

– It's very much indeed. And hello to everyone, I'm pleased that you're with me this evening. My evening, your morning, afternoon or evening. I'm going to begin in a way that I have done before. I'm going to read my blog. You can read what I'm about to say on my blog because I wrote on the blog a sort of introduction to this evening's talk. It's called "France, the Bourbons 1589 to 1793," and it's subtitled, To great glory and to utter humiliation for the French Royal House. And I wrote, it's only two short paragraphs. Glory came in the reign of the The Sun King, Louis XIV. This is exemplified in the construction of The Palace of Versailles. It was also exemplified in the political and military power exercised by France, and France became the first country of Europe. Humiliation came with the trial and guillotining of Louis XVI in 1793, during the revolution. Of course, the revolution had roots in the period long before 1789 and The Storming of the Bastille. So the important question I think for many in this period of French history is where and for what reasons did disenchantment with Bourbon rule eventually lead to bloody revolution and the emergence of modern France? And what I'm going to do is to provide an introduction, which is a brief look at the Bourbon kings and then concentrate on the reigns, looking at the, what historians call the long-term causes of the French Revolution. Next week I'll be looking at Louis XVI reign and the short term and into the revolution, the short-term causes and into the revolution.

I said just now, my talk today encompasses the glory days of a Bourbon monarchy under Louis XIV, the so-called Sun King, le Roi Soleil. He saw himself and projected himself as did his main ministers as the centre of the universe. In other words, the Sun King. He developed court ritual to emphasise this great importance. A court ritual which was partly adopted by King Charles II of England when he returned from exile, but the English wouldn't take to it. He also used the arts in various forms to push himself rather like modern dictators have pictures and busts, and columns and statues all over the place. So did Louis XIV do exactly the same thing in painting, in sculpture, but he also went into theatre, dance, music, and perhaps quite interestingly, almanacks. Which were produced every year, which was a source of royalist Louis XIV propaganda. So in many ways it's quite a modern monarchy, in some ways, or at least it is a modern absolutist rule. Think Putin, Putin without the glamour. Louis XIV has glamour, he also is educated. I think the jury's out on Putin. Louis XIV is the longest reigning monarch in history. He ruled from 1643 right through to 1710th. When I say ruled, I should really say he was on the throne from 1643 to 1710, because he's a baby child when he inherits the throne. The second longest, if you ever do a sort of quizzes, the second longest was 70 years but she's outdone by Louis XIV. It is absolutely true that during Louis XIV reign, France achieved greatness, both politically within Europe, headed by Louis, headed by

emerge, sorry, both politically within Europe, emerging as the continent's great power. Think America or think China or think Russia, or whatever. And it was also a great power culturally headed, as I said earlier, by Louis' own palace at Versailles, to which thousands of us still go every year to gawp in wonder at the opulence. And that's important because the opulence of the top 10% was a cause of jealousy, more than that, a cause of anger amongst the 90% who could only dream of such opulence. By the end of my talk tonight, we shall have reached the reign of Louis XIV. I've got to get this right. Great, great, great grandson, Louis XVI. Who ascended the throne in 1774, was placed on trial and guillotine joined the French Revolution in 1793. That's the sort of story that we're talking about.

In my last talk, we ended the story with the accession of the first king of the House of Bourbon, Henri-Quatre. Henry IV, the man who famously said Paris is worth a mass. He ditched his Protestantism and returned to the faith of his childhood Catholicism. Why? For religiously, oh, come on, not for religious reasons, please. He did so to secure the prize of the crown of France and to found the Bourbon dynasty. That was in year 1589, a year after the Spanish Armada sailed against England. On recapture, Henry IV reigned until he was assassinated in 1610 by a, well, a Catholic fanatic, a man called Ravaillac. And he killed him because he thought that Henry was about to attack the Spanish Netherlands. And he thought that was an equivalent of an attack on the Pope. This man is a fanatic. The reasons are not, many assassination politically in history have been carried out by fanatics, well adrift of the real facts of the event. But he doesn't concern us in those terms, what concerns us is that Henry IV died young. And he, oops, I've lost my own picture, there we are. And Henry IV died young and he was succeeded by his son Louis XIII. Louis XIII was only just, well, he's eight years old, coming up to his ninth birthday, so he couldn't reign as king. So his mother acted as regent and her name was Marie de Medici, one of the Medici family. When he did come of age, he fought a war with his mother. I mean, I don't know, sometimes my mother and I didn't agree but I never actually went to war with her. When he came to power, he was a rather weak man. He was really uninterested in politics. He was suspicious of everyone around him. You wouldn't want to invite Louis XIII for dinner, let's put it like that. He relied on his chief ministers. And the two most famous ones were both cardinals of the church of Rome, Cardinal Richelieu, and then Cardinal Mazarin. And Mazarin went on until his death in 1661 to serve Louis XIV, in turn, these men had enormous power. Under Louis XV, both, the problem with monarchies is when you are landed up either with a child king or a mad king, well Louis XIII died also young. He was only 41 when he died. He was succeeded by his son, Louis XIV. And Louis XIV, as I said before, is a mere baby child. He's only four and a half years old. And that's the age of my youngest grandson. I really wouldn't want him, oh, I don't know, maybe he'd do a better job than our prime minister, but four and a half years old. And his mother Anne of Austria becomes regent

supported by Mazarin. It is under Louis XIV that France adopts a really absolutist monarchy. The king has total power. There are no constraints on the king's power. Now if you compare England, there were always constraints. Charles I chose to ignore the constraints on his power by not calling parliament. And that's what did for him. Because civil war, he loses and he's executed. Louis XIV had real absolute power. There's no one to say, "Excuse me, "I don't think you should be doing that, sir." He had complete control when he came of age. Louis XIV is different than his father. He's a, very interested in the arts, he's an educated man. We've mentioned Versailles, but he surrounded himself with great cultural figures. Le Notre, the great gardener, Moliere, Racine Colbert, the politician, Turenne of the military geniuses of the age. He had quality around him and he selected quality. That is a very, very good trait in any leader, democratic or absolute, that you can choose people who are better than you. It is why Churchill was successful. He always chose the right person. The square peg in the square hole is what Louis XIV did. If I mention a few cultural things in addition to Versailles, he established the French Academy of Arts. He also established the French Academy of Dance and the French Academy of Opera. He was particularly interested in both ballet and opera. And music, he was always on the look out for young men, usually men with talent in music. We know he lived in Versailles outside of Paris. That in itself is to prove difficult, as we shall see in the reign of Louis XVI. Promise me that if you become Prime Minister in Britain, you will not live in Manchester. Promise me, if you become president of the United States, you will not live in Los Angeles. It's not good news. You have to live in the Capital and by moving out to Versailles, I know today when you go to Paris, Versailles is a small trip on the train or whatever, on the metro. But you have to go back to his time and it was a tiny village outside of Paris. The palace in Paris, the Louvre is interesting because Louis XIV arranged for it to be given over to the arts and made public. Now that is an interesting thing. It's the sort of thing that King Charles in Britain is considering doing today with Buckingham Palace we're told but Louie did it right back there in the 17th century. And what is interesting about the Louvre, it remains today one of the world's greatest art galleries and museums. And again, as I'm giving this talk, people are thinking, I remember going to Versailles. I remember going to the Louvre, because many of you will have been to both places whether you live on this side of the Atlantic or the other. I'm a fan of Napoleon Bonaparte, I have to tell you. And Napoleon is always worth listening to. And Napoleon said, this is not a made up quotation, Napoleon genuinely said of Louis XIV that he was the only king of France worthy of the name king. Well that says something. And indeed, if you were to identify great leaders of France, then Louis XIV and Napoleon Bonaparte will be right up at the very top of your list. Simon Sebag Montefiore, the historian, produced a book a little while back now called "Titans of History." Don't worry about books, I'm going to put up on my blog before next week, a much longer list of books on French history that you might be interested to

get hold of to read. But I'm going to do that all in one go next week.

This is what Montefiore says, "Louis XIV was the greatest ruler of Europe in his day." That's what just said, France was the preeminent European country, "The paradigm of magnificence, Versailles and absolutism. But his ambitions to dominate Europe with his vision of French monarchy plunged the continent into long and vicious wars that cost the lives of many. Yet he remains the Sun King, the very definition of royal glory like Ruler in France. And probably with Napoleon Bonaparte, the greatest of French monarchs, he ruled for 72 years." That really underlines what I've been saying. And by quoting that, I hope you believe what I've said and it brings it together. I want to read just three little bits more from Montefiore. First of all this, "He was absolutist in every way." Montefiore writes of Louis XIV. "Controlled, disciplined, sensuous, haughty." Sensuality, Trudy is going to speak to you about the women in Louis XIV life later this week. I think she thought I was far too young and naive to be able to talk about that. She'll give you a really good talk, I know. "Control, disciplined, sensuous, haughty, mysterious, "magisterial and visionary, pious and debauched." I always like it when people are so hypocritical. Pious and debauched, it's a lovely phrase of Montefiores "Louis created the Palace of Versailles and with it, a complex court hierarchy of ritual designed to remove the nobles from their feudal ambitions of regional power centres." They had to be at court and if they were at court, they couldn't plot trouble against the king wherever they might live. "Versailles itself was designed not only to house the king, court and entire nobility, but also to represent Louis himself. On one occasion, he said, "I am Versailles." The nobility competed for a glance, a word with the king. Once when the king asked a noble when his baby was due, the noble then answered, "But whenever your majesty wishes it." Extraordinary, isn't it? It's like I was at a boarding school from the age of 11 and we were always trying to be noticed by the headmaster, or else if you weren't noticed, you got into trouble. So it was best to be on your polite and this is exactly what they are. It's sucking up to the king, it's pouring, it's pouring out all the things he wants poured out. "Oh your majesty, your dress is magnificent this morning." "Oh really? I'm so pleased you think so." And all of that, it was a very false sort of society. 90% of the people are out there, whether in cities or in rural areas. And the bulk are in rural areas and they're living quite different lives, quite, quite different types. I think I've just got two small pieces to read from here and then I'll move on. "Louie's vision of himself as a supreme Catholic monarch, led to his revocation of the Edict of Nantes. That was the Edict that gave Henry IV gave to Protestants so they were able to live and worship freely in France. And he revoked it leading to many Huguenots, French Protestants, leaving. "Abroad, Louis ambitions meant he was constantly at war, whether with the Dutch, the Habsburg emperor," that's in Austria. "The Spanish or the Swedes. He paid Charles the second vast bribes to neutralise English power." Charles II never declared it to parliament, went into his back pocket

because he didn't want to get into the difficulties his father got into by asking parliament for money, which it wasn't going to give him for what things he wanted to do. He overreached himself in all honesty. And he overreached France. He overreached himself because he gave no, he gave no slack to any sort of criticism of himself and his rule. And he ruled France because these wars were extremely costly and France couldn't raise the money. And all of that I will come to very shortly. But one of the points is that Louis XIV is certainly, if you don't want to go back before Louis XIV, you can say that many of the troubles that led to the revolution in 89 began in the 17th century with Louis XIV. One last thing, "As Louis aged," says Montefiore. "As his heirs died, as France suffered poverty and hunger, his armies were humiliated by the outstanding commanders of the British Duke of Marlborough and the German prince Eugene of Savoy, in a trans-European conflict known as The War of the Spanish Succession." Louis lived too long, he saw France defeated and the deaths of all his sons and all of his grandsons. French invincibility was broken. "In 1715, just as he had dined and dressed in public. So Louie died in public after telling his child heir, "I've delighted too much in war." He was succeeded by his great grandson, Louie XV. In the end, he'd lived too long. In the end, the world had somewhat accelerated past him. Many of us as we grow older, feel similar things about our own professional or our view of the world. The world has to some extent gone on and it is only with great difficulty that we keep up with that world. So Louis XV who succeeds him is a mere seven years old, sorry, five years old, he's a mere five years old. He was also to rule France for a long time, in fact, in his case for 59 years. But he spent money even less wisely. He entered wars less wisely. He entered the so-called Seven Years' War between 1756, 63 against Britain. And in the course of which he lost French Canada, or if you prefer, I think it's better to say because it's wider than that, he lost French North America and he lost French India. Had that war not been fought, well, the United States might be French speaking today and not English speaking, but he didn't, he lost it. Clive in India is well known across the world as creating the beginning of the Raj in India. And Wolfe in Canada at Quebec on the heights of Abraham, ensured that Canada too would be British in its basic, basic laws, basic rules and so on and so forth, and English speaking and not French, and Protestant and not Catholic. He also supported the Americans in the American War of Independence. And that's a strange thing in many ways. And I'll come back to that in due course. It isn't that Louis XV government didn't attempt reform, it did attempt reform, but most historians say he did too little and it was too late anyhow. He himself lacked all leadership skills, both Louis XIII and Louis XV and Louis XVI. And that's the problem with absolute monarchy. Louis XIV fine as a young man and as a middle-aged man, but not as an old man and the others really not up to the job. When he died, the throne went to his grandson, Louis XVI. They not have much success in staying alive these Bourbons.

Now all that is by way of an introduction, many of those things you

will know and you will be saying, "Well, why didn't he mention that?" And I will just certainly have mentioned whatever. Well, that's my introduction just to sort of break the ice, I suppose you might say. But it gives me time now to turn to the key question of the period, which is what are the events and issues that cause the French Revolution of 1789? Not a year before the revolution, not even a decade before, not even in the reign of Louis XVI, but before that. Back into the reigns of Louis XV, XIV, XIII. There's going to be three quotations in this part of the course, which are worth remembering. And I'll emphasise those at the end. Louis XV is credited with giving us this quotation. "Apres moi, le deluge," "After me, the flood." Many people say, many historians say he wasn't talking about the French Revolution at all. He was talking about events that were happening then in particular, the loss to the Germans, to the Prussians of The Battle of Rossbach where the French were humiliated. But he was also interested in astronomy. And he may be referring to the fact that Halley's Comet was predicted in 1757. And many people thought Halley's Comet had previously caused the flood in the Book of Genesis. And so they were very nervous about it. But it doesn't matter what he meant because the phrase, "Apres moi, le deluge" fits the history. And that's why we use it, "After me, the flood." After me, the deluge, after me, the revolution. And that makes a lot of sense. Let me tease out now for you some of the key underlying issues, the long-term issues that led to the revolution under Louis XVI in 1789. One historian has written this sentence, "The French state suffered from several structural weaknesses that belied its great power status. Several structural weaknesses that belied its great power status." Now, if I was teaching in an American university postgraduate American historians, I would quote this to them. "France suffered from structural weaknesses that belied its great power status." And I would ask the American students, how true is that or untrue is that of the United States in 2022. If I was teaching Chinese students in Hong Kong, I would ask them the same question, but refer to China, not to the United States. This is a phenomenon we've seen time and again in history of great powers with structural weaknesses. The Roman Empire in the West is a very clear indication of that, and indeed the Roman Empire in the East in Constantinople falling and Byzantine falling in 1453. All of those make it but we have a better example, because today we see it being played out on our television screens and in our newspapers. Russia a great power whose structural weaknesses have been laid bare for the world to see in Ukraine. History doesn't repeat itself, but some phenomena occur again and again. So the quotation here about France is, "The French state suffered from several structural weaknesses that belied its great power status." Let's start, the France of the 18th century suffered from ongoing financial problems. I've mentioned the wars that they entered into, but there were bigger problems than that. One of the problems was that the nobility paid very few taxes, very few. The Roman Catholic Church, which owned 10% of France, paid no taxes at all. But occasionally made a voluntary payment to the crown. Now, if that wasn't bad enough, the

taxes that fell on the bulk of the people, the middle class, the bourgeoisie and the peasants was not taxed as it was in the England of the day, of the 18th century by the government centrally. But it was taxed out by tax farming. Now I apologise for treating some of you as though you're stupid and you don't know and others that there's no reason why you should know. But there will be finance people who will say, "Oh, we know about tax farming." And the others of you will say, "What on earth is he talking about?" So I apologise to both sets of people, but let me just very briefly explain tax farming. If I'm the government and I want to bring in income tax, then I put it up for sale. I say income tax in Britain will cost you whatever it might be. Figure out, yeah, 2 billion pounds to buy, and you bid against other people and you win, you bid the highest you win. Then you collect the tax and any additional tax that you collect in addition to the 2 billion you bid is your profit.

Now the 2 billion figure is basically set by the government thinking that's the revenue that it wants to get in. So provided the tax farmer, that farmer in, suggests the word that's used. Provided the tax farmer produces the 2 billion from the government, he can pocket the rest, might be another 2 billion. That's not the way to run a country as large as France in the 18th century. It simply doesn't work and it didn't work. The tax burden, as I said, are largely on the middle class, the bourgeoisie and that was bad news for France. Because the bourgeoisie are the economic heartbeat of France. The nobility, oh no, no. Think of the American view of British aristocracy. Oh no, nothing to do with trade. I won't go into trade. Well, it's the bourgeoisie who were in trade that made the money for France, and instead of it being a fair taxation system, they are carrying the brunt of it. And it's the old argument, if you overtax the people who are making the economy tick, then they've not got the money to invest in their farms, their businesses and so on, to make the economy grow fast. And that's an argument that we're having in Britain at the moment, and I'm sure it's an argument everyone understands. But it was really bad in France. It's been estimated that if I was a peasant in France in the 18th century, up to a third or half of my income goes in taxation, a third to half. Some of it to the crown, the tax farmers, some of it to the church in tithe, and some of it in the system we talked about earlier, the seigneurial system. The sort of neo feudalism where I have to pay the feudal Lord to avoid having to dig his own, dig his ditches or whatever it might be, I paid money to get myself exempt. And so a third to a half, it's been estimated of income earned by peasants in France went in taxation. It isn't true that the crown made no attempts to improve the system, they did, but they were opposed. Now they were opposed by what is called in France, parlements, P-A-R-L-E-M-E-N-T-S. It does not mean the same as Britain, Australia and Canada's parliament. It does not mean a parliament like that. A parlement was really a local court and it was meant to rubber stamp the decisions of the king. And normally it rubber stamp them. But when the king tried to change the taxation

system, the nobles in a particular region who controlled the parlement, said, "No, no, no, no, "we're not going to vote for that. "Why should, like turkeys voting for Christmas, "you're not going to do that." And so the system never quite worked. Moreover, by the end Louis XV reign in particular and Louis XVI, by then the nobility has a nouveau riche in it. The nouveau riche are the bourgeoisie who paid the crown to give them a title. So I made a lot of money, whatever it might be in, and I rather fancy turning myself into a comte, Comte de Worthy, and I pay the king. And I'm now a member of the nobility. Of course, the other older nobility looked down their noses at me because I have no breeding. But when it comes to stopping the king putting taxation on, I'm with them. So the truth of the matter is, at the end of the day, the king, the crown cannot change the system, and it cannot raise enough money through taxation. So what do you do if you can't raise money in taxation? You borrow and you pay back. But what happens if you can't pay back and you still need loans, then the next loan costs you even more to pay back. And you are in a spiral which goes down and down and down. And that is what is happening prior to the French Revolution. There's a further problem structurally beyond finance. And that is, although the French state is unified under the crown because of the way that it came about, which we've looked at with various provinces and bits and pieces added on. And in the Middle Ages, the various Dukes and Counts and so on, having enormous power locally, then there were different rules in different parts of France. The law was not the same in one part of France to another. There's no codification of law until we get to Bonaparte. There's no agreement on weights and measures until we get to Bonaparte. Some regions were exempt, had special privileges. For example, Brittany was exempt from a salt tax. Oh, we know what trouble salt caused in India under the Raj regardant. But they didn't have to pay a salt tax in Brittany. Well handy for Brittany because its salt is coming from the sea in Brittany sea salt then doesn't have to pay tax on. The parlements that I've mentioned, there were 13 of them all altogether in France at this period. They also have different rules of what they can and can't do. So this is not a unified state in the way that Britain was a unified state in the 18th century. Whether you sold a pound of flour in Cornwall or a pound of flour in the north of Scotland, a pound was a pound. But if you sold a pound of flour in Lyon in Northern France and a pound of flour in Marsais, it's different, it's different. So there were real problems in terms of the infrastructure of France. In terms of the economy as a whole, they suffered from internal customs barriers and tolls, in the same way now that Britain can't sort of move goods around within the EU like we could when we belong to the EU, because there are customs barriers and tolls and all the rest in it. In France as one country in the 18th century, they couldn't, you couldn't move things from Aquitaine to wherever, Provence, without going through customs. And you might go through a series of customs all having different rules. An absolute nightmare as Britain is finding out or British trade is finding out, dealing with EU countries. It's not easy, and it certainly wasn't easy



in France.

Now it is true that the French monarchy tried to do things, but as we've said before, they don't have the money and their control is in that sense, is restricted by local pressures. They did however build a Canal du Midi and some of you may be on holiday on the Canal du Midi. And they built that between 1666 and 1681. And that was a tremendous thing. You know, in the history of transport in Europe, canals come first, then roads, then railways. And this canal is early, 1660, 1681. Far earlier than Britain, for example, which is the 18th century when we get proper canals being built. This was a great canal. And all European canals were broad. If you've seen the Canal du Midi, it's broad. It's like the Mississippi if you like. So France has these major structural problems, money, but also the economy. The economy in terms of encouraging the economy to grow and in terms of the infrastructure for that economy. And when I was at school, I didn't want to know about things like that when I was doing history, I wanted to know about battles and all his mistresses. But the important things, it's what Clinton says, it's the budget, it's the money stupid. And it was the money that caused the problems and is a major factor in moving towards the revolution. They had no central bank. England had a central bank since 1689, they did not. Somebody said, "Why do I always mention England?" Well, a, because lots of you know English history, but because England was the yardstick in Western Europe to which you could measure in the 18th century what you might describe as modern methods. Modern methods in agriculture, modern methods in industry, modern methods in finance, all these things were here, but they aren't in France. France looked in comparison to England, mediaeval. We shall come to why that was a problem in a moment, I'm looking at the clock. I now want to move to the people at the very bottom society. Mary Antoinette is supposed to have said, "Let them eat cake," when the peasants were going hungry. "Qu'ils mangent de la brioche." She almost certainly did not say it, but again, it doesn't matter. It's like, "Après moi, le déluge." Let them eat cake is, gives you a good clue. The upper classes were remote from the poverty of the poor and the poverty of the poor resulted in famine during bad harvest time. Famines had disappeared by this century in Britain, exceptions in Ireland with the potato famine and partly in Scotland. But in England, they'd completely gone by the 18th century. From the 1770s, there was deep resentment amongst the 90% of the peasantry. Deep resentment, I'm hungry, why should I be hungry in a country like France? It's what we're saying about food banks in Britain today. Why should we have food banks in a country which is meant to be one of the richest in the world? And they're saying, "We're hungry, give us food." But the 10% don't want to listen. Simply don't want to listen. And that is a recipe, a great recipe for disaster. By the way, the story of "Let them eat cake," is recorded by Rousseau, but he doesn't mention Mary Antoinette. His actual quote is this, "At length, "I remember the last resort of a great princess." He doesn't say who. "Who when told that the peasants had no bread,

replied, "Then let them eat brioche." Well famine, food is always a major factor in any revolution. If people can't eat, or as in America when taxation on tea caused so much resentment and why the British still drink tea and the Americans drink coffee. Because the East India company were prevented after the independence of America of supplying tea at all.

Now let's turn to another topic. So we've looked at finance, we've looked at infrastructure in terms of the IR political infrastructure, which simply doesn't exist, and the social infrastructure. And we've looked at famine and hunger. And there's another problem with French agriculture. And this is interesting because it's relevant in the Europe of 2022. It's been estimated that by the revolution, still 75% of all domestic production in France was agriculture, agricultural but agriculture was behind. In Britain, there'd been the agricultural revolution. This was only beginning in France, but there was a fundamental flaw in the French system, which is a legal flaw. If I'm the owner of a relatively small farm, but we make a living, and I die and I've got three sons, then my land has to be divided between three sons. Whereas in Britain, primogeniture, it goes to my eldest son and the other two have to find another job. But not in France, it's divided up. And dividing it up is a nightmare to efficient farming. And some of the problems placed with the agricultural policy of the European Union driven by France, is to support small and unprofitable farms. It was one of the major arguments of the British farming industry. But which is modernised in a way that I think most people listening to me understand with large farms, in fact, some of them gigantic farms because of the benefits of production and such. But not in France. So the French agriculture problem has persisted into the 21st century and poisoned a lot of the European. The money spent by Europe, the biggest sum of money spent by EU is on agriculture, agricultural subsidies. We lived, my wife and I lived in Essex in the East Coast and we had lots of fruit farms. And as soon as the EU gave subsidies to people not to grow fruit, then all these fruit farms cease to exist. And where we'd gone to buy apples in the autumn and plums and so on, no longer were operating. They could make more money just taking the money in the subsidy not to have them. It was a madness and we understand that. But by saying that, it also emphasises how some practises become so ingrained in the DNA, as in France and Italy is the same. Southern Italy in particular with farming. There was a problem. So the farmers are not producing enough in France to feed an ever increasing population. Therefore, hunger is growing in France by the time of the 89 revolution. Inflation is in, well of course inflation because if there's less, whatever it might be, less cabbages and the demand remains the same, then the price goes up, and who can't pay it? The people at the bottom of society, the peasants who grew it. They also had a lot of harvest failures, famines. Now that's another story in itself. Now it isn't true they did nothing, but they didn't do anything on a national level. They introduced particularly in the south, from America, the growing of maize, Indian

corn. And that saved a lot of lives, I think. They also introduced from America potatoes. They were against both to begin with, but they soon realised, but it didn't. In England, everyone was growing potatoes on their, not, in their own patch in the back garden and everything as well as commercially. But in France, no, it didn't spread right across the country. It's the conservatism of the rural peasantry which no one was able to cope with. I've written here, the famines and hunger in France would've been worse, if it had not been for maize and if it had not been for potatoes. But it wasn't sufficient, it wasn't sufficient. So in addition to financial ineptitude, in addition to all the other things we've spoken about, we now have to add poor farming techniques and hunger and famine. I've alluded earlier to the fact that France is a major European power, the major European power was involved in war after war in the 18th century. And the debt accordingly rose and then France began losing wars. It lost, as I said, the Seven Years' War to Britain and lost in French India and French North America. It was humiliatingly defeated by the Germans, the Prussians in 1757, whilst the Seven Years' War was raging around the world in Canada and India, it was also raging in Europe. And the French were humiliated by the Prussians in 1757 at a battle called Rossbach. R-O-D, you don't need to remember, R-O-S-S-B-A-C-H. The important thing is that the Germans, that is to say the Prussians, the biggest power in Germany, which is growing exponentially, puts down a marker, puts down a marker in 1755. And 60 years later, a combined Anglo Prussian army defeats Napoleon finally at Waterloo. Prussia is the power that's moving in Europe. Napoleon himself said later of this Battle of Rossbach in 1757, when the Prussians defeated the French, he said, "The French Revolution really began in 1757 "at the Battle of Rossbach." He believed that that was the beginning of the end of France as a major power. And they supported the American colonists and they had to borrow money, large sums of money to pay the Americans and to pay for the French troops in America. And the debt rose to 12 billion livre, pounds by 1789. The monarchy simply couldn't go on, it had run out of money. So all of these things are things that we might understand and it all makes sense. But there's one unforeseen consequence of French troops serving in the American War of Independence. I'm sure the Americans listening will know what exactly that is. The American slogan as they went into war, you'll all remember was, no taxation without representation. And the French soldiers and the French officers serving in the States said, "Hang on a moment, "we don't hang this at home. "We're fighting for the Americans, "no taxation without representation, "but we're taxed with no representation. "That's a bit odd, isn't it?" And it's even odder when you think it's an absolute monarchy supporting a republic. France had, well it, the ideas of the enlightenment had really originated many of them in France, but in America they saw them in practise. The ideas of the enlightenment were being made practical in America as it broke from Britain. And it wasn't lost on the French soldiery that were there. And they carried those ideas back home with them. "What was it like in America?" "You'll never believe this, but

they're campaigning to win "against the British saying, 'No taxation without representation.'" Yeah, but we don't have it." "Exactly, that's what we learned." Interestingly, in 1815, 1415 when Napoleon is defeated, the Russian troops in France took the ideas of the French Revolution back to Tsarist Russia. But this is a short term thing. This isn't going to go on for a hundred years. This is going to go on for 20 odd years only. As they come back from America, they bring these ideas back. Now the ideas have been there before but now they'd seen them in practical use. American politicians using these words to create a new country. And of course, Lafayette, a hero in both the states and in France becomes an important figure in this, and we shall meet him again on another day.

So how do these messages get out about America, about the practicalities that the enlightenment can give? What is interesting, a German historian, well a German philosopher historian coined the phrase, the public sphere. And by that he meant things like newspapers, journals, magazines, all of these things that you could get in France. Now the 18th century is the century of hugely improved literacy right across Europe and right across America. Literacy is rising everywhere, not least in France. And so even members of the peasant, not every peasant of course, but enough can read. So you'll go along and you'll say to William, "Well I can't read, what does this say?" And I read it and then a whole gathering comes round and I read it and we say, "My goodness, "we don't have this sort of freedom in France." Paris, by the time of the revolution, had 1,600 cafes. In British terms, it would mean pubs, places where people meet, well men meet and discuss. They had 1,600 cafes in Paris and simply, I've no idea how many cafes there are in central Paris today, but I very much doubt there's more. And it's in those places that people meet and talk and share ideas. "You were in America, you were in America, tell us, "tell us how, what do we do? "Well, we need a revolution here "like the American Revolution." It's those messages that are coming out. And it's interesting, isn't it? Just to speculate, that the French practicality of democracy, never say this to a Frenchman or French woman comes from Anglo American democracy. Interesting, but it does, it really does. The public sphere to discuss these things. Now, France had a rigid system of three estates, three groups of people. The first estate were the clergy, the higher clergy, the second estate was the nobility. And the third estate were the ordinary citizens, but actually the bourgeoisie. Now they met in a much more similar to a British parliament in what is called the estates general. But the estates general had not met since the 1610s. So there's no way that all these things I've learned in the coffee houses and from soldiers that have fought in America, all these things buzzing around. And I'm a member of the bourgeoisie, I'm a solicitor, let's say like Danton, like Robespierre. I'm a solicitor and I think, I will need a vote about taxation but where can I make that voice heard? I can't, because the estates general hasn't met. And of course when it does meet, well that's the revolution in 1789. Everything begins to speed up in the

reign of the Louis XVI and we move inexorably towards revolution. But going back to the three estates, the clergy, the nobility and the ordinary citizen. On top of all that sits one man, the king. And it summed up in a phrase attributed again, erroneously to Louis XIV, "L'Etat, c'est moi." "The state is me, I am the state." So there's the three quotations which are probably all erroneous in who they're attributed to. But in terms of understanding the French Revolution, you just need to remember, "Apres moi, le deluge." You then need to remember, "Let them meet cake." And then you need to remember, "L'Etat, c'est moi." Those are the things and they explain those three. Again, if I was teaching a group of postgraduates, those would be the three quotations I would give them and say, "How far did these go to explain "the revolution in France?" The next time the deluge really does sweep over France and with it the guillotine heads of the king and queen fall into the basket. And we'll look at that and the beginning of the revolution. But I've got one quotation I'm going to finish with. This is from the book we've been using, Cecil Jenkins' "History of France," and I want say the Bourbon monarchy right to the end remained out of touch. Louis XVI kept a diary. And in that diary on the 14th of July, 1789, 14th of July, 1789, the fall of the Bastille, the beginning of the revolution. What does he write in his diary? The fall of the Bastille? No, no, no. One word, rien, nothing, nothing's happened today, rien. And he didn't realise that the deluge, the waters were through and into the state of France, but to him nothing had happened, rien. I'm going to stop there. I think we're, oh, I've gone over, I'm sorry. That clock, I've been looking at that clock because it's easiest, and it's obviously a bit slow. I apologise, I don't like doing that. But I'm sure, have I got any questions? Oh, yes, I seem to.

#### Q & A and Comments

– Yes, you're right, operas, who is that? Shelly, you are right. Some opera, some shows were subversive, absolutely right.

– Dennis, I can't even pronounce what you've put, but others will see it's King Sobhuza II became king at age 4 months and reigned for 83 years. For some reason rather, you will find that he does not appear in the figures of the longest reigning monarch. Ah, he then goes on to say, Mark says, "He reigned as king for only 61 years and was paramount chief before." Well, that's the answer. And yes, I will do a biography of Louis XIV. All of that I will put on my blog before next week. I'm going to put all the French Revolution, all the lot 'em.

Q: Why was Louis XIV such a good king?

A: Because he gave France l'adour. The French love the concept of l'adour. Napoleon uses it, in a sense, Macron has used it. Giscard d'Estaing used it, Tugal used it. It gives the French a, trust an

English one to say this, but it gives the French a sense of superiority. And he gave the French something to in subsequent centuries, to be proud of. That's what he had. But he never thought of the consequences financially. And in the end, of course they began to lose wars.

- Which Louis XV quote, which one are we referring to? "Apres moi, le deluge." Oh, well other people have used it. I'm not sure, I can't remember Metternich using it, but he might well have done. But no, no, no, it's usually ascribed to Louis XV. Who was that?

- Adrienne, yes, Adrienne you sent me an email about your book, I haven't forgotten and I've got it, and I'm going to, I've got it on my list of things to do because I wanted to produce another list about historical novels. I've just been rather busy.

- Yeah, no, no, of course Anita, the Quebecers remained French and Catholic, but it's still part of a Protestant English country called Canada, and it is not French. I take it Anita, well, I won't go down that line. No, let me just say that. No, and it has been a divisive issue, but it doesn't detract from a major point that Canada became British and not French.

- Barry says, ""Apres moi, le," oh, you won't be terribly intellectual. "Apres moi, le deluge," was adopted by the RAF 617 Squadron as its motto, the Dambusters.

Q: Do you think America's involvement with war parallels the French situation?

A: Not really, because America is a democracy and because budgets have to be agreed through Congress, et cetera, et cetera. So it's not one man condemning, it's a political decision to go to war whether you agree with that political decision is something different, but the funding for it is agreed. And one, I think, I don't know enough to say whether expenditure and say Vietnam seriously damage the American economy. I don't think it did particularly.

Q: Did France invent improvements in agriculture?

A: No, they were in England, all the improvements were English including the use of potatoes, which of course we'd taken from America. They were, we should say, from indigenous Americans, so both corn and potatoes. Originally sweet potatoes, then the potatoes, the other potatoes we eat today.

Q: How did they find enough food for all the people at court?

A: Oh, quite easily, Rosalyn. Rosalyn, why have you got four eggs? Can you hand three over to me please? But you say, "But William that only

leaves me one." That's your problem, not mine. In other words, food could be commandeered and was by the upper classes.

– Oh, oh, oops, I've lost the question. When, where are we? When I worked for an agriculture corporate in 96 and France was self-sufficient, no food except pork. Well, yeah, maybe, yeah, okay. But that is not the situation in the 18th century and it's still the problem. I'm not even sure that's correct. I'd have to check that because they import a lot of food for example, from Italy. They import food from Britain as well. Where am I?

Q: Didn't the French help the American colonist in the Revolutionary War because England was their enemy?

A: Yes, but France wanted America and so they were hoping to gain something out of all of this.

– John says, "Situation correct changing and it's still changing. Many Anglos have moved to Toronto and other British speaking provinces. There's been an increase in the Muslim population, largely from French speaking Lebanon and immigrants from France. There's been some resentment amongst English because, well, this is the new world that we live in of people migration." And with the problems caused by the changes in our environment, we are going to have to, we're going to have to find new ways of dealing with it. And I'm afraid countries like Canada, with it's vast spaces may find themselves under enormous pressure to take more and more people. This is a big question and it's a question our grandchildren will face, definitely have to face. What do we do about all the people who can no longer live? What about Pakistan? Where are they all going to go? And I'm not suggesting they all go to Canada. What I am saying is that Canada has a problem because of its size and because of its small population in relation to its territory. Take a place like Britain, I mean, where it comes a point when we are genuinely haven't got space. It's all very worrying.

– Who is this? Alfred and Yona. For an interesting fictionalisation of the social financial complexity of pre-revolution France in relation to America, see Lion Feuchtwangers novel, "Proud Destiny," thanks very much.

Q: How do we access your blog?

A: I think it's on the, you just put [www.talkhistorian.com](http://www.talkhistorian.com). [www.talkhistorian.com](http://www.talkhistorian.com) and you'll find it.

– I don't think that Georgina, far be it for me to criticise Lady Antonia Fraser. It isn't like the brioches today, like a sort of, it was a bigger thing and more like a cake in consistency than bread, but I don't think it was a meat pie.

- Yes, salt is always a contentious issue. Salt is one of the things that we can't live without and salt has often been a problem historically. India and the salt tax is one. The salt tax in France is another.

Q: Who wrote "rien" in his diary?

A: Louis XVI on the day that the Bastille fell, 14th of July, 1789, Ava. That's Louis XVI diary.

- Oh, Rita, bless you. Rita has put up my blog, [www.talkhistorian.com](http://www.talkhistorian.com). And if you want to go straight to the blog /blog. It isn't difficult to find, Talk Historian brings everything up.

Q: How was the court at Versailles? How lavish was it?

A: Well, think of the most lavish you can think of and then multiply by 10. It was enormously lavish. Everything, food, clothing, everything about Versailles was totally over the top.

Q: Where would you have to go to see something similar?

A: Not Spain because it was too poor, certainly not Britain, and not Italy of course. The only other European example would be the czars in Russia. But there it would've been very much cruder than even in the 20th century, much, much cruder than at Versailles.

- Tommy says, "There is a Czech saying that salt is worth more than gold." Excellent, that's a very. Yeah, I mean salt was carried over enormous distances in Europe. Yes, Alfred and Yona, you are right. That word salary comes from salt. And that was what the Romans, it was a Roman quotation.

Q: Weren't there nobility impoverished by having to live and keep up with the court at Versailles?

A: Yes, that's also true. And some were, but it built up resentments as well. The difference between France and England, which illustrates this, the English aristocracy remained on their land. And it's one of the reasons that the agricultural revolution work better in England, because the owner of the land will come down and inspect it and make sure people were doing what he wanted. And so productivity increased in England because the nobility weren't in London. They went to London for a season usually in the autumn. Outside of that, they're on their own land. The French nobility stayed in Paris and had not a clue what was going on back home. Absolutely right.

Q: Would you recommend watching the TV series, "Versailles?"

A: I have not, I have to admit Catherine, I have not watched it. I



tend, sorry that sounds awfully snobby. I just don't like watching them because it's, you just find it, I'm just too critical of it really. And my wife gets so angry. She, "For goodness sake, can't you just watch it in peace and let others enjoy it?" No, I can't so I have to go out the room. So no, I don't know about "Versailles."

- I think probably have we nearly got to, I think I've pretty well got to the end of the questions. Can I thank you all for being good listeners, asking good questions, supplying wonderful pieces of information. I always say I learn as much as I give out to you. In fact, I sometimes think I learn a lot more. So thank you very much for joining in. Next week, get your Republican hats on. Americans will find this very easy, British people will not, and we will enter the streets of Paris or revolution French 18th century style. Thanks for listening.