EUROPE
1760–1871

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FLAGSHIP HISTORY

1 Europe, 1760–1871: a synoptic assessment

1.1 In what ways did ideas about government and society change between 1760 and 1871?
1.2 How far did the structure of government change in Europe between 1760 and 1871?
1.3 To what extent did European international relations change between 1760 and 1871?
1.4 How did warfare develop in Europe between 1760 and 1871?
1.5 How great was the change in Europe's economy and society between 1760 to 1871?

Key Issues

- *Why did the structure and role of government activity change, 1760–1871?*
- *How far did European international relations change, 1760–1871?*
- *In what ways, and why, did society and the economy change in Europe, 1760–1871?*

1.1 In what ways did ideas about government and society change between 1760 and 1871?

Absolute monarchy: The King or Queen has total control over the country. This power is believed to be ordained by God and the monarch rules with the support of the noble classes.

Tsar: Title of the emperor of Russia. Also spelled Czar and Tzar. Believed to be a shorted form of Caesar (Roman emperor).

Liberalism: This idea, spread by the French Revolution, encouraged personal and economic freedom. Personal freedom included the right to property, freedom of speech and worship, and the freedom to participate in politics. The term came to imply resistance to autocratic rule and liberals favoured government by an elected, representative assembly.

Nationalism: The growth and spread of loyalty towards a nation, rather than an individual ruler.

In 1760 the dominant form of government in most of Europe was **absolute monarchy**. This form of state organisation was based on the rule of a hereditary monarch who was the sole source of political power. Such an idea was reinforced by the belief that hereditary monarchs had been chosen and were responsible to God. Historians such as Nicholas Henshall have suggested that the amount of political power held by a monarch was not always complete and unchallenged. Nevertheless, the *ancien régime* rulers of the mid-18th century possessed a degree of political power unknown in the early 21st century.

By 1871 several states were still absolutist in structure. The most important of these states was the Russian Empire. The **Tsar** of Russia, in political terms, was still answerable only to God. Another major state with this form of government was the Ottoman Empire. However, between 1760 and 1871, a major change took place in most European states.

The period 1760–1871 was dominated by competing ideas about the organisation of government and society. Conservatism was a set of ideas that wished to preserve the type of society associated with absolutist monarchy. Absolute monarchy supported a society where large-scale landowners (the aristocracy) possessed considerable political power, usually in the regions of a state. Before the French Revolution, France under Louis XVI was regarded as the best example of this type of state. From 1815 to 1848, Prince Metternich (Chancellor of the Austrian Empire) was the main defender of European conservatism. Throughout the whole period, Russia was Europe's most conservative state. Nicholas I (Tsar 1825–55) was known as the 'policeman of Europe' because of his defence of conservative ideas.

This was challenged by **liberalism** and **nationalism**. Both ideas were products of a major change in European ideas about politics, society and

culture known as the 'Enlightenment'. Enlightenment ideas grew in influence during the 18th century. These ideas formed the basis of the major political movements that helped to undermine and, ultimately, destroy the *ancien régime*. The French Revolution of 1789–99 can be seen as a product of the Enlightenment.

Liberalism was a set of ideas that wished to see political power within a state shared between a monarch and the wider population. Some liberals wanted political power to be limited to those in society who owned property. For instance, in Britain in 1832, and again in 1867, the right to vote in parliamentary elections was based on a property qualification. Most of the Liberals who participated in the 1848–49 European Revolutions shared this view of society. To them, **peasants** and factory workers did not possess either the property or the education to participate in politics. More radical liberals wished to see the creation of democracy (one man, one vote). Only in France, during the early 1790s and during the Second Republic (1848–52), was democracy put into practice.

Peasants: Farm labourers who rented land from a landowner. They were, mostly, illiterate (unable to read and write) and poor.

National/Liberal revolts and risings, 1820–49

Republic: A country whose system of government is based on the idea that every citizen has equal status, so that there is no king or queen and no aristocracy.

For most of the period 1760–1871 liberalism was associated with nationalism – a set of political ideas which suggested that states should consist of people with a common language, culture or race. In 1760, no state could be described as a 'nation state'. Instead, loyalty within a state was to a monarch rather than to 'the nation'. Those republics that did exist were not nation states. Switzerland comprised French, German, Italian and Romansh (Latin) speaking people. The republics of Genoa and Venice, in Italy, had an elected monarch known as the Doge.

The first state based on the principles of liberalism and, to a lesser extent, nationalism was not in Europe at all but was founded by Europeans – the United States of America (USA). The United States' Constitution of 1787 abolished monarchy, creating a **republic** from 13 states. Political power was divided between an elected President and a national parliament (Congress). In addition, political power was also divided between a national government and state governments.

Within Europe, France was the first state to combine these two ideas. The creation of the First French Republic in September 1792 combined support for a French national state with the creation of a National Assembly. So radical was the change brought about by the creation of the First French Republic that the French revolutionaries abolished the traditional calendar – 1792 became Year 1! Perhaps the most famous, or notorious, aspect of these changes was the French Revolutionary Terror of 1792–94, when thousands of aristocrats were put to death. The most significant victim of the Terror was King Louis XVI who was executed in January 1793.

Socialism: A set of political beliefs and principles whose general aim is to create a system in which everyone has an equal opportunity to benefit from the country's wealth.

Throughout the period 1789–1871 European monarchs feared the spread of liberalism and nationalism. Both ideas would undermine their authority and could, ultimately, lead to their overthrow. Following the overthrow of Napoleon I, in 1815, Europe was affected by outbreaks of liberal, national revolutions. In 1820–21, 1830–32 and 1848–49 revolutions took place across Europe.

Most revolutionary leaders wanted to create political regimes based on the parliaments elected by the property-owning classes. In virtually every case, the revolutions were defeated. Only in France, in 1830 and in 1848, was a political regime overthrown by revolution. One of the reasons for the continued failure of liberal revolution was the lack of military power and opposition from peasants and urban industrial workers. Even in France after 1830 and 1848 urban industrial workers tried, but failed, to seize political power. The most serious outbreak of revolutionary violence in Europe after 1799 occurred in France in 1871: the Paris Commune. The Commune was a rising of the population of Paris against the liberal republican government created as a result of France's defeat in the Franco–Prussian War. The Communards looked back to the example and ideas of the French Revolution of 1792–94. The political idea that attracted the urban workers of Paris in 1848 and in 1871 was **socialism**. This idea suggested that economic wealth within society should be distributed more equally among members of society. In 1848, the German socialists Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels produced 'The Communist Manifesto' calling for all industrial workers in Europe to unite against the wealthy classes. Although socialism was to become a popular and powerful political force in the late 19th and 20th centuries, by 1871 it was still in its infancy.

1. How did Conservatism differ from Liberalism in Europe between 1760 and 1871?

2. In what ways did liberalism and nationalism challenge the ways European states were governed and organised between 1760 and 1871?

3. To what extent did the Enlightenment bring about fundamental change in Europe between 1760 and 1871?

1.2 How far did the structure of government change in Europe between 1760 and 1871?

During the period 1760–1871 the structure and role of government changed considerably in western and central Europe. In eastern Europe,

most notably Russia and the Ottoman Empire, political power remained in the hands of ruler. Even here, in 1864, elected local government was introduced in Russia in the form of local ***zemstva***.

Zemstva: Elected local government institutions in rural areas of Russia, established in 1864. The functions of the *zemstva* included the administration of primary education, public health, poor relief, local industry and the maintenance of the highways.

The most notable change in the structure of government was the rise in importance of national, elected assemblies in decision making. In Britain, in 1760, parliament played an important role in the government of the country. By that date, it was accepted that the Prime Minister had to command support from the majority of the House of Commons. The King had the power to create parliamentary seats. He also had the power to offer MPs government jobs. As a result, for most of George III's reign (1760–1821) parliament followed the views of the reigning monarch. By 1871, the political role of the British monarch had declined considerably. Queen Victoria (1837–1901) became a constitutional monarch who, by the time of her death, reigned but did not rule. In 1871, the Prime Minister was the Liberal, William Gladstone, whom Victoria disliked intensely. Monarchic-controlled government had been replaced by parliamentary government. The extension of the right to vote, in 1832 and 1867, aided this process.

In France, parliamentary government had become established. Between 1830 and 1852, the French national parliament played an important part in government. However, under Napoleon I (1799–1815) and Napoleon III (1852–70) France was, in reality, a dictatorship.

Serfdom: The social and economic system by which the land was owned by the wealthy classes but cultivated by serfs (peasants).

Suffrage: The right of people to vote in order to choose a government or a national leader.

In central Europe the absolute power of monarchs had been adversely affected by the impact of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1792–1815). As Napoleon's armies crossed Europe to reach as far as Moscow in 1812, the French Emperor abolished **serfdom** and the Holy Roman Empire. By 1815, central Europe had been transformed into the German Confederation of 38, later 39, states. Many of these states had their own national parliaments. The most notable exceptions were the two Germanic 'Great Powers', Prussia and Austria. Instead they possessed local Diets, assemblies dominated by the aristocracy. Although the 1848–49 revolutions in Central Europe failed to overthrow any state, they did lead to changes within them. In Prussia, a national parliament elected by a three-class **suffrage** appeared in 1848. In Austria, conflict between the ruling Habsburg family and the Hungarians led to the creation of the Compromise, or *Ausgleich*, of 1867. This created the new state of Austria-Hungary. Each half of the Empire possessed its own elected national assembly.

By 1871, every state in Europe, with the exception of Russia and the Ottoman Empire, had a national parliament. In Britain, control of the House of Commons resulted in control of government. In states like the newly-created German Empire, parliament had an advisory role only. Of the five Great Powers, in 1871, only Britain and France possessed parliamentary government; Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia were states where the ruling royal family still possessed considerable political power.

1. Explain how rule solely by a monarch was changed in Europe between 1760 and 1871?

2. How important were parliaments in the government of European states by 1871?

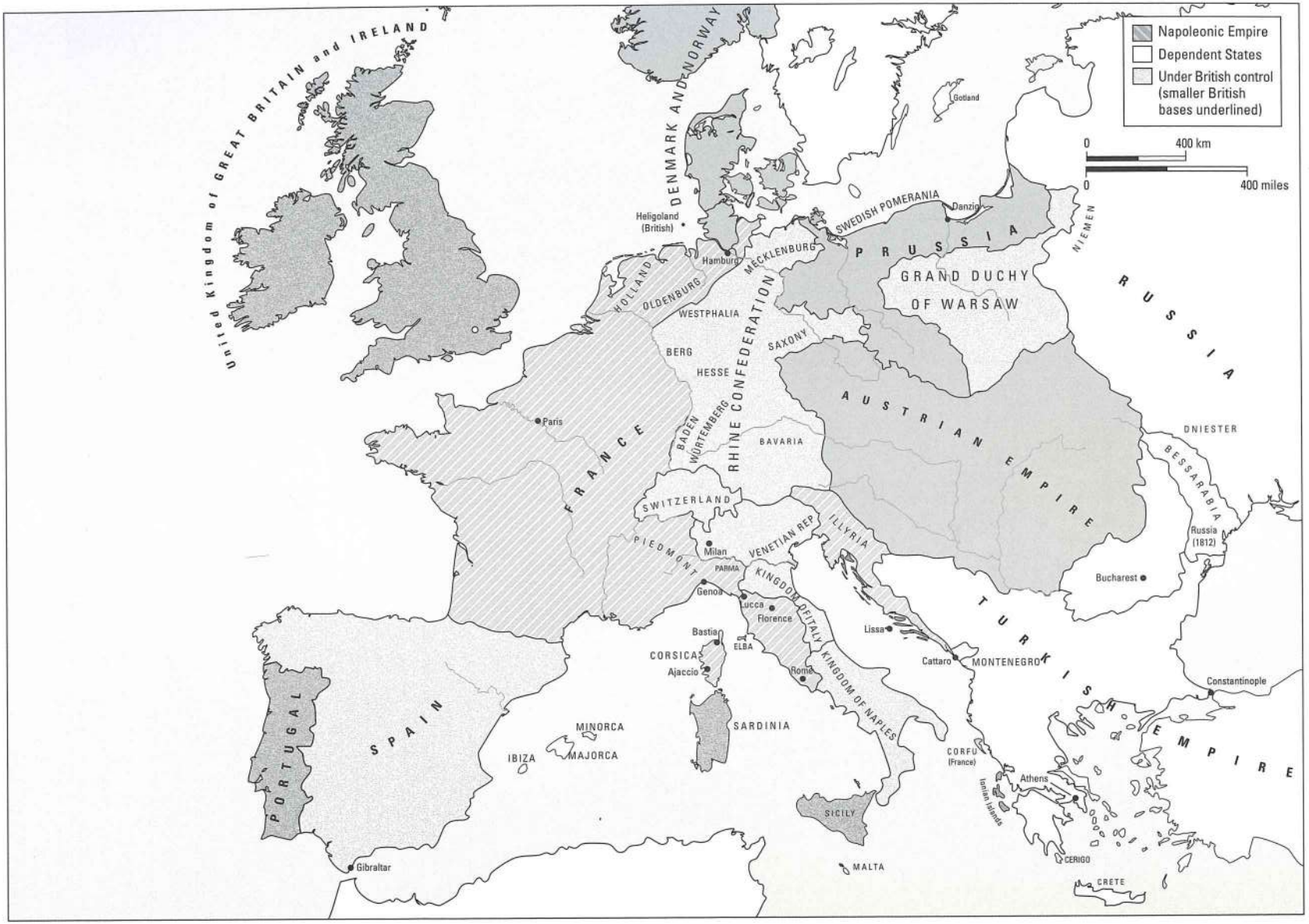
1.3 To what extent did European international relations change between 1760 and 1871?

In 1760, the five Great Powers of Europe – Britain, France, Austria, Russia and Prussia – were all engaged in the Seven Years' War (1756–63). These states were regarded as 'great powers' because of their military strength. An important aspect of 18th-century international relations was the 'balance of power'. This idea aimed at preventing any one state dominating Europe. No one Great Power possessed the ability to dominate the other four.

Throughout the 18th century, two major conflicts between the Great

Central Europe in 17

Central Europe in 1789



Europe in 1811

Central Europe in 1815

Study the three maps on pages 15–17.

1. In what ways did the political map of Europe change between 1789 and 1811?

2. To what extent was the political map of Europe in 1815 similar to the political map in 1789?

Powers took place. Britain and France were at war 1701–13, 1744–48, 1756–63, 1778–83 and 1793–1815. Britain and France's conflict was mainly over colonial possessions. The British and French fought each other in North America, the Caribbean and India. In addition, from 1714, the Kings of England were also Electors of the German state of Hanover. British armies in the 18th and 19th centuries not only fought to defend Britain but also the King's German possessions.

The other major Great Power conflict was between Austria and Prussia – the two Germanic powers. This conflict reached its height when King Frederick the Great of Prussia invaded the Austrian province of Silesia in 1740. Austria and Prussia fought each other 1740–48 and 1756–63. This does not mean that Austria and Prussia were not able to find agreement on some issues. From 1772 to 1796 Austria, Prussia and Russia co-operated in partitioning the large, but politically weak, eastern European state of Poland.

The European internal system was transformed by the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon I. From 1792, old animosities between the Great Powers were put aside because of the greater threat of the French Revolution. From 1792 to 1815 Britain, Austria, Prussia and Russia allied together at various times. Initially, these Great Powers allied together to stop the spread of French Revolutionary ideas. From 1799, they allied together against Napoleon I. From 1799 to 1815 Napoleon I dominated European international relations. His military campaigns of 1805–06 defeated Austria, Russia and Prussia. By 1810, France dominated the European continent from Portugal to the Russia border.

Napoleon I's eventual defeat between 1814 and 1815 was the result of considerable co-operation between the European states. The Fourth Coalition of Powers against Napoleon (1812–15) was made up of Britain, Austria, Prussia, Russia and Sweden.

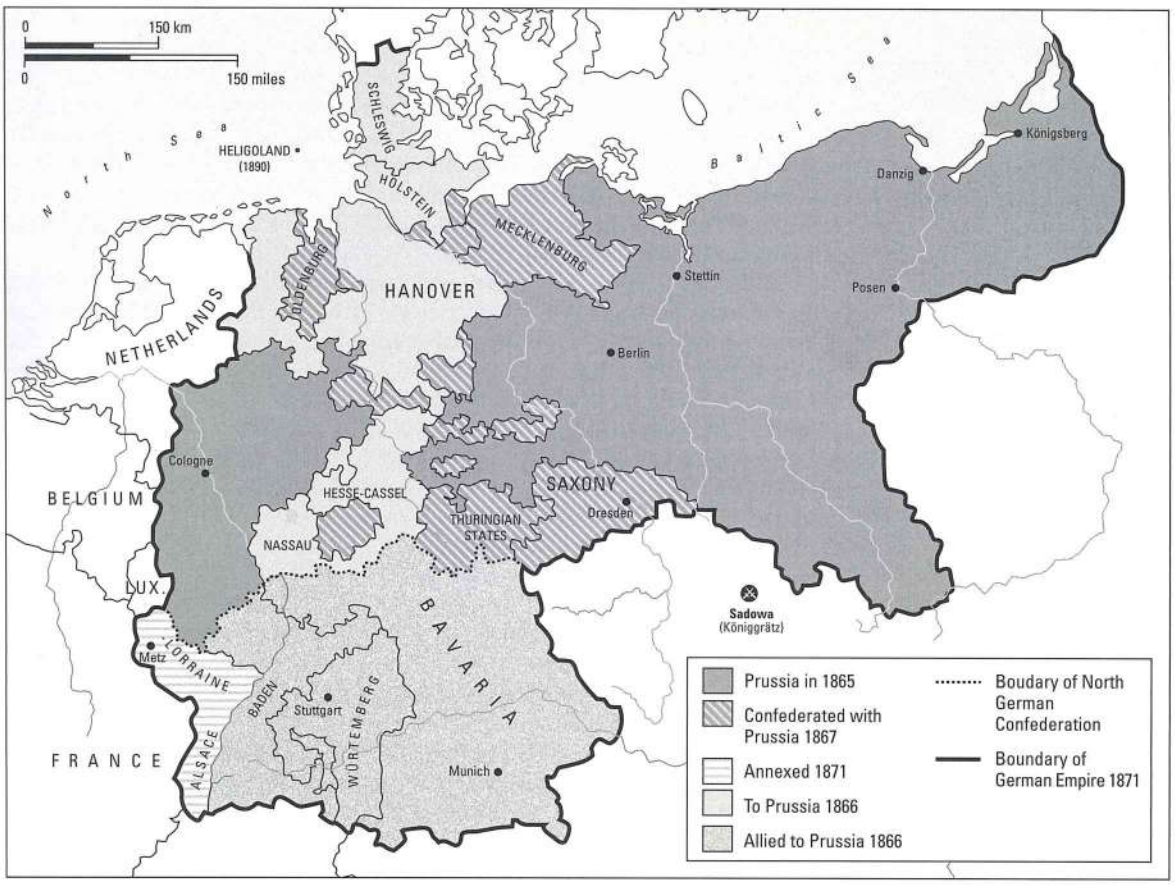
The highlight of European international co-operation took place in Vienna in 1814–15 – a new balance of power based on the five Great Powers of the 18th century. The political map of Europe (see page 17) was redrawn to help ensure that a recurrence of the Napoleonic Wars could not occur. To maintain European peace the Great Powers agreed to work in concert (together) to resolve any major European crisis. The Concert of Europe worked successfully to end the Greek War on Independence (1830–32), the Belgian Revolt (1830–39) and conflicts in the Ottoman Empire (1840 and 1841). From 1815 to 1854 war between European Great Powers was avoided.

However, between 1854–71, European international relations were transformed. From 1854 to 1856 Russia fought Britain, France and the Ottoman Empire in the Crimean War. This conflict occurred as a result of **the Eastern Question** and the European 'balance of power'.

The Eastern Question: Term applied to the issues raised by the decline and disintegration of the Turkish Empire in the 19th century. The most important of these was the question of which states would fill the power vacuum left by the decline of Turkish power in the Balkans, and what the impact would be upon the balance of power in that part of the world.

The Eastern Question was an international problem created by the widespread belief that the Ottoman Empire was in a state of collapse. Britain feared Russia would gain territory and influence if this took place. This would result in an alteration in the European balance of power in Russia's favour. Already, during the Greek War of Independence (1821–32) and the Mehemet Ali crises (1831–33 and 1839–41), problems within the Ottoman Empire almost resulted in war between the Great Powers.

The Crimean War had a major impact on international relations. The most important was the end of the Holy Alliance. This international agreement had united Austria, Russia and Prussia since 1815. The main aim of the alliance was to prevent the success of liberal revolutions in Europe. In 1849, the Hungarian revolution within Austria was defeated with the aid of the Russian army. In 1855, at the height of the Crimean War, Austria



The unification of Germany

allied itself with Britain and France against Russia. From 1855 to the creation of the Three Emperors' Agreement of 1873, Russia did not become involved in European international relations.

The end of the Holy Alliance helped to bring about the two most important developments in international relations between 1815–1914 – the unification of Italy and the unification of Germany. The unification of Italy began with the defeat of Austria by France in 1859. From 1859 to 1861 the Italian state of Piedmont-Sardinia and Italian nationalists led by Guiseppe Garibaldi united most of the Italian peninsula.

Of great significance was the unification of Germany. The old rivalry between Prussia and Austria reappeared in the 1860s. Prussia wanted to be co-equal in importance with Austria within the **German Confederation**. When this could not be achieved through diplomacy, war broke out between Austria and Prussia in 1866. Prussia's crushing victory resulted in the Prussian domination of Europe. In 1870–71, the Franco–Prussian War led to the creation of the German Empire when the three South German states of Baden, Bavaria and Würtemberg agreed to fight on Prussia's side against the French.

German Confederation: The alliance of German states, under the presidency of the Austrian Emperor, established in 1815 to guarantee the security of its members in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars. Also known as the *Bund*.

In both the unification of Italy and of Germany, Russia took no active part to preserve the Treaty agreed at Vienna in 1814–15. Britain actively encouraged the unification of the Italian **peninsula**. The British saw Italy as a possible ally against France in the Mediterranean.

Peninsula: A body of land surrounded on three sides by water.

By 1871, European international relations had been transformed. Since the Middle Ages central Europe, in the form of Germany and Italy, had been divided into a large number of small states. Both areas had been the

1. What was the 'balance of power', as applied to European international relations?

2. Why were the European Great Powers willing to co-operate with each other in the period 1760–1871?

3. Why were European international relations transformed between 1792 and 1815 and between 1854 and 1871?

battlegrounds of large powers such as France, Spain, Sweden and Austria. By 1871, both areas were united into large states. Germany, in particular, had now replaced France as Europe's most important Great Power. Ever since the reign of Louis XIV (1643–1715) France had been Europe's most important state. This position reached its height under Napoleon I. In 1870–71, France lost its position in dramatic fashion. At the battle of Sedan (September 1870), the French Emperor, Napoleon III, was captured by the Prussians. Between 1870 and early 1871, Paris was besieged by the Prussians and forced to surrender.

Although Germany was the dominant Great Power on the continent, Britain was Europe's only world power. Although Britain lost its American colonies between 1775–83, it still controlled a large world empire. The centrepiece was the British Indian Empire. In addition, Britain had colonies in every continent. It dominated world trade and had Europe's most industrial economy.

1.4 How did warfare develop between 1760 and 1871?

The changes in international relations were influenced by changes in warfare. The most effective aspect of warfare in the period 1760–1871 was British sea power. The Royal Navy laid the foundations for and maintained the British Empire and British dominance of trade. By 1760, the Royal Navy had established itself as Europe's most successful navy. In 1759, in the Seven Years' War, the Royal Navy defeated the French Atlantic fleet at the battle of Quiberon Bay and the French Mediterranean fleet at Lagos Bay.

These victories contained the basic ingredients of British success. Sailors in the Royal Navy were better fed and had a higher morale than their French or Spanish counterparts. This allowed the Royal Navy to **blockade** enemy naval bases, such as Brest in France, for long periods. The ability to blockade enabled the British army to conquer French Canada in 1759–60. In the Napoleonic Wars, the Navy successfully blockaded French-occupied Europe.

Blockade: To prevent goods and armies from reaching a particular country or place.

The other ingredient for success was the quality of naval officers. A naval career was one way a person of modest means could rise to a position of authority. The best example was Horatio Nelson (1758–1805), the son of a Norfolk parson. Nelson's command of naval strategy and tactics helped to defeat Napoleon's navy off Egypt in the battle of the Nile in 1798. His most spectacular victory was at Trafalgar on 21 October 1805. Nelson destroyed the combined fleets of France and Spain, the second and third largest navies in the world after the Royal Navy. Trafalgar confirmed Britain's control of the seas, which was to last beyond the First World War. Britain's naval dominance was enhanced by the Treaty of Vienna (1814–15), which gave Britain important naval bases across the world. Britain acquired the Cape of Good Hope, Mauritius, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Malta and the Ionian Islands off western Greece.

Even the development of naval technology, with the appearance of steam-driven ships, did not diminish British naval power. In the 1830s, the Royal Navy blockaded the river Scheldt. This forced Holland to accept Belgian independence. In the 1850s, the Navy helped Britain to win the Crimean War. Only in 1859 did a naval scare occur. In that year the French launched the world's first ironclad ship, 'La Gloire'. By the early

1860s, Britain had launched the first true battleship, 'HMS Warrior', to reconfirm British naval power.

In land warfare the most important developments occurred in military tactics. The individual who transformed these was Napoleon I. His spectacular military career from 1797 to 1815 displayed his ability to use field artillery effectively. More importantly, it showed his ability to organise and move troops around the battlefield. Napoleon introduced the 'Corps' as a basic unit of army organisation.

However, what gave French Revolutionary and Napoleonic armies the edge over their rivals was conscription (compulsory military service). Beginning with *La Levée en masse*, in 1793, the French were able to raise large armies. By 1805 Napoleon was commanding a force of 150,000 men. Well led, well provisioned and well armed, these large forces gave the French spectacular military success from the battle of Valmy in 1792 until the battle of Leipzig in 1813,

Even after Napoleon I's death, in 1821, Napoleonic tactics dominated European military thinking up to 1871. However, military tactics were overtaken by the development of weaponry. By the 1860s the French and Prussians had developed breech-loading muskets which allowed infantry to fire more rapidly over greater distances. This development led to considerable loss of life.

The Franco–Austrian War of 1859 was noted for its bloody battles of Magenta and Solferino. By the time of the Franco–Prussian War of 1870–71, mass infantry attack – a feature of Napoleonic tactics – proved both ineffective and costly in terms of lives.

Even more important than changes in weaponry were changes in transportation. The development of railways and their efficient use by the army gave Prussia the military edge in the 1860s. The Prussians were able to concentrate their forces quickly and effectively. It was a decisive factor at the battle of Sadowa (Königgrätz) in the Austro–Prussian War of 1866. It also enabled the Prussians to defeat France in 1870–71.

? *1. Why was Britain the dominant naval power in Europe between 1760 and 1871?*

2. To what extent was France the main military power in Europe between 1760 to 1871?

1.5 How great was the change in Europe's economy and society between 1760 and 1871?

In 1760, Europe was a continent heavily dependent upon agriculture. The vast majority of the population lived and worked on the land as peasants. For most of this population a form of serfdom existed. In France, this involved **feudal obligations** to landowners. In the Austrian Empire it took the form of the *robot* (labour service).

Feudal obligations: Peasants had to perform a number of duties by law, such as working for the landowner, free of charge, during harvesting or giving the landowner a proportion of their produce.

In Russia over 80% of the population were serfs – the property of their owners. The lack of freedom and the failure of harvests led to peasant revolt. These revolts were spontaneous, short lived and excessively violent. Peasants attacked millers (who were believed to have secretly stored food) and landowners. The most serious peasant uprising in the mid-18th century occurred in 1763 in Russia: the Pugachev Rebellion. It was defeated by Catherine the Great of Russia.

Industry was usually limited to towns where a guild system operated. Each industry, such as shoemaking, was controlled by a guild, which regulated working practices and wage rates.

By 1760, Europe was a major participant in world trade. Britain, France, Spain, Portugal and Holland had all gained considerable wealth from trading with the Americas, Africa and Asia. A significant feature of European trade was the Atlantic slave trade. A triangle of trade, where Europeans sold their home-produced goods in west Africa for slaves which were sold for tobacco, cotton and sugar in the New World. Britain

dominated this trade by 1760. Ports like Bristol and Liverpool acquired considerable wealth as a result.

By 1871, European society had gone through considerable change. Serfdom and feudal obligations on peasants had been swept away. In France, change came with the French Revolution of 1789. For western and central Europe, feudal obligations were abolished by the advancing French Revolutionary and Napoleonic armies. The 1848 Revolutions brought an end to the *robot* in Austria and feudal obligations in eastern Prussia. However , it took till 1861 for serfdom to be abolished in Russia. Even then the former serfs had to pay 'redemption' payments to their former masters over 49 years.

The most significant social change occurred with industrialisation. Beginning in Britain a revolution occurred in manufacturing. Machines in textile production increased production by such a margin that cost of production dropped significantly. Also the new machines could be operated by semi-skilled workers. Highly skilled handloom weavers faced economic ruin as a result.

1. In what ways did industrialisation affect Europe between 1760 and 1871?

2. How important was economic and social change in producing political change in Europe between 1760 and 1871?

By 1815 Britain had become the manufacturing centre of Europe. New cities such as Manchester arose because of the boom in the textile industry, notably cotton. Other cities such as Birmingham grew wealthy through engineering and metal production. Unique to British industrialisation was the use of canals as the major transport system. Britain's industrial might helped make Britain one of Europe's Great Powers.

Industrial change brought social change. Large numbers of rural workers flocked to new industrial cities. Living in poor housing and working long hours factory workers became an important social class. Even more important were the new wealthy middle class which had grown rich as a result of the growth of trade and manufacturing. In Britain this rising middle class led the campaign for the extension of the right to vote in 1830–1832 and the demand for free trade in the 1840s.

Industrial change also affected much of Europe after 1815. In France, the growth of factories and mass production led to the economic ruin of the guilds and skilled workers. It was this social group which was important in the 1848 French Revolution. It was also important within Germany during the 1848–49 Revolutions.

1. Assess the importance of the change in political ideas, economy, society and warfare to the development of European international relations between 1760 to 1871.

2. What do you regard as the most important changes in European History between 1760 and 1871?

Give reasons to support your answer.

The development of railways and the telegraph helped to reduce distance and to speed up the transmission of news. In the 1848 Revolutions the news of the fall from power of the Austrian Chancellor, Metternich, was so rapid that it precipitated revolution in other parts of the German Confederation with days.

In Germany, economic change was aided by the creation of the *Zollverein* (customs union) in 1834. Under the leadership of Prussia, and excluding Austria, the *Zollverein* brought economic unity to Germany. It helped to pave the way for eventual political union under Prussia in the 1860s.

By 1871, industrialisation had reached the Low Countries (Belgium and Holland), parts of France and much of Germany outside Austria. It meant that during the remainder of the 19th century economic power would have an important impact upon military power. This led to the dominance of Britain in naval power and Germany in land warfare.

2 The Enlightenment and Enlightened Despotism

Key Issues

- *How important was the Enlightenment?*
- *Did the Enlightenment present a coherent programme of change?*
- *How far did Enlightened ideas affect existing ideas about absolute monarchy?*

2.1 What was the Enlightenment?
2.2 What were the main ideas of the writers of the Enlightenment?
2.3 What was the impact of the Enlightenment?
2.4 Did Joseph II of Austria succeed in imposing the Enlightenment throughout his Empire?
2.5 Historical interpretation: Why have historians differed in their interpretations of Catherine the Great?

Framework of Events

The Enlightenment

1734	Voltaire publishes *The Philosophical Letters*
1748	Montesquieu publishes the *Spirit of the Laws*
1762	Rousseau publishes *The Social Contract*
1763	Beccaria's work on justice is published – *Crime and Punishment*
1772	The *Encyclopédie* (collected works of the *philosophes*) is completed
1774–6	Turgot, a Physiocrat, becomes *Controlleur-Général* in France

Austria and Joseph II

1765	Joseph becomes co-Regent with his mother, Maria Theresa
1780	Joseph assumes sole power
1781	Toleration for Protestants; Joseph abolishes serfdom; penal code is introduced
1782	Papal visit. Toleration for Jews
1784	District Commissioners are appointed
1787	Administrative reforms in Belgium
1788	War with Turkey. Revolts in Hungary
1789	Tax and Agrarian Law. Belgium revolts
1790	Reforms cancelled. Joseph dies.

Catherine the Great

1762	Catherine becomes Tsarina
1764	Church lands taken over by the state
1767	Legislative Commission called
1773–5	Pugachev revolt
1775	Local Government reform
1785	Charter of Nobility/Charter of the Cities
1786	Statute of Popular Schools
1790	Catherine's anti-Revolutionary suppression
1796	Catherine dies.

Overview

THE term 'Enlightenment' refers to the outpouring of ideas which sent shock waves throughout Europe from the middle of the 18th century. As historian E.N. Williams states, in *The Ancient Regime in Europe* (1970), it burst 'in a shower of brilliant concepts' and led to feverish intellectual debate across the continent. Europe was a continent dominated by the actions of kings, queens, nobles and clergy. The 18th century witnessed a challenge to existing ideas about absolute monarchy. Some monarchs, such as in France, clung to old beliefs. Others, such as Joseph II of Austria or Catherine the Great of Russia, recognised that they had a duty to serve the state and to reform it. For once, historians cannot be blamed for attaching the label the 'Enlightenment' to that period. Contemporaries used the term *le siécle des lumiéres* ('the enlightened age') because they realised that this was an exciting time to be enquiring, philosophising and reasoning. As the printing presses got to work and as discussions took place in coffee-houses, clubs, literary associations or among **salon society**, there was an awareness that new ways of looking at the world were being formulated. Jean D'Alembert called it a 'lively intellectual ferment'; but where was it leading?

Salon society: Fashionable ladies and gentlemen drawn from the noblesse (nobility) who met socially in salons or public lounges either at Court or in the houses of the wealthy. The salons were places of gossip, gambling and talk of the Enlightenment.

Philosophes: These writers of the Enlightenment sought to question traditional assumptions about society, the Church and **absolutism**.

Absolutism: In theory, this political system meant that the ruler was 'absolved' from accountability to his fellow men – he or she was answerable only to God.

It is easier to identify what the intellectuals of the Enlightenment disliked rather than decide what they were actually proposing. Perhaps this is hardly surprising. It was never the intention of the French ***philosophes*** to suggest policy; it was certainly their intention to question, argue and reason. As historian Hugh Dunthorne, in the Historical Association pamphlet 'The Enlightenment' (1991), puts it: 'For all its party-spirit, the movement produced no generally accepted programme and its leading members were famous for disagreeing with one another.' Their ideas were complex, as were the geographical, social and political contexts in which they wrote. Few ideas united them. Things were certainly different in Britain, in France, in Italy or in Germany.

However, it is possible to identify broad features which were common to the thinkers of the Enlightenment and which highlight changes in mentality which were taking place throughout Europe. What were these features?

2.1 What was the Enlightenment?

A sense of enquiry and criticism

Jean le Rond d'Alembert (1717–1783)
A French mathematician who worked closely on the great work of the Enlightenment, *Encyclopédie*, with Denis Diderot. D'Alembert framed several mathematical theorems and principles (including d'Alembert's principle) and devised the theory of partial differential equations.

It was the central nature of the Enlightenment to criticise and to enquire – and the range of targets selected for scrutiny was very wide. The *philosophes* did manage to agree on one matter – they contributed to the collection of their works, the *Encyclopédie*, published in 28 volumes and completed by 1772.

Denis Diderot, its co-editor, set out the aims of the Enlightenment: 'Everything must be examined, everything must be shaken up, without exception.' Little escaped their attention. As T.C.W. Blanning notes, in *Joseph II and Enlightened Despotism* (1970), there was nothing new about the attack on existing assumptions, ideas and institutions. But there was a new intensity and passion about it.

This search for new truths would shake the confidence of the establishment, particularly the Catholic establishment. The thinkers refused to

accept the unproved dogmas (stated opinions) of the Churches or the Scriptures. The Church's insistence that it was itself the exclusive repository of all truth and knowledge had already been undermined. Scientific enquiry threatened the Church. The **Inquisition** had been called to suppress Galileo's theory that the sun was at the centre of the universe, an idea which was contrary to Church teaching. Questions were being asked about Catholic beliefs. Printing presses poured out attacks on Church dogmas, abuse and injustices. The bishops were attacked for their worldly wealth, loose morals and privileges. The Church seemed to encourage superstition and intolerance.

The Inquisition: A Catholic tribunal set up by Rome to root out heresy.

The **Revocation of the Edict of Nantes** which suppressed the French Huguenots (Protestants) and led to the emigration of thousands of skilled **artisans** was further evidence of a backward-looking Catholic Church. The celebrated case of Jean Calas, a Huguenot wrongly executed for murder after **judicial torture**, was further evidence of injustice carried out by a corrupt legal system. **Tithes and church taxes** contributed to the burden on peasants. Monasteries attracted particular contempt. The portly monks – isolated, rich and surrounded by holy 'relics' – were the subject of scorn. Many contemporaries would have agreed when Voltaire (see page 30) dismissively noted that 'they (monks) sing, they drink, they digest'. The Catholic Church controlled education and did its best to prevent the spread of new ideas – the work of its censors saw to that. The enlightened thinkers had a different agenda.

Revocation of the Edict of Nantes 1685: Louis XIV revoked the edict (law) granting some limited toleration of Huguenots (Protestants) within the French State. Following this, Huguenots were persecuted and forcibly converted to Catholicism.

Artisans: People whose work requires skill with their hands, such as painters and sculptors, carpenters and engravers.

Judicial torture: A 'confession' was extracted on the orders of Catholic judges. In fact, Jean Calas' only crime was being a Protestant. His name was eventually cleared.

Tithes and church taxes: The clergy received special dues, including tithes, which amounted to about 8% of a peasant's annual crop. See Chapter 3.

A sense of human progress

Enlightened thinkers sought to liberate 'man' from the narrow teachings of the Church. They shared a faith in the possibility of human progress and improvement – people should no longer be satisfied with their lot just because 'God had ordained it thus'. Thought was given to the 'general good' – promoting people's happiness in this life rather than in the after-life. Education could help people to realise their talents and to become useful citizens. Everything was subjected to the test of **utilitarianism** – useful laws and useful institutions were needed to improve the welfare of society. And this would be achieved by an army of officials. They would spread the benefits of reform introduced by a ruler who would regard himself as the 'first servant of the state'.

Utilitarianism: The belief that the greatest happiness of the greatest number should be the guiding principle of conduct.

A sense of reason

A revolution in philosophy was driven by René Descartes, Isaac Newton and John Locke. When Newton proposed his laws on motion in his book

René Descartes (1596–1650)
French philosopher and mathematician who believed that commonly accepted knowledge was doubtful because of the subjective nature of the senses. He attempted to rebuild human knowledge using as his foundation *cogito ergo sum* ('I think, therefore I am'). Descartes identified the 'thinking thing' (i.e. the human soul and consciousness).

Isaac Newton (1642–1727)
English physicist and mathematician who laid the foundations of physics. He studied at Cambridge University, where he became a professor at the age of 26. Newton sat in the parliaments of 1689 and 1701–2 as a Whig. As master of the Royal Mint he carried through a reform of coinage. In 1665 he began to investigate gravitation inspired, so legend has it, by seeing an apple fall from a tree. A by-product of his experiments with light and prisms was the development of the reflecting telescope.

John Locke (1632–1704)
English philosopher who studied at Oxford. He practised medicine before becoming secretary to the Earl of Shaftesbury in 1667. Locke fled to Holland in 1683 where he lived until the 1688 revolution brought William of Orange to the English throne. Locke's 'Second Treatise on Civil Government' (1690) helped to form contemporary ideas of liberal democracy. This theory supposed that governments derive their authority from popular consent, so a government may be rightly overthrown if it infringes such fundamental rights of the people as religious freedom.

Principia Mathematica, his ideas about gravity, and the movement of the planets soon became popular throughout Europe.

The idea of observation and arriving, through scientific reasoning, at an understanding of the laws which govern Nature, quickly caught on. Newton's success in using this approach lit the path which others would follow. He showed that there were alternatives to accepting blindly the assertions of the Church. But the *philosophes* still had a belief in God – He had not been discarded; nor was there any intention of this happening. God was acknowledged as part of Nature. As the creator, God still had a role in the universe along with the laws which made it work. However, God was no longer the all-powerful and sole force.

A sense of upheaval

Descartes declared he would 'accept as true nothing that I did not know to be evidently so'. Politics, society and economics were not going to escape criticism. If the Church was being challenged, so was **divine right monarchy**. The mystical powers of the King (for example, his claim to cure diseases by the laying-on of hands) were likely to fail the application of scientific reasoning. Once divine right was undermined, absolutism was also likely to be challenged. Absolutism 'absolved' the monarch from earthly accountability because he would ultimately answer to his God. If this was questioned, on what authority was the power of the ruler now based? And was absolutism so beneficial?

Divine right monarchy: Traditionally, Kings claimed to be appointed by God and thereby act as his representatives on Earth.

It was not a coincidence that some of the *philosophes* were **anglophiles**. Both Voltaire and Montesquieu (see page 29) appreciated that the English model reflected Enlightened thinking and that England's emergence as a world power and industrial nation owed nothing to absolutism. Why should it? The defenders of an absolutist system argued that it guaranteed strong government and military pre-eminence, as it enabled the complete mobilisation of the resources of the state. England, however, appeared to be achieving similar results with a monarch who shared power with parliament. Knowledge of other ancient civilisations was likely to make Europeans question the assumption that they were more advanced. Books told of cultures outside Europe, perhaps in China or Arabia, Rome or Greece. Europe's ruling families no longer felt assured that they were centre stage – the Catholic Church and absolutist rulers ought not to have sounded so self-satisfied, claiming that they alone had all the answers. Enlightened thinkers did not accept that the state should be run purely in the interests of one royal family. Critical voices were heard more regularly as the century wore on.

Anglophiles: People who love all things Anglo-Saxon (English).

If the purpose of the ruler was being re-examined, so was the purpose of **privilege**. Did privilege fulfil a useful role, thinkers asked? Did the privileges of the Church, **nobility**, **guilds** and **municipal corporations** safeguard the rights of the individual citizen? Or did they detract from the general good by encouraging exploitation of one individual by another? How might the greatest happiness and a sense of progress be achieved when one group of citizens overburdened and forced the rest into following them? How might injustice be prevented when the privileged few could maintain their position at other people's expense?

Privilege: Nobles and clergy had particular rights – for instance, they could claim to be tried in special courts and to have tax exemption.

Nobility: Traditionally, the noble class fought to defend the realm. It consisted of a privileged, landed and titled group of people.

Guilds: Groups of skilled craftworkers organised themselves into guilds (groups) to protect prices and wages.

Municipal corporations: Ruling bodies of towns and cities, often controlled by one powerful, wealthy family.

Those who defended privilege were regarded as the enemies of progress. John Locke's 'Second Treatise on Civil Government' (1690) proposed the idea of a social contract between government and governed. 'Man' had a right to basic freedoms and security. The ruler was responsible for maintaining such natural laws. In a **civil society**, there was mutual consent and agreement about these fundamental rights – power was a trust from the community. When laws were applied according to reason,

Civil society: Based on the theory that the governed consented to the rule of an administrator who would provide security and a 'natural order' in society – liberty, self-preservation and the right to own property. Power in a civil society was not derived from God but from the agreement and trust of the governed.

What does this source reveal about the attitudes of the Enlightenment towards the law and the reform of justice in the 18th century?

In this engraving from one of Beccaria's books, the figure of Justice turns away from capital punishment towards the tools used by criminals sentenced to hard labour.

the individual should be protected against injustice and arbitrary rule. The rule of law should protect the citizen, but who should safeguard the law? Should it be the King, who also created the law? It became a fundamental principle of enlightened thinking that those who enact the law should not have the power to enforce and apply it. Hence a 'separation of powers' was proposed – that the ruler should be separate from the judiciary – to prevent despotism (see page 29), and to impose checks and balances on the power of the monarch.

Similarly, when Cesare Beccaria wrote about justice in 1764 he called for a fairer legal system. This included equality before the law, and an end to torture and capital punishment. Laws, he said, needed to be simpler and fairer.

But did the writers of the Enlightenment present a clear and organised programme? No. In matters of detail there were major differences between the *philosophes*. However, in general their writings were optimistic, benevolent, reflective and committed to making laws which guaranteed progress and the greater good. None of this might reasonably be regarded as revolutionary.

Humanitarianism: The concern that humanitarians have for the welfare of humankind. Humanitarians work for the welfare of humankind in the hope that life will be improved and there will be less suffering and pain.

Orphanages: Places where children who are orphans (have no parents or guardians) are looked after.

Emancipation of serfs: Freeing peasants from having to work for an overlord, so that they can live their own lives.

Enlightened beliefs

These include:

- the rule of law
- welfare and the general 'good'
- progress
- efficient administration
- better education and poorhouses
- toleration
- abolition of torture and persecution
- **humanitarianism**
- a free press, the founding of **orphanages**, the **emancipation of serfs**
- the abolition of privilege.

1. In what ways did the Enlightened challenge traditional ideas in 18th-century Europe?

2. How far was the Enlightenment a 'revolutionary' movement?

2.2 What were the main ideas of the writers of the Enlightenment?

The Physiocrats

This group of writers aimed to resolve the apparent contradiction between authority on the one hand and defending people's freedoms on the other. How was it possible to ensure the rule of law (which was necessary to protect people's security and rights) while at the same time preserving civil liberty? In which case, were 'enlightened' and 'despotic' two mutually exclusive and contradictory concepts? The Physiocrats defended the concept of 'legal despotism'. They argued that only a strong ruler with authoritarian powers could maintain the natural order of things. They defined the natural order as the people's right to self-preservation, liberty, private property, and to buy and sell in a free market without hindrance. According to historian Norman Davies, in *Europe – A History* (1970), 'The celebrated slogan '*pauvres paysans, pauvre royaume*' ('poor peasants, poor realm') encapsulated the revolutionary notion that national prosperity could only be assured through the personal prosperity and liberty of all.'

Physiocrats, who included François Quesnay (who wrote his 'Tableau Economique' in 1758) and Anne[1] Turgot (French *Controlleur-Général,* 1774–76) then set about arguing how this prosperity might be assured. In a concerted attack on **mercantilism**, they aimed to abolish restrictions and remove obstacles to economic freedom. These included abolishing monopolies, guilds, tariffs and, most of all, the privileges of the wealthy. It would need despotic power to cut through the self-interest of these privileged groups. With obstructions removed, the state would flourish. **Serfdom** would be abolished. A single land tax would be

Mercantilism: An economic theory based on strict state regulation to obtain wealth by stimulating exports and restricting imports. Subsidies and monopolies would help exports, while tariffs would stop foreign competition.

Serfdom: The social and economic system by which the land was owned by the wealthy classes but cultivated by serfs (peasants).

[1] Anne was a man's name at this time.

paid by all, with the landlord paying his fair share. Efforts would be made to stimulate 'natural' products since the wealth of the nation depended on agriculture, fisheries and forestry rather than gold (as mercantilists believed). Expanding grain production would prevent famine and encourage the growth of the population, which would increase taxable wealth.

'**Legal despotism**': When a King adopted powers in order to introduce Enlightened reforms against the wishes of self-interested groups in society.

Laissez-faire: The belief in free trade and that government interference should be kept to a minimum.

It needed '**legal despotism**' to overcome the forces of privilege, combined with economic freedom based on ***laissez-faire*** principles. The ruler would merely have to follow the natural order to win the consent of the people. The assumption was that the best government was the least government. Apparently, Quesnay's reply to Louis XV when asked what he would do if he was king was '*Rien*' (nothing). Other Enlightened thinkers did not agree, as they were convinced that the human condition could be transformed by enlightened law-making. Some historians, such as Fritz Hartung in *Enlightened Despotism* (1957), have dismissed the influence of the Physiocrats. Hartung claims that their practical effects were nil.

Turgot had the chance to put Physiocratic ideas into practice and failed. He was dismissed after only two years when his reforms aroused anger from privileged groups (see page 55).

However, there is another case to answer. While no European ruler directly implemented Physiocratic ideas, it would be wrong to assume that they made no impact on those rulers who read them, especially if they were receptive to change. *Laissez-faire* and free trade were widely accepted in the 19th century, and Joseph II eagerly embraced 'legal despotism'.

We will now look at three of the more important *philosophes*.

Montesquieu (1689–1755)
Born Charles de Secondat: nobleman and magistrate. Montesquieu became President of the parlement of Bordeaux. His major works included *Lettres Persanes (Persian Letters)*, published in 1721 and *De l'Esprit des Lois (Spirit of the Laws* 1748). He was a defender of privilege and nobility, and proposed the 'separation of powers'.

What were Montesquieu's ideas?

Montesquieu had the most influence on political ideas of all the philosophes. His books were very popular. *De l'Esprit des Lois*, despite running to 22 volumes, was a bestseller and the Catholic Church lost no time in banning it by placing it on the **Index**. Montesquieu's approach was conservative. What really concerned him was how to develop a political system which would prevent despotic rule. He disapproved of absolutism. Instead, political processes must be in place to restrain the ruler. His views were used by French parlements to voice their opposition to Louis XVI. Montesquieu influenced the constitution formulated by the Americans following their successful rebellion against George III. His language 'was conceived essentially as a safeguard against **despotism** rather than as an instrument of progress' (G.R.R. Treasure, *The Making of Modern Europe 1648–1780*, 1985). He was far from a revolutionary. Monarchy and the defence of privilege were guiding principles. A mixed monarchy provided the best basis for the defence of people's rights and liberties. Paradoxically, he had travelled widely and despite studying the English political constitution (which he admired) he mistakenly thought that it represented a 'separation of powers'.

Index: A list of books banned by the Catholic Church.

Despotism: The rule of states by individuals whose power is not limited by reference to a constitution.

Veto: To decide officially that a scheme or plan must not be put into action and to have the power to prevent it being put into action.

Tyranny: Cruel and unjust rule by a person or small group who has complete power over everyone else in the country.

According to Montesquieu, the monarch would administer the laws (and have the power to **veto** them). An assembly with two houses would make the laws, while an independent judiciary would ensure that the laws were obeyed. A privileged nobility was guaranteed power under this constitution through one of the assemblies. Montesquieu foresaw a kindly monarchy acting in accordance with reason to protect the people and avoid the misery of war. He warned against intolerance and **tyranny**.

Montesquieu claimed that such things as climate, religion, social practices and historical customs shaped 'a general spirit' of law. This differed from state to state. He was more interested in trying to understand the

ways in which people were governed. He left it to others to advocate radical change. This did not stop him criticising absolutism, the clergy and financial abuse. His *Lettres Persanes* (1721) claimed to be the letters written by a visitor to Paris from Persia. It was a device that not only enabled Montesquieu to escape the censor, but also to score points against the establishment. Most of all, Montesquieu offered a practical political model – other writers were less constructive.

'Voltaire' (1694–1778)
Pen name of François Arouet, one of France's most intimidating and influential writers. He abandoned a training in law to make a living as an author. Early experiences gave him a sharp focus for his attacks on intolerance, privilege and the abuse of the law. He spent 11 months in the Bastille after insulting the duc de Rohan. Once that ***lettre de cachet*** was cancelled, Voltaire travelled to England. The more liberal society he found there was more to his liking. Although his fame spread across France, his writings were frequently banned or subjected to the censor's pen.

Lettre de cachet: Royal decree ordering arrest and imprisonment without trial.

Patronage: The willingness of wealthy or powerful sponsors to commission works from creative artists or to encourage writers to develop their ideas.

What were Voltaire's political ideas?

Voltaire's witty use of ridicule or sarcasm exposed obvious cases of injustice, such as that of the Huguenot Jean Calas. He had no time for the Catholic Church, which he regarded as the worst example of an intolerant institution. His prejudices in matters of faith resulted in the Church preventing him from having a Christian burial. 'If God did not exist it would be necessary to invent Him' was just one of his many attacks on established religion.

Voltaire contributed to the *Encyclopédie* (see page 39) and in his *Lettres philosophiques* (1734) he spread Newton's ideas. Historians have questioned Voltaire's reputation as a thinker and philosopher. Essentially, he was a merciless campaigner and a satirist. He spread ideas in a style which made them popular. His writing made fun of tyrants and the clergy. Voltaire has been criticised for not presenting clear Enlightened policies. This is hardly surprising as it was never his intention to present either practical alternatives or clear ideas about a perfect society. He was a critic. His greatest achievement was to emphasise the importance of reason and toleration.

Voltaire believed that if a ruler was wise and fair, then checks and balances were unnecessary. He hated the idea of 'government by the masses' – or by *la canaille* (rabble) as he referred to them. Instead, Voltaire proposed the continuation of absolute monarchy. He knew that power could be abused (as in a tyranny). But there would be a select group of nobles to assist the ruler. The approval of absolutism was in contrast to other *philosophes*, although he shared the view that privileged nobility should take part in government.

Judgements of Voltaire are varied. His popularity contributed to the way in which existing ideas were challenged. On the other hand, he sometimes went too far. He is not above criticism himself. He was a wealthy man – and part of his wealth came from the slave trade and from his estates at Ferney where he lived as feudal lord, claiming tax exemption and exacting dues from his peasants. He built a church for his peasants despite attacking the existence of God. He also courted the favour of Frederick the Great of Prussia and Catherine the Great of Russia. He accepted their **patronage**. He even accepted Frederick's hospitality in Potsdam for three years. However, Voltaire never missed the opportunity to attack despotism. In his book *Candide* he mocked the King of Bulgaria (in reality, Frederick the Great) for the futility of military discipline and warfare. Voltaire was part of the spirit of the Enlightenment but he did not have much in common with fellow *philosophes* – as the next section will show.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778)
French philosopher and writer. Born in Geneva to a watchmaker's family. Although he left when he was 15, Geneva provided a model which shaped his ideas. If his autobiography, *Confessions*, is to be believed, he never settled anywhere for long; instead he had a dissolute and isolated life, much of it spent around Paris or in exile in Holland, Switzerland or England, escaping the attentions of the French authorities for writing banned works.

Did Rousseau encourage tryanny?

'Man is born free, but everywhere in chains.' Rousseau's *The Social Contract* delivered this powerful statement. His idea of human equality and the 'natural' goodness of each individual lay at the heart of this remarkable man's philosophy. Yet he has been accused of encouraging and justifying tyranny. Why?

Rousseau was appalled by the repressive nature of French absolutism and by the extent of poverty in Paris amid the wealth of the aristocracy. In

his 'Discourse on Inequality' he wrote that 'Money, though it buys everything else, cannot buy morals and citizens'. He rejected the Church's dogma on original sin because he asserted that children were born as innocents into a corrupt and rotten world. For Rousseau, 'civilisation' was blamed for the evils of society. 'Man' in his natural state was peaceful, free, equal and part of a supportive community.

Rousseau never suggested that society should go 'back to nature' or that the clock should be turned back. Nevertheless, in *Emile* (published in 1762) he showed how a boy could still lead a good, moral life if he was given the right education. This would allow the individual to learn and develop naturally.

There was a sense of emotion here which was missing from some of the writings of the Enlightenment. Rousseau's bestseller *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) argued that, while reason was important to the human condition, so were people's inner feelings. This book was, after all, the story of an ill-fated couple – the love between a nobleman's daughter and a poor man.

It was *The Social Contract* (1762) which received public condemnation, forcing him into exile (not for the first time). Rousseau drew on the example of Geneva, a small city-state in which many adult males participated in government. He grappled with the same political dilemma as others – how could individual freedom and rights be maintained by a government which had power and authority over the people? Rousseau proposed that the direct participation of all people would give the government the authority to run the state. He thought that all citizens should meet in assemblies to discuss laws and either choose or sack the government. Everybody had to be involved in this ideal of democracy – the people would give consent to the laws, and the interests of all would be guaranteed. Mass meetings would hardly be popular with the crowned heads of Europe – nor with Voltaire. The idea of electing a parliament to represent the views of the people was rejected. From these mass assemblies, those who ran the government would understand 'the General Will' – which laws were best for the whole community. This wise group of administrators would act unselfishly and in accordance with common sense. This 'General Will' represented obvious truths – so obvious that those who disagreed would have to be disregarded. Indeed, Rousseau argued that laws were in the interests of all, so the 'General Will' would be imposed.

Rousseau's views would certainly promote democracy but were unlikely to work in all but small communities. Unfortunately, French Revolutionaries re-interpreted Rousseau's views and used them to justify dictatorship. During the 'Terror', Maximilian Robespierre defended his actions and the use of the guillotine on the grounds that he understood the 'General Will'. Hence the 'Terror' would safeguard the Revolution and the best interests of all. Rousseau's reputation suffered as a result.

However, nothing could be further from his true intentions. Rousseau rejected despotism and resolutely defended the individual. He disagreed with other *philosophes* who argued for some form of monarchy. His ideas did not really take root, although some American Revolutionaries were influenced by him. In the development of political ideas, Rousseau played his part in putting the case for democracy and the direct participation of people in government. This is what made him so different.

1. In what ways did these writers of the Enlightenment disagree?

2. How fundamental were these disagreements?

2.3 What was the impact of the Enlightenment?

The historian Lord Acton delivered a series of lectures in 1890. He was in no doubt that the Enlightenment brought real progress.

> 'The years that followed the Seven Years' War were a time of peace for a greater part of the continent, in the course of which a memorable change took place. It was the age of what may be called the Repentance [regret] of monarchy. That which had been selfish, oppressive and cruel became impersonal, philanthropic [giving freely] and beneficent [helping other people]. The state was employed for the good of the people. It was still despotism but enlightened despotism. It was influenced by the great writers – Locke, Montesquieu, Turgot … There was a serious tendency to increase popular education, relieve poverty, build hospitals, promote wealth, free serfs, abolish torture and to encourage academies and the like. Attempts were made to reform prisons. Laws were codified. The movement was almost totally universal …'

Few contemporary historians would take this extreme position. The idea of a sudden turning point in the 1760s, when rulers abandoned what had gone before and accepted a new set of principles by which to rule their states, is not supported by the evidence. Certainly not in France, as you will read in Chapter 3.

The Enlightenment and the enlightened despots

What impact did the Enlightenment have on European rulers?

There is no agreed view about the extent to which rulers believed the way they acted was because of the Enlightenment. Hartung's definition of enlightened despotism as 'a form of government strongly influenced by the philosophy of the Enlightenment' has the virtue of being clear but rather too broad. It would encompass any ruler who had read the works of the *philosophes* and then took steps to attack the church, end torture, codify the law, tolerate other religions, improve the lot of peasants, encourage education and culture, and free industry and trade from stifling regulation. They undermined the ***status quo***, and the belief in divine right monarchy. They attempted to modernise the administration so that they could be the 'first servant of the state' and thereby drive through reforms more quickly and effectively.

Status quo: Keeping things unchanged.

Ultimately, the historian takes a leap of faith – that rulers who were genuinely receptive to the ideas of the Enlightenment might well adopt these in some form to suit their particular states. Attitudes of mind changed as a result of direct contact with the philosophes. This would include Joseph II of Austria, (1780–1790), Catherine the Great (1762–1796) and Frederick the Great (1740–1786). Rulers of smaller states were similarly affected, such as Leopold of Tuscany and Margrave (Marquis) Charles Frederick of Baden.

Some historians have argued that it is difficult to discern any direct impact the Enlightenment might have had. M.S. Anderson, for instance, argued in *Europe in the Eighteenth Century* (1961) that it was impossible for any ruler to stick rigidly to one set of ideas because they were too busy trying to sort out the problems they had inherited. 'Most European rulers could not afford the luxury of close adherence to one ideology even one so loosely defined as the Enlightenment.' The political, economic, social and military characteristics of their states were so complex and powerful that each ruler had little time or energy to implement philosophical theories. Neither were they prepared, apart from Joseph II, to face the upheaval required to implement radical reforms. Rulers such as Frederick the Great merely used the ideas of the *philosophes* to justify policies

undertaken for 'reasons of state'. *Raison d'état* (reason having to do with state security) involved increasing the power of the state so rulers could pursue an aggressive foreign policy. The attacks on the Church and the streamlining of the administration might be seen as attempts to improve the wealth and efficiency of the state. The attacks on privilege would assist in modernising government so it could be more successful in war.

It is important to recognise the compromises rulers had to make. The realities of trying to rule large empires meant that practicalities had to be placed before theories. Joseph II, Frederick the Great and Catherine the Great each built on what had gone before. The Enlightenment, by itself, did not lead the monarchs to reform. Often their predecessors had taken huge steps – Frederick William I in Prussia and Maria Theresa in Austria, for example, both introduced key administrative improvements without any influence from the *philosophes*. Nevertheless, it is impossible to read the correspondence between, for example, Voltaire and Frederick the Great or Catherine II, without recognising that they had genuine interest in each other's work. As S.J. Lee notes, in *Enlightened Despotism* (1978), 'this was largely a marriage of convenience'. It suited each side. Voltaire never denied that he flattered monarchs – they provided protection, patronage and a feeling of importance which derived from the association. The monarchs, on their part, could draw on the ideas of *philosophes* and implement those which were realistic according to the situation in which they found themselves. It would never be possible to act entirely on the *philosophes*' suggestions. Catherine the Great recognised this, although Joseph II failed to grasp the realities of power. The 'art of the possible' therefore baffled him.

Autocracy: Government of a country or empire by one person who has complete power. Any dissent is usually dealt with harshly.

1. Why is Lord Acton's view of the Enlightenment now outdated?

2. Why is it difficult to assess the impact of the Enlightenment?

These rulers are something of a contrast. Joseph aimed to impose enlightened principles through despotic means. For him, the Enlightenment was not open to question. Catherine, however, recognised the limitations on her **autocracy**. She realised what could and could not be achieved if she were to maintain her grip on power. The case could be made that Joseph was an 'enlightened despot', while Catherine aimed for an Enlightened monarchy. The final part of this chapter will explore this idea.

2.4 Did Joseph II of Austria succeed in imposing the Enlightenment throughout his Empire?

What influences shaped Joseph II's view on monarchy?

The young Joseph, despite his mother's hostility to the Enlightenment, was well read in the writings of the *philosophes*. It is impossible to discount the effects that they had on the young Prince, particularly his Professor of Law,

Joseph II of Austria (1780–1790)
When only three months old, Joseph was thrust onto the political stage. His mother, Maria Theresa, had become Empress of Austria in the previous year. She had inherited a weak state paralysed by debt, dithering old ministers, a poor army and an administration which was ineffective and inefficient. In 1741, a disastrous event took place which would overshadow Maria Theresa's reign and that of her son. Frederick the Great attacked Austria and seized its richest province – Silesia. Maria appeared in front of the Hungarian **Estate** with Joseph in her arms and appealed for taxes and military support. In order to regain Silesia, Maria Theresa was forced to reorganise her state for war.

Estate: A representative assembly of nobles, through which they exercised power.

Karl Martini. Joseph's teenage *Rêveries* (diaries), written when his political views were forming, show him eager to modernise the Empire and to adopt an enlightened but despotic approach in order 'to do good'. But he would have to wait. Maria Theresa ruled until 1765 when her husband, Francis of Lorraine, died. Joseph became co-regent with his mother until 1780 when she died. She was cautious, pragmatic, and never dazzled by the Enlightenment. Over-enthusiastic proposals for reform were quickly suppressed, and Joseph chafed under his mother's restrictions. There was no disguising the fact that Joseph wanted action. On the death of Maria, Baron Risbeck wrote: 'As soon as Joseph stands alone at the helm, a revolution will take place here …'. In 1780 he was 39 and a cold, single-minded individual, probably not likeable, and certainly arrogant to the point where he thought he was incapable of making mistakes.

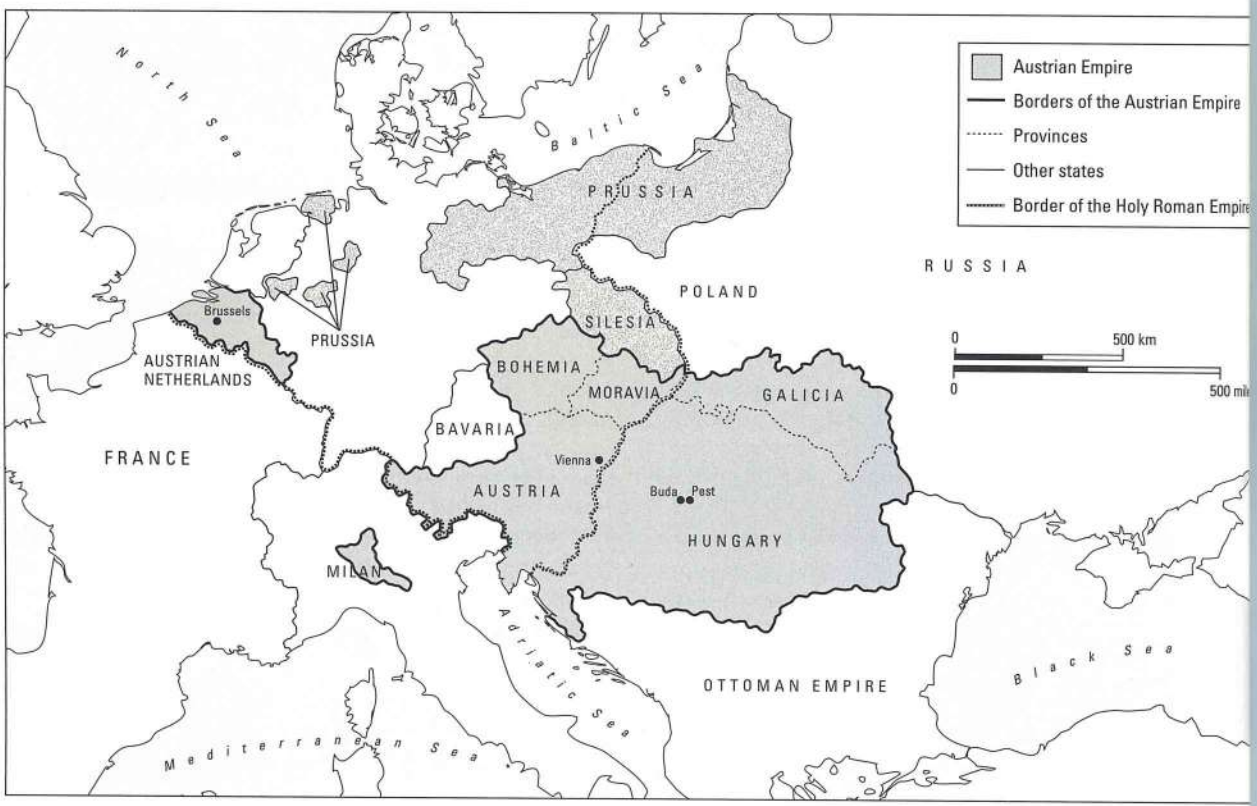
Joseph was impatient. He was intolerant of criticism. His intention to impose a whirlwind of reform, attempting 100 years of change in 10 years, would cause major problems.

What kind of state did Joseph inherit?

Geography was the stumbling block. The Empire was far flung (see map). Each area had its own Estates and the nobles who sat on them were stubbornly independent. They blocked centralised rule and, despite Maria Theresa's attempts to streamline the administration of the Austrian homelands, only a limited amount had been achieved. The Roman Catholic Church also hindered progress. It had immense power and had no wish to see enlightened principles adopted, particularly towards Protestants. The Church was determined to maintain the *status quo*.

Austria was mainly agricultural with a sparse and illiterate population. The economy failed to prosper, and the different languages, laws and culture within the Empire made the prospect of reform difficult. Parts of

The Austrian Empire under Joseph II



Joseph's Habsburg lands did not welcome Imperial interference, particularly the Austrian Netherlands and Hungary which were **semi-independent**.

Semi-independent: Both areas had Estates or assemblies that exercised significant powers above those exercised from Vienna.

Maria Theresa had attempted modest reforms, and there is a case for arguing that Joseph introduced little that was original. His government and education reforms built on work started by his mother. Although Hungary, Italy and Belgium had been hardly touched, Austrian provincial administration was modernised and the Estates bypassed. Small steps were taken to extend state supervision of the Church – their courts were supervised. In 1774, a General Education Regulation set up a national system of schools and, the following year, there was a move to limit the amount of forced labour (the *robot*) which a serf had to complete. Joseph wanted the *robot* to be abolished but his mother insisted on it being limited to three days a week. This law, called the Urbarium, had to be withdrawn when internal revolts threatened the safety of the state. Again, Joseph and his mother had argued about the measure. To his disappointment, serfdom remained intact. Nevertheless, Joseph would take up many of these threads when he achieved power.

Robot: Peasants were forced to provide free labour for their landlord.

What were the main influences on Joseph II?

In some respects Joseph II admired Frederick the Great of Prussia who had modernised and centralised his own scattered lands and forged a **unitary state**. But there again, Frederick had seized Silesia from the Austrian Empire. Frederick, then, was both an enemy and a model. He considered himself 'the first servant of the state' and Joseph adopted a similar view. Joseph felt he had a duty to achieve the supreme good, to create a more humane state, to prevent the abuse of privilege and to promote public welfare. He considered his authority was a trust from the people. Despite the unappealing sides to his character, he had an idealistic view of human equality and disliked snobbery and privilege. It was not unknown for him to venture out into the streets and engage ordinary people in debate.

Unitary state: Centralised administration throughout the empire, with laws imposed by decree.

However, his methods provoked hostility – in his single-minded pursuit of change he would accept no criticism. There would be no compromise with the forces of privilege ranged against him – short-term despotism would cut through that. Nor would there be any separation of powers – the ruler would need to monopolise power for the benefit of all. Joseph could not wait for practical results. In 1780, he had been made to wait before applying his vision, and his health was now failing. He had no time to lose. It was not what he did, it was the way that he did it which caused a crisis at the end of his reign.

How did Joseph attempt to create a unitary state?

Joseph's vision of a more humane and efficiently run state would depend on a centralised, well-run **bureaucracy**. Only through this would new laws be passed and the forces of privilege swept away. Uniformity would be imposed and traditional self-interest destroyed. Such was the diverse nature of his **dominions** that control from Vienna had to be assured and an army of civil servants would carry out the urgent task of reform. Everywhere Joseph turned, there were local Estates or municipal councils with powers which posed obstacles to the smooth execution of laws from Vienna – local bodies would be swept away.

Bureaucracy: Administrative system operated by a large number of officials following rules and procedures.

Dominions: Areas controlled by a ruler.

1. Even in Austria and Bohemia, at the heart of the Empire, authority was divided. Here, Joseph built on his mother's tightening of control. A single Chancellery was introduced to have an overview of all areas of government, chaired by the Emperor. Only foreign policy (where Maria's old minister, Prince Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz, retained a say

in policy), the army and justice were outside the Chancellery's authority. Local government was streamlined and six administrative units (governments or *gubernia*) were set up. The surviving local Estates lost nearly all of their influence.

2. Hungary was further away from Vienna and virtually independent. Maria Theresa had confirmed the local powers of Hungarian nobles in exchange for assistance against Frederick of Prussia. Nobles were in control everywhere. Although the national parliament was rarely called, noble families had a stranglehold on county assemblies which controlled the administration, the Church, schools and justice. Indeed Hungarian justice was something of a scandal – it was both unfair and barbaric. The execution of 115 gypsies in 1782 for alleged **cannibalism** is often quoted as one of the more shocking cases of the abuse of legal powers. Furthermore, Hungary did not pay a fraction of the taxation which was due given the size of the province. Joseph was determined to impose a more humane and unified system.

Cannibalism: Eating the flesh of living things of the same type (e.g. humans eating humans).

Reforms began in 1784 to a predictably hostile response. In Hungary the following reforms were introduced:

- Joseph refused a coronation in Budapest and the ancient Crown of St Stephen was transferred from Hungary to Vienna in 1784. Nationalist passions were inflamed because of this.
- German was decreed as the official language. It was more useful if all official documents were written in one language. But, again, national pride had been assaulted. However, the Hungarian Diet (government) conducted business in Latin.
- Hungarian assemblies declined in importance and their authority was transferred to ten provincial Austrian Commissars.
- Conscription (compulsory military service) was introduced.
- Courts were run by Austrian officials not Hungarian nobles.
- If all this was not enough to provoke a revolt, the final straw was a proposal to end nobles' tax exemption. Austria was at war with Turkey (1788–90) and Joseph needed resources urgently. Instead of coming to his aid, Hungarian nobles rebelled in 1789 and appealed to Prussia for assistance.

3. In the Austrian Netherlands (Belgium), Joseph had much to gain from the co-operation of the ruling elite. The province was passive, paid generous taxes and serfdom did not exist.

Joseph could not let things alone. He visited Belgium and found the process of government complex, inefficient and unclear. Local estates had wide powers and 'within each province, the privileged groups of a bygone era kept Belgian life in a state of self-satisfied stagnation: clergy, nobility, universities, town councils and guilds and so on' (E.N. Williams). Insensitive to the interests of nobles and office holders, Joseph began the process of reform in 1787. Once again, the German language decree was introduced and local Estates lost their powers. A General Council implemented orders from Vienna and provincial government was in the hands of nine German-speaking ***intendants***.

Intendants: Royal officials who carried out orders directly from Vienna.

Once again, the onset of the Turkish war brought fears that privileges would be under attack. By 1789 the Austrian Netherlands, too, had exploded with civil disobedience and insurrection.

4. Joseph's Italian territories – Lombardy and Milan – were not immune from the drive to impose reform by edict. If the law and the economy were to be modernised then obstructive, privileged oligarchies (government by few) would have to be destroyed. Milan was the home of Cesare Beccaria. Where better to introduce enlightened justice?

In 1786 ruling bodies were abolished: the Senate (in Lombardy) and the Council of Sixty (in Milan). Once again, Vienna ruled through *intendants*. New administrative districts and new courts of law were introduced.

Even Enlightened thinkers were shocked by the radical and rapid nature of these reforms. Economist Pietro Verri wrote that Joseph knew the system was rotten but, in destroying all laws and practices, he made the 'remedy worse than the malady. He took no account of opinion ... and made men feel all the unlimited power of a monarch who recognises no other standard than his own will.'

Joseph had committed the major error of losing the support of his nobles. Other monarchs, such as Louis XIV or Frederick the Great, understood the truth behind Montesquieu's dictum, 'No nobles, no King, no King, no nobles'. Nobles were the keystone to maintain the stability of the state and the monarchy. Joseph ignored this at his peril.

Could the civil servants cope with the pace of change?

The civil servants had to deal with over 17,000 of Joseph II's decrees, long hours and a demanding master. They failed to cope and Joseph hurled abuse at them for what he assumed was their lazy and unco-operative behaviour.

They were spied on, bullied and files were compiled on their work. In 1784, District Commissioners were appointed in the provinces to ensure that no one was ignoring his decrees. In the teeth of a storm of protest, Joseph was determined to see these administrative changes through. In Austria, at least, the unitary state stood a chance; elsewhere it was unlikely to succeed. Was a programme of forcing enlightened reform on people by edict doomed to fail? Was it Joseph's ideas which were at fault or his methods? Before reaching a conclusion, how were other reforms greeted? Which were the most lasting of Joseph's reforms?

How did Joseph use the law?

Joseph's legal reforms are usually considered a great success. They lasted into the 20th century. Characteristically, they are a mixture of humanity and the severe application of reason. The latter, however, did introduce a darker side to aspects of Imperial justice.

Initially, Joseph II continued Maria Theresa's work by drawing on the ideas of Beccaria and his own law professor, Martini. Most remarkably, the Penal Code (1781) and Code of Criminal Procedure (1788) introduced equality under the law (nobles receiving the same punishments as everyone else) and abolished the death penalty.

Appeal courts gave a chance for a re-trial. To prevent those accused of crime languishing in prison for too long, charges had to be brought within 24 hours and presented to a judge within three days. Some punishments were banned, such as mutilation, branding and the use of stocks. Some crimes that related to spiritual practices, such as witchcraft, were regarded as less severe and were no longer punishable by death. Nobles were deprived of duelling as a method by which gentlemen might resolve a dispute – it was banned. The quality of justice did not escape scrutiny. The Order of Civil Procedure (1781) gave Vienna the power to supervise church and local courts, while judges were required to pass law examinations. Children and the insane were no longer regarded as criminally responsible.

These were remarkable advances, and historians often make comparisons with justice elsewhere. Historian T.C.W. Blanning points out, in *Joseph II* (1984), that Joseph was 'a model of rationality' compared with government in France where a child could have his tongue cut out for blasphemy.

Nevertheless, there was another side. Capital punishment may have been abolished but prison and hard labour were savage. Forcing a convicted murderer to pull barges up the river Danube was not only more useful, but also made a lasting example of the guilty party. Reference will be made later to the expanding activities of the secret police, which operated outside the law.

Overall though, Joseph had introduced a more humane justice system.

How did Joseph change education and welfare?

Education policy continued along the lines introduced during the co-Regency. The reforms appear enlightened enough as Austria provided a level of education unequalled anywhere in Europe. The reality reflects a utilitarian and penny-pinching, miserly attitude. Joseph had no appreciation of education for its own sake. Intellectual pursuits were a means to an end – expanding the frontiers of human knowledge was not enough.

State education had specific purposes – to teach obedience, to break the grip of the Catholic Church on education, to further the use of German throughout the Empire, and to provide a steady stream of trained civil servants. There were only enough places at university for the number of vacancies in the civil service.

Amadeus Mozart, too, suffered in the name of utilitarianism when his pension was terminated. It was a sad reflection on Joseph's enlightened policies.

Education

- Compulsory education for primary school age children but still only 30% attended.
- Fines were levied for non-attendance.
- Schools would provide civil servants, farmers or soldiers, and housewives.
- There was a much smaller number of secondary schools with 60 'gymnasia' for able boys subject to fees being paid.
- Only four universities survived Joseph's cuts.
- German was spoken widely in schools and 'non-useful' subjects like Music were not taught.

1. In what ways was Joseph II more interested in utilitarian reform than humanitarian reform?

2. To what extent did these changes reflect the Enlightenment?

In contrast, Joseph introduced a wide range of welfare reforms which went far beyond those elsewhere in Europe or those proposed by Enlightened writers. From virtually no provision, Joseph set up orphanages, hospitals, institutions for handicapped people as well as foundling homes (for illegitimate children). **Lunatic asylums** were run along liberal and humanitarian lines. Where hospital provision existed, the very poor didn't pay. This forms an impressive record.

Lunatic asylums: Hospitals for those with mental illnesses.

How did the Church fare?

The Enlightened writers reserved particular venom for the Catholic Church. It was rich, privileged, intolerant and an obstacle to reform. Its beliefs were based on dogma and superstition – not reason. Its censors

were out in force to suppress the *Encyclopédie* and its like. Joseph hated the way it anchored Austria in the past.

However, Joseph's motives were more complex. It is true that Joseph could see the practical advantages of encouraging skilled workers from abroad who might be Protestants. He recognised that the Church could do useful work in the community, although he felt its wealth might be better spent on welfare and 'good' works. Joseph understood how education ought to be liberated from the **metaphysical**. Yet he had no wish to destroy the Church. He was a devout man who observed religious practices with the same grim sense of duty he applied to many other aspects of his life. In many ways Joseph II strengthened the Church – he built over 1,000 churches in Hungary, for example, and paid particular attention to improving the training of priests.

Metaphysical: Relating to theories about what exists and how we know that it exists – often based on the abstract or superstitious.

However, Joseph wanted religious policy on his own terms. The Church had to play its part in the 'unitary state'. Politically, that led to an attack on the influence of the **Papacy**. Not only did the Church claim special status, virtually a 'state within a state', but the Pope exercised authority over Joseph's subjects from outside the state. Given Joseph's view that the clergy should serve the state and their interests should be national, there was bound to be trouble.

Papacy: The position, power and authority of the Pope, including the length of time that a particular person holds this position.

None of this was likely to happen unannounced. Apart from the writings of the *philosophes*, which Joseph allowed to circulate freely, his mother had agreed to attacks made by her trusted minister, Kaunitz, on church wealth, privileges, courts and Papal influence. Not for the first time, Joseph would push these early changes to the limit.

Reform was not half-hearted. The first moves were to undermine links with the Papacy. Joseph was uncompromising. The first visit by a Pope to Austria for 350 years took place in 1782. No good came of it, except to advertise the popularity of Pope Pius VI at Joseph's expense.

Attacks on monasteries had begun as early as 1781 with the **dissolution of contemplative orders**. These amounted to around one-third of the total number of monasteries. As far as Joseph's strict logic was concerned, they had made no contribution to poor relief or welfare. The monks and nuns were given pensions, and the buildings put to use as schools, prisons or lunatic asylums. The sale of land and property brought in large revenues – equivalent to a year's taxation.

Dissolution of contemplative orders: The closing of monasteries which were devoted to prayer study rather than 'good works'.

Joseph took matters a step too far. His interference in daily religious life was badly received. The simple faith of peasants was soon shaken, although Joseph's faith in his own infallibility was unshakeable. The test of utility was applied rigorously to whatever Joseph considered superstitious. **Relics**, statues, paintings, processions and candles were cleared out. German, not Latin, would be spoken. In 1784, coffins were banned in favour of burial sacks.

Relics: Things which are kept because they are associated with a saint, often a body or part of it. They are thought to be holy.

Joseph never quite grasped the damage he had done to the peasants' personal faith – so much so that everything else the Emperor attempted was automatically damned. He built churches so that no one was more than one hour's walk away from one. Priests were paid a decent salary and tithes were abolished. Colleges taught priests to pay less attention to the superstitious side of Christianity and more to practical welfare. It was also the priest's duty to teach obedience to the state. The priest was expected to be the mouthpiece for the government's enlightened instructions from the pulpit: everything from farming to not drinking contaminated water. Joseph's efforts were not appreciated. 'The unitary state may have borne a distinct resemblance to a workhouse but at least it was a co-operative effort' (Blanning in *Joseph II*).

These changes were deeply unpopular with ordinary people. So were Joseph's attempts at toleration. Once again he had the best of intentions

and religious toleration was not unknown elsewhere in Europe. Frederick the Great had introduced it. Joseph showed concern for the oppression suffered by minorities and a pragmatic eye for the benefits of attracting useful immigrants.

The Edict of Tolerations for Protestants (1781) attracted 150,000 Protestants to the Empire and was a success. But in 1782 the Edict of Toleration for Jews created outrage and was even disliked by Jews themselves. They hated conscription and, although Joseph was in favour of assimilating them into the state, the Jews wished to cling to their separate identity. They were relieved of the need to wear the yellow Jewish armband but they feared a dilution of their status as 'chosen' people. Christians were outspoken in their opposition. Despite all this, the Jews did benefit the Empire and there would be no turning the clock back after Joseph's death.

These religious changes were profoundly significant and, for many, profoundly disturbing. Joseph may have had everybody's best interests at heart, but they detested him for it.

Religion

- Papal influence in Austria was completely weakened. Bishops would have to swear to obey the state and links with the Papacy were severely constrained. Imperial permission was needed before any appeals to Rome could be made or before papal communications were published. No foreign bishop was allowed authority inside Austrian borders.
- The Edict of Toleration for Protestants only allowed private worship but did give them equality under the law, of education and entry into professional careers.
- The Edict Relating to Jews tried to remove their social stigma and encourage them to play a full part in the economics of the state and to become obedient servants. It included the same rights as those granted to Protestants but with some limitations. Synagogues (Jewish places of worship) were not allowed – nor was Hebrew in official documents. Jewish children could attend state schools but would be liable to conscription too.

Attacks on the guilds and the economy

The drive toward the unitary state brought a sustained attack on guilds (see page 26). To Joseph, guilds represented a privileged group who prevented progress and performed no useful service except in their own self-interest. Price-fixing, establishing monopolies and limiting membership were all characteristics of the guilds – and their days were numbered.

Many were abolished. Foreign workers were brought in and trade opened up. In general, Joseph's economic polices were a mixture of the the old and the new. He was keen to follow Physiocratic ideas of **free trade**, removing restrictions on industry and internal customs. The exception was Hungary, which was treated like a colony – customs separated it from the rest of the Empire. Otherwise, strands of mercantilism keep re-emerging. Efforts were based on a better transport system (roads and harbours), immigration of skilled workers and incentives for factory owners. Imports were controlled by tariffs – and predictably fell victim to retaliation when tariffs were placed by other government on goods from the empire.

Free trade: A system that encourages the free flow of imports and exports. It is exempt from import tariffs.

Results were modest. Silesia's loss was a constant handicap and everywhere agriculture dominated. Industry was of workshop scale, although tax income increased by over one-third. The most cherished project of the Enlightenment – a single land tax paid by all – was introduced but it had to be quickly withdrawn (see later).

Regrettably, Joseph's work was undone by a disastrous war against Turkey which left a mountain of debt (equivalent to four years' taxation) for the next Emperor, Leopold.

Nobles, privileges and serfs

Perhaps this is the area of policy where Joseph's judgement was at its worst. To Joseph, serfdom cast the darkest shadow over the Empire and it had always been at the heart of disagreements between him and his mother. Again, Joseph mixed humanitarianism with an awareness that serfdom was not useful – it damaged the state by depressing the economy. Agricultural developments were held back, rural poverty was never able to stimulate demand in other sectors of the economy. In common with the ***ancien régime*** elsewhere, the least able to pay taxes paid the most, while those able to pay did not.

Ancien régime: System of government or state of affairs in France before the Revolution.

Maria Theresa had, in the end, achieved nothing to alleviate the burden on serfs. She was too concerned about not upsetting the nobles to take effective action. Joseph had no such qualms. Indeed, he was more than pleased to treat their social status with disdain. In 1781, a group of decrees made steps towards freeing serfs from their bonds and turning them into freeholders. In theory, these decrees appeared to be a turning point. Reality was different. Until steps were taken to abolish the robot, Austria would remain gripped by serfdom.

Joseph set an example by ridding his Crown lands (including those of the Church) of serfdom. The nobles failed to follow suit. Undeterred, Joseph planned the boldest step of all. In 1789, the Tax and Agrarian Law was introduced. Presumably to the rapture of the *philosophes*, it proposed to replace all taxes, tithes and the *robot* with a single land tax, paid by all. The *impôt unique* would be imposed from above, by decree. Surveys of landholdings (to assess taxation) were carried out, at the point of a sword, causing resentment. Nobody wanted the new law, not even the group of people who were likely to benefit most – the peasants.

Serfdom: 1781 Decrees

- Serfdom was abolished.
- The hold of nobles over serfs was weakened.
- Serfs could leave their village without permission.
- The Penal Patent limited the powers of nobles to punish serfs through the manor courts e.g. higher approval was needed for jail sentences of more than 8 days.
- Serfs had the right of appeal against landlords via a free advocate (lawyer).
- Peasants were allowed to buy land.

Why was there opposition to Joseph II's reforms?

Seigneurial dues: For landowners, particularly in rural France, the collection of dues from villagers was regarded as a major item of income.

Without question, nobles hated the land tax. They would lose their tax privileges, the *robot* and **seigneurial dues** without receiving any

compensation. Joseph was deaf to criticism. Indeed he revelled in threatening the nobles if they blocked reform. Louis XIV or Frederick the Great would not have made the same error of judgement. There was a mutual dependency between monarch and privileged orders – the nobles' support for the Crown added stability and underpinned its legitimacy. Attacking privilege would deprive the monarch of his or her mainstay – without privilege conflict was bound to occur.

The serfs' opposition is, perhaps, more difficult to grasp. However, only 20% of serfs were included in the reform – the rest felt excluded and their hopes of an end to the *robot* dashed. The peasants were also in the dark about Joseph's true intentions. They were already suspicious of conscription and were angry at the Emperor's religious reforms. They feared what might happen next. On the face of it, peasants would only pay 30% of their income – a great improvement on previous crippling rates of taxation. But still peasants and nobles rose in revolt.

The French Revolution had already de-stabilised Europe and the army was caught up in a bitter war against Turkey. Conditions for radical reform were not favourable. The Tax and Agrarian Law had to be suspended and the army sent in to crush the revolts. Joseph's single land tax experiment had failed. Here was another example of the way his reign was to end in disappointment and reaction.

Was Joseph II a failure?

Many of Joseph's reforms not only outlived him, but were remarkable advances. The law was most enlightened, Austria was the best schooled country in Europe, and there was no question of reversing the changes in religion. The Catholic Church was no longer the force it had been. The sheer extent of Joseph's legislation was spectacular by any measure. Welfare measures brought more humane treatment to many. However, there was the unmistakable feeling, at the end of the reign, that all his efforts were crumbling.

The Empire was in open revolt. Belgian riots increased from 1787 onwards and, by 1789, the Emperor's troops had been expelled. Hungary's protests were predictable. It was already seething from the administrative restructuring and economic changes which had injured Hungarian pride by reducing its status to little more than a colony. The imposition of the German language and rule from Vienna were regarded as intolerable. Tariffs depressed its economy. But the last straw was the tax decree, and not only in Hungary, for anger and frustration boiled over everywhere. How much of this was Joseph's fault? In Joseph's defence, the nature of the Empire made it difficult to establish a modernised, unitary state.

The geography of the dominions made communications and direct rule from Vienna very difficult. Attitudes of mind were deeply provincial. Each province had distinctive culture, language and traditions. They had no desire to change. Why should they alter the *status quo* on the orders of German officials? Their loyalties and horizons were parochial (based on their own local affairs). Joseph's mother had grasped that to steamroller the provinces into change would cause nothing but trouble. The noble-serf relationship was deeply engrained and produced a static society. It proved beyond Joseph's capabilities to impose a revolution from above, by decree.

Three weeks before he died, the tax decree and the abolition of the *robot* were abandoned. Many administrative changes were reversed and Joseph offered to restore the nobles and the Estates. Joseph had relied on an army of officials to carry out his edicts. They were unequal to the task. He criticised them for their laziness and conservatism, although the way

he treated them did not encourage selfless devotion to duty. They were nagged, punished, spied on and overworked.

Here, then, is Joseph cast as the villain. Many of his difficulties were of his own making. He never understood why his efforts to improve the human condition of his subjects were rejected. He was arrogant enough to dismiss the opposition and to plough on regardless. Compromise did not occur to him. Time and again his tactics were at fault. Frederick the Great complained that Joseph made the mistake of taking the second step before the first. His actions certainly lost him the support of nobles and clergy – normally the bedrock of the state. Their outlook could not have been less radical. The attacks on the Church, the establishment of provincial Estates and the ultimate threat of the land tax caused the privileged orders to abandon the Crown. Joseph could not be trusted to defend their interests so they turned to insurrection instead.

Peasants should have supported him, but his religious policies were so deeply resented that Joseph was associated with **heresy** and the anti-Christ. The system of conscripting peasants to the army added to the sense of outrage. By the time the Tax and Agrarian Law was proposed, Joseph was condemned both for doing too little and for going too far. Some serfs were left out of the reforms and others were fearful of them.

Heresy: The rejection of the doctrines and authority of the Roman Catholic Church.

It was foreign policy that began the crisis at the end of the 1780s. Joseph was a disastrous diplomat and a hopeless soldier. T.C.W. Blanning describes his foreign policy as 'muscular but mindless'. Joseph failed to win more than 34 square miles of Bavarian land from Frederick the Great. His efforts to swap Belgium for Bavaria were an embarrassment. And in 1787, war against Turkey left him with a legacy of debt and retreat.

Why was Joseph II pictured like this?

Joseph II is shown behind a plough.

Radicalism: The belief that there should be great or extreme changes in society.

As the Empire began to collapse, taxation and conscription were intensified, as was the economic crisis. There were bread riots in 1788. It brought a reversal of Enlightened thinking. As a flood of pamphlets criticised Joseph, he turned to measures to bolster his despotism. Censorship was imposed. Spies were everywhere and the activities of the secret police, under Count Pergen, expanded alarmingly. At times, the rule of law was cast aside in favour of imprisonment without trial.

When **radicalism** was spreading its influence from France, Joseph's subjects were taking urgent steps to maintain as much of the *status quo* as possible. They had had enough. Joseph was thoroughly hated; he had lofty ideals for humanitarian reform and to impose his view of human equality. But his grimly utilitarian outlook was imposed regardless of the opposition of those who were his natural allies in society.

Joseph would have regarded himself as a failure. This was a harsh judgement, but typical of a ruler who would grant no concessions nor waver from his vision of the unitary state.

1. What were Joseph II's successes and failures?

2. How far was the nature of his dominions responsible for Joseph II's failures?

2.5 *Why have historians differed in their interpretations of Catherine the Great?*

A CASE STUDY IN HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION

Catherine was a complex figure. At times she could be enlightened, at others autocratic. The historian G.R.R. Treasure regards her as the prophet of the Enlightenment – industrious, genuine and devoted to the service of the state. At other times the *philosophes* disapproved of her.

Catherine seemed overwhelmed by the conservative forces at work in 18th-century Russia. In which case, her claims to be an Enlightened monarch are no more than a **propagandist** at work. These are extreme views to adopt. Catherine knew the realities of power. She probably achieved what she could in the circumstances. She knew she was treading a dangerous path and there were 'moments when it is not necessary to be too precise'.

Propagandist: A person who spreads propaganda (exaggerated or false information) for, for example, a political group or for personal ends.

Was there a progressive shift away from Enlightened thinking during the early part of her reign?

The religious changes started by her husand, Peter III, were confirmed and concluded. In 1764, all monasteries were abolished and all church property was run by the state. There was to be no religious persecution –

Catherine the Great (1762–1796)

Catherine, a German princess, came to power after her husband, Peter III, was butchered by the brother of one of her numerous lovers. 'I shall reign or perish,' she told the British Ambassador. It would take all her skill to survive; brought to power by a palace revolution, she might easily have become the victim of any one of the aristocratic factions which vied for power. Catherine was a remarkable figure – energetic, determined and intelligent. She was well versed in the works of the Enlightenment, writing regularly to Voltaire, Diderot and Montesquieu.

When aged 15, Catherine married the man who would become the future Tsar Peter III. The marriage did not work – Peter rejected her at Court. In 1762, Peter succeeded to the throne but he lasted only a few months. Palace guards overthrew him and Catherine was declared Tsarina.

She inherited a militaristic state, economically underdeveloped, without an efficient administrative structure and dominated by serfdom. The civil service was totally inadequate and the government barely functioned at all.

Catherine's Instructions included:

- Article 9: 'The Sovereign is absolute'
- Article 13: 'What is the true End of Monarchy? Not to deprive people of their natural liberty; but to attain the supreme good.' Voltaire, not surprisingly, loved it.

Zemstvo: An elected assembly consisting of all classes in Russia. It was the first time such a commission had been called to talk about Russia's laws. Catherine's set of instructions to the *Zemstvo* were called the *Nakaz*.

a sign of the Enlightenment. Catherine was certainly enlightened, but she recognised that the take-over of Church lands would be of immense practical benefit – she gained enormous wealth plus over one million serfs. The Church was also in no position to prevent this. Peter the Great had weakened the Church and made it almost a department of state in 1725. However, this policy was largely a success judged purely on the enlightened grounds that religious intolerance barely existed in Russia by the end of Catherine's reign.

In 1767, Catherine called together representatives of Russia in a legislative commission or ***Zemstvo***. It was to discuss Russia's laws in an attempt to rationalise them. Two years' hard work went into the instructions for this assembly. Many threads are apparent – some fashionable, some autocratic. Catherine said there should be more freedom for peasants and torture should be abolished. Voltaire praised her to the skies. The commission's results, though, were a disappointment. Few laws were drafted and participants seemed hell bent on preserving their privileges. It did teach Catherine the limitations on her power and how she would need to be cautious in maintaining the support of the nobility by not proceeding too radically.

Subsequent events were to prove her right.

The Pugachev Revolt

Between 1773 and 1775, a serious Cossack revolt, led by Emelian Pugachev, took place. Pugachev pretended to be Peter III. Serfs flocked to join him; so did Cossacks who wished to remain independent. The fact that nobles were killed, towns were sacked and that thousands of serfs took part in it shook Catherine and the aristocracy. Its scale was threatening – it impressed upon Catherine the importance of having a solid basis of support amongst the nobility. Subsequent reforms granted nobles extensive powers over serfs. Catherine is accused of failing to deal with serfdom and repression was savage. Pugachev, though, did promote administrative change – and, in 1775, efforts were made to impose a framework of order, efficient institutions and administrations. In this sense, Catherine's vision was enlightened.

- In 1775, the government was overhauled. Peter the Great's provinces were too large and the administration too cumbersome. Catherine set about decentralising by splitting Russia into better-sized units. Fifty *gubernia* (governments) were set up, each with a governor who was directly responsible to Catherine. Each *gubernia* was split into districts and this enabled local decisions to be made. Nobles dominated the whole system. Enlightened writers applauded this streamlining process, particularly since each *gubernia* had a board responsible for finance, industry, schools, hospitals and poor relief. Catherine the Great's structure survived well into the 19th century, although she was always short of efficient, trained civil servants, and corruption continued to be widespread.
- Russian laws were extended to conquered areas.
- In 1785, Catherine tried to stimulate the urban economy and the spirit of enterprise by publishing the Charter of the Cities. A governor would supervise an elected committee to run each city and a group of professional civil servants would assist.
- As fears of a violent civil war receded after the Pugachev Revolt, it was clear that 'the whole affair sealed the knot that tied Catherine to her nobility' (G.R.R. Treasure). The Charter of Nobility of 1785 (see panel

on page 47) confirmed the nobles' privileges. Did it greatly increase their power as has been claimed? Probably not. At least it placed their rights and obligations within a proper structure. Even the voluntary nature of state service was more in appearance than reality. Catherine could summon them to 'spare neither labour nor life' when necessary. Crucially, she controlled the nobles through her personally appointed Provisional Governors.

When Catherine wrote to the *philosophes* she made it clear that she detested serfdom. But she knew it was not within her power to abolish it. Indeed, Catherine contributed to further enserfment. Not only did nobles gain absolute rights over them, but 800,000 Crown serfs (who were not overburdened by obligations) were handed over to nobles and favourites.

The pull of tradition had proved too strong and the rigid social structure, based on the noble–serf relationship had asserted itself.

What happened to the economy and education?

In some aspects of economic life Catherine 'was a true daughter of the Enlightenment'. There was industrial and commercial growth based on order, stability and the liberalisation of the economy. All privileges, monopolies and regulations were swept aside. Trade more than quadrupled (1762–96) and Russia became the world's largest pig-iron producer. However, at the heart of Russia's difficulties was backward agriculture based on serfdom. Nothing was done to solve rural poverty by granting land to the serfs, thereby stimulating production and demand. Farming techniques were primitive and the Russian middle class never developed sufficiently to take trade out of the hands of foreign merchants. By the time of Catherine's death, industry was in decline and debt, because of war and an expensive court, was growing.

Education might have helped. The Statute of Popular Schools (1786) planned a network of elementary and high schools. By her death, 288 had been built. It may appear impressive but their impact was limited. Nor is there any evidence that Catherine was in favour of educating serfs.

The end of the reign

By the late 1780s, Catherine's position in Russia was secure. Her critics point to the lack of progress on serfdom and her increasingly reactionary views. Catherine despised the activities of the French Revolutionaries. She called the National Assembly 'fools masquerading as philosophers'. 'I am an autocrat by profession,' she said and she meant it. Russian students were withdrawn from France, just in case dangerous ideas spread eastwards.

In 1790, Alexander Radishchev, a young nobleman, violently attacked serfdom in a book, *Diary of a Journey from Moscow to St Petersburg*. Catherine's reaction was swift. He was charged with treason and was sent into exile in Siberia.

Police burnt books, papers were censored and spies were widely used. It would be easy to conclude that Catherine had abandoned the Enlightenment, but at least she had given Russia a more cultured and westernised aristocracy. Art and literature flourished. The country was better administered and had a framework of laws and institutions. Catherine's achievements were considerable. Reality prevented her from doing more. She no doubt realised that, in the wake of the Pugachev Revolt, abolishing serfdom was beyond her powers.

1. Why have historians differed in their views on Catherine the Great?

2. Is there a case for defending Catherine the Great's record as an Enlightened monarch? Explain the arguments both for and against this.

The Charter of the Nobility 1785

It agreed that nobles:

- would have their titles protected
- could only be tried by other nobles
- were exempt from paying taxes
- could travel abroad without permission
- had the right of Assembly every three years
- commitment to state service was now voluntary.

Source-based questions: Enlightened Despotism

SOURCE A

Royal authority is sacred ... absolute ... subject to reason. God establishes Kings as his ministers and reigns over people through them. The person of the King is sacred. The prince need render account to no one for what he orders.

Bishop Bossuet, 'Political lessons to be drawn from the scriptures', 1670

SOURCE B

Absolute government is inconsistent with Civil Society. If the King has both legislative and executive power in himself alone, there is no judge to be found, no appeal is open to anyone.

John Locke, 1690, from 'An Essay concerning the true original extent and end of Civil Government'

SOURCE C

The new rationalism meant that the ruler was more willing to justify his authority. He no longer sheltered behind the term 'Divine Right'. Instead he placed more emphasis on the monarch as a servant of the state. Only by this total dedication could he hope to rule the state.

'Enlightened Despotism' by S J Lee, 1978 (from Aspects of European History*)*

SOURCE D

Montesquieu could not tolerate the absolute aristocracy of France, but praised the mixed monarchy of Great Britain ... which separated the legislative and executive. The French Constitution was absolutist and contrary to nature for it could not adapt itself to the changing needs of the community.

Phyllis Doyle, A History of Political Thought, 1963

1. Study the sources and explain what is meant by the following highlighted phrases. Use your knowledge of absolutism and the Enlightenment to help you explain your answer.

(a) 'Divine Right' (Source C)

(b) Civil Society (Source B)

(c) 'mixed monarchy' (Source D)

2. Study Source A. How useful is this source in understanding the arguments that were used to justify absolutist government?

3. In what ways did the Enlightenment undermine the concept of absolutism? Use all the sources and the information in this chapter to help you answer this question.