

The Trial of the King

Trial Fact file.

- The trial took place in December 1792.
- Louis could have lawyers, but could not call witnesses for the defence.
- The case was heard by the National Convention whose 749 deputies acted as judge and jury.

Reminder! Keywords!

National Convention – a bit like our parliament.

Deputy – A representative elected by the people to sit at the convention. A bit like our MPs.

Treason – a crime against the country.

The Charges: Louis faced a total of 33 charges when he was put on trial in December 1792. They included; bankrupting the nation, plotting against the revolution, trying to flee, accepting a constitution he despised, helping the Austrian invasion of France. In short, he was accused of being a traitor.

The case for the prosecution.

Sources 1,2 and 3 below highlight the case for the prosecution. Read them carefully.

Source 1. From a speech by a radical deputy, Goupilleau.

"Citizens, let me repeat his infamous words: 'In my heart I cannot approve the Revolution and the detestable constitution.'"

Source 2. From a speech by Saint-Just, the youngest deputy.

"He oppressed a free nation; he declared himself its enemy; he abused its laws; he must die to ensure the peacefulness of the people, since to assure his own he intended that the people be crushed.

Monarchy is an outrage. No man can reign innocently. Louis is an alien among us and not a citizen. He must die."

Source 3. From a speech by Mailhe, a deputy from Toulouse.

"After having accepted the 1791 constitution, Louis declared he was a prisoner. That was a signal for foreign powers to come to his aid. Instead of resisting the Prussian and Austrian invasions, he organised treason in all border towns.

He continued to support the émigrés with money, and paralysed the actions of the government. His acceptance of the constitution was just a trick to keep him on the throne while he waited for the foreign armies to re-establish his rule on the ruins of the constitution."

Tasks:

- 1) Using the trial fact file, do you think Louis's trial will be a fair one? Explain why.
- 2) Read the sources. What is Louis accused of in: a) source 1; b) source 2 and c) source 3? (Write as many as you can)
- 3) What does Saint-Just think should happen to Louis?
- 4) What impression of Louis does sources 1, 2 and 3 give you? (Short paragraph with reference to specific sources please)



The case for the Defence.

These sources were presented as Louis's defence. Read them carefully.

Source 4. From a speech by De Seze, one of Louis's defence lawyers.

"Louis was the first king to voluntarily give up some of his power for the good of the people. You called him the 'restorer of French liberty'."

Source 5. From a speech by Malesherbes, one of Louis's defence lawyers.

"On 6th October 1789 at Versailles he ordered his armed guards not to defend him.

At Varennes he preferred to be brought back rather than cause the death of a single man.

You blame him for the blood that has been shed, but on 10 August 1792 he came to the Assembly to prevent it being shed."

Source 6. From Louis's own defence.

"I have not broken the law since the constitution was introduced. I will defend each of my actions as morally correct and faithful to the letter of the law. I have done nothing except for the good of the people. I will argue for my life but not beg for it."

Source 7. Louis's response when questioned about hidden documents which showed him trying to encourage foreign armies to invade France, and trying to bribe deputies.

"I have no knowledge of it. It is not my handwriting."

Source 8. Louis's response to the charge of disorganising the army.

"Never did the idea of counter revolution enter my head. There is not one word of truth in this accusation."

Tasks:

- 1) Read sources 4 and 5. What defence does each source offer on behalf of Louis?
- 2) What opinion do you have of Louis after reading sources 4 and 5? Why?
- 3) Read sources 6, 7 and 8. What opinion of Louis do these sources give you? Explain how.
- 4) Read Louis's answers to the charges in sources 7 and 8 again. Do you believe him? Explain why.



BONUS TASKS!

- A) Imagine you are a Deputy at Louis's trial. Would you find him guilty or not guilty? (Think back to your previous work on Louis's behaviour during the revolution to help you, as well as the charges shown on this worksheet)
- B) You are a lawyer for the PROSECUTION. Use sources 1 - 3 to write a closing argument. Remember! Your argument needs to convince the deputies to find Louis GUILTY!
- C) You are a lawyer for the DEFENCE. Use sources 4 - 8 to write a closing argument. Remember! Your argument needs to convince the deputies to find Louis NOT GUILTY!

