

## **Lecture 3: The Radical Phase of the French Revolution: 1792-1794**

### **1. Introduction**

In our previous lecture, we explored the events of 1789, focusing on the fall of the Old Regime and the birth of a new political order in France. In this third lecture, we will delve into the radical phase of the French Revolution, spanning from 1792 to 1794. This period was marked by the rise of the Jacobins, the execution of King Louis XVI, the Reign of Terror, and the extreme measures taken to protect and advance the Revolution.

### **2. The Rise of the Jacobins and Political Factions** **Political Clubs and Factions**

As the Revolution progressed, various political clubs and factions emerged, representing different interests and ideologies. The most prominent of these were:

- **The Jacobins:** Originally a moderate political club, the Jacobins became increasingly radical. Led by figures like Maximilien Robespierre, they advocated for the establishment of a republic, the execution of the king, and extensive social and economic reforms.
- **The Girondins:** Initially part of the Jacobin movement, the Girondins were more moderate. They supported the Revolution but were wary of the extreme measures proposed by the radical Jacobins. The Girondins were influential in the early years of the Revolution but eventually clashed with the more radical elements.
- **The Sans-culottes:** These were the working-class revolutionaries of Paris, who were often more radical than the Jacobins. They played a crucial role in pushing the

**Revolution towards more extreme measures, particularly during times of economic hardship.**

### **The Legislative Assembly**

- **October 1791: The Legislative Assembly replaced the National Constituent Assembly, marking a new phase in the Revolution. The Assembly was divided between radicals and moderates, with the Jacobins and Girondins becoming increasingly dominant.**
- **Foreign Threats: The Revolution soon faced threats from abroad. Monarchies across Europe, fearing the spread of revolutionary ideas, formed coalitions to intervene in France. This external pressure exacerbated internal divisions and pushed the Revolution in a more radical direction.**

## **3. The Declaration of War and the Fall of the Monarchy**

### **War with Austria and Prussia**

- **April 1792: Under pressure from the Girondins, the Legislative Assembly declared war on Austria, soon followed by war with Prussia. The Revolutionary Wars would continue for over two decades, fundamentally shaping the course of the Revolution.**
- **Impact of the War: The war initially went poorly for France, leading to a sense of crisis. The fear of foreign invasion and internal betrayal (from royalists and counter-revolutionaries) fueled radicalization within the revolutionary government.**

### **The Insurrection of August 10, 1792**

- **Storming of the Tuileries Palace: On August 10, 1792, revolutionary forces, led by the Sans-culottes and**

supported by the Jacobins, stormed the Tuileries Palace, where the royal family was residing. The king was arrested, and the monarchy effectively collapsed.

- **Suspension of the Monarchy:** Following the insurrection, the Legislative Assembly suspended the monarchy and called for the election of a National Convention to draft a new republican constitution.

## **4. The Establishment of the First French Republic**

### **The National Convention**

- **September 21, 1792:** The newly elected National Convention convened and formally abolished the monarchy, declaring France a republic. This marked a radical shift in French history, as centuries of monarchical rule were swept away.
- **Key Figures:** The National Convention was dominated by Jacobins like Robespierre, Danton, and Marat, who would become central figures in the radical phase of the Revolution.

### **The Trial and Execution of Louis XVI**

- **The Trial:** The National Convention put King Louis XVI on trial for treason. The trial was highly contentious, with fierce debates over whether the king should be executed.
- **Execution:** On January 21, 1793, Louis XVI was executed by guillotine. This event shocked Europe and deepened the revolutionary fervor in France. The execution of the king symbolized the definitive break with the Old Regime.

## **5. The Reign of Terror**

### **The Committee of Public Safety**

- **Creation:** In response to the growing internal and external threats, the National Convention established the

**Committee of Public Safety in April 1793. The Committee, led by Robespierre and other Jacobins, was given broad powers to protect the Revolution.**

- **Revolutionary Tribunals:** The Committee set up revolutionary tribunals to try and execute suspected enemies of the Revolution. These tribunals operated with little regard for legal norms, leading to widespread fear and repression.

### **The Terror**

- **The Law of Suspects:** In September 1793, the Law of Suspects was passed, allowing the government to arrest and execute anyone suspected of being counter-revolutionary. This law greatly expanded the scope of the Reign of Terror.
- **Mass Executions:** The Reign of Terror saw the execution of tens of thousands of people, including prominent revolutionaries like Danton and Desmoulins, who were accused of being too moderate. The guillotine became a symbol of the Revolution's radicalism and the government's determination to maintain control at all costs.

### **The Role of Robespierre**

- **Robespierre's Influence:** Robespierre became the dominant figure during the Reign of Terror, advocating for the use of terror as a means of defending the Revolution. He believed that virtue and terror were necessary to achieve the revolutionary goals.
- **The Cult of the Supreme Being:** In an attempt to replace traditional religious practices, Robespierre introduced the Cult of the Supreme Being, a form of deism that aimed to

**promote republican values. This move alienated many, including his former allies.**

## **6. The Fall of Robespierre and the End of the Terror**

### **The Thermidorian Reaction**

- July 27, 1794 (9th Thermidor): As the Reign of Terror intensified, opposition to Robespierre grew within the National Convention. On July 27, 1794, Robespierre and his closest allies were arrested and executed the following day. This event, known as the Thermidorian Reaction, marked the end of the Reign of Terror.**

### **Aftermath**

- End of the Terror: The fall of Robespierre led to a relaxation of the extreme measures of the Terror. The National Convention dismantled the Committee of Public Safety and attempted to restore some degree of stability.**
- Political Shift: The Thermidorian Reaction marked a shift towards more moderate republicanism. However, the Revolution was far from over, and France would continue to grapple with political instability.**

## **7. Conclusion**

**The radical phase of the French Revolution, characterized by the rise of the Jacobins, the execution of Louis XVI, and the Reign of Terror, was a period of intense upheaval and violence. While the Revolution's goals of liberty, equality, and fraternity were pursued with fervor, the means employed during this period often led to tragic and brutal outcomes. The fall of Robespierre and the end of the Reign of Terror signaled a turning point, but the Revolution's legacy continued to evolve in the years that followed.**

