

4th of August Decrees

August 4, 1789

In late July 1789, as reports of several thousand separate yet related peasant mobilizations poured into Paris from the countryside, a majority of them against seigneurial property, the deputies of the National Assembly debated reforming not just the fiscal system or the constitution but the very basis of French society. In a dramatic all-night session on 4–5 August, one deputy after another stepped forward to renounce for the good of the "nation" the particular privileges enjoyed by their town or region. By the morning deputies of all orders had proposed, debated, and approved even more systematic reform, voting to "abolish the feudal system entirely." In effect, they had decided to eliminate noble and clerical privilege, the fundamental principle of French society since the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, the meaning was unclear, for the "feudal system" had ceased to exist in France several hundred years earlier. Thus working out the details of this decree became a primary objective of the National Assembly for the next two years.

[Article] 1. The National Assembly abolishes the feudal system entirely. They declare that among feudal and taxable rights and duties, the ones concerned with real or personal succession right and personal servitude and the ones that represent them are abolished with no compensation. All the others are declared redeemable, and the price and the method of buying them back will be set by the National Assembly. The rights that will not be suppressed by this decree will continue to be collected until they are entirely paid back.

2. The exclusive right of *fuies* [allowing birds to graze] and dovecotes is abolished. The pigeons will be locked up during times determined by the communities. During these periods, they will be considered prey, and anyone will be allowed to kill them on their properties.

3. The exclusive right of hunting is also abolished. Any landlord has the right to destroy or have someone destroy any kind of prey, but only on the land he owns. All administrative districts, even royal, that are hunting preserves, under any denomination, are also abolished. The preservation of the King's personal pleasures will be provided—as long as properties and freedom are respected.

4. All seigneurial justices are abolished with no compensation. Nevertheless the officers of these justices will go on with their duties until the National Assembly decides on a new judicial order.

5. Any kind of tithes and fees, under any denomination that they are known or collected . . . are abolished. . . . Other tithes, whatever they are, can be bought back. . . .
6. All perpetual loans . . . can be bought back. Any kind of harvest share can also be bought back.
7. Venality of judicial fees and municipal offices is abolished. Justice will be dispensed at no cost. And nevertheless officers holding these offices shall fulfill their duties and be paid until the assembly finds a way to reimburse them.
8. County priests' casual offerings are abolished and the priests will not be paid anymore.
9. Financial, personal, or real privileges are abolished forever. Every citizen will pay the same taxes on everything.
10. . . . Every specific privilege of provinces, principalities, regions, districts, cities and communities of inhabitants, either in the form of money or otherwise, are abolished.
11. Every citizen, whatever their origins are, can hold any ecclesiastic, civilian, or military job.

Taken from: <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/366/>

Source: J. Mavidal and E. Laurent, eds., *Archives parlementaires*, 1st ser., 82 vols. (Paris, 1862–96), 8:378. Translated by *Exploring the French Revolution* project staff from original documents in French found in J.M. Roberts, *French Revolution Documents*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), 151–53.