



iv) Inefficient and corrupt administration - The administration was corrupt and inefficient. The officials were selfish and did not care about the welfare of the people. Also, King Louis XVI was a pleasure-loving and extravagant person. He was completely ignorant and indifferent to the sufferings of the common people and was greatly influenced by his beautiful and ambitious wife, Marie Antoinette. They wasted a large amount of money on festivities and pleasure and emptied the royal treasury. The monetary condition further declined because of the French involvement in useless wars against England.

v) Increasing national debt and subsistence crisis - France had been plunged into a state of considerable national debt, running up to two billion livres. The King was at his wit's end and wanted to impose more taxes on the Third Estate, while the poor of the country lay starving because of rising prices of food and shortage of grains. The King's failed to initiate reforms.

vi) Influence of the American Revolution - The French generals and soldiers who had fought in the American revolution came back to France and influenced the



people to fight for their rights against the unjust government. The success of the American Revolution encouraged the people and pushed them towards rebellion.

IMPORTANT EVENTS

i) The Tennis Court Oath - On 17th June 1789, the members of the third estate declared that they would constitute themselves as the National Assembly. On 20th June 1789, the members of the third estate met at a tennis court and took an oath not to separate until a new constitution was drawn up. This is the historic Tennis Court Oath.

ii) The Storming of the Bastille - On 14th July 1789, a great mob attacked **Bastille**, the state prison for political prisoners and a much-hated symbol of the Old Regime. The prisoners were released and they joined the revolutionaries. The keepers of the fortress were killed. This incident symbolised the victory of the people of France against the monarchy. It marked the beginning of the revolution.

iii) The New Constitution - The newly formed National Assembly, consisting of the representatives of the third



estate took over the control of the affairs of France. It adopted the famous **Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen**, a landmark in the history of human progress, written by Abbé Sieyès and Marquis de Lafayette after consulting Thomas Jefferson, the Founding Father of America and eventually its third President. By 1791, a new Constitution was drawn up for France and the King became a constitutional monarch. Louis XVI and the Queen tried to escape to Germany but were captured and later publicly executed. Monarchy was abolished and France became a democratic republic.

iv) The Reign of Terror - The period from 1793 to 1794, France experienced the 'Reign of Terror'. Maximilian Robespierre had sentenced to death everyone who he considered as enemies of the republic, whether they were ex-noble, clergy, and members of any political parties, including Jacobins. The prisoners were executed after trial by a revolutionary tribunal. Robespierre followed a policy of severe control and punishment. He used a device called the **guillotine**, named after its inventor Dr. Guillotin, to behead the prisoners. It consisted of two poles and a blade. As the bloodshed and executions of the Terror



became worse, many people realized that it needed to come to an end. Because of the forcible implementation of laws, even supporters of Robespierre started the demand for change. Enemies of Robespierre organized to overthrow him. On July 27, 1794, he was removed from power and was executed the next day. With his death, the Reign of Terror came to an end.

v) A Directory rules France - After the fall of the Jacobins, a **new Constitution** was introduced and power was seized by the wealthier middle class. According to the new constitution, the non-propertied section of the society had no right to vote. Two elected legislative councils were to run the government. These two legislative councils would appoint an executive committee of five members, called the **Directory**, which would finally run the government. The Directory could be dismissed by the majority vote of councils. These new provisions were brought to prevent the concentration of power in the one-man executive, as happened in the reign of Jacobins. The clash between Directory and member of councils led to political instability, which opened the door for a military dictator,



Napoleon Bonaparte. Napoleon Bonaparte became the emperor of France in 1804.

vi) The Rise of Napoleon - On 22nd August 1795, the National Assembly approved a new constitution that established a representative system of government with a legislature consisting of two legislative houses. For the next four years, the French government was beset by political corruption, domestic unrest, a weak economy, and ongoing efforts by radicals and monarchists to seize power. Amongst all this chaos, a French general named Napoleon Bonaparte rose to power. On 9th November 1799, Napoleon, backed by the army, overthrew the National Assembly and declared that the French Revolution was over.

Over the next decade and a half, he consolidated power domestically as he led France in a series of military victories across much of Europe, declaring himself Emperor of France in 1804. During his reign, Napoleon continued the liberalization that had begun during the Revolution, reforming its civil code, establishing the first national bank, expanding public education, and investing heavily in infrastructures like roads and sewers. As he



continued to expand his empire, he enforced new reforms, known as the Napoleonic Code. He liberalized property rights, ended the practice of segregating Jews in ghettos, and declared all men equal. But Napoleon was eventually undermined by his own military ambitions and was defeated in 1815 at the Battle of Waterloo. He died in exile on the Mediterranean island of St. Helena in 1821.

IMPORTANT PERSONALITIES

i) Louis XVI – He was king of France when the Revolution commenced. He had plunged France into severe debt. He had called the meeting of the Estates but denied approval of reforms. Along with his wife, Marie Antoinette, he was executed in 1793. His deposition and execution turned France into a republic for a short time, until the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy (the line of kings to which Louis XVI had belonged) and then the coming to power of Napoleon.