

On the night of August 4, several members of the Assembly drew up a key document of the French Revolution – this was the [DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF MAN AND THE CITIZEN](#). On August 26, the *Declaration* was formally adopted by the National Assembly. A moral document through and through, the *Declaration* outlined man's natural rights. The purpose of such a *Declaration* was to rally the country and to add support to the National Assembly.

*The representatives of the French people, organized as a National Assembly, believing that the ignorance, neglect, or contempt of the rights of man are the sole cause of public calamities and of the corruption of governments, have determined to set forth in a solemn declaration the natural, unalienable, and sacred rights of man, in order that this declaration, being constantly before all the members of the Social body, shall remind them continually of their rights and duties; in order that the acts of the legislative power, as well as those of the executive power, may be compared at any moment with the objects and purposes of all political institutions and may thus be more respected, and, lastly, in order that the grievances of the citizens, based hereafter upon simple and incontestable principles, shall tend to the maintenance of the constitution and redound to the happiness of all.*



Barely 300 words in length, it could be printed cheaply on one side of a single sheet of paper.

The *Declaration* appeared all over France and was subsequently translated into every major European language. As a symbol, it became the gospel of the new French social order.

Louis accepted neither the decrees of August 4 nor *the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*. However, on October 5, 1789, several hundred Parisian men and women marched the twelve miles to Versailles in order to protest the lack of bread to Louis and the National Assembly. At the same time, 20,000 Paris Guards loyal to the Revolution set out to join the mob gathered at Versailles. Louis had no choice but to promise bread and return to Paris with the protesters. Louis was now the captive of the people. He promised bread. He approved the decrees of August 4 including the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*.



With the conclusion of the [OCTOBER DAYS](#) the King and the National Assembly left Versailles for Paris. By the end of 1789, Louis had made several concessions to the National Assembly, none of which he sincerely intended to keep. The people of Paris and the French countryside loved their king as a child loves his father. Louis was not to blame for the misfortunes of France, instead, his evil ministers were held responsible. So, by bringing Louis to Paris, it was hoped he would be less influenced by his evil and corrupt ministers. But on June 20, 1791, Louis XVI did something which earned him the general distrust of most French subjects. He planned to raise an army and crush the revolution. He

appealed to Leopold II, the brother of Marie Antoinette, who promised Louis Austrian troops if Louis could reach Montmédy and mobilize a sizable French force. Louis did not intend to leave France except as a last resort.

At ten o'clock on the night of June 20, a *berline*, or heavy coach, drawn by four horses, pulled up at the south end of the Tuileries. At intervals until 11:30, the coach picked up members of the royal family, all of whom were dressed in disguise -- Louis as a valet, Marie Antoinette as a children's governess. It had been planned that as Louis passed through major cities and towns that his troops would be nearby. If he kept on schedule, Louis ought to have arrived at Montmédy the following day. But it was not to be. Louis began to treat this serious occasion as an excursion -- he ordered extra stops so that he could sup on his favorite meals and on one occasion he was recognized at Ste.-Ménéhould by an old soldier, Jean-Baptiste Drouet.



Drouet rode ahead to the small village of Varennes and with the help of the locals, blocked the bridge across the Meuse River. At midnight, Louis' *berline* was stopped at the bridge and Louis immediately admitted who he was. The royal party was treated to dinner and treated with utmost respect. Of course, all the church bells began to ring and by morning, 10,000 peasants were in the streets of Varennes. Finally, at 6 A.M. on June 22, representatives of the National Assembly arrived on the scene, escorted by the National Guardsmen. Three days later, the royal family was back at the Tuileries. Louis was now a prisoner of the Revolution and an enemy of the Revolution. With the [FLIGHT TO VARENNES](#), the National Assembly began to wonder just how possible a limited monarchy really was, or if indeed it was now even necessary.

Regardless, between the October Days of 1789 and September 1791, the National Assembly busied itself with reforms meant to dismantle the *ancien regime*. They accomplished this with six basic reforms

1. the abolition of special privileges of the nobility through the legalization of equality (August 4, 1789)
2. they made their statement of human rights with the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* (August 4, 1789)
3. they subordinated Church to State. In November 1789, the National Assembly confiscated all Church property. And in early 1790, they passed the [CIVIL CONSTITUTION OF THE CLERGY](#) which reduced the power of the bishops. The clergy was now selected and paid by the State
4. in September 1791, the National Assembly drew up a constitution, something it had been trying to do since June 1789. The constitution of 1791 specified such liberal ideas as a limited monarchy and full equality before the law
5. the National Assembly also made every effort to replace the inefficient and uncoordinated provinces with 83 new administrative units nearly equal in size. A standardized system of courts was introduced, the sale of judicial offices was abolished, citizen-filled juries were introduced and torture was abolished
6. in terms of economic reforms, the National Assembly adopted a uniform system of weights and measures, guild restrictions were abolished and customs on goods transported within the country were eliminated

By the end of September 1791, the National Assembly announced that its work was done. In many ways, the Constitution of 1791 seemed to fulfill the promises of reform which had been first uttered by the *men of 1789*. All Frenchmen could now be proud that the following rights had been secured: equality before the law, careers open to talent, a written constitution, and parliamentary government

With this in mind, there was a sizeable faction within the National Assembly who were so satisfied that they claimed the Revolution to be at an end, since its primary aims had been achieved. But, revolutionary times are unpredictable. By 1792, the Revolution moved in a more radical and violent direction. This radical direction was neither desired nor anticipated by the men of 1789. Why the Revolution became radical is interesting and there are basically two reasons why it did so. First, a counter-revolution, loyal to Church and King, was led by the

noble and the clergy and supported by staunch Catholic peasants. Because this counter-revolution threatened the changes of the revolutionaries, the revolutionaries had to resort to more drastic measures than hitherto imagined. Second, the economic, social, and political discontent of the urban working classes also propelled the Revolution in the direction of radicalism. These were the small shop-keepers, artisans and wage earners. These were the *sans-culottes* (see [Lecture 13](#)), men who defined themselves not only by their trade but also by the clothes they wore. They wore trousers or pants as opposed to the knee-breeches of their social superiors. The *sans-culottes* had played a role in revolutionary events since 1789, but they had, as a class, received few gains. As one historian has written:

*The sans-culottes saw that a privilege of wealth was taking the place of a privilege of birth. They foresaw that the bourgeoisie would succeed the fallen aristocracy as the ruling class.*