



6 October 1789

The storming of Versailles



1788: France on the verge of  
bankruptcy

Louis XVI



## A financial crisis

Debt-Budget deficit spiralling out of control

A tax system complex & unequal

Widespread corruption

The cost of multiple wars





# The American War of Independence (1776-1783)

Victory over Great Britain:  
renewed prestige

BUT

A heavy financial burden



COMPTE  
RENDU AU ROI,

Par M. NECKER,  
Directeur général des Finances.

*An mois de Janvier 1781.*

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Imprimé par ordre de SA MAJESTÉ.

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A PARIS,  
DE L'IMPRIMERIE ROYALE

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M.D.CCLXXXI

Borrowing vs. raising taxes

A deepening debt crisis



Jacques Necker



Charles de Calonne (1783-1787)

More spending

More borrowing (to bring  
confidence back)

**1786:** bankruptcy looming

Urgent need of financial reforms





26 August 1786

Calonne's "*plan d'amélioration des finances*"  
(plan to improve finances): a revolution!

New land tax payable by ALL landowners: the  
end of fiscal exemptions to the nobility and  
clergy

The King's full support ("*I have not slept all  
night, but it is of pleasure*")

BUT

COULD SUCH A PLAN BE APPROVED?





# The *Parlement* de Paris

High Court of Justice with jurisdiction over a third of the kingdom

New laws (edicts) recorded by the *Parlement*

Right of remonstrance (formal statement of grievances)

*Lit de Justice*: formal session under the king's presidency – Compulsory registration of the royal edicts







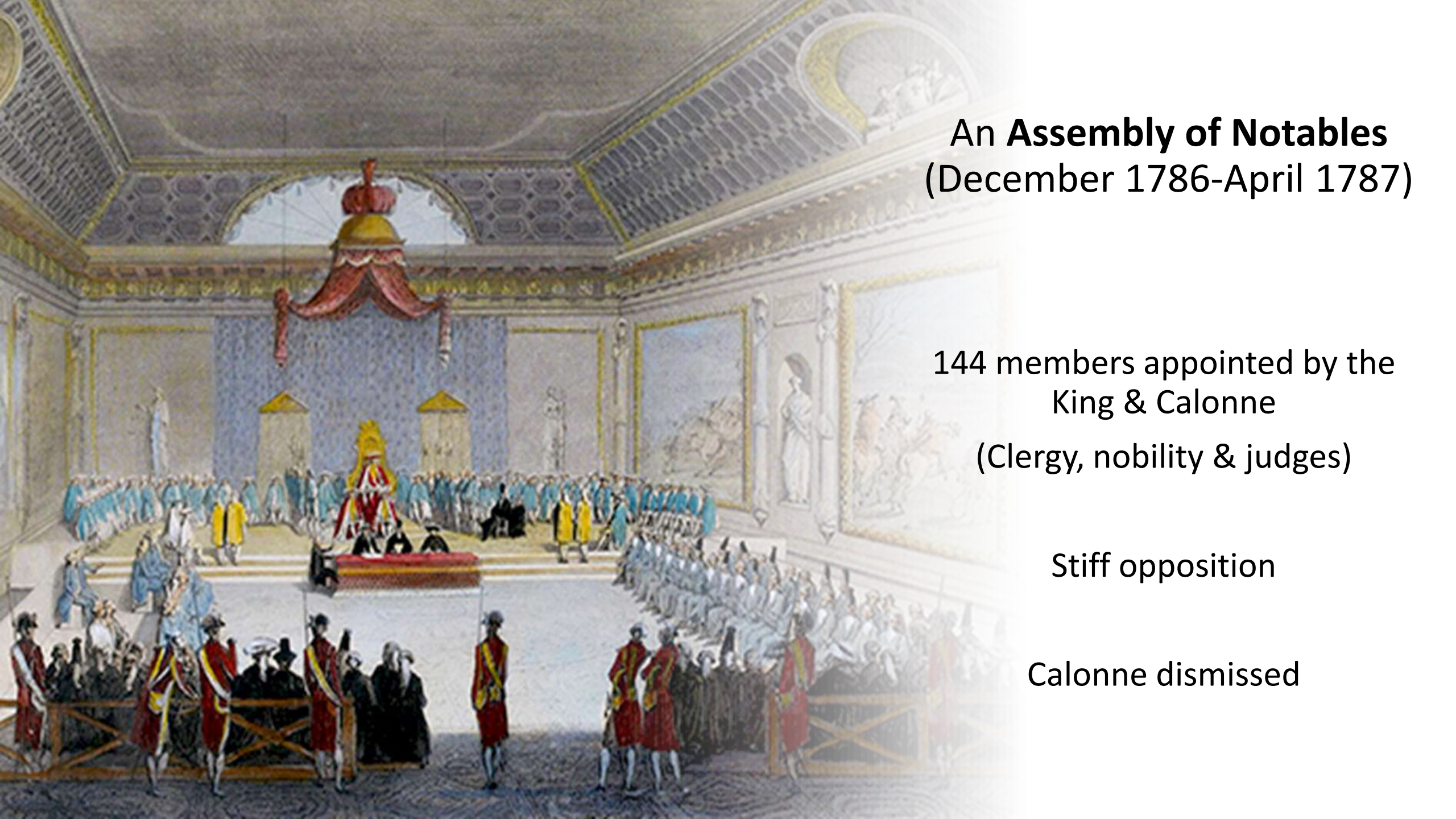
## The Parlement

The *Parlement* styled itself the representative of the French people and guardian of liberty against despotism

A breeding ground for political opposition

Obstruction to Calonne's plan to be expected





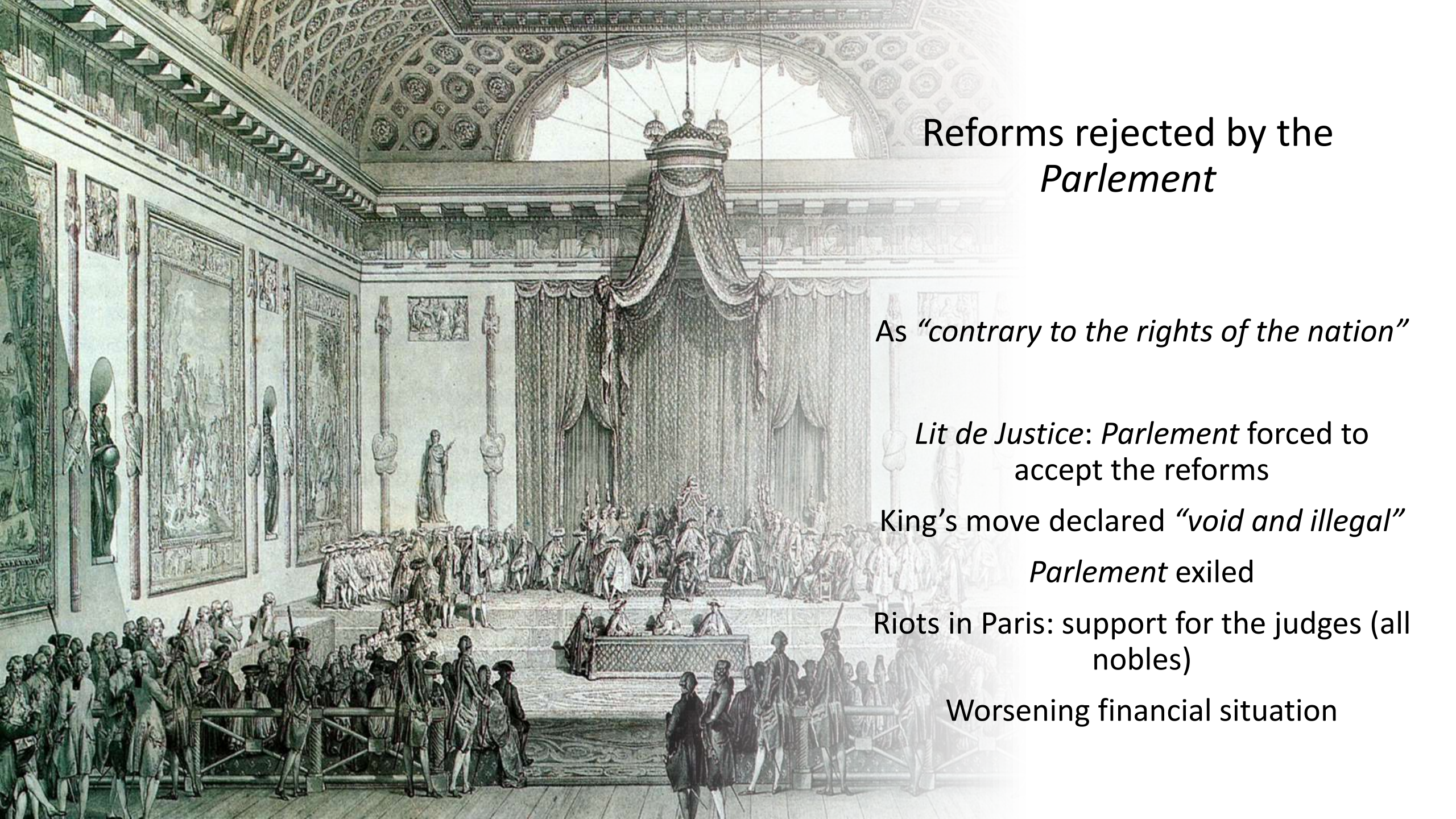
## An **Assembly of Notables** (December 1786-April 1787)

144 members appointed by the  
King & Calonne  
(Clergy, nobility & judges)

Stiff opposition

Calonne dismissed





## Reforms rejected by the *Parlement*

As “*contrary to the rights of the nation*”

*Lit de Justice*: *Parlement* forced to  
accept the reforms

King’s move declared “*void and illegal*”

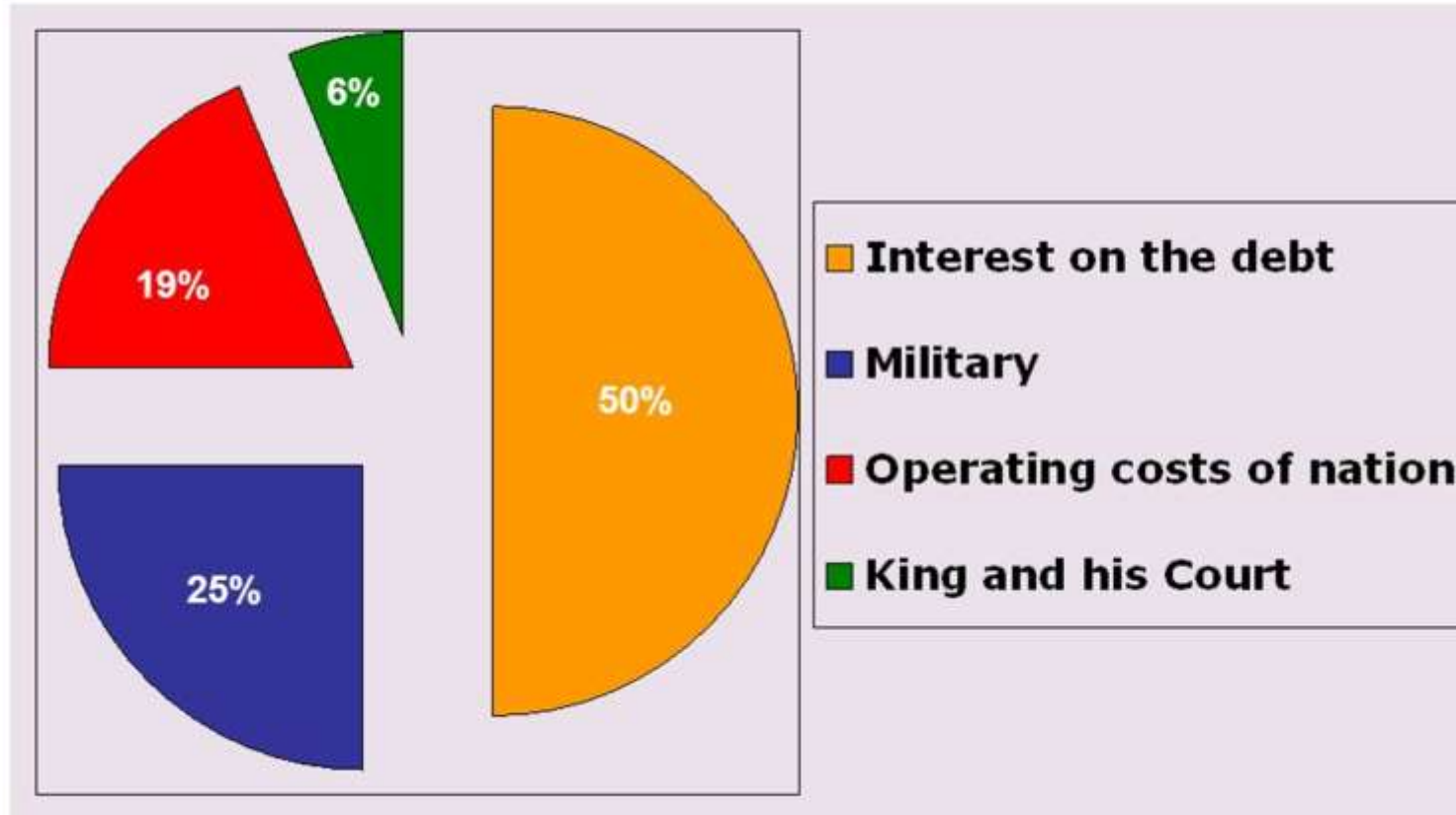
*Parlement* exiled

Riots in Paris: support for the judges (all  
nobles)

Worsening financial situation



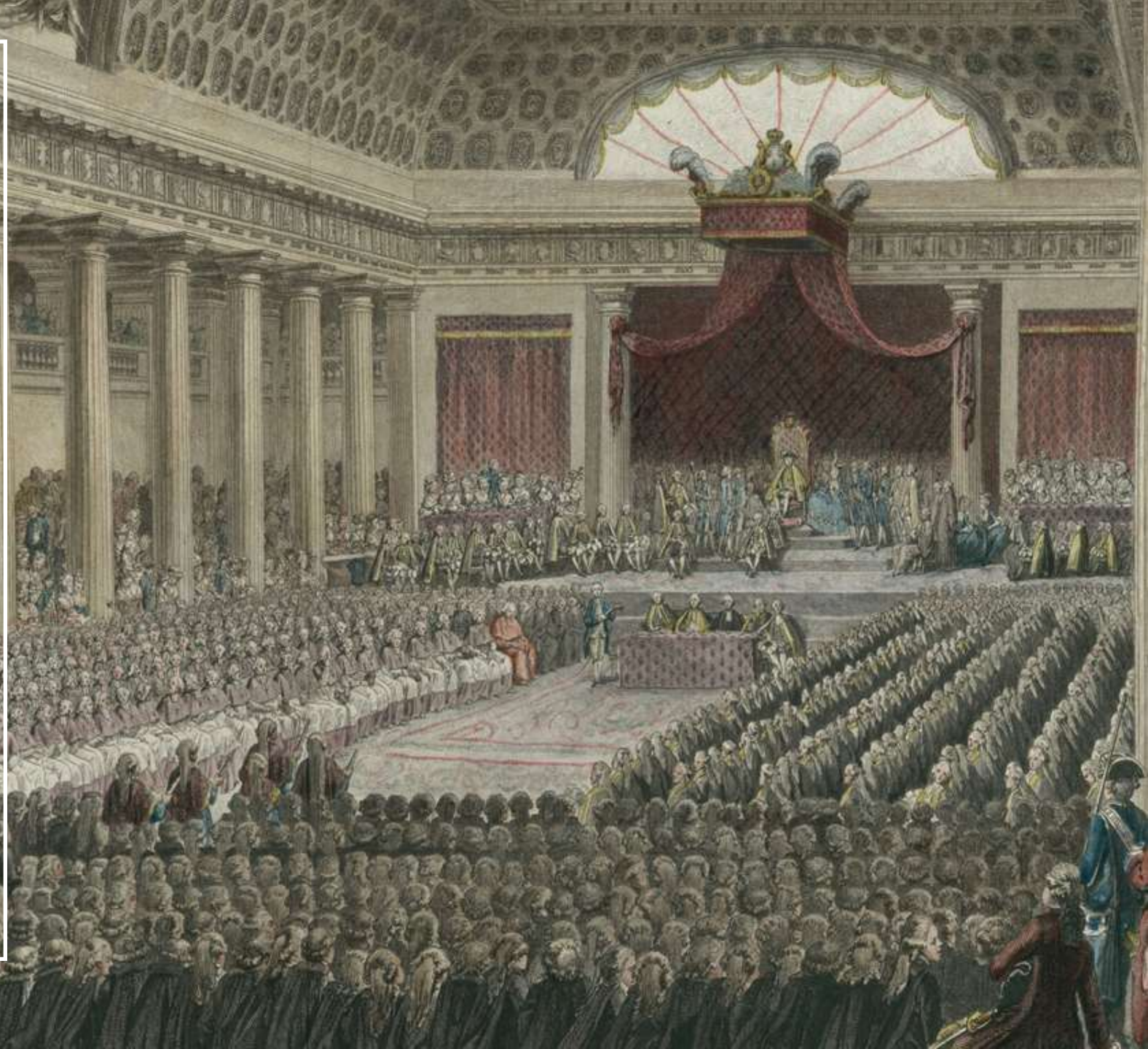
## By 1788 the national budget broke down like this





# The Estates-General

**Consultative assembly**  
(deputies representing the  
three social orders: nobility,  
clergy & Third Estate)





## Lists of grievances

60 000

A republic not an option

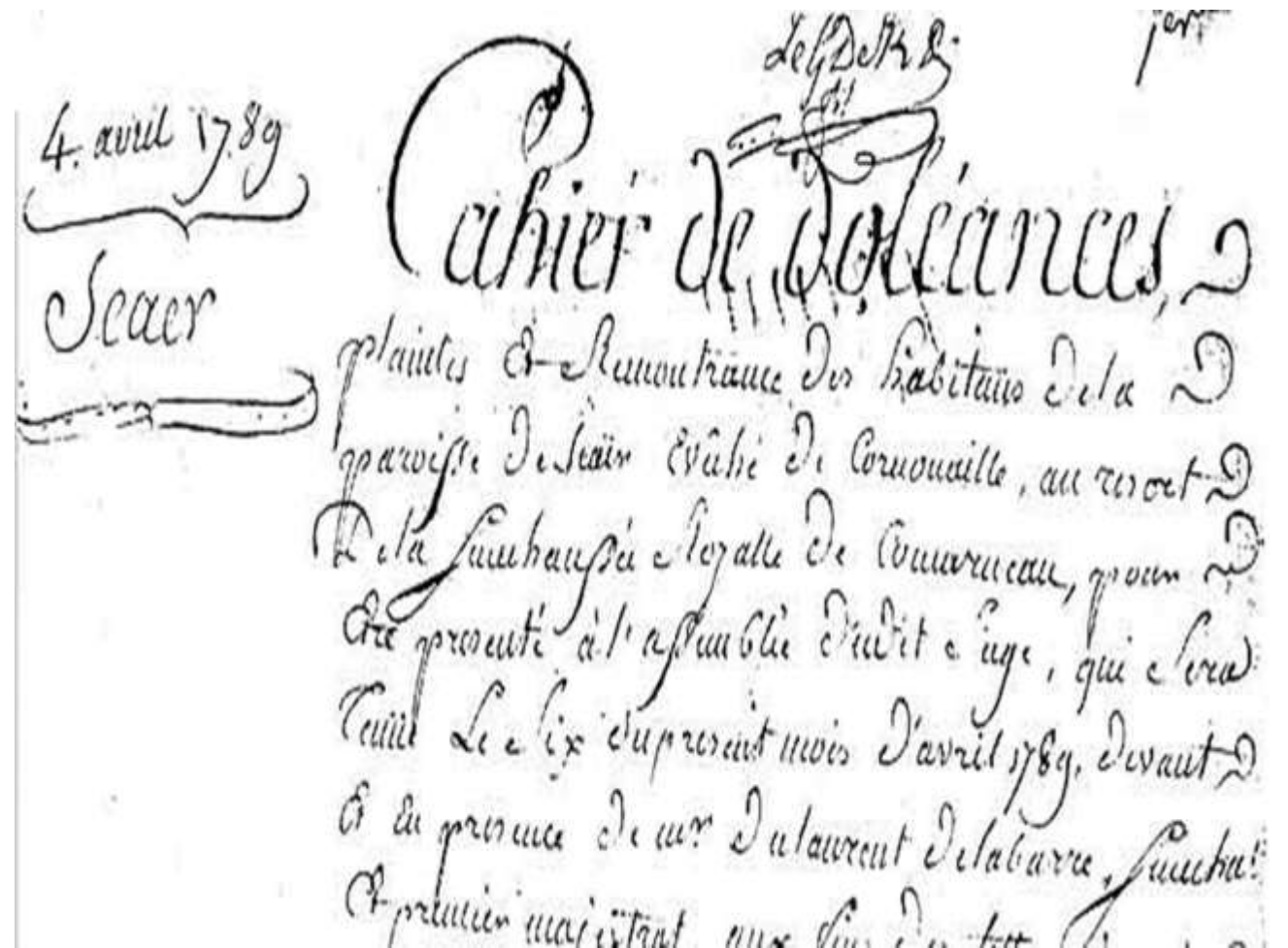
King loved and trusted

A national representation to  
approve new taxes

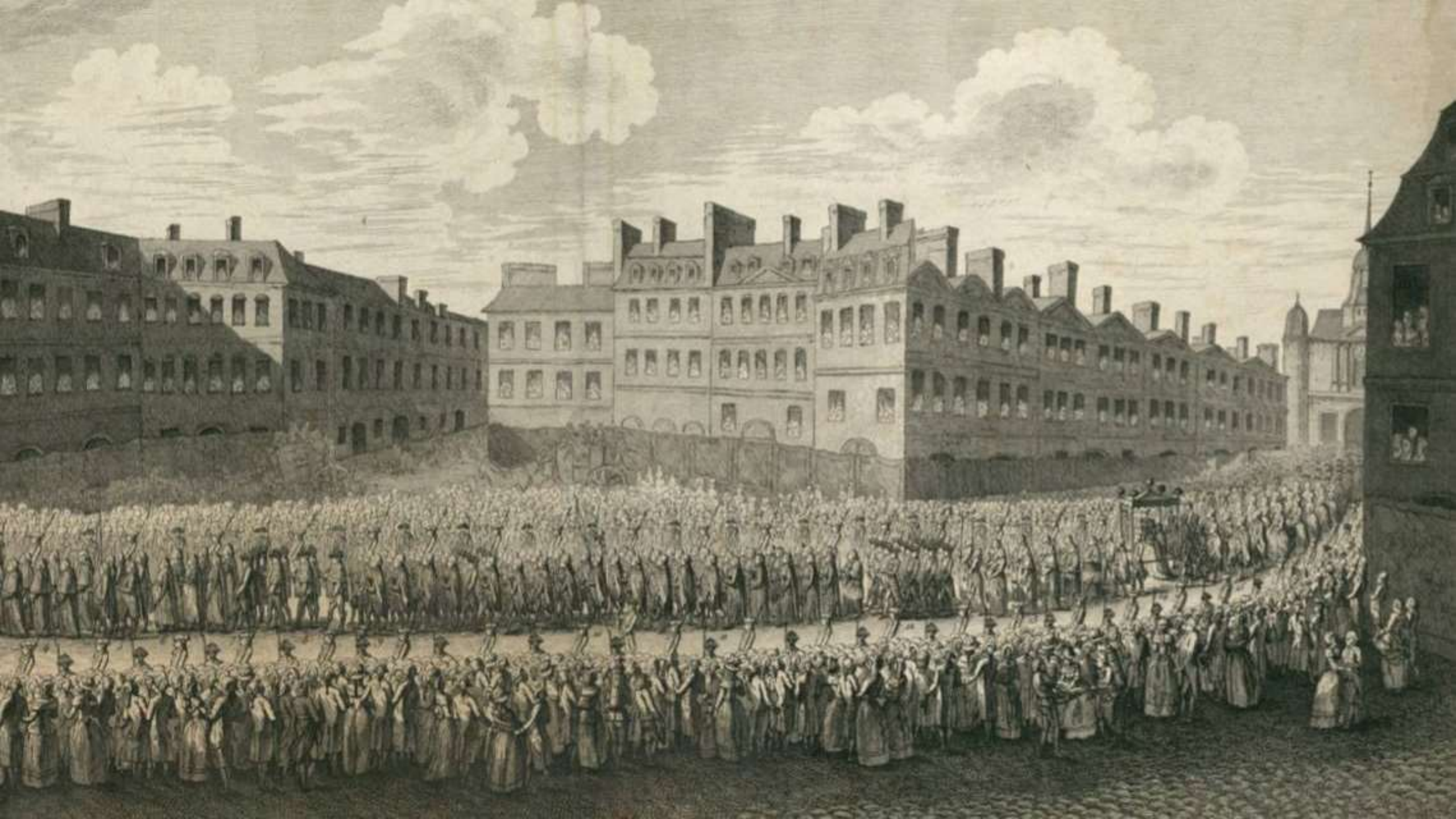
Taxation for all: the end of fiscal  
privileges

Alliance Crown-Third Estate?

A peaceful transition (constitutional  
monarchy)?









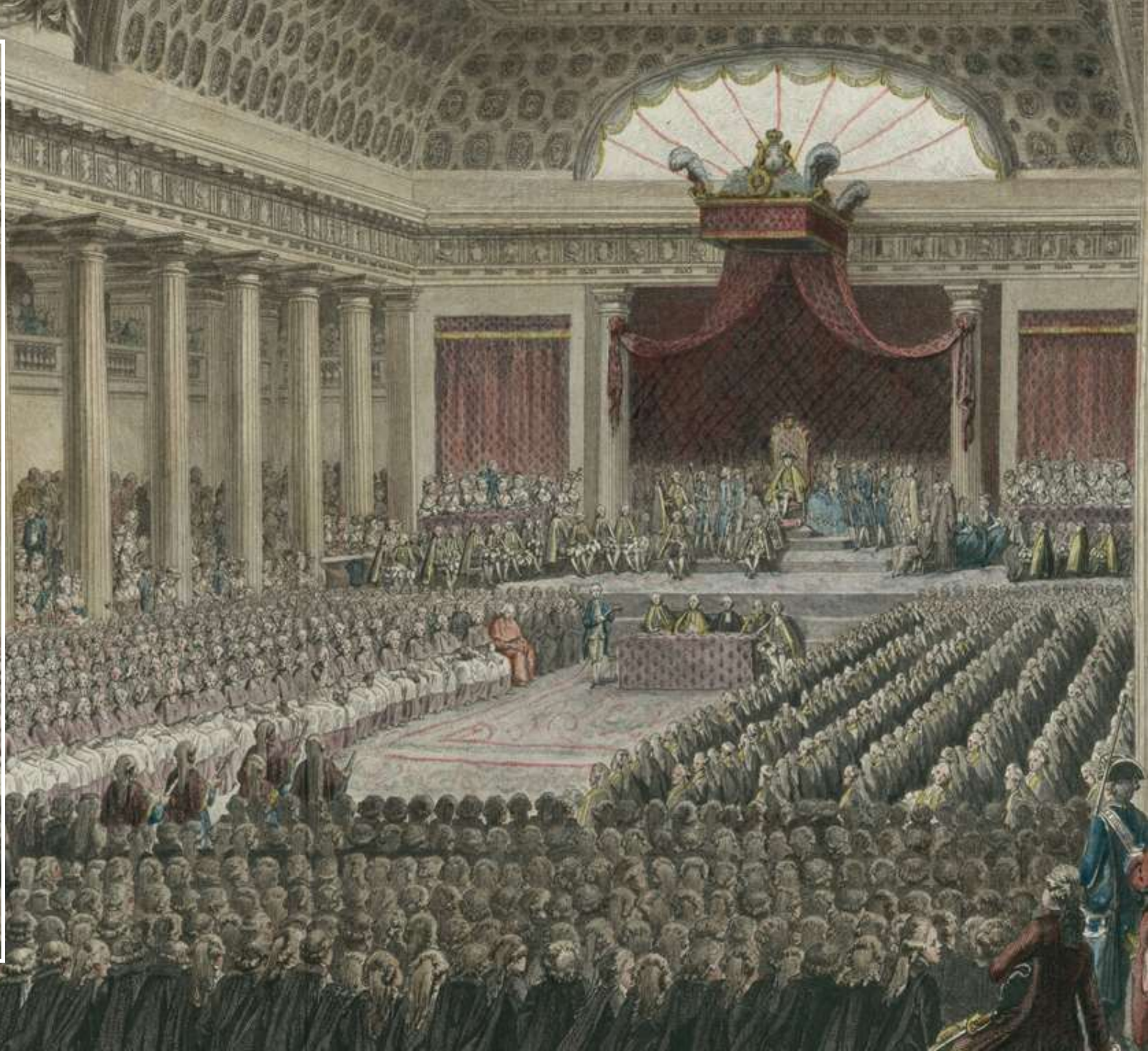




# The Estates-General: the first 7 weeks

**Procedural wrangles:**  
deputies to vote by order or  
head

The King silent







**4 May**

The death of the Dauphin (heir to the throne)

A devastated royal couple

The King irresponsible: vacuum of power

*"They are no fathers then among the third estate"* (Louis XVI)



Mourning the loss of a son at **Marly**





17 June 1789: the Third Estate  
proclaims itself **National  
Assembly**


The King's powers severely  
curtailed

20 June 1789: **the Tennis  
Court Oath**

Oath *"not to separate, and to  
reassemble wherever  
circumstances require, until  
the constitution of the  
kingdom is established."*





A portrait of Jacques Necker, a French economist and politician. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark purple coat over a white cravat. His hair is light-colored and styled in a powdered wig. He has a serious expression and is looking slightly to the right.

*“It is just a phrase”* (Necker)

King sufficiently alarmed to  
return at once to Versailles



The end of the divine rights of  
kings

The King's political powers to be  
discussed and decided by the  
Assembly







*“A pack of mad men”*

No treating with *“rebels”*

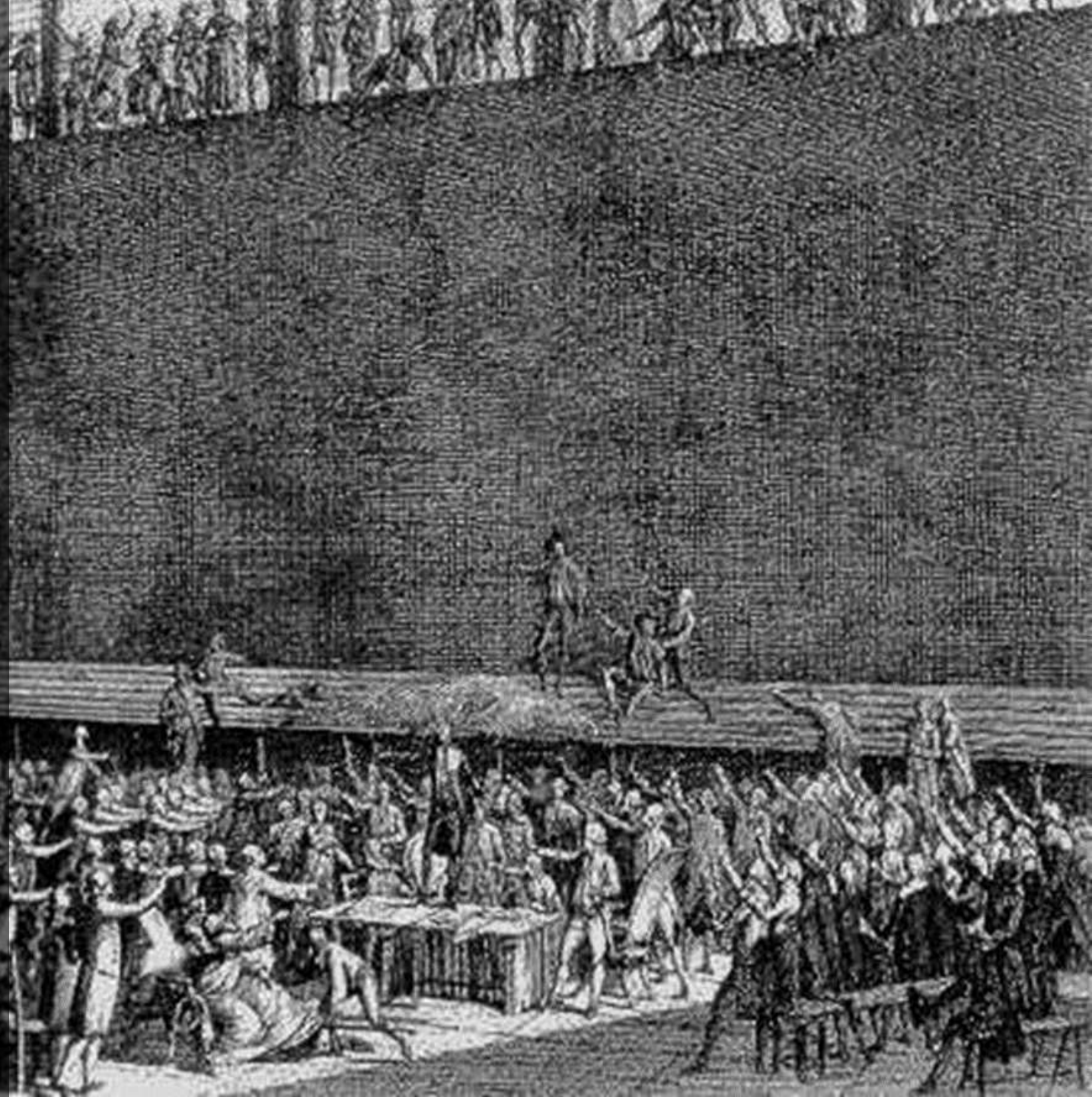




**9 July**

The Assembly renamed itself  
**National Constituent  
Assembly**

A governing body to draft a  
**Constitution**

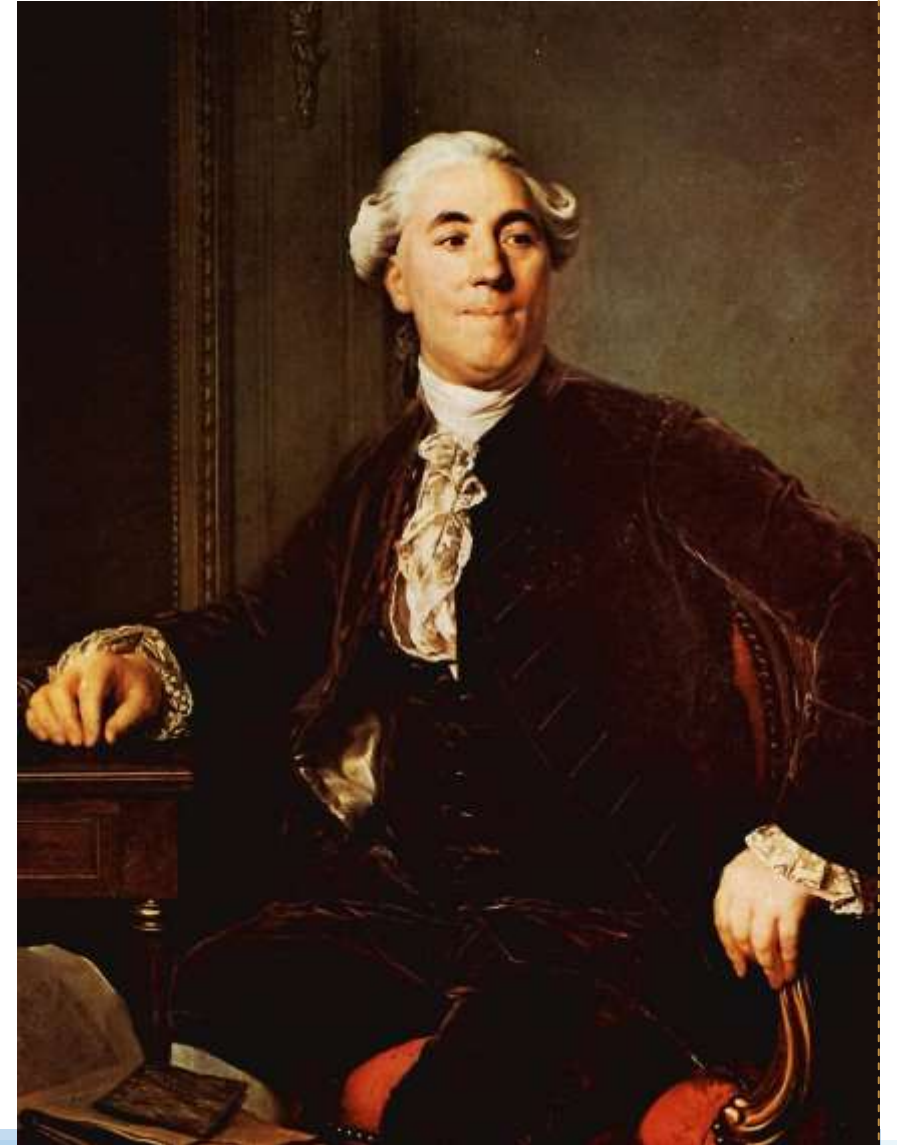




## **11 July:** Necker dismissed

Outrage in the streets of Paris (belief he was the only one to save France from economic collapse)

Shift towards a more conservative government (concentration of troops near Paris & Versailles)





## **14 July:** the storming of the Invalides (weapons)

Where to find the gunpowder: the Bastille

The primary reason behind the storming of the Bastille: gunpowder  
NOT to “the symbol of despotism”


Repeated calls to assassinate the Queen and her friends











Disappointment: only **7 prisoners**  
found at the Bastille

4 counterfeiters who promptly  
disappeared

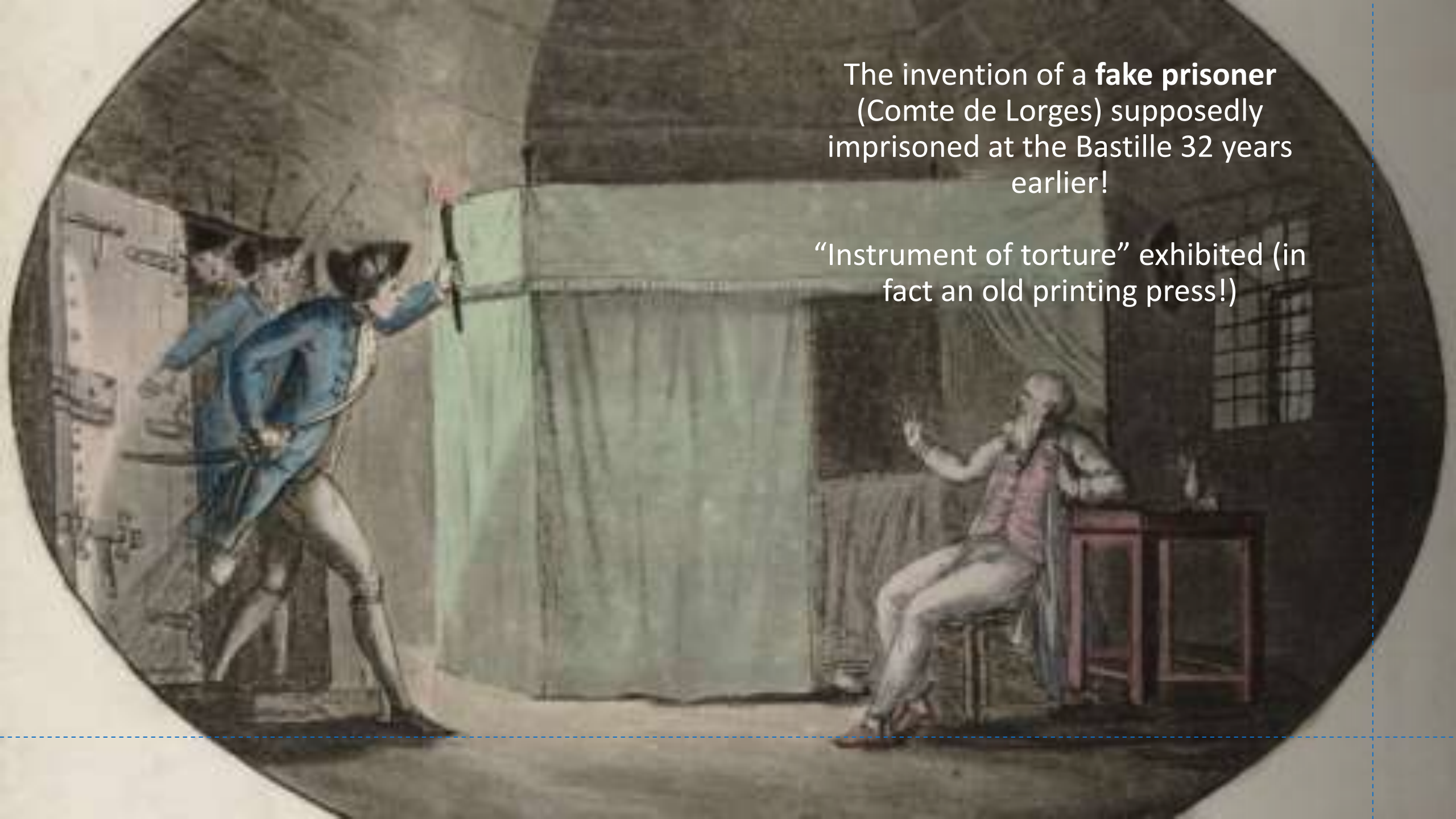
1 aristocrat accused of incest

2 madmen (quickly sent to an  
asylum!)



The invention of a **fake prisoner**  
(Comte de Lorges) supposedly  
imprisoned at the Bastille 32 years  
earlier!

“Instrument of torture” exhibited (in  
fact an old printing press!)







The birth of a myth: the storming  
of a **symbol of oppression &**  
despotism

Fake stories & fake heroes



Paris into a state of  
insurrection

Leading figures of the Paris  
*bourgeoisie*: growing concerns over  
rioting and looting

The creation of a citizens' **militia** (the  
**National Guard**) to keep order

Marquis de Lafayette: a moderate

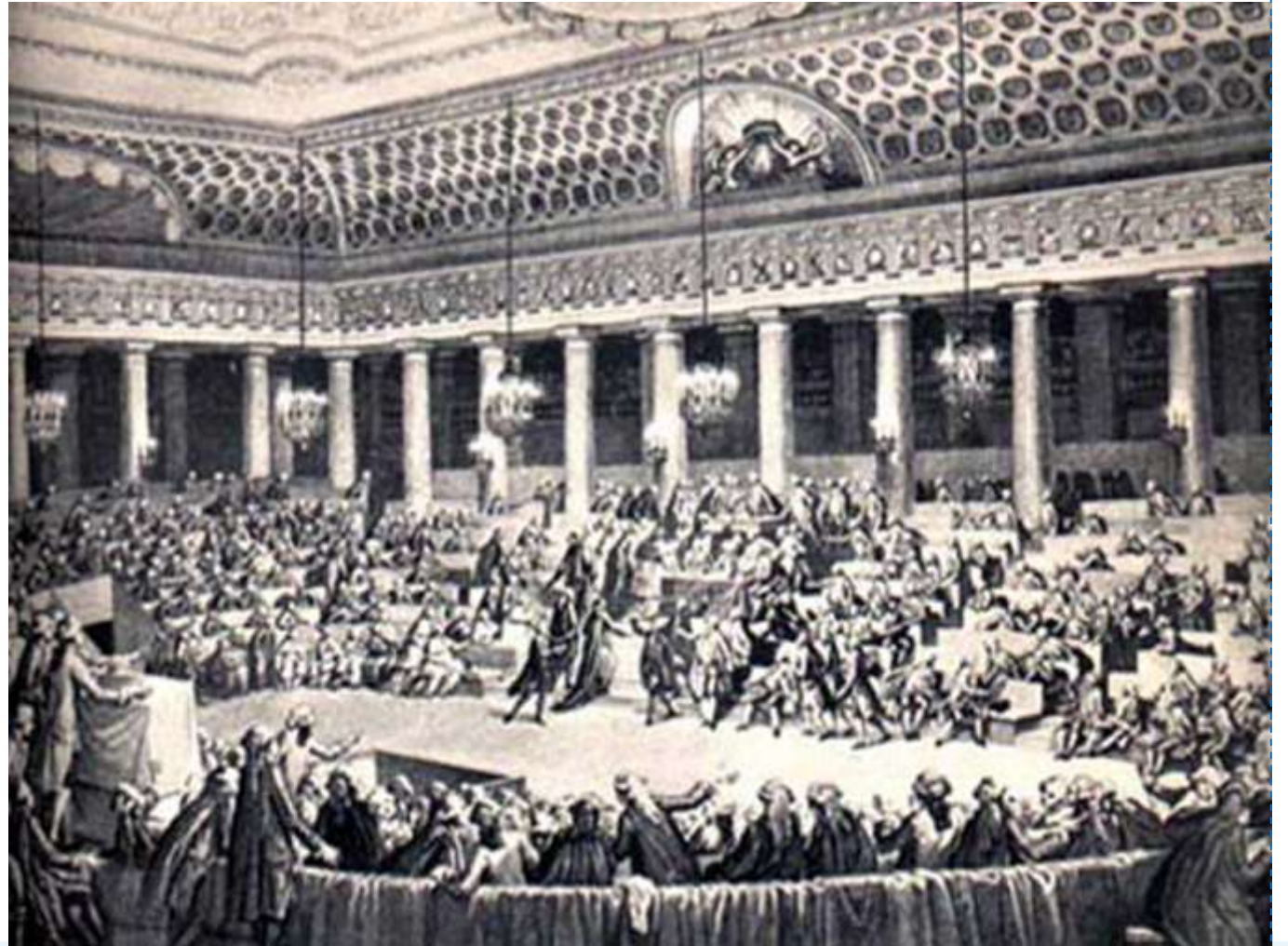




**4 August 1789:** the spectacular  
end of the feudal system and  
**fiscal privileges**

The moderates: an orderly  
revolution (the mob to be  
contained)

**No to political chaos** and the rule of  
the mob (the storming of the  
Bastille)





# Declaration of the Rights of Man & Citizen

What powers for the King?

A “suspensive veto”: the King can oppose any new law for a period of 4 years

Little political powers left for the King

Mounting popular pressure







What response from the King?

*"I owe it my myself, I owe it to my children, I owe it to my family and all my House to prevent the regal dignity which a long succession of centuries has confirmed in my dynasty from being degrade in my hands..."*

(12 October 1789)

The Declaration: *"a metaphysical and philosophical government which cannot work"*



# Should the King leave Versailles?

Louis XVI: "No"

*"The king saw a shame in withdrawing from Versailles; he was perfectly aware of the danger but he flattered himself he could avoid it by a display of force, though if it came to it, he could never decide to draw his sword against his subjects"*







Loyal troops summoned  
to Versailles

The Flanders regiment

**1 October:** a banquet

**5 October:** food riots in Paris





6 October 1789

The storming of Versailles





5 October: 10am

Comte de Saint-Priest  
Minister of the King's Household

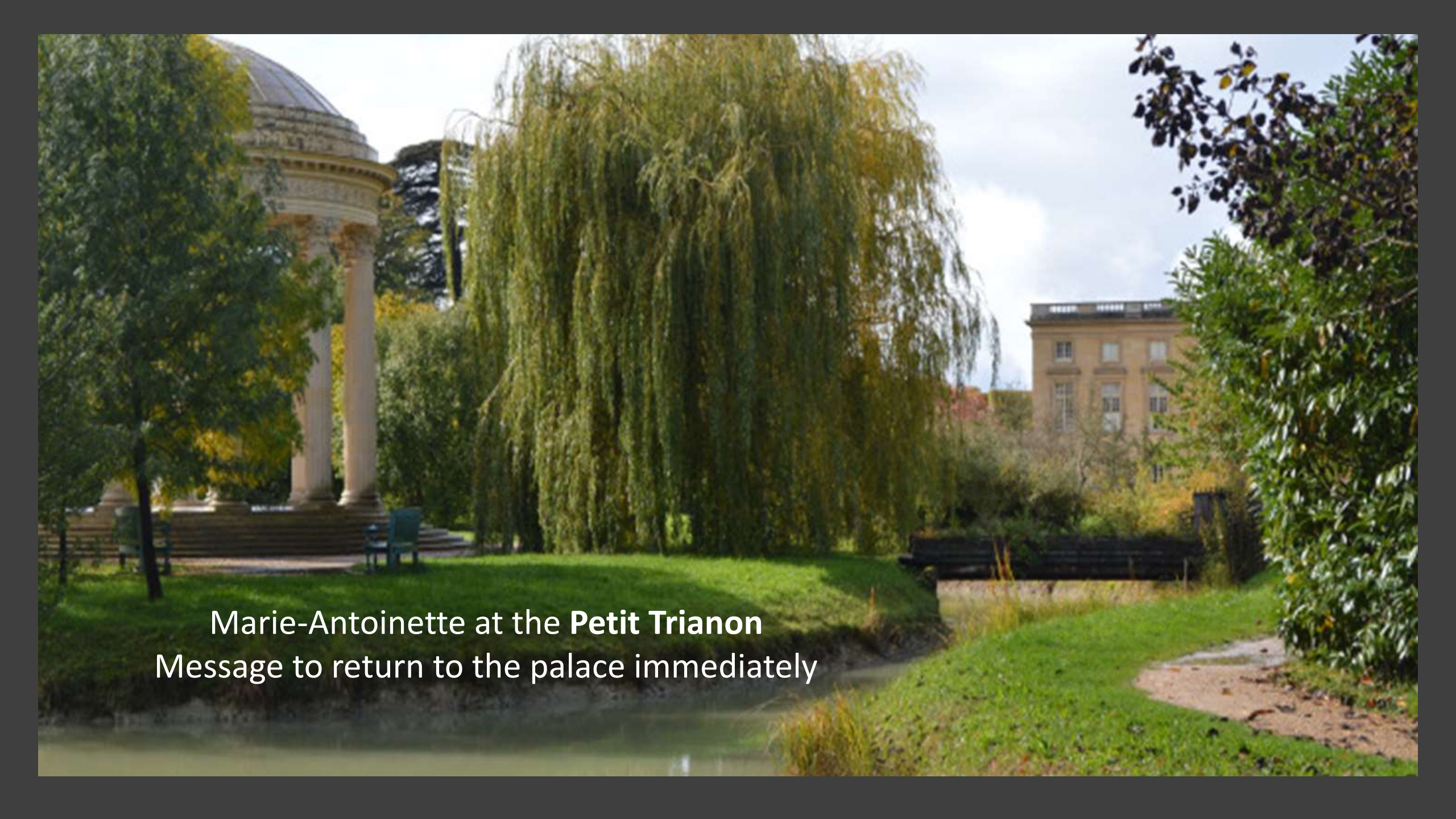
Intelligence received that a mob (mainly women) had left Paris and was making for Versailles

What did the mob want?

Bread

The King's sanction to the Declaration of the Rights of Man



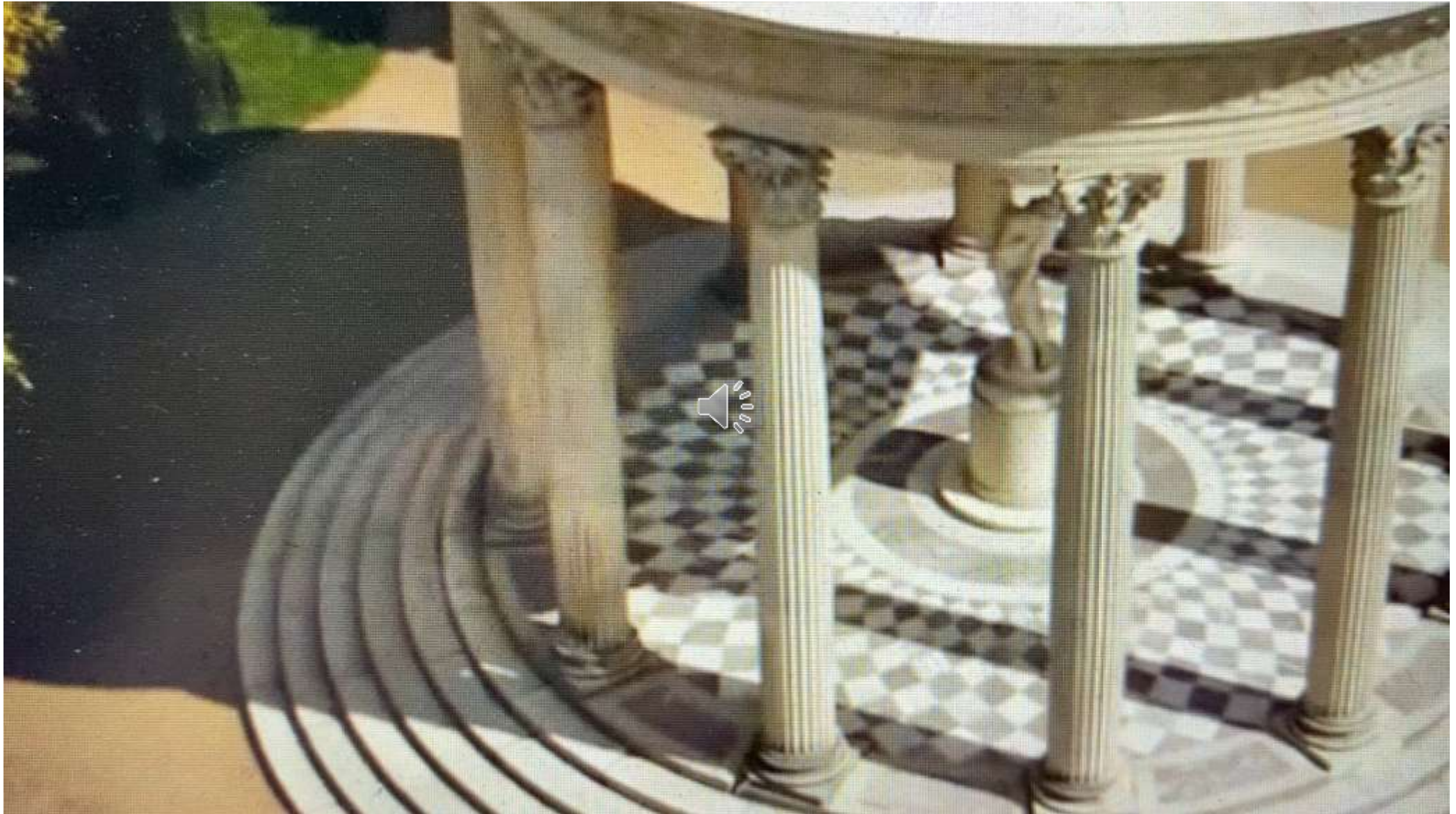
A scenic view of the Petit Trianon in Paris. In the foreground, a calm body of water reflects the sky. A large, lush green weeping willow tree stands prominently in the middle ground. To the left, a classical building with a dome and columns is partially visible. In the background, a large, multi-story building with many windows is visible. The sky is blue with some clouds. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and historical.

Marie-Antoinette at the **Petit Trianon**  
Message to return to the palace immediately













King gone shooting

*"Interrupted by events. Rode there  
and back" (Diary)*

3pm: King back at Versailles

Withdrawing from Versailles or  
staying?

Council of ministers evenly divided

**Decision to stay**





A deputation of 5 women  
received by the king

Orders to bring bread in to satisfy the  
mob

Promise to rush in grain supplies to  
Paris

Will it be enough for them to  
leave and return to Paris?



6pm

A message arrived: Lafayette and the Paris National Guard on the move

**Danger:** the National Guard now included the French Guards (who carried out the attack on the Bastille!)

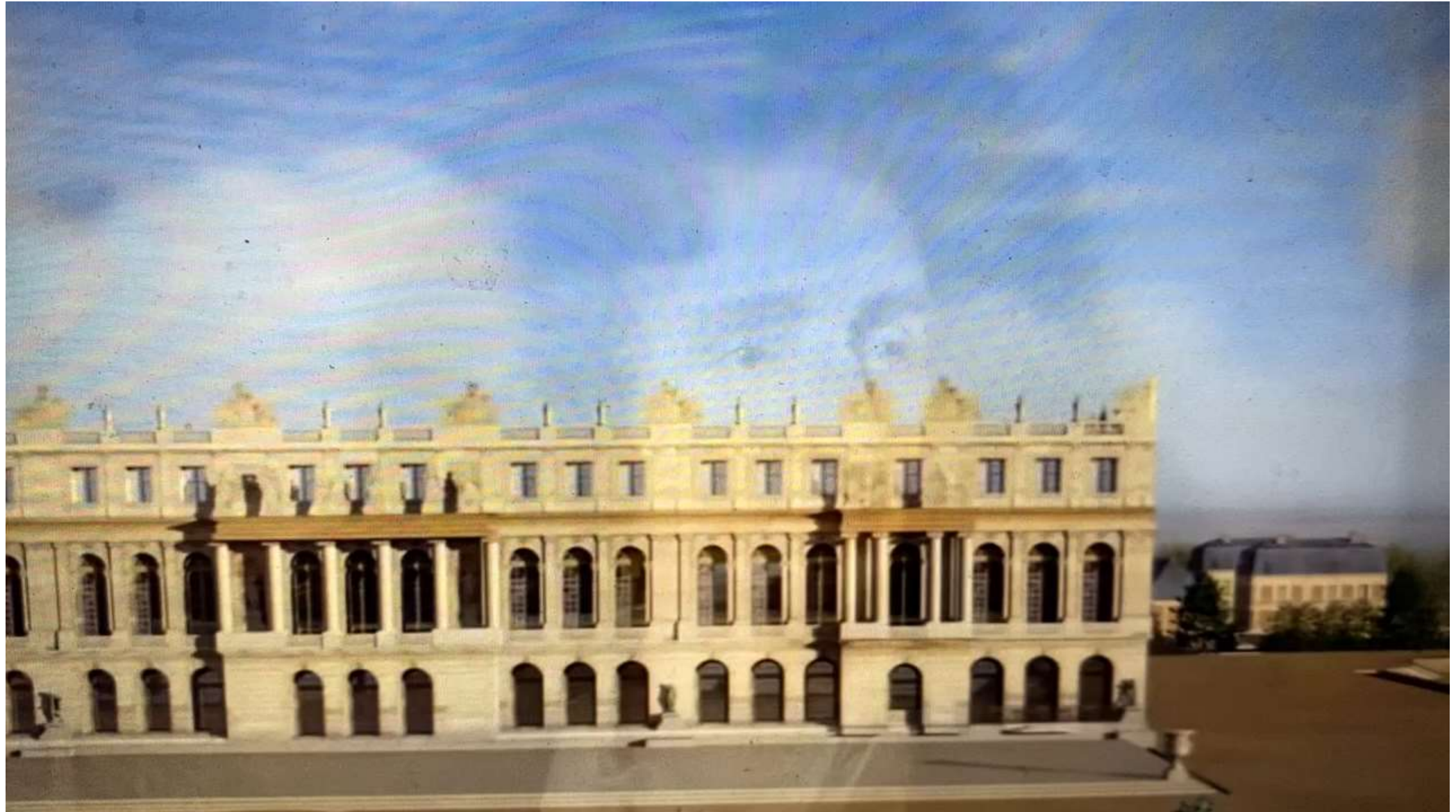
**Renewed calls** amongst ministers to leave Versailles at once

Orders given for the carriages


Marquis de Lafayette: a moderate










An aerial photograph of the Palace of Versailles and its surrounding grounds. The main palace building is in the foreground, with its long wings and central section clearly visible. In the background, there are two large, rectangular buildings, likely the royal stables, situated on a green lawn. The sky is clear and blue. Four red numbered callouts are placed on the image: 1. on the left wing of the main palace, 2. on the central part of the main palace, 3. on the left stable building, and 4. on the right stable building. A blue text box is positioned above the stable buildings, and another blue text box is positioned below the main palace building.

**3 & 4.** the royal stables (hundreds of horses and carriages): only 1 level to offer unobstructed view from the château

**1.** 1678: the terrace replaced by the Great gallery (Hall of Mirrors)

**2.** The South wing reserved for the royal family



An aerial photograph of the Palace of Versailles and its surrounding grounds. The main palace building is in the foreground, with a large formal garden featuring a central pond and symmetrical paths. In the background, there are two large, rectangular buildings, likely the royal stables, situated on a grassy field. Three red circular markers with white numbers are placed on the image: marker 1 is on the left side of the main palace building, marker 3 is on the path leading to the stables, and marker 4 is on the right stable building.

Too late!

Mob prevented the carriages from leaving the royal stables

*“A fugitive king! A fugitive king, never!”* (Louis XVI)






8pm

The Assembly took the opportunity to  
ask the king for his acceptance "*pure  
and simple*" of the Declaration

Louis XVI agreed under duress



A portrait of Louis XVI, King of France, wearing a red and gold military-style coat with a white cravat. He has a powdered wig and a serious expression.

2pm

The king goes to bed

The queen already retired to her apartment with 2 ladies-in-waiting





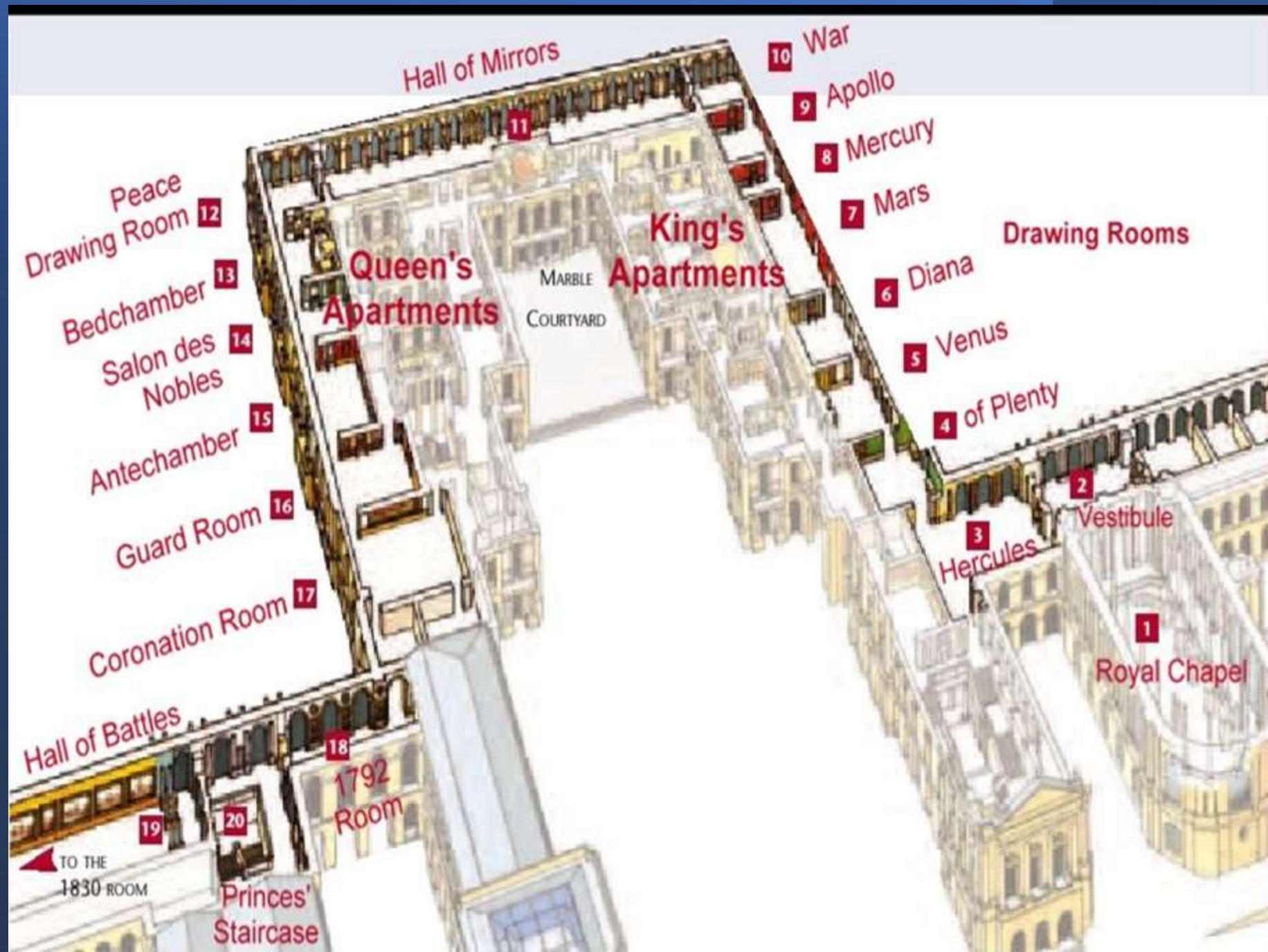


5am

Lafayette left the palace for  
his grand-father townhouse  
in Versailles

*“General Morpheus”* accused  
of *“sleeping against his king”*













*“Save the queen, her life is  
in danger”*

*...re d'un Garde-du-Corps a la porte de la  
la Reine par des brigands*













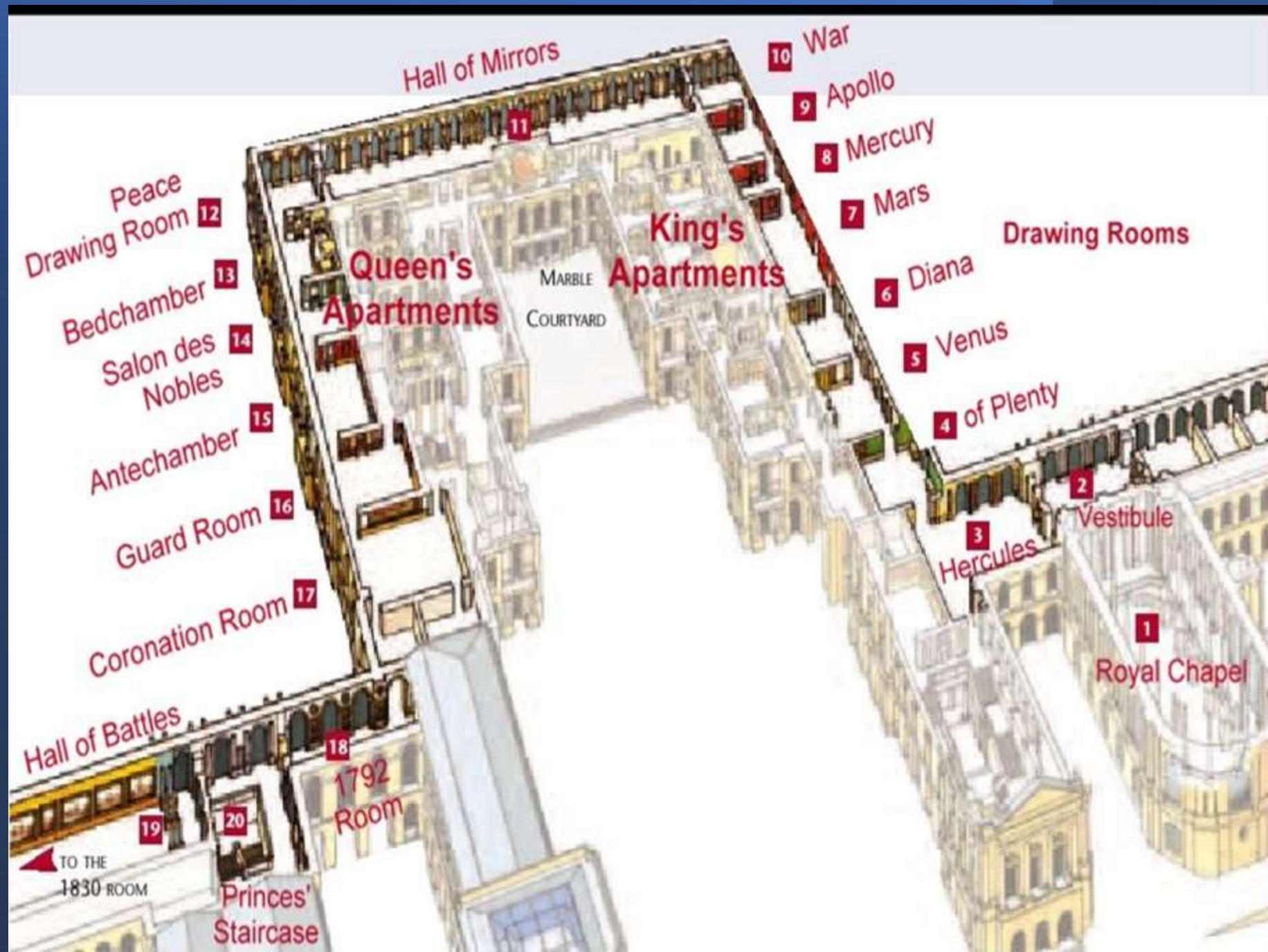




The royal family reunited

Crowd gathered in the  
Marble courtyard below







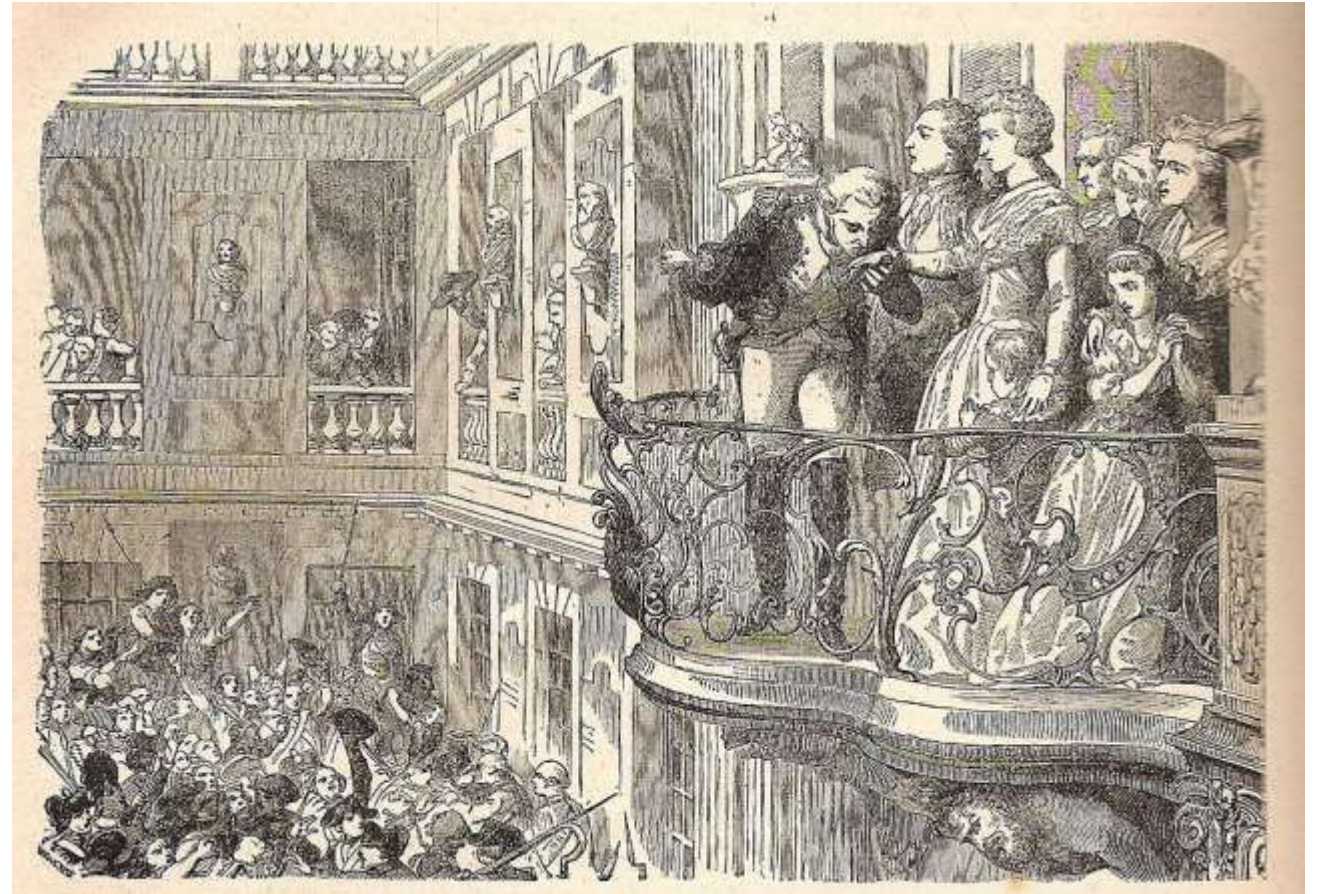
She's already fled !





*“Head erect, her mouth firmly set, she appeared upon the balcony. She appeared not as a petitioner, not as one seeking a favor. She looked like a soldier marching to the attack, firm of will, ready to die without flinching. She appeared, but she made no sort of obeisance. Yet her very defiance had an appeasing influence”*

(Stefan Zweig)







*“They want to force us, the king  
and me, to go to Paris with the  
heads of our bodyguards  
carried before us at the end of  
their pikes”*









## A grotesque procession

October 6 (1pm)

The royal family leaves  
Versailles for Paris (never to  
return)

Seven hours to cover the  
distance




# From Versailles to the Tuileries Palace

The royal family prisoner in Paris?

The October days: the destruction  
of the last vestige of the king's  
political independence of action







The Tuileries: the King's  
**official residence in Paris**  
since 1682

Only a small apartment for  
the Queen when she  
visited Paris

7 October: improvisation

The Tuileries: temporary residence for courtiers  
& artists

800 workers renovated the royal apartments



# At the Tuileries...

Royal couple considered themselves prisoners  
A dual policy: promises made under duress are  
not binding

Marie-Antoinette: a permanent state of anguish  
Her obsession: to flee Paris and recover her  
freedom





6 October 1789 – 20 June 1791

A period of up and downs within a declining  
trajectory

Periods of deceiving calm followed by renewed  
violence

Passive acceptance of the Revolution until the  
end of 1790







1790: the last summer at Saint-Cloud

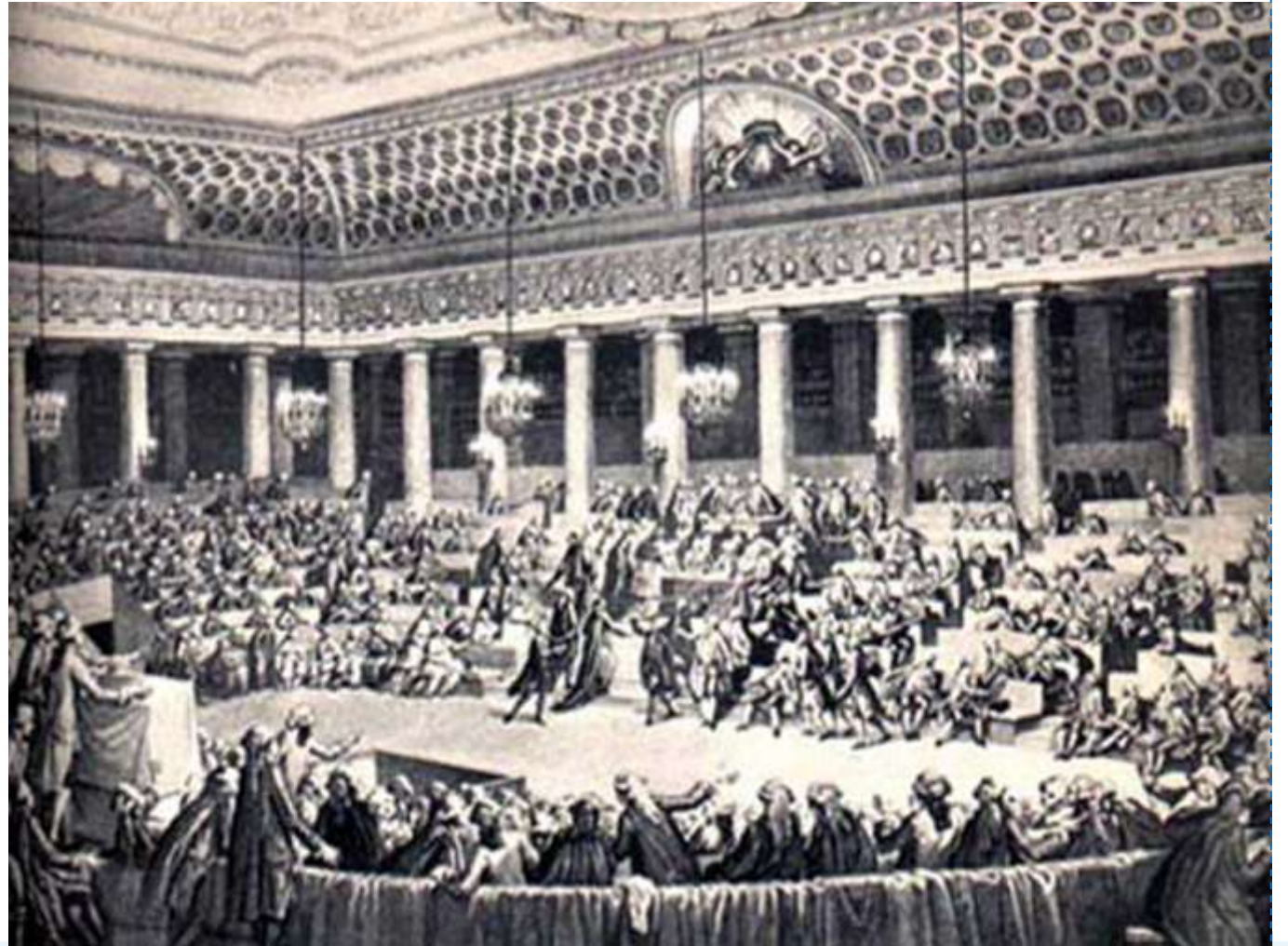




**The National Assembly**  
followed the royal family in  
Paris

The moderates: how to celebrate  
the first anniversary of July 14?

**To promote national reconciliation  
& unity** (not the storming of the  
Bastille)

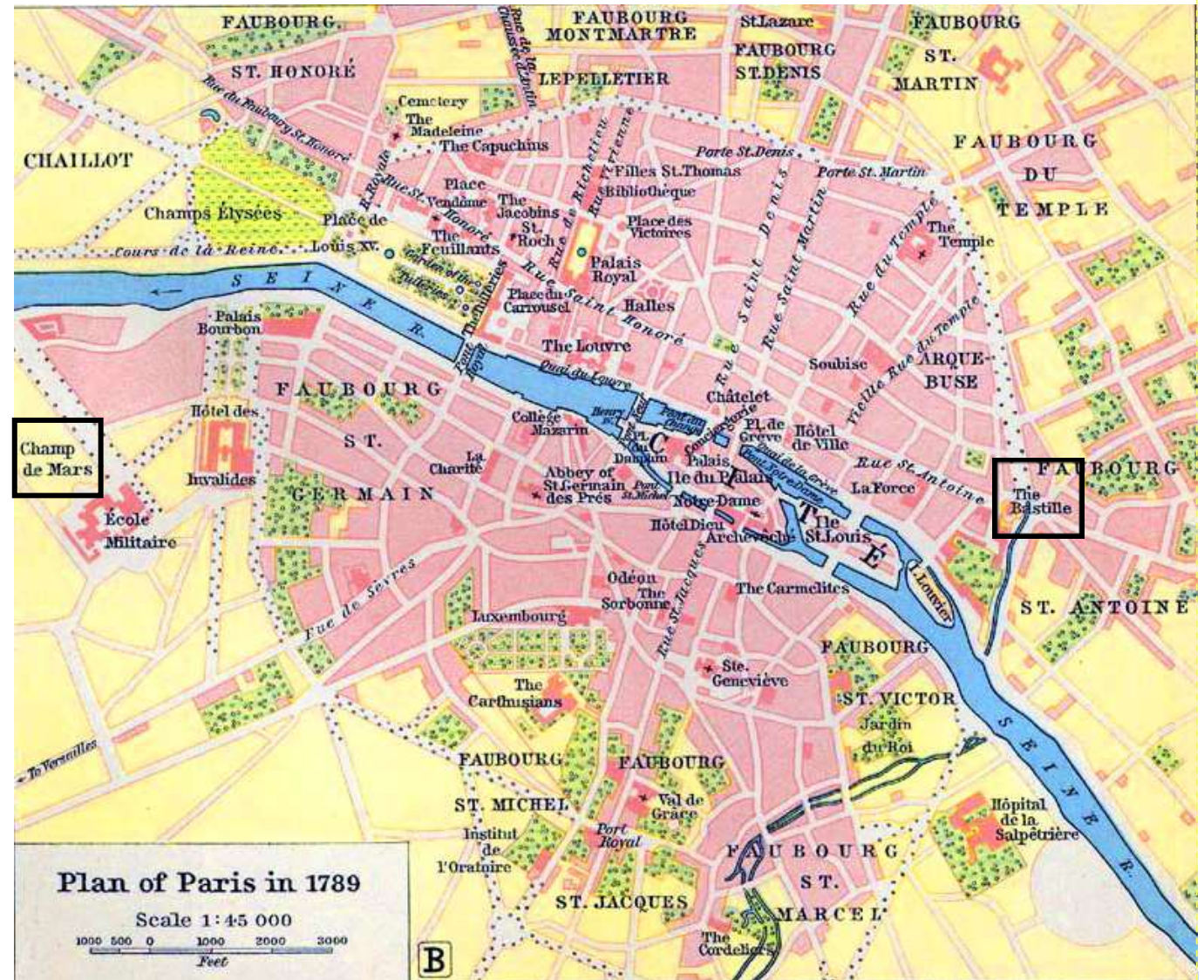




## 14 July 1790: the *Fête de la Fédération*

The location: Champ de Mars  
(far from the Bastille)

## A grand ceremony: the illusion of reconciliation & unity









A detailed engraving of the National Assembly in 1790, showing a large hall with many people in 18th-century attire. Some are seated at long tables, while others stand. The architecture features classical columns and a high ceiling. The scene is busy, representing a significant political gathering.

12 July 1790

The Civil Constitution of the Clergy: a “red line” for the king

The Catholic Church reorganized without the Pope’s agreement

Church land confiscated


Members of the clergy to be elected

Mandatory oath to France

Louis XVI opposed





This is a detailed historical engraving of the Palace of the Tuileries in Paris. The central focus is the large, multi-story palace building with its characteristic mansard roof and numerous windows. In front of the palace is the Grand Canal, a long, straight body of water. To the left of the canal is the Apollo Fountain, a large, ornate structure with multiple tiers and statues. To the right of the canal is the Apollo Fountain, another large, ornate structure with multiple tiers and statues. The gardens are filled with people, including many in carriages, and there are several smaller fountains and statues throughout the scene. The overall style is that of an 18th-century engraving, with fine lines and a rich color palette.

18 April 1791: the royal family  
prevented from leaving the  
Tuileries for Saint-Cloud



Escape



LOUIS XVI STOPPED IN HIS FLIGHT AT VARENNES.

ARRESTATION DU ROY LOUIS.



UN FILM D'ETTORE SCOLA

JEAN-LOUIS BARRAULT MARCELLO MASTROIANNI

HANNA SCHYGULLA HARVEY KEITEL

# LA NUIT DE VARENNES



JEAN-CLAUDE BRIALY ANDREA FERREOL MICHEL VITOLD  
LAURA BETTI ENZO JANNACCI PIERRE MALET et DANIEL GELIN





# The royal family recognized at Varennes

Gruelling return to Paris

*"I exist... but I have been terribly  
uneasy about you, and it distresses  
me to think how much you will  
suffer if you get no news of us."*





## Reciprocal deception

The Assembly: the King as a constitutional monarch

14 September 1791: Louis XVI swore allegiance to the Constitution







# Double-game

Correspondence with moderate revolutionaries

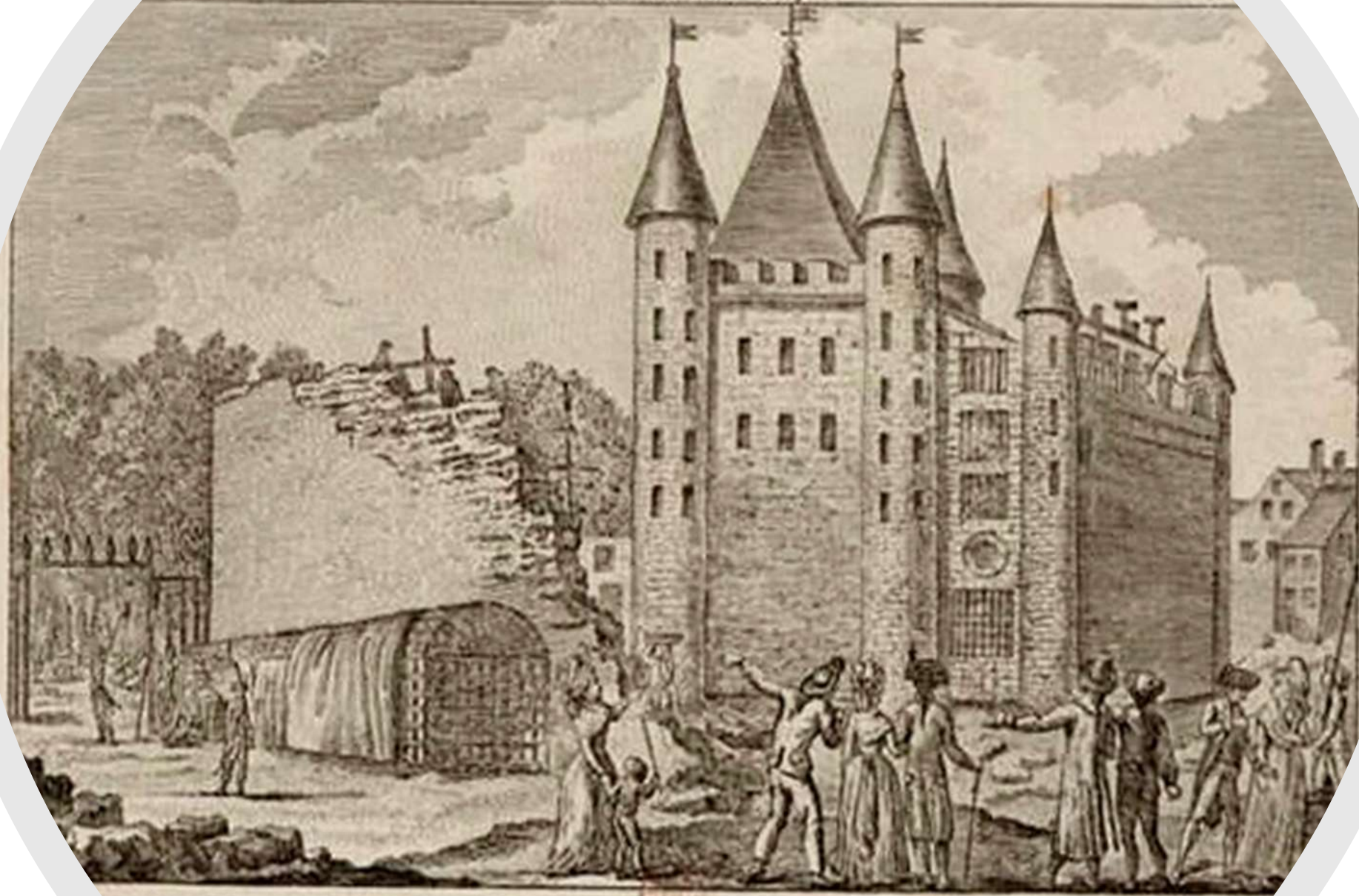
*"You need have no anxiety! I shall not allow myself to be misled by these '**enragés**'. If I have interviews with some of them, or enter into relationships with them in any way, it is only in order to make use of them; and I loathe them too much to make common cause with them, whatever the circumstances."*



10 August 1792: the storming of the Tuileries Palace







est qui'ouvrent de grands yeux à la vue de ces donjons du Temple rense  
et sa famille.





21 January 1793



# The “Widow Capet”

3 July 1793: the Queen separated  
from her son

2 August 1793: transfer to the  
**Conciergerie** (“the antechamber of  
death”)















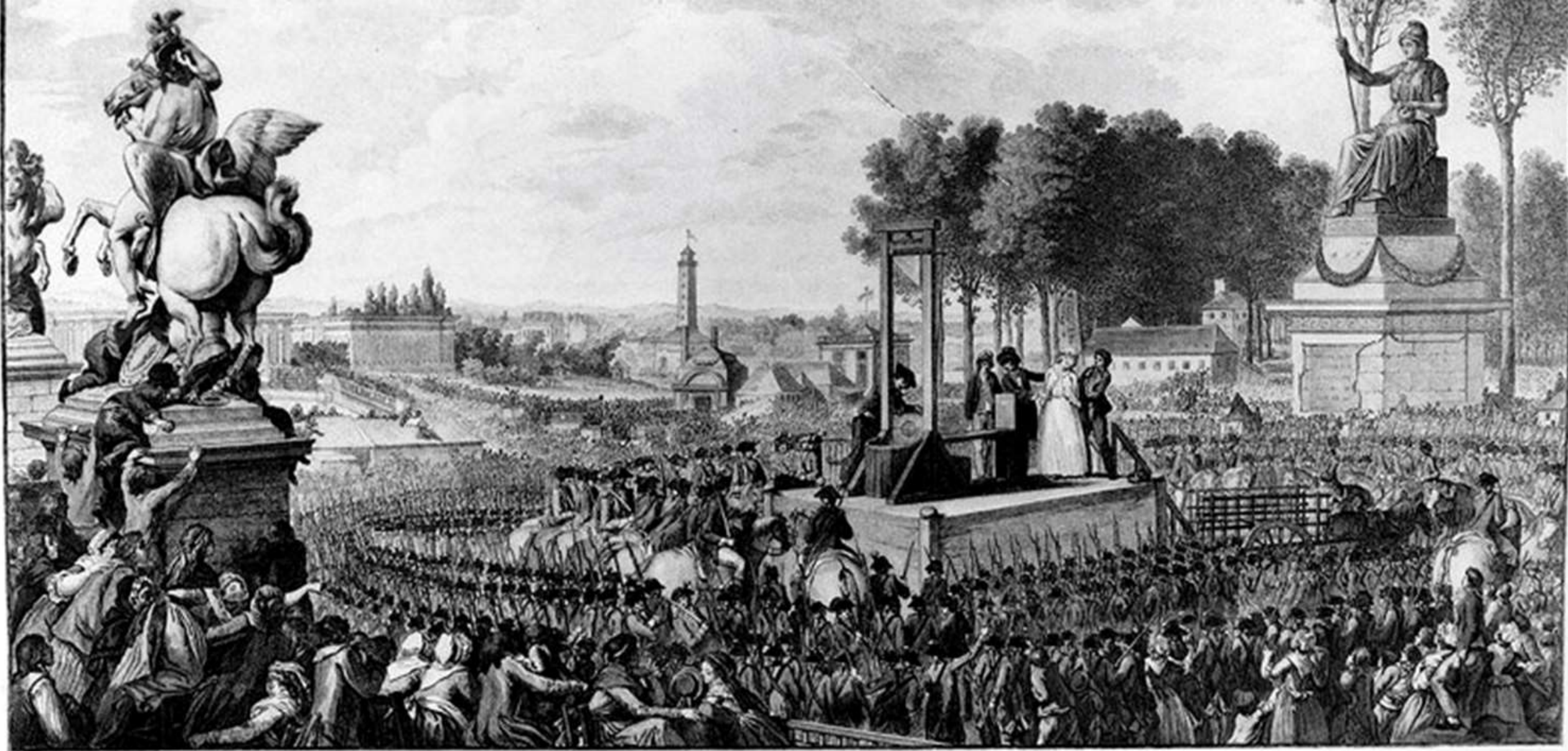
**16 October 1793**

*“With her hands tied behind  
her back she sits as  
challengingly upright on the  
wooden seat of the tumbril as  
if she were seated upon a  
throne”*

(Stefan Zweig)







*Journée du 16 Octobre 1793.*