

# The King and the Revolution



Source A. King Louis XVI of France

## C. What sort of man was Louis XVI?

Louis XVI came to the throne in 1774. He was an absolute monarch, which meant that he was not bound by a constitution, so had complete power. Like many other European monarchs, Louis believed his power had been given to him by God. Louis was a 'family-man'. Even during the Estates General meeting, Louis was more concerned with his son who was dying of tuberculosis than the political crisis he was facing. Louis was dominated by his wife, Marie-Antoinette, whose brother was the Austrian Emperor. Marie-Antoinette was the subject of many rumours about love affairs, expensive clothes and over spending. She was also criticised by many for the way she interfered with Louis's attempts to govern the country.

"The power to make laws belongs only to me"

Source B. Louis XVI, (1774 - 1793)



Source D. Queen Marie-Antoinette of France.

## F. How did Louis respond to the events of 1789-91?

It is possible that Louis did not fully understand the events of 1789 - 1791. It is also possible that Louis had no idea how widespread the demand was for reform in France. When the Three Estates met in May 1789, Louis did not have any ideas to put to them. When the National Assembly was set up, Louis did not know what he should do. On 5-6 October, 1789, the Paris mob came to Louis's palace at Versailles and attacked. They captured Louis and his family, and imprisoned him in the Tuilleries in Paris. Louis could have ordered his guards to fire on the mob but refused to do so. Louis claimed that he played the role of an English style 'constitutional monarch'. Between 1789-1791, Louis signed decrees from the Assembly so that they became law.

In September 1791, when the constitution was finally proclaimed, Louis signed an oath of loyalty. Some believe that this was an act of good will from Louis. Others think that Louis took the oath because he had no other choice. What do YOU think? Read the information on Louis's behaviour between 1789 and 1791 before you make your decision.

Source E Descriptions of Louis and Marie -Antoinette by an American Ambassador in France.

On Louis...  
He is an honest man and wishes to do good, but he has not either genius or education...

On Marie-Antoinette...  
Louis has a queen who controls his weak mind. Her ..extravagance has been a major cause of exhausting the government's finances.

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