Pressure for Change

Why demands for reform grew in France

MWH.C.4.1.A "Examine the influence of Enlightenment philosophy, economic conditions, the rising influence of the middle class, and the excesses and corruption of the French monarchy on demands for reform."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline economic pressures, circle Enlightenment ideas, write 1 beside evidence of the middle class seeking influence, and write 2 beside evidence of royal excess or favoritism. Use your marks to trace why people demanded reform.

France on the Edge of Reform

(1) In the winter of 1788–1789, bread became harder to afford in many French towns. A poor harvest in 1788 reduced grain supplies, and higher bread prices swallowed workers' wages. At the same time, the royal government owed enormous sums, much of it from wars, including French support for the American Revolution. To pay its debts, the government sought more revenue, yet many nobles and clergy enjoyed tax privileges. People who already struggled to buy food could see an unfair pattern: those with the least room in their budgets carried heavy taxes while powerful groups kept exemptions.

(2) Prosperous merchants, lawyers, and other educated members of the Third Estate also felt shut out. Their businesses and professions mattered to the economy, but birth, not talent, often determined access to high office. They helped write petitions demanding change. Enlightenment writers offered a language for criticizing this system. Montesquieu argued that dividing government power could help prevent abuse; Rousseau argued that legitimate political authority rested on the people. Readers did not all agree on a single plan for France. Still, these ideas helped people ask why inherited privilege should outweigh the interests of those who worked, paid taxes, and helped sustain the kingdom.

(3) At Versailles, the king's court displayed luxury while the treasury was in crisis. Court expenses were not the main source of royal debt, but the contrast made the monarchy look distant from everyday hardship. Royal appointments that favored well-connected families fed concerns that connections mattered more than ability. In 1789, Louis XVI called the Estates-General, an assembly of representatives, to address the financial emergency. Many people demanded fairer taxes and a stronger political voice for the Third Estate. Food prices, debt, privilege, and new ideas had combined to turn dissatisfaction into demands for reform.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did bread prices and royal debt together increase demands for fairer taxes?

2. Why did prosperous members of the Third Estate seek a stronger political voice?

3. How could the ideas of Montesquieu and Rousseau support demands to change the monarchy?

4. Why might court luxury and favored appointments have increased anger even though court expenses were not the main source of royal debt?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are a member of the Third Estate in 1789. Write a four-sentence petition proposing a reform not named in the passage, and explain how two different pressures described in the passage make it necessary.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline economic pressures, circle Enlightenment ideas, write 1 beside evidence of the middle class seeking influence, and write 2 beside evidence of royal excess or favoritism. Use your marks to trace why people demanded reform. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did bread prices and royal debt together increase demands for fairer taxes?	**High bread prices strained workers' budgets while royal debt pushed the government to seek more revenue. People objected to carrying heavy taxes when many nobles and clergy had tax privileges.**
2	Why did prosperous members of the Third Estate seek a stronger political voice?	**Their work mattered to the economy, but birth often limited their access to high office. They helped write petitions demanding change and wanted more influence over government.**
3	How could the ideas of Montesquieu and Rousseau support demands to change the monarchy?	**Montesquieu's argument for dividing power challenged concentrated royal authority. Rousseau's view that authority rested on the people supported demands for a stronger political voice.**
4	Why might court luxury and favored appointments have increased anger even though court expenses were not the main source of royal debt?	**Luxury made the monarchy seem distant from people facing hardship, while favored appointments suggested that connections counted more than ability.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

We ask the king to publish a yearly account of royal debts and spending. The government needs money after costly wars, so people should know how funds are used before they pay more taxes. The court's luxury during hardship has weakened trust in the monarchy. A public account would let representatives question spending rather than rely on royal assurances.

Accept historically plausible links between the passage's conditions, ideas, social groups, and demands for reform. For the petition, accept any specific reform not named in the passage if the student explains how two distinct pressures support it.