

PALAIS DE VERSAILLES



Versailles, 1789

5 MAY 1789

WELCOME

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to BUSUN 2010! I am beyond excited to be meeting you all for this year's committee: Versailles, 1789. At the risk of offending all the other chairs, but upholding the characteristically French egotism of the committee, I am absolutely confident that this will be the best committee at BUSUN. So, to introduce myself:

My name is Daniel Ma, a junior at Brown University, originally from Edison, NJ. I am double concentrating in Comparative Literature in Literary Translation between French and Italian, and History. I have been participating in Model UN since the seventh grade, and have an immense experience with historical committees, both as a delegate and as a chair.

The purpose of this background guide is to give you a basic understanding of the complex issues, the historical impact and the possibilities for solutions in this time period. As an advanced committee outside the more mainstream GA's et cetera, there is a certain degree of knowledge to be expected out of the delegates. So, this background guide will try its best to be comprehensive in its information. Coming in with outside research would be phenomenal, and expected, but if all else fails, I personally hope that this background guide will be enough to get by the weekend.

This committee will begin in May of 1789, when the Estates-General of all of France are convened to deal with the greatest crisis the "oldest nation of Europe" has ever seen. You will represent, not the delegates of the Estates-

General, but the advisors, councilors, officers, staff, family and close friends of the King Louis XVI, who will be represented by me. As every Model UN committee should have a significant theme on the broader spectrum of things, the weight of the French Revolution on the rest of the world may be one of the most important events in all of history, short of the discovery of fire. The entire world turns to Paris and France as the center of the world, and Revolution here means a change in every opinion in the world, some way or another. As the wealthiest men and women in the world, in the most powerful political, economic and cultural capital in the world, what we will explore over a weekend is the backbone of Western civilization afterwards, whether you are aware of it or not.

The topic is general and vague enough for you to have your own opinion: How to Save France.

Good luck with your preparation, and I hope you enjoy delving into the most important moment in international history within the last five centuries (seriously.) If you have any questions or problems, be sure to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,
Daniel Ma
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COMMITTEE RULES

Before going into the topic, I feel it is appropriate to address the specific role of the committee, the delegates and our modified rules of decorum.

Essentially, this committee is the gathering of the most powerful members of royal authority in France, in 1789. I, the chair, will be the monarch, Louis XVI. This is very

convenient for you, because of Louis' personal weaknesses and indecisiveness in administration means that the chair will take little action. Thus, while on paper the sovereign is absolute and can do whatever he wants, in reality, because of Louis' indecisiveness, you, the delegates, will take a crucial role. Here is a list of our delegates:

CABINET

First Minister, Minister of Finance : Jacques Necker

Foreign Minister : Armand Marc, Comte de Montmorin de St. Harém

Secretary of State of War : Philippe Henri, Marquis de Ségur

Secretary of State of the Maison de Roi,
Secretary of State of Protestant Affairs :
Louis Charles Auguste le Tonnelier, baron de Breteuil, baron de Preuilly

Keeper of the Seals : Charles Louis François de Paule de Barentin

Minister Without Portfolio : François-Emmanuel Guignard, comte de Saint-Priest

Secretary of State of the Navy : César Henri, comte de la Luzern

Crown Governor of Saint-Domingue: Alexandre de Vincent de Mazade

ECCLÉSIASTICAL OFFICE

Archbishop of Reims: Alexandre Angélique de Talleyrand-Périgord

Archbishop of Paris : Jean Baptise Joseph de Gobel

ROYAL FAMILY AND GRAND ARISTOCRACY

Marie Antoinette, Reine de France

Louis Xavier Stanislas de France, Duc d'Anjou, comte de Provence

Charles-Philippe de France, Comte d'Artois, Colonel-General of the Cent Suisses

Louis-Philippe II, Duc d'Orléans, Colonel-General of the Hussars

Louis Henri, Prince de Condé, Colonel-General of the Infantry

Gabrielle de Polastron, Duchesse de Polignac
Elisabeth de France

MILITARY

Chief of Versailles Security, Colonel-General of the Dragoons : François Henri de Coigny

Marshal of France : Augustin-Joseph de Mailly

Admiral of France : Louis Jean Marie de Bourbon

Grand Equerry, General of the Cavalry : Charles

Eugène de Lorraine, Prince de Lambesc

OFFICE MÉTROPOLITAIN

Mayor of Paris : Jacques de Flesselles

Because this is not a modern day cabinet, nor an organ of the United Nations, we do not function democratically. Whatever actions we take will not necessarily be voted on, nor does it require the majority of the committee to pass it. Remember that we are the vanguard against republicanism, and therefore, different members have different roles. To get something done and pass something, you must instead convince the King (me) that it is a good idea. Generally, this means that the Cabinet must pass it, and the majority of the committee must not have an objection to it. We must however note the influencing nature of palace intrigue. The queen, Marie Antoinette, the King's two brothers, Louis-Xaver and Charles, in addition to the royal princes, the queen's favorite the duchess of Polignac and the King's aunt, have significant ways of influencing elections, votes, and other matter put forward by the cabinet. In short, everyone in the committee has a voice, a particular way of convincing the King, and a role to play.

As for the rules of debate, there will be a few minor changes. It will be looser, functioning as a cabinet, having fewer rules for the flow of debate. As for historical authenticity, although it would be pretty awesome to speak in French, English will of course be the working language. You must also take into consideration the various hierarchies and ranks of the committee. Royalty precedes nobility, and nobility precedes commoners, which we won't try to enforce too much, but it would be nice to hear someone

say “Her Majesty”, as opposed to “Marie Antoinette.” Instead of referring to “The Chair”, it would be nice to hear “His Majesty”, “His Highness”, “My Liege”, “Sire”, et cetera. No, this isn’t just me being weird. Having historic authenticity does contribute to the debate, makes it more lively and French.

All in all, it is an informal gathering of the King’s most important advisors, and thus debate will be fluid, which we will adapt to as committee progresses.

ABSOLUTISM, THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND PRELUDE TO CRISIS

France has long been considered one of the oldest nations of Europe, with the Frankish king Clovis taking over Roman Gaul in 486 BC. By the end of the Hundred Years’ War, the French Monarchy had centralized the nation under the ultimate authority of the King rather than feudal lords and provincial aristocracy. But the story of the Revolution truly begins with the coronation of Louis XIV of France, who would reign from 1643, or the date of his maturity 1651, until 1715.

Louis XIV, also known as the Sun King, was the longest reigning monarch in European history. His system of government hinged on an ideal of Absolute Monarchy. This meant that the entire nation would revolve around him, and he was the most powerful and final word in the nation. He strengthened France’s central authority around the monarch so much that the nobility, monarchy’s traditional enemy, would make a deal to relinquish power in return for stability in the country.

On paper it was an absolute dictatorship. The King, unlike the English monarch who had to answer to Parliament, was the supreme judge of the state, was able to collect taxes, and command the army and navy. But in

essence, it was more than a dictatorship. It hung around the image and ideal that the sovereign had an absolute authority from God. And perhaps, more importantly, only a King as powerful, shrewd and competent could manage this form of government, as Louis XIV was, and would go on to declare “L’état, c’est moi” (I am the state.) France under this system centralized its economic and financial structure, improved its army, and became the most powerful country in Europe. Every other country in Europe wished to copy Louis and his model of France, but none would succeed nearly as well. It was only with the determination of Louis’ lifelong nemesis, William III of Orange and his gathering of almost all of Europe’s powers against France. Needless to say, France, and thus Louis XIV, was the axis in which Europe revolved around, and Paris and Versailles were the center of almost everything from fashion, the arts, science, technology, finance, and perhaps most important, philosophy.

The Enlightenment occurred largely after the death of Louis XIV in 1715. Names like Voltaire, Rousseau and Montesquieu (all French names, as you can imagine), would lead the way in progressive thought. They championed Reason and rational thinking above all else, and in their salons would plant the seeds of popular discontent against the Absolutist monarchy. Their works are of course immortal, but not worth getting into acute detail for this committee.

If, however, Absolute monarchy was so powerful, why did it crash so miserably seventy years after Louis XIV’s death? French government at the time was very complex, and difficult to describe. Even though there was a centralized bureaucracy, there were many other institutions that had a say in things. Different regions throughout France had different feudal lords, and were subject to different tax and tariff laws. They did not all answer to a similar rule of law, and the local Parlements made up

of wealthy nobles, refused to be taxed based on the ancient heritage of nobility being exempt from these taxes. The only reason it truly succeeded was because Louis XIV was such a conscientiously hardworking individual with a strong determination that set him apart from former and later French monarchs.

But without Louis XIV, the system slowly collapsed. Two major wars after 1750, the War of Austrian Succession and the Seven Years' War forced the coffers to be emptied. Ministers were no longer able to force nobles to pay taxes as well as they did under Louis XIV, and were frustrated by the system. Everyone else outside of Versailles, however, thought that the monarchy was much too strong. The first showdown occurred in 1770, when Louis XV and his chief minister, René Maupeou, took on the powers of the Parlements by issuing numerous decrees limiting the local powers of these institutions. Most of the Parlements simply refused to obey. By the time Louis XV died in 1774, the confrontation between the ministers of the King and the Parlements did not go anywhere but did intensify on both sides.

Enter Louis XVI, the great great great grandson of Louis XIV. Maupeou was asked to step down, and the lesson was clear to all: though the Parlements had not gained any ground, they had not lost it, and only a powerful monarch, not his ministers, could enact any change into a system of government that would be successful only with highly competent sovereigns like Louis XIV on the helm.

Maupeou was replaced by Jacques Turgot, who, like his predecessor, tried to reform the government by transforming France's entire economy. He made the grain trade more economically liberal, and most importantly, attempted to abolish the guilds that dominated French local economies since the dark ages. But Turgot failed as well, as without a strong monarch to push reforms

through, all was hopeless. Louis XVI sacked Turgot, and replaced him with Jacques Necker.

Necker, a Protestant commoner, was the first to become the nation's chief minister. He attempted to reform France piecemeal, by slowly reducing expenses, making taxes more efficient, and publishing public spending, inviting everyone to debate about the economy. Like Maupeou and Turgot, however, Necker was unsuccessful, and was sacked in 1781.

France's one outstanding foreign policy triumph was the beginning of the end. In 1783, France had led the way to the independence of the United States of America, knocking a major blow against Great Britain. France may have been the most powerful country in Europe, but that only meant that everyone was her enemy, including Britain. Louis XVI spent much of the monarchy's money on this war, to great success as well. But Louis XVI did not want glory and power like Louis XIV, nor did he have a knack for intrigue like Louis XV. He went into the war, but gained little more than prestige, while instead of taxing the population for the war, borrowed heavily. With such a crushing financial situation, France stood idly by while Britain and Prussia intervened in the Dutch Republic, a role that France should have been playing. Louis XV would famously say: "Après moi, le déluge." (After me, the flood.)

PARIS IS BURNING

The situation before you delegates now is a result of many factors and groups. By the 1780s, the population of France had expanded dramatically, and a widening gap grew between the rich and the poor. The Bourgeoisie, professionals, merchants, et cetera, increased their resentment against the nobility's right not to pay taxes, as well as the Church's independent economic system. This had been

going on for decades. But they were compounded because the crisis involved all the woes of the French state put together.

In 1786, controller-general, Charles-Alexandre de Calonne the replacement of Necker, announced that the royal government was on the brink of insolvency. The loans needed to pay the American War of Independence were putting a huge strain on the state. To deal with this, Calonne called an Assembly of Notables to try to reform the French state.

It was an ambitious and admirable gamble, but ultimately failed. The delegates rejected Calonne's proposed reforms. Calonne was replaced with Loménie de Brienne. Brienne tried to reinstate Maupeou's 1770s reforms, but their failure resulted in a loss of faith in the government.

In the summer of 1788, a devastating hailstorm destroyed harvests in northern France, raising grain prices dramatically. The public outcry was enormous, and the nation called for an institution that had never been summoned since 1614, the days of Cardinal Richelieu and the Three Musketeers (imagined later, of course). On 5 July, 1788, Brienne announced that the Estates-General would be called, and the French absolute monarchy collapsed to public opinion. Brienne resigned in favor of the popular Jacques Necker.

The Estates-General was composed of three Estates. The First was the nobility and aristocracy, in total two per cent of the population; the Second was the Clergy, about one per cent of the population; the third was everyone else. The First Estate was the traditional enemy of the King. The King's authority could only be eroded by the First Estate demanding their privileges in the running of the state, like the system in Britain, America and even Poland. The King, traditionally supporting the people, in this case the Third Estate, however, was a weak individual.

Two plans for reform of government arose. Absolute government, everyone thought, must be destroyed. Delegates from Dauphiné, near the French Alps in the South, proposed to make the Estates-General the new system of government that could check Royal power, with a single assembly composed of one quarter from the first estate, one quarter from the second, and one half from the third, the first two being the privileged estates. In Brittany, however, the petty noblemen demanded that the Third Estate gain no concessions, and that the three estates meet completely separately.

Louis XVI's response was a compromise that satisfied no one: to double the delegates in the Third Estate, but refuse to merge the three Estates into one body. For the first time, too, cahiers de doléances, lists of grievances, were drawn up for the King to read when the Estates-General was assembled. Most cahiers demanded that some representative governmental institution be established, eradicating absolutism, and the abolition of tax privileges and legal inequalities. Peasants drew up complaints about seigniorial rights, while the bourgeoisie demanded social and civil equality with the nobility. One minority in the Estates-General even voiced an opinion to compose a Constitution.

And so this is the situation that the committee must confront when session begins on 3 May 1789. The questions we need to consider are: How does the committee defuse the situation, and what course does the reform of the French government take? Which sides does the monarchy choose? How can the nation avoid civil war?