

# The King and the Revolution



Source A. King Louis XVI of France

## What sort of man was Louis XVI?

Louis XVI came to the throne in 1774. He was an absolute monarch, which meant that he was not bound by a constitution, so had complete power. Like many other European monarchs, Louis believed his power had been given to him by God. Louis was a 'family-man'. Even during the Estates General meeting, Louis was more concerned with his son who was dying of tuberculosis than the political crisis he was facing. Louis was dominated by his wife, Marie-Antoinette, whose brother was the Austrian Emperor. Marie-Antoinette was the subject of many rumours about love affairs, expensive clothes and over spending. She was also criticised by many for the way she interfered with Louis's attempts to govern the country.

"The power to make laws belongs only to me"

Source B. Louis XVI, (1774 - 1793)



Source C. Queen Marie-Antoinette of France.

## How did Louis respond to the events of 1789-91?

It is possible that Louis did not fully understand the events of 1789 – 1791. It is also possible that Louis had no idea how widespread the demand was for reform in France. When the Three Estates met in May 1789, Louis did not have any ideas to put to them. When the National Assembly was set up, Louis did not know what he should do. On 5-6 October, 1789, the Paris mob came to Louis's palace at Versailles and attacked. They captured Louis and his family, and imprisoned him in the Tuilleries in Paris. Louis could have ordered his guards to fire on the mob but refused to do so. Louis claimed that he played the role of an English style 'constitutional monarch'. Between 1789-1791, Louis signed decrees from the Assembly so that they became law.

In September 1791, when the constitution was finally proclaimed, Louis signed an oath of loyalty. Some believe that this was an act of good will from Louis. Others think that Louis took the oath because he had no other choice. What do YOU think? Read the information on Louis's behaviour between 1789 and 1791 before you make your decision.

Source D. Descriptions of Louis and Marie -Antoinette by an American Ambassador in France.

### On Louis...

He is an honest man and wishes to do good, but he has not either genius or education...

### On Marie-Antoinette...

Louis has a queen who controls his weak mind. Her ..extravagance has been a major cause of exhausting the government's finances.

# How did Louis behave in 1789 – 1791?

Louis behaviour in the years 1789 – 1791 is crucial in deciding whether or not Louis co-operated with the Assembly's attempts at reform.

- 1) When many nobles fled France after their chateaux were burned. Louis continued to support the nobles (known as emigrés) who were now living in the courts of other European monarchs, by sending money to them.
- 2) Marie-Antoinette (whose brother was Emperor of Austria) wrote to neighbouring monarchies stating that she and Louis wanted to leave France and that they hoped their absolute monarch friends would invade France, put down the revolution and restore Louis to absolute monarch. Louis agreed with his wife's actions, and himself wrote to the kings of Prussia, Spain and Sweden, as well as the emperors of Austria and Russia to suggest an alliance to put down the revolution.
- 3) During the night of June 20-21, 1791, Louis attempted to escape to Montmedy, near the Austrian Netherlands. He and his family were disguised and carried false passports. Once there, he hoped, he would rally the emigrés nobles, get the support of Austria and return with an army. However, Louis's plan was filled with problems.
  - Firstly, the queen insisted that all the family travel together. This meant using a larger, slower coach, which, even with six horses had a top speed of only 10km per hour.
  - The bodyguards wore easily recognisable uniforms.
  - There were six people instead of five listed on the passport.
  - Louis himself was recognised on the route to Varennes, and a mob prevented his coach from proceeding.
  - Louis's advisers suggested he use his bodyguards to shoot their way through the mob, but Louis refused.

On June 22<sup>nd</sup>, Louis and his family were captured and brought back to Paris. The crowd along the way jeered them, but once in Paris, Louis and his family were greeted with a grim silence. Anyone who applauded the King was beaten, and anyone who insulted him was hanged. The National Assembly had to decide what to do with Louis... **What happened next??**



Source E: Louis and family being brought back to Paris. The caption read, 'the family of pigs being brought back to the pigsty'

## Well???

In the end, the Assembly decided to keep Louis as their CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCH (a monarch who has to obey the rules of a constitution). On September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1791, the constitution was proclaimed and Louis swore an oath of loyalty to it. On 30<sup>th</sup> September 1791, the National Assembly declared its work finished. It seemed the revolution was over.

## We shall see...

And finally...

Extension: Write a newspaper report for 'Le News' on Louis's attempted escape. You'll need a headline, a picture, and as many details of the event as you can find! Ask your teacher for a writing frame, or make your own!

## Tasks...

- 1) Carefully look at sources A, B, and D. What kind of person do you think Louis XVI was?
- 2) Now look at sources C and D. How would you describe Marie-Antoinette?
- 3) Can you be sure that your descriptions of Louis and his queen are accurate? Explain your answer.
- 4) Find all the dates on this worksheet and write them in your margin. Next to each date, write down the event it relates to.
- 5) In what three ways did Louis behave badly in the years 1789-1791? Explain each fully.
- 6) How did Louis show that he could not be trusted during this time?
- 7) What point was the cartoonist of source E trying to make? Explain your answer.
- 8) Mini-essay (at least one page of your exercise book) – How did Louis deal with the difficulties he faced in the years 1789 – 1791? Use the information and sources on this sheet, as well as your previous work.