Alexandra Cequeria

Professor Frisbie-Fulton

HIST 110-08

9/21/15

Essay One

The French Revolution was caused by a series of injustices imparted on the lower classes of the French economy. While I believe the cause of the Revolution itself is justified, the succession in leadership did not support the Revolution’s ideals.

*Travels of France* documents Arthur Young’s observations of French society and its underlying issues in the years 1787, 1788, and 1789. He supported the revolution at the time because of his aversion to the *métayage* system, the “abuses attending the levy of taxes,” (274) inadequate punishments to crime, and the unfair administration of justice. Those who occupied land were often given very little land, and were in debt to the landlords because of their lack of profit. Intendants and administrators of justice alike could often be bribed to favor some wealthy individuals in taxation or justice. The majority of his observed injustices solely applied to *tiers état*, or the third estate.

The Law of Suspects was published in regard to the administration of punishment on those suspected of royalist beliefs. Several years after *Travels of France*, this decree was born during the Reign of Terror following the revolution. This document immediately suspended freedom of speech, as those “who by their conduct, their connections, their remarks, or their writings show themselves the partisans of tyranny and federalism and the enemies of liberty….” (The Nat’l Convention, 290) were considered automatic suspects.

While I believe the Revolution was initially justified by France’s injustices towards the third estate, the management of leadership after the dethroning of King Louis XVI created an environment rampant with paranoia and abusive power. The Committee of Public Safety overtook the National Convention’s responsibility to seek out internal enemies to a fault. The Law of Suspects condemned a large amount of citizens to suspicion based on their actions, speech, or even heritage. Basically, if one was not constantly reinforcing their support of the revolution, they were branded a “suspect-person” and could be arrested. Approximately 300,000 people were incarcerated during the Reign of Terror, and around 40,000 people were killed. It would be miraculous if all of the people accused were actually guilty of treason. It is also mentioned in the Law of Suspects that the civil and criminal tribunals had a right to jail “persons accused of offences…who may have been acquitted of the accusations brought against them.” In my opinion, this strikingly resembles Young’s observation of the unjust courts of justice under the National Convention’s predecessor: the French monarchy.

To put it simply, I do not believe the end justified the means. The people of France who wished to escape an oppressive monarchy were eventually thrown into an oppressive attempt at democracy. They lived in fear of their government because of its ruthless prosecutions of counter-revolutionary behavior. The National Convention and Committee of Public Safety implored similar tactics as the monarchy they abolished for such reasons. The Revolution was meant to encourage enlightened ideals and support the common man, but the government born from it did not meet society’s expectations.