio-political system for France

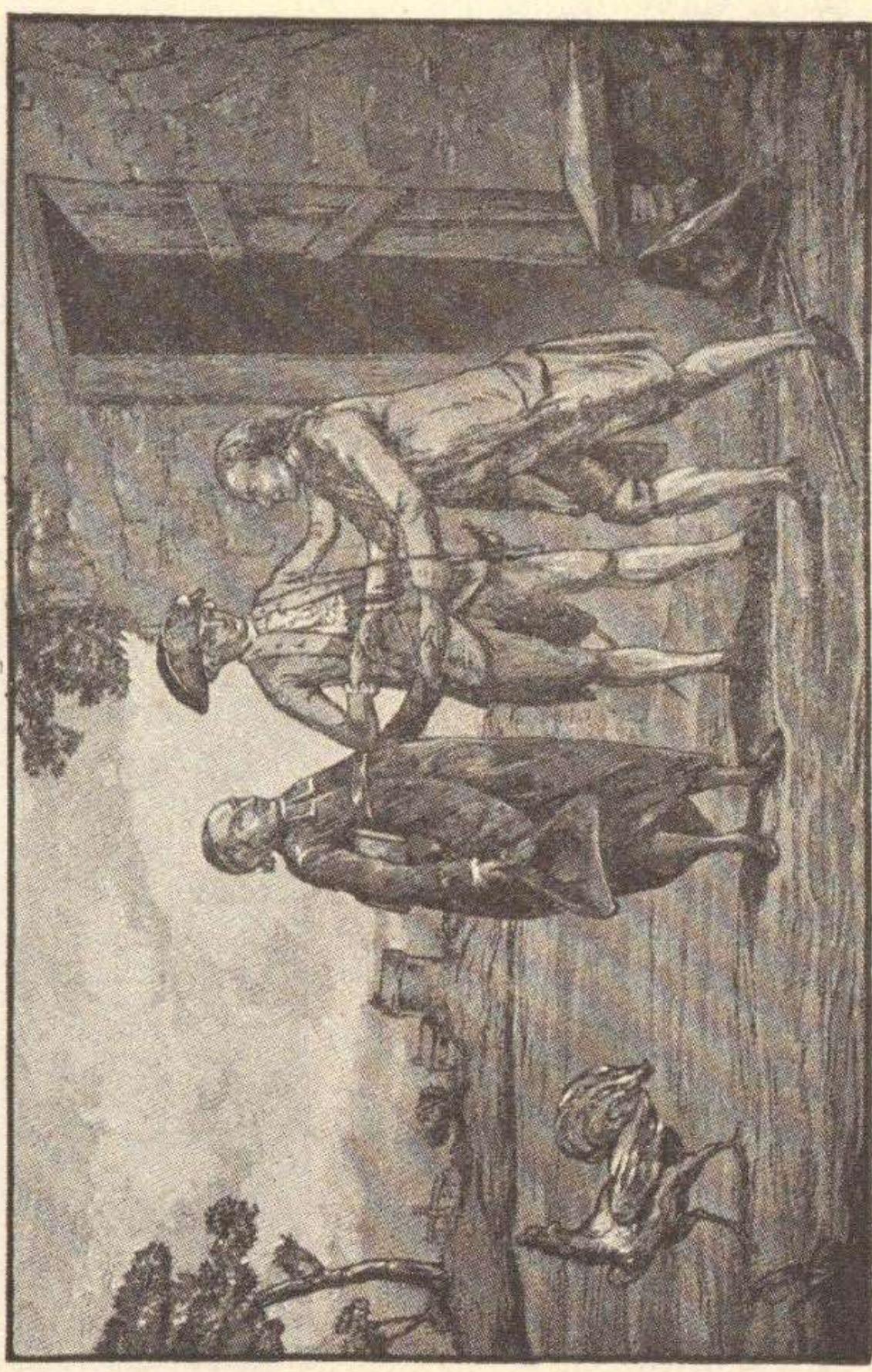
## Estates-General

# Preparing for the *Estates-General*

- Winter of 1788-1789
  - Members of the estates elected representatives
- *Cahiers*
  - Traditional lists of grievances written by the people
  - Nothing out of the ordinary
    - Asked for only moderate changes

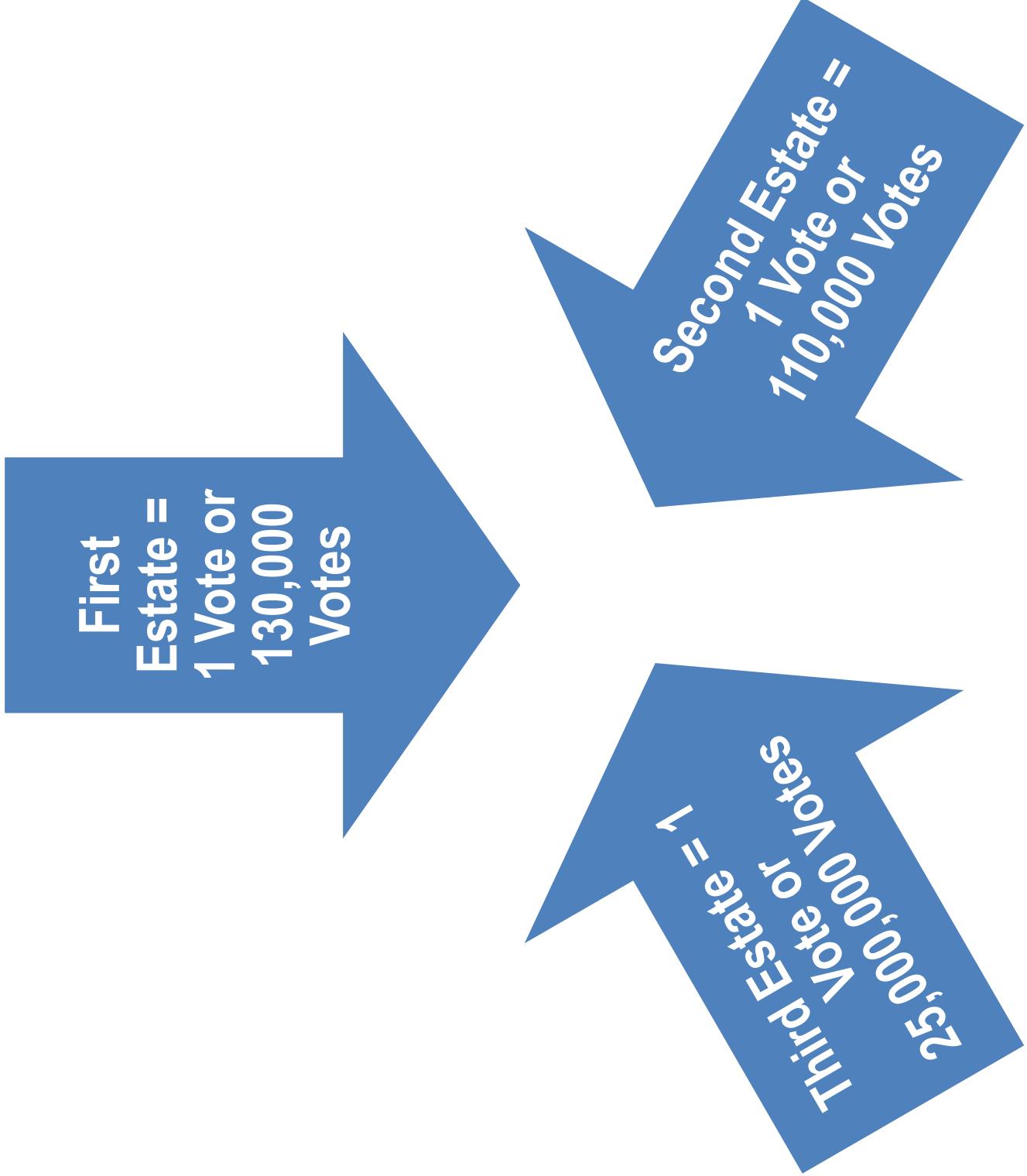
### THE THREE ESTATES

A contemporary cartoon, showing the Third Estate welcoming the nobles and the clergy to the ranks of the National Assembly, June 30, 1789.



# Meeting of the Estates-General: May 5, 1789

- Voting was conducted by estate
  - Each estate had one vote
  - First and Second Estates could operate as a **bloc** to stop the Third Estate from having its way
- ◊ First Estate + ◊ Second Estate - vs. - ◊ Third Estate
- Representatives from the Third Estate demanded that voting be by population
  - This would give the Third Estate a great advantage
- Deadlock resulted



**First Estate =  
1 Vote or  
130,000 Votes**

**Second Estate =  
1 Vote or  
110,000 Votes**

**Third Estate =  
1 Vote or  
25,000,000 Votes**

# Tennis Court Oath

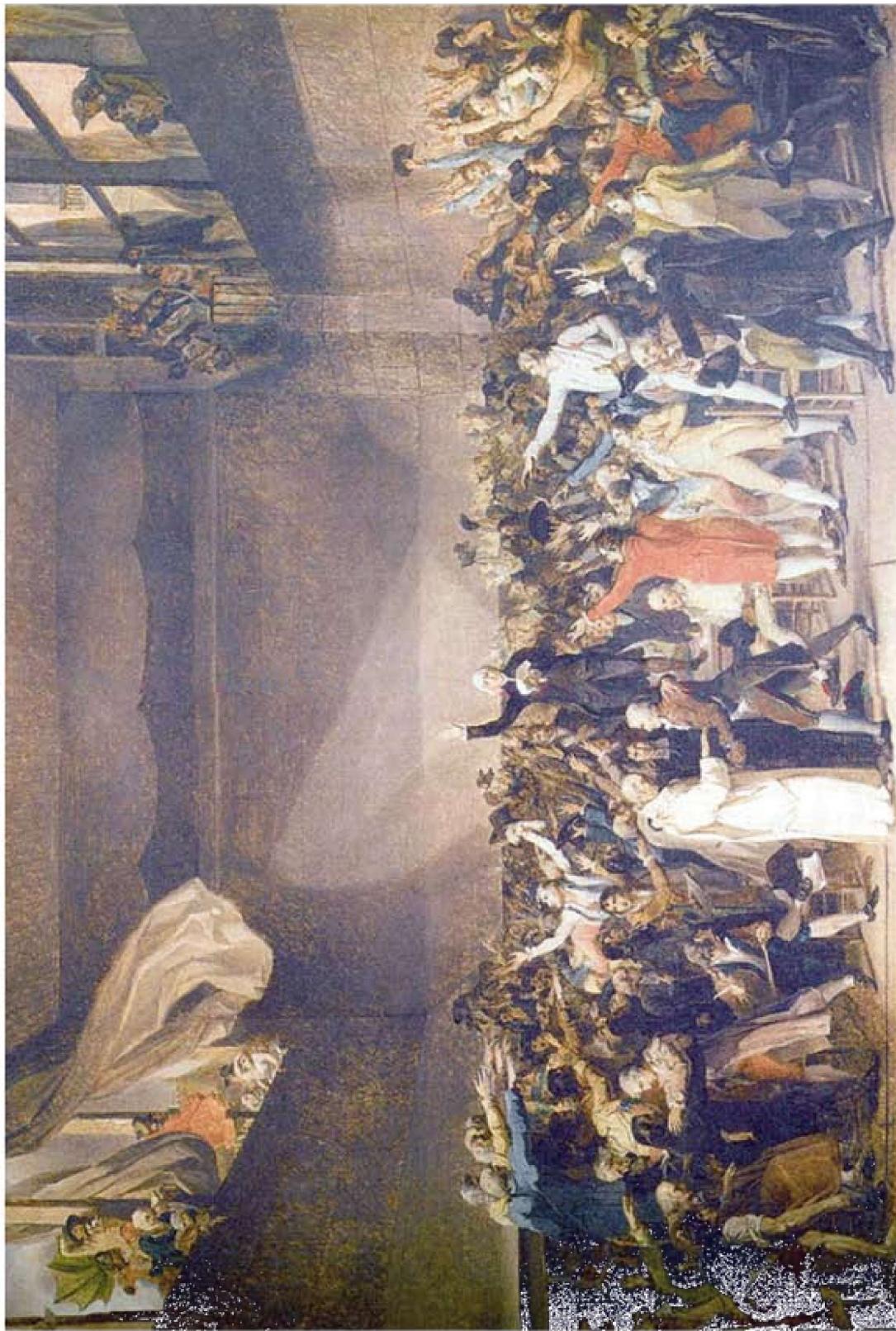
The Third Estate declared itself to be the **National Assembly**.

Louis XVI responded by locking the Third Estate out of the meeting.

The Third Estate relocated to a nearby tennis court where its members vowed to stay together and create a written constitution for France.

On June 23, 1789, Louis XVI relented. He ordered the three estates to meet together as the **National Assembly** and vote, by population, on a constitution for France.

# Tennis Court Oath by Jacques Louis David



# The Tennis Court Oath

“The National Assembly, considering that it has been summoned to establish the constitution of the kingdom, to effect the regeneration of the public order, and to maintain the true principles of monarchy; that nothing can prevent it from continuing its deliberations in whatever place it may be forced to establish itself; and, finally, that wheresoever its members are assembled, there is the National Assembly;

“Decrees that all members of this Assembly shall immediately take a solemn oath not to separate, and to reassemble wherever circumstances require, until the constitution of the kingdom is established and consolidated upon firm foundations; and that, the said oath taken, all members and each one of them individually shall ratify this steadfast resolution by signature.”

# Review Questions

1. What was the Old Regime?

2. How does an absolute monarchy (absolutism) operate?

3. Describe the size, privileges, exemptions, and burdens of the three estates.

4. What is deficit spending?

5. Describe the type of thinking used by the *philosophes*.

6. What were the underlying (long-term) causes of the French Revolution?

7. What were the immediate (short-term) causes of the French Revolution?

8. Explain the debate over voting which occurred in the *Estates-General*.

9. What was the Tennis Court Oath?

# Four Phases (Periods) of the French Revolution

National Assembly (1789-1791)

Legislative Assembly (1791-1792)

Convention (1792-1795)

Directory (1795-1799)

# National Assembly (1789-1791)

- Louis XVI did not actually want a written constitution
- When news of his plan to use military force against the National Assembly reached Paris on July 14, 1789, people stormed the Bastille



STORMING THE BASTILLE

# Uprising in Paris

People of Paris seized weapons from the **Bastille**

- July 14, 1789
- Parisians organized their own government which they called the **Commune**
- Small groups – **factions** – competed to control the city of Paris

Uprising spread throughout France

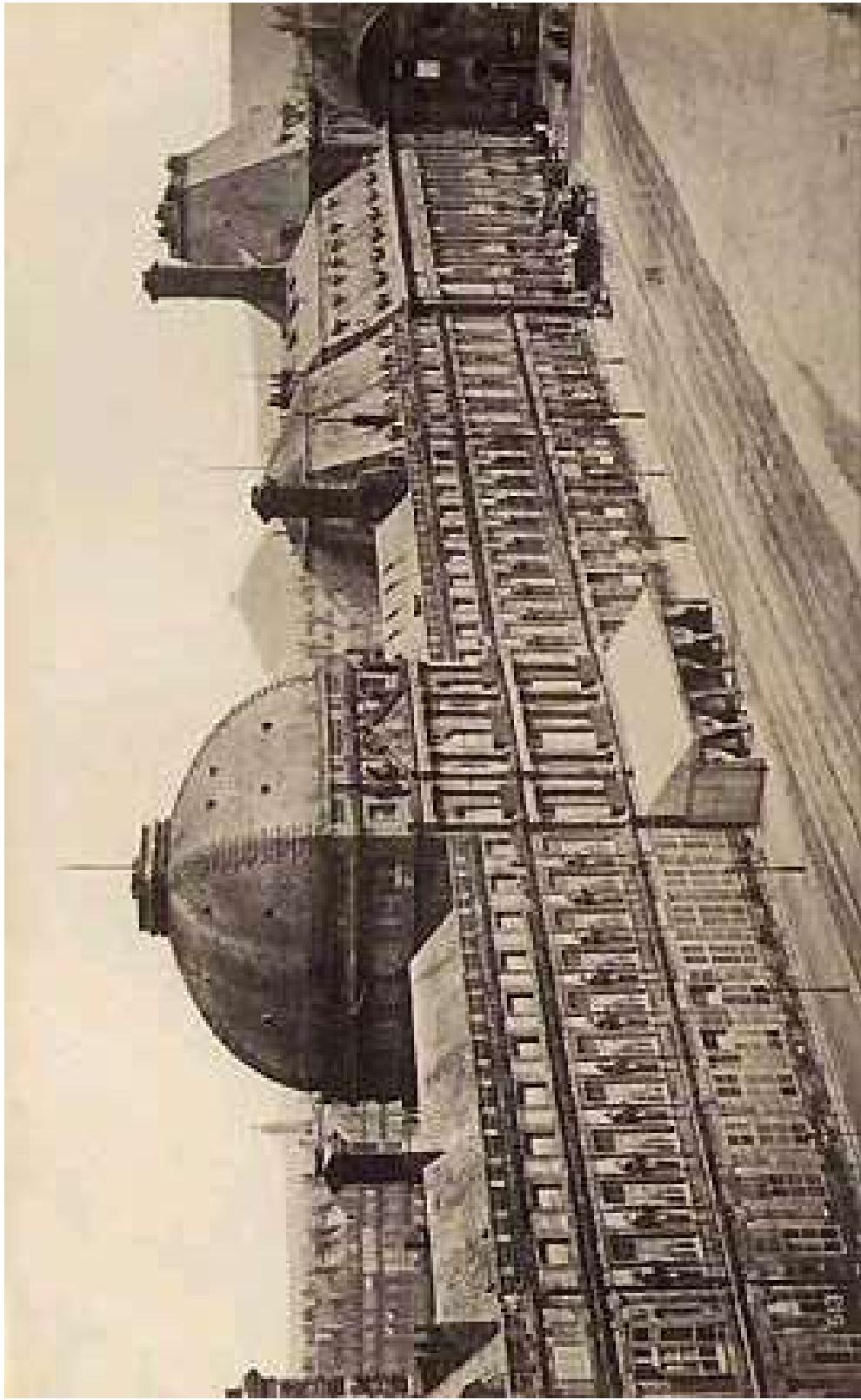
- Nobles were attacked
- Records of feudal dues and owed taxes were destroyed
- Many nobles fled the country – became known as **émigrés**
- Louis XVI was forced to fly the new tricolor flag of France



# Goodbye, Versailles! Adieu, Versailles!

- Parisian Commune feared that Louis XVI would have foreign troops invade France to put down the rebellion
  - Louis XVI's wife, Marie Antoinette, was the sister of the Austrian emperor
- A group of women attacked Versailles on October 5, 1789
  - Forced royal family to relocate to Paris along with National Assembly
  - Royal family spent next several years in the Tuilleries Palace as virtual prisoners

# Tuileries Palace (Paris, France)



# Changes under the National Assembly

Abolishment of  
guilds and labor  
unions

Abolition of  
special privileges

Constitution of  
1791

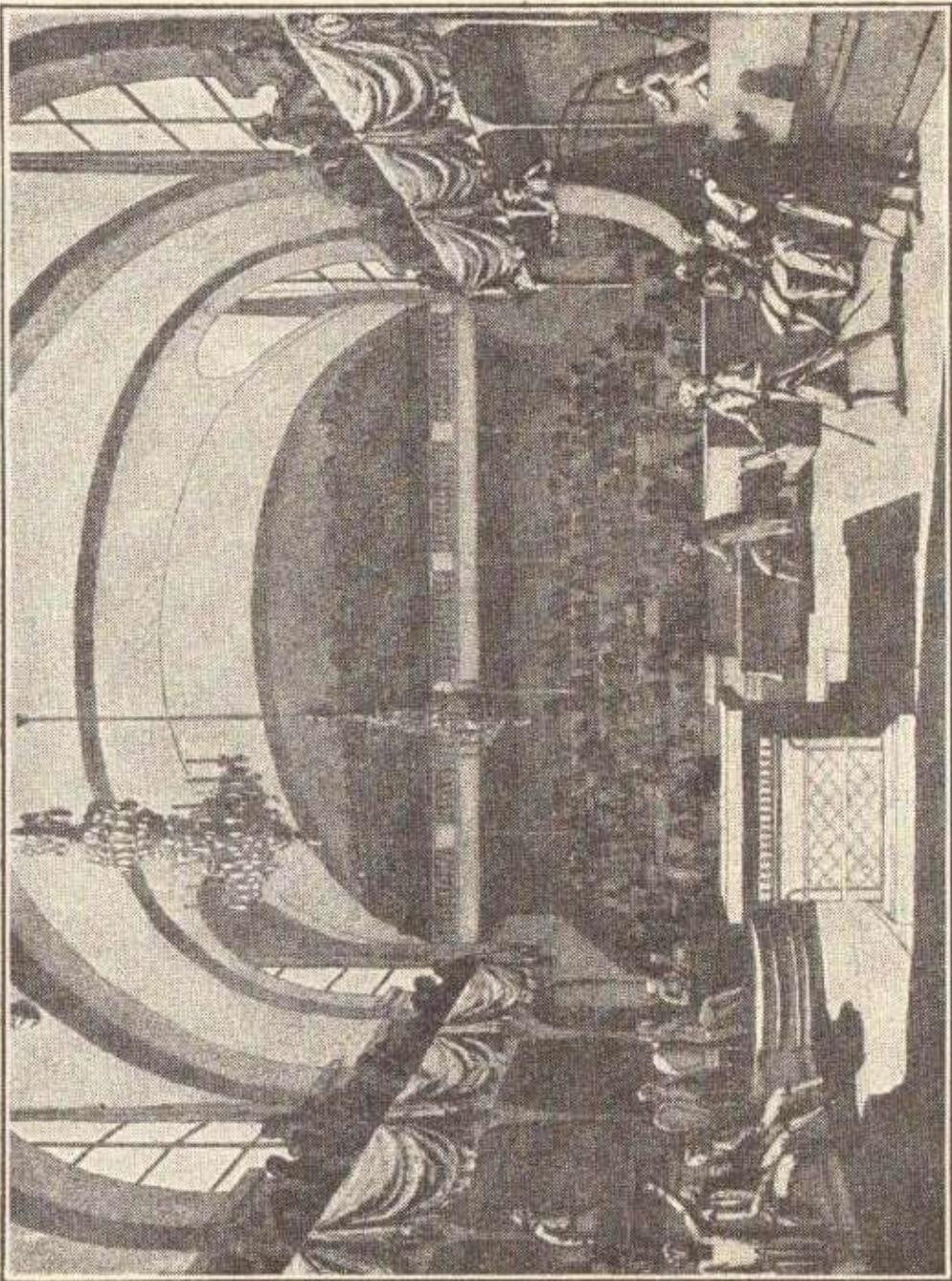
*Declaration of the  
Rights of Man*

Equality before the  
law (for men)

Many nobles left  
France and  
became known as  
*émigrés*

Reforms in local  
government

Taxes levied based  
on the ability to  
pay



#### HALL OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IN PARIS

From a contemporary print. The States-General which met in May, 1789, had adopted the name National Assembly. When the mob compelled the king to move to Paris from Versailles the Assembly followed and convened in a hall near the Tuileries. From the speaker's rostrum at the right of the picture the Assembly was addressed at various times by the leaders of the Revolution, including Lafayette and Mirabeau. The mob filled the galleries, hissing or applauding the speakers. Those who could not crowd inside stood without and were informed by signals from the windows of what was going on within.

# *Declaration of the Rights of Man*

Freedom of religion

Freedom of speech

Freedom of the press

Guaranteed property rights

“Liberty, equality, fraternity!”

Right of the people to create laws

Right to a fair trial

# Declaration of the Rights of Woman

<p>Journalist <b>Olympe de Gouges</b> argued in her <i>Declaration of the Rights of Woman</i> that women are equal citizens and should benefit from governmental reforms just as men did.</p>	<p>Madame Jeanne Roland also served as a leader in the women's rights movement, and was able to heavily influence her husband (a government official).</p> <p>Women did gain some rights during the French Revolution, but these were designed for purposes other than liberating women.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Women could inherit property, but only because doing so weakened feudalism and reduced wealth among the upper classes.</li><li>• Divorce became easier, but only to weaken the Church's control over marriage.</li></ul>
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# End of Special Privileges

- Church lands were seized, divided, and sold to peasants
- **Civil Constitution of the Clergy** required that Church officials be elected by the people, with salaries paid by the government
  - 2/3 of Church officials fled the country rather than swear allegiance to this
- All feudal dues and tithes were eradicated
- All special privileges of the First and Second Estates were abolished

# Reforms in Local Government

- The 30 provinces and their “petty tyrants” (*Intendants*) were replaced with 83 new departments
  - Ruled by elected governors
- New courts, with judges elected by the people, were established

# Constitution of 1791

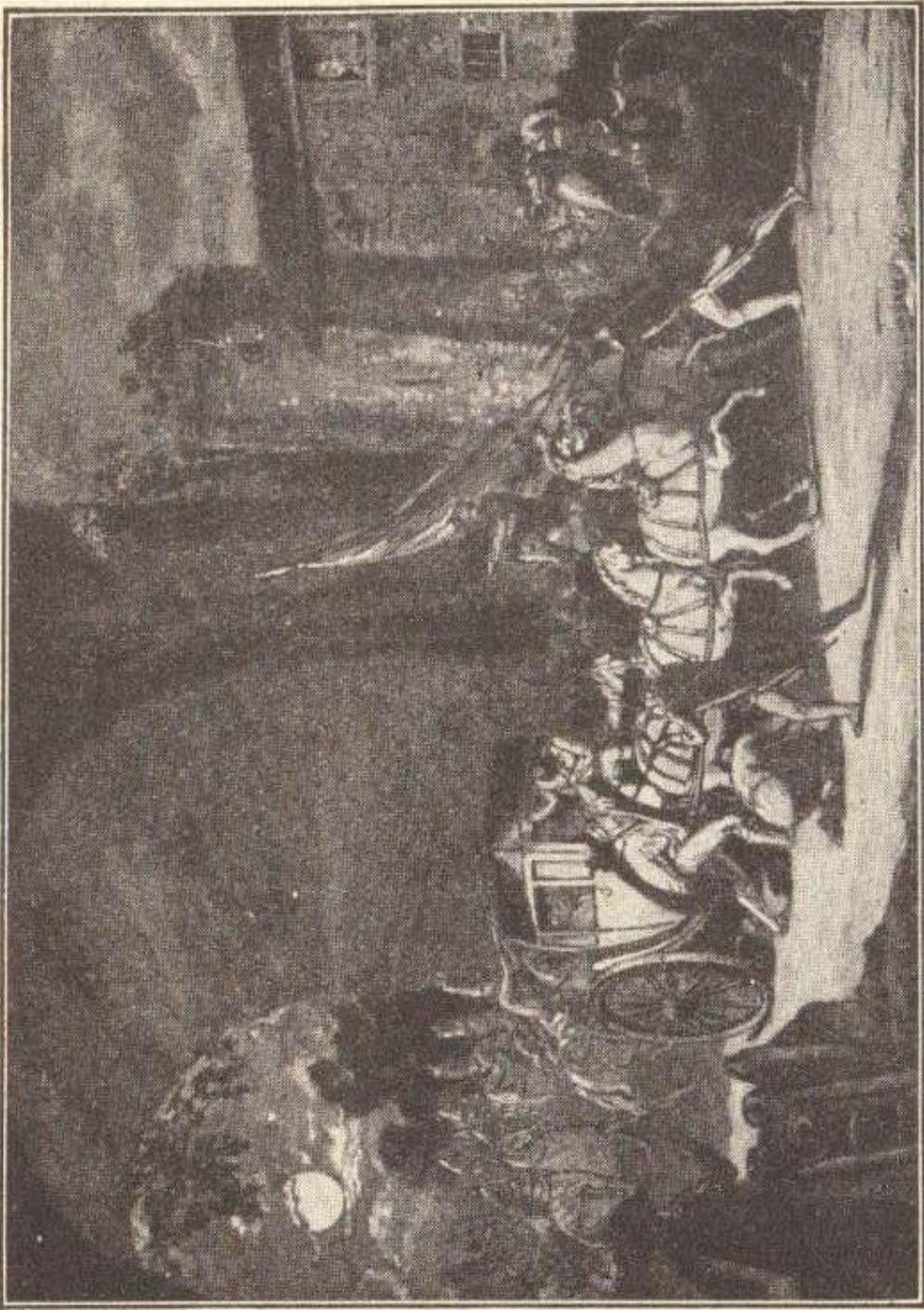
- **Democratic features**
  - France became a **limited monarchy**
    - King became merely the head of state
  - All laws were created by the **Legislative Assembly**
  - Feudalism was abolished
- **Undemocratic features**
  - Voting was limited to taxpayers
  - Offices were reserved for property owners
- This new government became known as the **Legislative Assembly**

# Legislative Assembly (1791-1792)

- Royal family sought help from Austria
  - In June, 1791, they were caught trying to escape to Austria
- Nobles who fled the revolution lived abroad as **émigrés**
  - They hoped that, with foreign help, the Old Regime could be restored in France
- Church officials wanted Church lands, rights, and privileges restored
  - Some devout Catholic peasants also supported the Church
- Political parties, representing different interests, emerged
  - **Girondists**
  - **Jacobins**

HALTING THE ROYAL FAMILY AT VARENNES

From a contemporary print. The royal family traveled in a great coach built for the purpose. The roads were bad, and the traveling carriage was heavy, but all went well until, at a point near Varennes, the king put his head out of the window and was recognized by the likeness of his features to the profile stamped on the French coins. The man who thus discovered the royal flight jumped on a horse, dashed into Varennes and roused the citizens to stop the coach. A messenger was dispatched to Paris, and shortly after, under the escort of members of the National Assembly, the royal family was compelled to return.



# Opposition to the New Government

- European monarchs feared that revolution would spread to their own countries
  - France was invaded by Austrian and Prussian troops
- In the uproar, the Commune took control of Paris
  - Commune was led by **Danton**, a member of the Jacobin political party
- Voters began electing representatives for a new convention which would write a republican constitution for France
  - A **republic** is a government in which the people elect representatives who will create laws and rule on their behalf
  - Meanwhile, thousands of nobles were executed under the suspicion that they were conspirators in the foreign invasion

# Convention (1792- | 795)

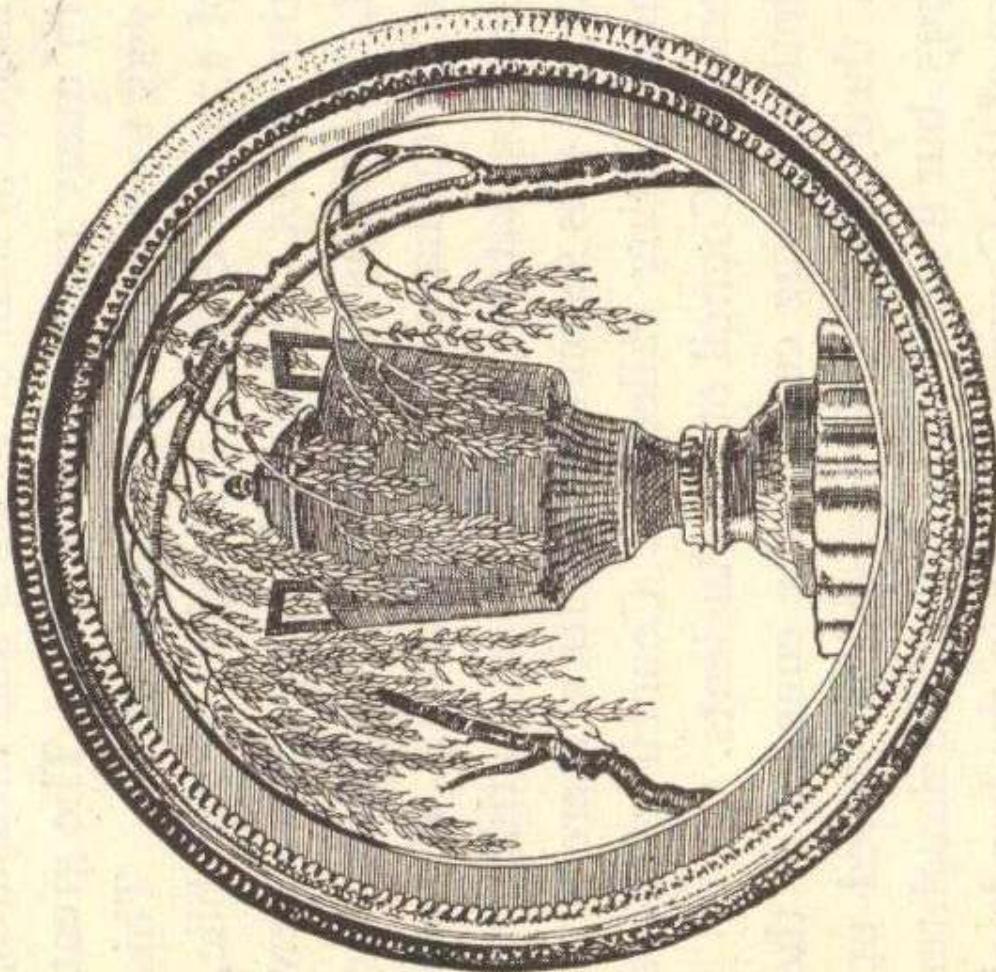
- On September 22, 1792, the **Convention** met for the first time
- Established the First French Republic
- Faced domestic opposition and strife
  - **Girondists** were moderates who represented the rich middle class of the provinces
  - **Jacobins** (led by **Marat**, **Danton**, and **Robespierre**) represented workers
- Faced opposition from abroad
  - Austria, England, Holland, Prussia, Sardinia, and Spain formed a Coalition invading France

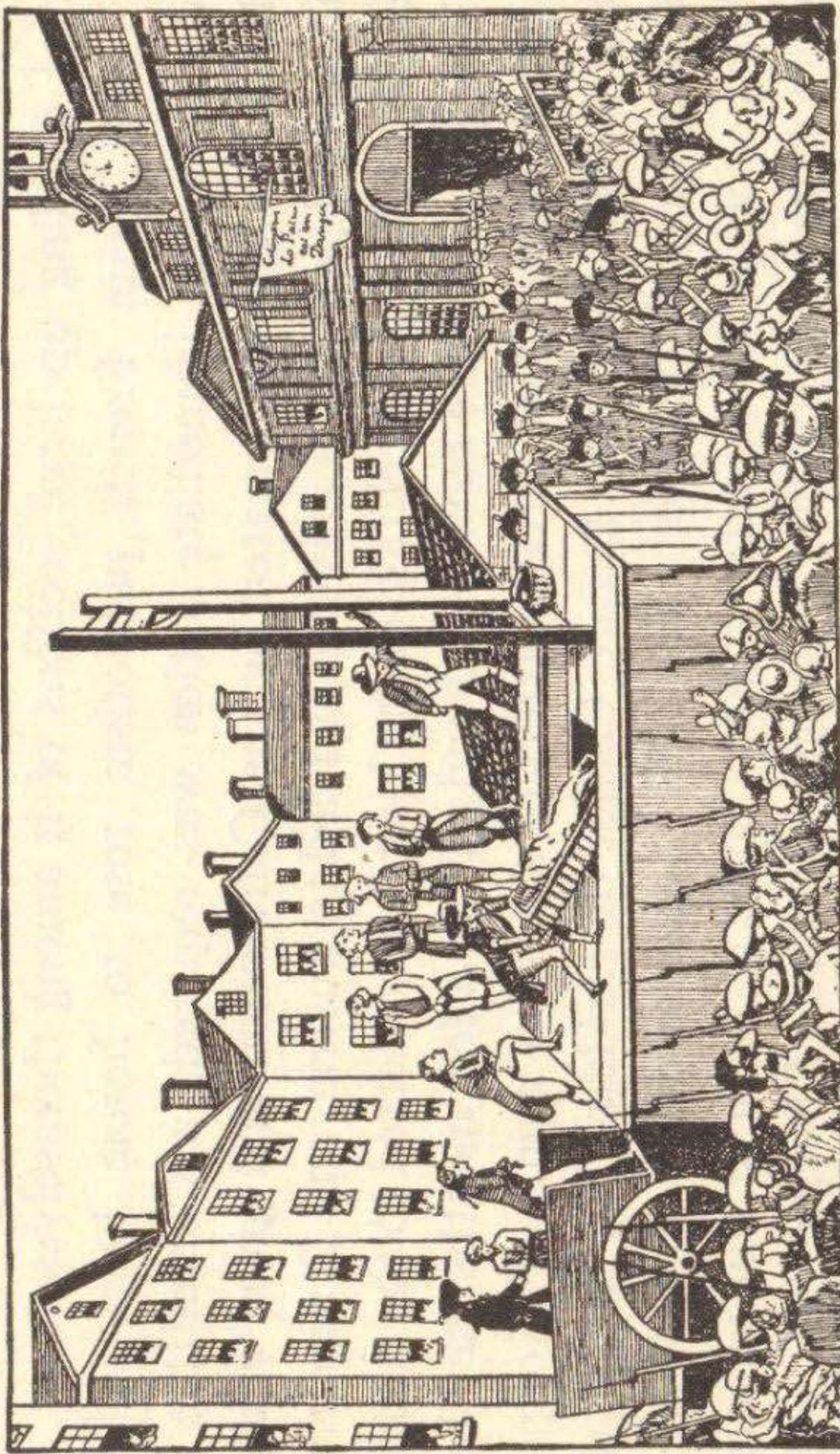
# Abolishment of the Monarchy

- The Convention abolished the monarchy
  - As long as the royal family lived, the monarchy could be restored
  - Put the royal couple on trial for treason
    - Convictions were a foregone conclusion
  - **Louis XVI** was guillotined on January 21, 1793
  - **Marie Antoinette** was guillotined on October 16, 1793
  - Daughter **Marie-Thérèse** was allowed to go to Vienna in 1795
    - She could not become queen because of Salic law, which did not allow females to succeed to the throne
  - Son **Louis-Charles**, a.k.a. Louis XVII (lived 1785-1795) was beaten and mistreated until he died in prison

MEMORIAL TO THE KING AND QUEEN

Drawing of a funeral urn with the profile of Louis XVI in the base at the left, Marie Antoinette at the right, the Dauphin in the willow tree at the right margin, and his sister Madame Royale at the left of the king's head. Made for sympathetic royalists by a contemporary artist.





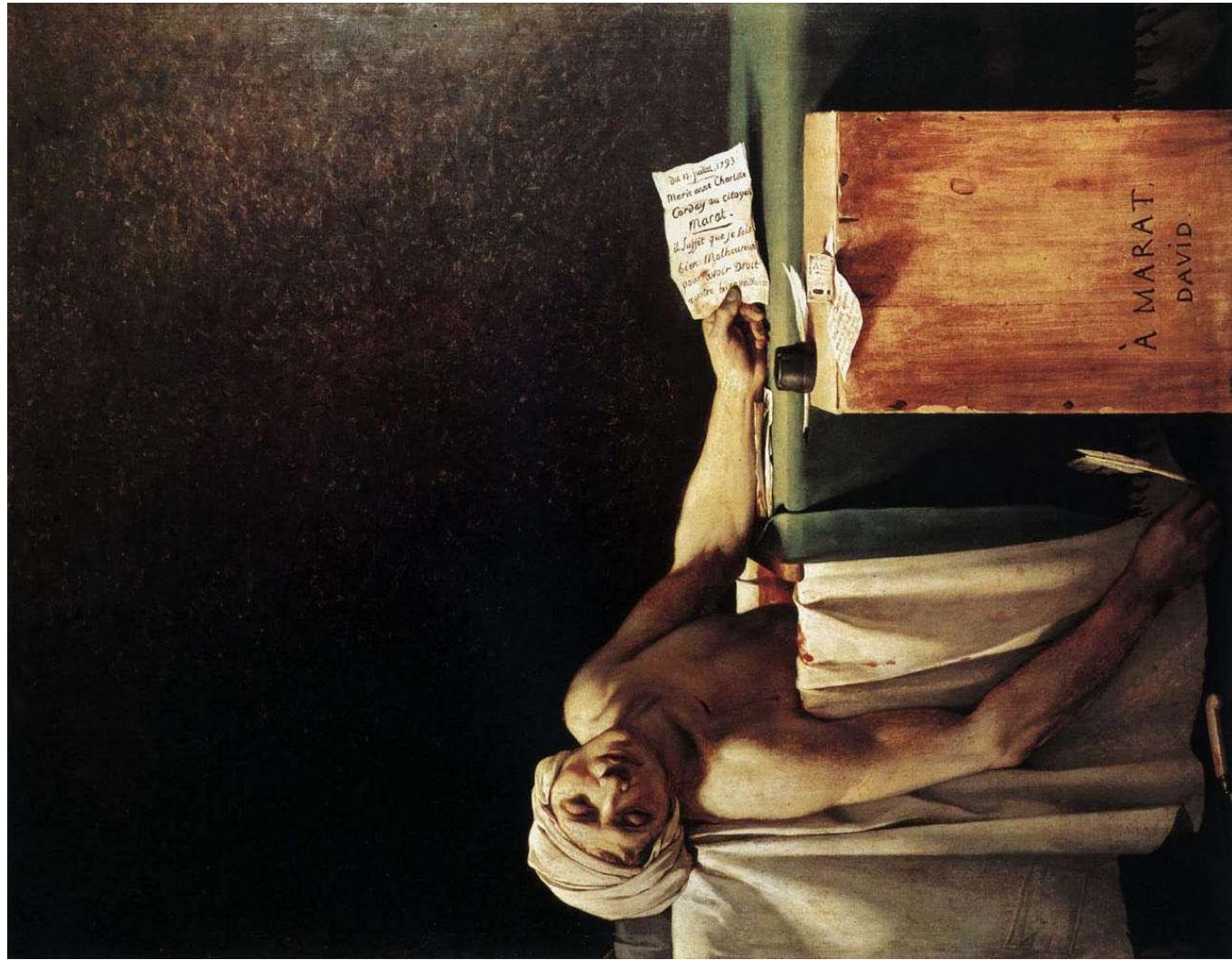
GUILLOTINE IN THE SQUARE BEFORE THE HOTEL DE VILLE

Illustration from a contemporary newspaper.

The three most memorable Jacobins were **Georges Danton, Maximilien Robespierre, and Jean-Paul Marat.**

Because of a debilitating illness, **Marat** was eventually forced to work from home. He was assassinated (in the tub while taking a medicinal bath) by **Charlotte Corday**, a Girondist sympathizer, in July, 1793.

*The Death of Marat* by Jacques-Louis David



# Growing Coalition against the French

- Convention drafted Frenchmen into the army to defeat the foreign Coalition
  - These troops were led by **General Carnot**
  - The people supported military operations because they did not want the country back under the Old Regime
- **Rouget de Lisle** wrote the “*Marseillaise*”
  - Became the French national anthem
  - Inspired troops as they were led into battle
- After two years
  - Coalition was defeated
  - France had gained, rather than lost, territory

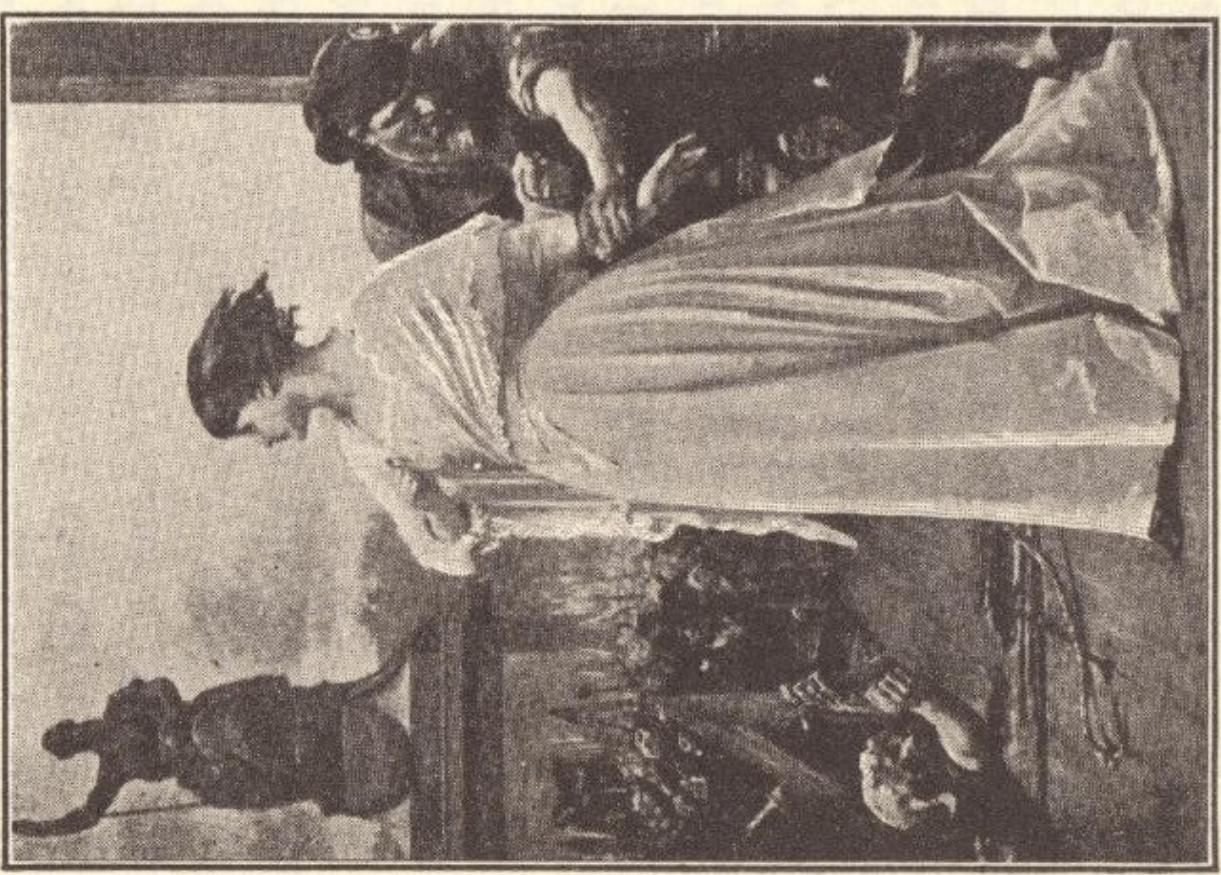
# Reign of Terror:

## September 5, 1793-July 27, 1794

- Despite military successes, the Convention continued to face problems domestically
- **Danton** and his **Jacobin** political party came to dominate French politics
- **Committee of Public Safety**
  - Headed by Danton (and later Robespierre)
  - Those accused of treason were tried by the Committee's **Revolutionary Tribunal**
  - Approximately 15,000 people died on the **guillotine**
    - Guillotine became known as the “**National Razor**”
    - Including innovative thinkers like **Olympe de Gouges** and **Madame Jeanne Roland**

# Committee of Public Safety





MADAME ROLAND ON HER WAY TO  
EXECUTION

From a painting by Royer.

# End of the Reign of Terror

- Members of the **Girondist** political party tried to end the **Reign of Terror** initiated by the **Jacobin** political party
  - This opposition to the **Committee of Public Safety** caused many Girondists to be tried and executed for treason
- Eventually, even **Georges Danton** wanted to end the executions
  - This resulted in Danton being tried and executed for treason
- **Maximilien Robespierre** became leader of the Committee of Public Safety
  - He continued the executions
  - Convention came to blame Robespierre for the Reign of Terror
- **Thermidorean Reaction**
  - July 27, 1794 – ended the Reign of Terror
  - Convention sent Robespierre and other members of the Committee of Public Safety to the guillotine
    - Robespierre was guillotined on July 28, 1794

# Constitution of the Year III of the Republic (1795)

- With the foreign invaders vanquished and the Reign of Terror at an end, the Convention was finally able to inaugurate its new constitution
- Constitution of the Year III of the Republic (1795) created the **Directory**

# Government under the Directory

## Executive

- 5 directors appointed by the Legislature

## Legislature

- Lower house (500 members) proposed laws
- Upper house (250 members) voted on these laws
- 2/3 of the Legislature would initially be filled by members of the Convention

## Qualifications

- Girondists (middle-class party) had defeated the Jacobins (working- and peasant-class party)
- Girondists' constitution stated that **suffrage** (the right to vote), as well as the right to hold office, were limited to property owners

# Other Parting Reforms Passed by the Convention

Adopted the metric system

Dealt the final blow to feudalism by abolishing primogeniture (the system whereby the oldest son inherited all of his father's estate)

Drew up a comprehensive system of laws

Ended debt imprisonment

Ended slavery in France's colonies

Established a nationwide system of public education

# Directory (1795-1799)

The Directory suffered from corruption and poor administration.

The people of France grew poorer and more frustrated with their government.

Despite, or perhaps because of, these struggles, the French developed a strong feeling of **nationalism** – they were proud of their country and devoted to it.

National pride was fueled by military successes.

It would be a military leader – **Napoleon Bonaparte**, coming to power through a **coup d'état** – who would end the ten-year period (1789-1799) known as the French Revolution.

# Review Questions

1. What Paris building was stormed on July 14, 1789?
2. What human rights were established in France by the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*?
3. How did Olympe de Gouges fight for women's rights?
4. What were émigrés, and why did French revolutionaries view them as a threat?
5. Name and describe the two political parties that competed for power in revolutionary France.
6. What was the Committee of Public Safety?
7. Describe the Reign of Terror and explain how it eventually came to an end.
8. Were the “excesses” of the French Revolution justified? Why or why not?
9. Looking back at the first half of 1789, could the French Revolution have been avoided? If so, how?