



The French Revolution: The Reign of Terror (1793-1794)

Introduction

Since the Storming of the Bastille, the government of France had been in a constant state of change and soon, it faced a crisis. At this time, radicals led by **Maximilien Robespierre** took over the government and started the **Reign of Terror**.

Who and what?

During the Reign of Terror, France was ruled by a group of men called **the Committee of Public Safety**. The leader of this group was Robespierre, a lawyer who was against the upper classes and chosen by the commoners as a representative of the Third Estate. He famously declared that Terror would be “the order of the day.”

Robespierre was also the leader of a radical group called the **Jacobins**. The Jacobins felt that it was their duty to preserve the revolution, even if it meant violence and terror.

The good and the bad

Some achievements during this period, were that public speeches helped spread wide the awareness of equality. Bread and meat were rationed meaning that the poor no longer starved. The people of France came to be known as citizens irrespective of their social status. Churches were put to use as offices of the government.

But, throughout this period, France was ruled by the Terror. A policy of severe control and punishment, along with new laws such as ‘Law of Suspects’ ensured that many people lost their lives. They had to be careful of everything they said, what they did, and who they talked to. The slightest hint of opposition to the revolutionary government could mean prison or even death.

The end of Terror

As the bloodshed and executions of the Terror became worse, many people realized that it could not continue. Enemies of Robespierre organized to overthrow him and in 1794, he was executed, bringing to an end the Reign of Terror.

Interesting Facts about the Reign of Terror

- The guillotine was a device used to execute people during the Terror.
- Queen Marie Antoinette was one of the first people executed during the Terror.
- Around 17,000 people were officially executed in France,



The French Revolution: A Directory Rules France (1795-1799)

After the fall of the Jacobin government, a new constitution was introduced by the people of the wealthier middle class. The non-propertied sections of society, however, were denied voting rights. This new government was called the Directory.

Who and what?

The directory had two legislative councils. These appointed a directory of five men who were responsible for the day-to-day running of the country.

When the Directory came into power, it was faced with many problems including famine, civil war and war with other countries. There was also a struggle for power within the directory and also against the legislative councils.

How did it end?

The Directory became more corrupt, while the military leaders of France grew in power. The people became unhappy with this new government. In 1799, a powerful military general Napoleon overthrew the Directory thus bringing an end to its rule and established his reign over France.

Take this quiz to check your understanding

1. What group ran the country during the Reign of Terror?

- Second Estate
- Committee of Public Safety
- Estates General

2. Who was the main French leader during the Reign of Terror?

- Marquis de Lafayette
- King Louis XVI
- Maximilien Robespierre

3. Which of the following best describes the Directory?

- The list of people who ruled France
- The council who advised the French king
- The government of France at the end of the French Revolution

4. What scary name was given to the period of the French Revolution before the Directory?

Period of Darkness

Reign of Terror

Black Death

5. What group was responsible for the running of France during the Directory?

Five Directors

Two Consuls

Council of Ancients

6. True or False: The Directory was corrupt and always fighting for power.

TRUE

FALSE

7. What happened to Robespierre after the Reign of Terror came to an end?

He was executed

He wrote a book about his experience and became wealthy

He continued to work in the government.

8. What was the guillotine?

A revolutionary newspaper

A device used to execute people

The building where the revolutionaries met

9. Who was the general who overthrew the Directory and established a new government?

Lafayette

Robespierre

Napoleon

10. What problems did the Directory have to deal with when it took control of France?

Famine and civil war

War with other countries

All of the above