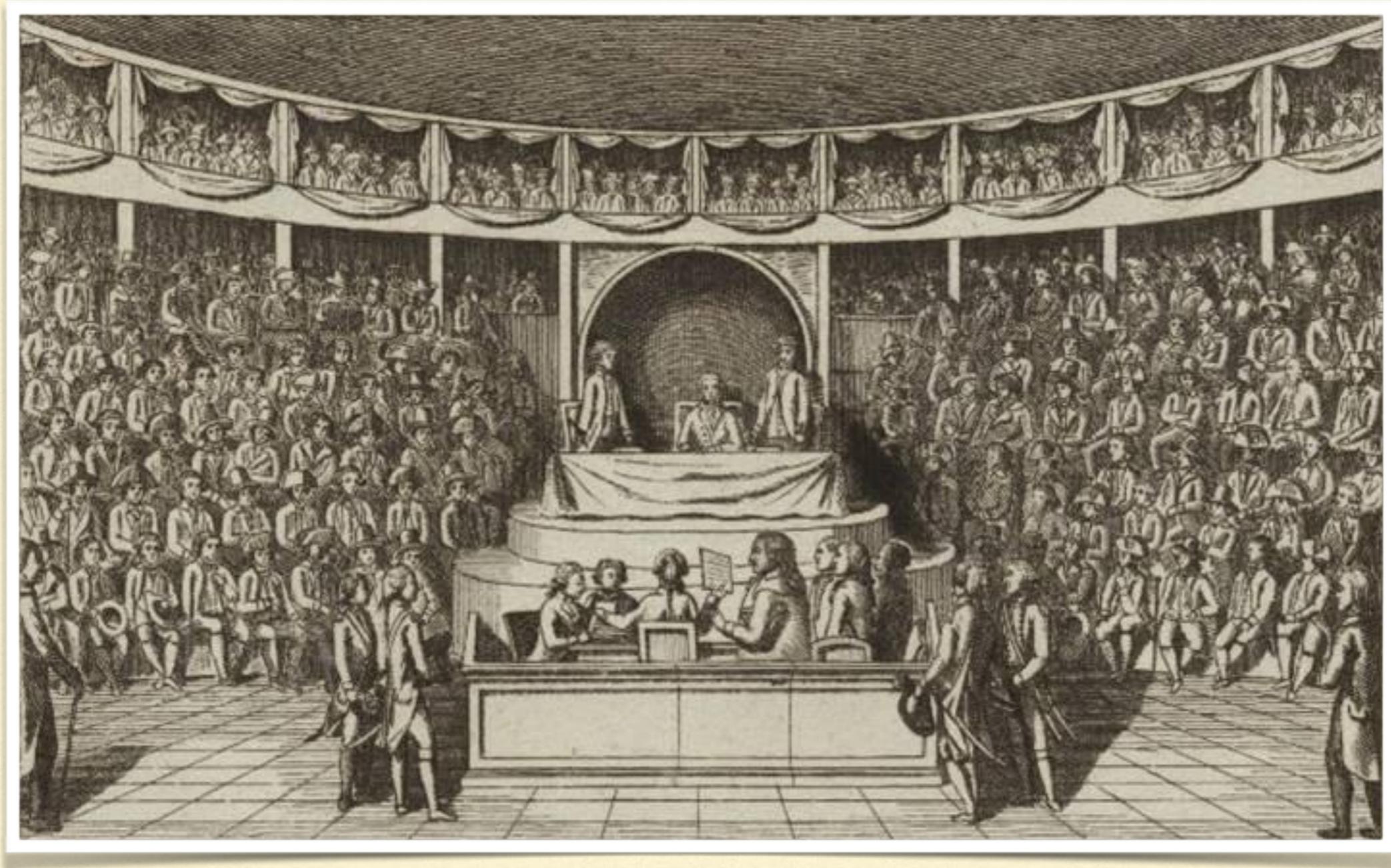


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# THE TRIAL OF LOUIS XVI . . .

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## Trial Fact file:

- The **trial** took place in December 1792.
- Louis could have lawyers, but could not call **witnesses** for the **defense**.
- The case was heard by the National Convention whose 749 **deputies** acted as judge and jury.



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## The Charges:

Louis faced a total of **33** charges when he was put on trial in December 1792.

They included:

- **bankrupting** the nation
- **plotting** against the revolution
- trying to **flee**,
- accepting a constitution he **despised**
- helping the Austrian **invasion** of France
- in short, he was accused of being a **traitor**.



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# The Case for the Prosecution

The Primary Sources 1, 2 and 3 below highlight the case for the prosecution.

## Primary Source 1:

From a speech by a radical deputy, Goupilleau.  
“Citizens, let me repeat his infamous words: ‘In my heart I cannot approve the Revolution and the detestable constitution.’”

Goupilleau is quoting Louis XVI.

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# The Case for the Prosecution

## Primary Source 2:

From a speech by Saint-Just, the youngest deputy.

“He oppressed a free nation; he declared himself its enemy; he abused its laws; he must die to ensure the peacefulness of the people, since to assure his own he intended that the people be crushed. Monarchy is an outrage. No man can reign innocently. Louis is an alien among us and not a citizen. He must die.”

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### Primary Source 3:

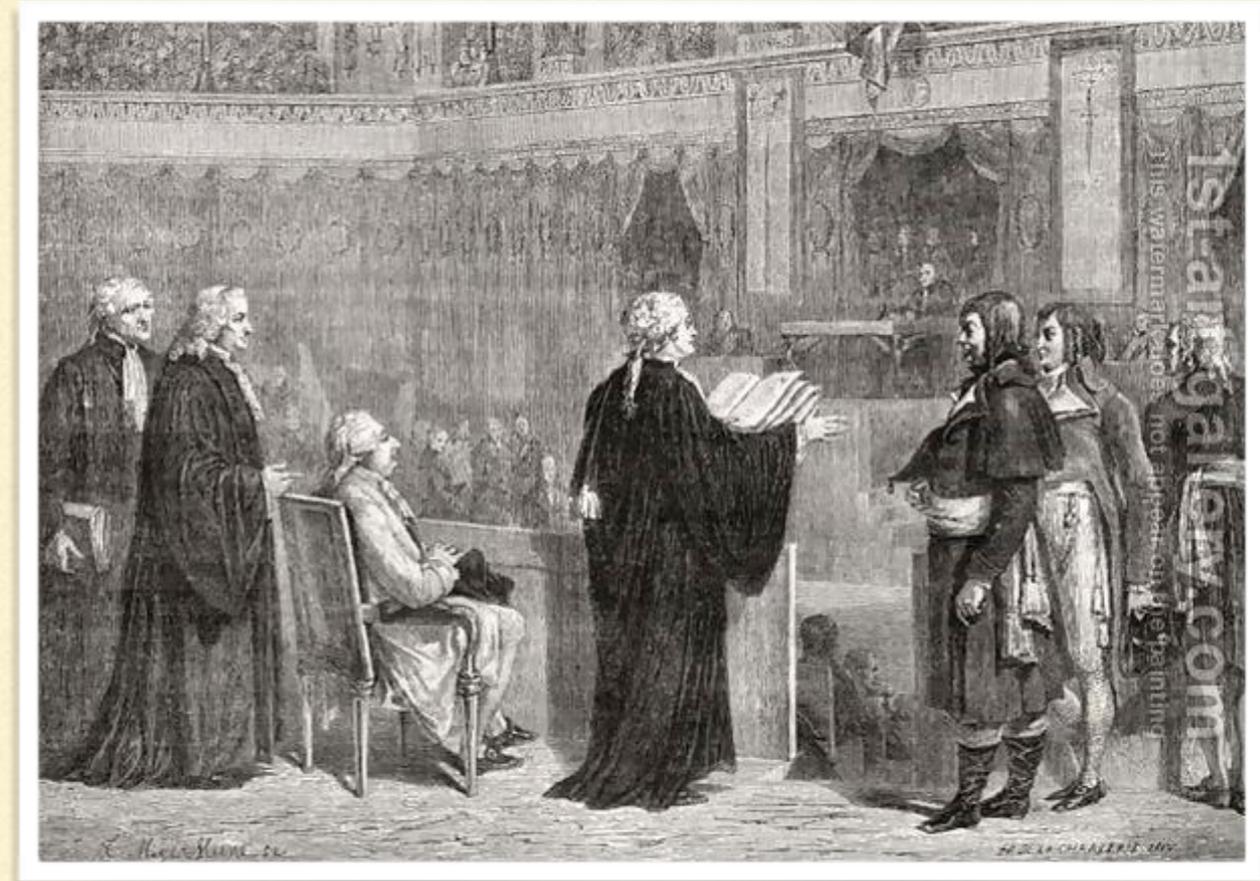
From a speech by Mailhe, a deputy from Toulouse.

“After having accepted the 1791 constitution, Louis declared he was a prisoner.

That was a signal for foreign

powers to come to his aid. Instead of resisting the Prussian and Austrian invasions, he organized treason in all border towns. He continued to support the émigrés with money, and paralyzed the actions of the government.

His acceptance of the constitution was just a trick to keep him on the throne while he waited for the Foreign armies to re-establish his rule on the ruins of the constitution.”



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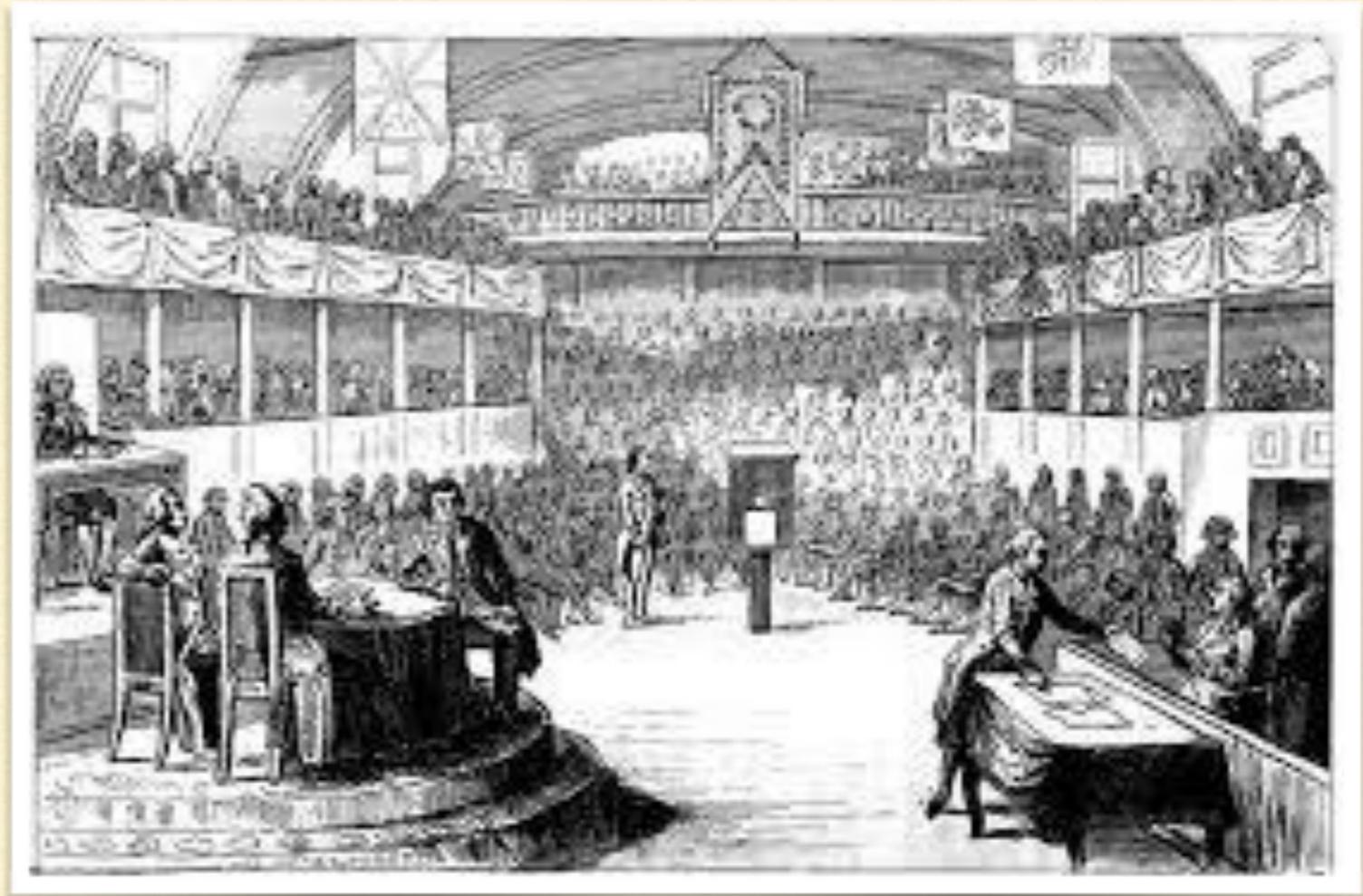
## Questions:

Using the trial fact file, do you think Louis's trial will be a fair one? Explain.

Re-read the sources. What is Louis accused of in:

a) source 1; b) source 2 and c) source 3? (Write as many as you can)

What does Saint-Just think should happen to Louis?



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## **The case for the Defense**

These sources were presented as Louis's defense:

### **Primary Source 4:**

From a speech by De Seze, one of Louis's defense lawyers.

“Louis was the first king to voluntarily give up some of his power for the good of the people. You called him the ‘restorer of French liberty’.”

### **Primary Source 5:**

From a speech by Malesherbes, one of Louis's defense lawyers.

“On 6th October 1789 at Versailles he ordered his armed guards not to defend him. At Varennes, he preferred to be brought back rather than cause the death of a single man. You blame him for the blood that has been shed, but on 10 August 1792 he came to the Assembly to prevent it being shed.”

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## **Primary Source 6:**

From Louis's own defense.

“I have not broken the law since the constitution was introduced. I will defend each of my actions as morally correct and faithful to the letter of the law. I have done nothing except for the good of the people. I will argue for my life but not beg for it.”

## **Primary Source 7:**

Louis's response when questioned about hidden documents which showed him trying to encourage foreign armies to invade France, and trying to bribe deputies. “I have no knowledge of it. It is not my handwriting.”

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## **Primary Source 8:**

Louis's response to the charge of disorganizing the army.

“Never did the idea of counter revolution enter my head. There is not one word of truth in this accusation.”

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## Questions:

Read sources 4 and 5.  
What defense does each source offer on behalf of Louis?

What opinion do you have of Louis after reading sources 4 and 5?  
Why?

Read sources 6, 7 and 8. What opinion of Louis do these sources give you? Explain how.

Read Louis's answers to the charges in sources 7 and 8 again.  
Do you believe him? Explain why.

